



"THEIR HANDS WENT UP ABOVE THEIR HEADS LIKE A FLASH."—(Page 106.)

# ON SECRET PATROL IN HIGH ASIA

BY L. V. S. BLACKER

CAPTAIN, "THE GUIDES"

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

MAJOR-GENERAL SIR GEORGE YOUNGHUSBAND  
K.C.M.G., K.C.I.E.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAPS

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TO

FIELD-MARSHAL HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS

THE DUKE OF CONNAUGHT, K.G.



## INTRODUCTION

BY MAJOR-GENERAL SIR GEORGE YOUNGHUSBAND,  
K.C.M.G., K.C.I.E., C.B.

BACK in the last century a young subaltern, afterwards known to fame as Sir Harry Lumsden, raised in India a peculiar corps. Its name was strange and new in the army, for he called it the Corps of Guides; its uniform was stranger still, for at a time when all were clad in scarlet or blue or green, Lumsden clothed his men in a uniform of his own invention, the very same khaki which these long years afterwards has become the fighting kit, not only of the British Army, but of the armies of more than half the world. Again parting from tradition, instead of raising a regiment of cavalry or a battalion of infantry this new corps was composed of cavalry and infantry combined, in which the officers, and if they so wished the men, were interchangeable. Thus an officer might be heading a cavalry charge one day and leading an infantry assault the next. But there was a still deeper inspiration in Lumsden's mind. The corps was to be composed not only of picked fighting men whom he could be assured "would not be taken aback in a sudden emergency," but which could produce from amongst its numbers trained explorers and military reconnoiters who singly or in small bodies could undertake the most hazardous and distant adventures, bringing back fairly accurate maps, as well as military, political, and geographical information. Thus founded, and nursed in its infancy by the soldierly genius and brilliant leading of Lumsden, the Corps of Guides grew into a tradition, so that long after that fine

soldier had passed away his spirit remained. Should any at this day wonder whether the old spark is still left alive their doubts will be set at rest after they have read the thrilling adventures of Captain L. V. S. Blacker and his little band of Guides "On Secret Patrol in High Asia."

Captain Blacker himself early in the Great War saw much hard fighting in France, till shot down and disabled whilst in the Flying Corps. Sent back to the regimental depôt to rest and recuperate, the spirit being more than willing he did so very shortly, and then with the true Guides spirit started on a series of hazardous services which were prolonged for three years, and during which he and his patrol covered very nearly 10,000 miles on foot or on horseback. The little band who followed him were of Lumsden's own breed, hardy, brave, and loyal, and never to be the least upset by any sudden emergency. Some, as this tale unfolds, undoubtedly had a lurid past, but only with the same luridness as had the past lives of knights of old.

During their patrol the Guides came into the vortex of wonderful exploits hidden from view by the absorbing events in the theatre of war nearer home. Of these none are greater than those of the 19th Punjabis and 28th Light Cavalry, who defeated in battle some 10,000 Bolsheviks, and established the fear of God and of British-led Indian soldiers throughout several thousand square miles of Asia. Captain Blacker has evidently a huge contempt for Red Army troops, and is quite of the opinion, though not here expressed, that the 19th Punjabis and 28th Light Cavalry could alone have chased the whole Bolshevik forces into Moscow.

Those, therefore, who wish to read an enthralling tale of endurance, courage, and adventure cannot do better than follow Captain Blacker and his gallant Guides on their secret patrol.

*February, 1922.*

## PREFACE

I HEARD a French officer remark the other day that war, like the other and minor activities of the human race, has always been subject to evolution.

First we had war between individuals, then between families, next between tribes and between nations, and to-day we are faced with wars between races. Whether these will be succeeded by wars between planets is outside the present question. I have endeavoured to describe the humble doings of an infinitesimally small force whirled on the fringes of the maelstrom of a foretaste, not even the first, of a great clash of races. Our experiences put us cheek by jowl with barbaric and primitive nature, and back to the struggles of the Bronze, if not the Stone Age. It was refreshing, and a charming change from the formalism and cut-and-dried methods of the Western Front and its unskilled warfare.

The most that I can hope for will be that my readers may obtain an idea of the rougher and less polished side of old Scythia and Bactria, which, lost from the sway of Nordic man, are now called Turkistan.

Perhaps this narrative may interest those jaded with the polished and suave periods of more civilized and scientific travellers.

I can only excuse its shortcomings and its omissions by the fact that it was written in the short and hectic intervals of the many examinations that fill present-day soldiering, and which Aubrey de Beauvoir and Sir John Mandeville, distinguished forerunners, were not subject to.



If the chapter which describes our sojourn in the Bolshevik capital appears flippant, the fact is due to the expunging of the more serious sections that explain our very serious reasons for going to that city and the more macabre side of Red rule. The time is not yet ripe for a full and complete description of the events of June, July, August, and September, 1918, in Turkistan.

I am indebted to the courtesy of His Majesty's Stationery Office for permission to use the large coloured map which appears at the end of this volume; to the Royal Geographical Society for the two remaining maps and several of the blocks; to the Editors of *The Cavalry Journal* and *The Royal Military College Magazine and Record* for some others, and for extracts quoted in the text; and to Colonel J. K. Tod, C.M.G., to Mr. Archibald Rose, C.I.E., and to Lieut.-Colonel P. T. Etherton, Royal Garhwal Rifles, for permission to use some of their photographs. Besides this, I have to thank many friends for their generously offered help in various ways.

I have made bold to venture a doggerel translation of the Pastu ballad in the heading of the first chapter, in order to express the fascination that Turkistan exercises:

Whene'er a lad has loved thee  
His heart is always for thee;  
He yearns again to reach thee  
Through snow, snow, snow.

If any further evidence were necessary of the strong Nordic strain in Yusafzai blood, if not in that of all Pathans, it is noteworthy that the air of this ballad is precisely that of one in the *Beggar's Opera*, commencing, "A fox may steal your hens, sir!"

L. V. S. B.

*January, 1922.*

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(General Staff Map. By permission of the War Office and H.M. Stationery Office.)	

# ON SECRET PATROL IN HIGH ASIA

## CHAPTER I

### FROM YARKAND TO YPRES AND BACK

Asheq sōk pa tá wi  
Hamesha hāl ba dá wi  
Shab o wruz ba jári  
Sta pa dūr, dūr, dūr.

*Pathan Love-Song.*

AWAY back in the third week of August, 1914, I found myself marching just after midnight out from the walled city of Yarkand through the desert of Takla Makan, straight into the North Star. Sometimes my Pathan henchman and I marched and trotted over the hard track of the gravel plain, and sometimes floundered through the soft sands of the dunes. In the morning, before the first dawn, my little caravan had settled down for the night on the plastered earthen shelves that serve for beds in Turkistan. I woke up in full daylight, and, walking out into the little muddy courtyard, was surprised by the sight of the khaki blouse and the blue breeches with the broad sky-blue stripe of the Orenburg Cossacks. This was a patrol under a young Sotnik, a troop leader. We breakfasted together, and haltingly and with great difficulty in scrappy Russian I learnt a vague rumour that some great war was impending in Europe. This was indeed news, but

## 2 FROM YARKAND TO YPRES AND BACK

we still had no idea about whom the bickering was between. The Sotnik had an idea that Germany and Russia were going to be the principal participants.

Two days later I reached Kashgar, and on the road met a *jigit*, a mounted messenger, sent out by Sir George Macartney\* to confirm the news of the war; but still there was no mention of a British participation, though that was anticipated. Instead of marching on northward and north-eastward across the desert to Maralbashi and Aksu to the Tian-Shan, the objective I had marked out for myself, I waited three days in Kashgar for more news from Europe. Sure enough, two days later, another *jigit* arrived from Irkeshtam, the telegraph office on the Russian frontier, with his great leathern saddle-bags bulging with newspapers, telegrams, and despatches. This, indeed, was the Great War.

That night I was the guest of the two sotnias of the Orenburg Cossacks, and the event was celebrated till well after the milk came round in the morning. That same morning after a very few hours' sleep I packed off my young Khatak orderly, Ghulam Ali, giving him a pony and telling him to march southward the forty or fifty days' march over the Pamirs to the Punjab. I little guessed that the next time I should see him would be in the bight of a blood-clotted stretcher in the Salient. I myself marched on through the Southern Tian-Shan to the Russian railhead at Andijan. Helped at every turn by the courteous and hospitable Russians, now our Allies, I travelled in a troop train north-westward over the Great Steppes—the primal home of our Nordic race—week in and week out, passing sidings every

\* H.B.M.'s Consul-General for Sin-Kiang.

dozen miles crammed with other troop trains full of Turkistan and Siberian regiments moving to the Western Front, a symbol of that rapid mobilization, and with smooth, hitchless working of the Imperial Russian railways that was such a surprise to the planners of the Great General Staff.

At Moscow I saw Japanese 11-inch howitzers on their way towards Königsberg, to fight on the side of their late enemies. Fifteen days and fifteen nights we spent on the train, meeting French Reserve Lieutenants and an odd Zouave or two, up through Finland, headed off by a German cruiser in the Gulf of Bothnia, then through Sweden and Norway, across the mine-strewn North Sea to England.

It is no part of my story now to tell you of adventures in the Flying Corps, of long glides with a shrapnel-shattered engine or a rent petrol tank from miles behind the German line, and those of a Company Commander in one of those debonair Punjab battalions that took Neuve Chapelle and held it against all comers, the only gain of the British Army in eleven months of trench fighting.

From fighting on the Belgian coast, and monitor bombardments of 1916, I was back commanding the Regimental Depôt at the end of 1917, and it was now just at that time that Falkenhayn began to realize that his hope of retaking Bagdad had vanished. The Yilderim armies wavered in his hands. In spite of plots and intrigues, and the lying propaganda of German conversion to Islam, all fighting Aryan Moslem had spurned the Prussian, the half-Mongol of Northern Europe. Some deep-seated, unthinking racial instinct had brought in Moroccan Berber, Punjabi, and Nordic Pathan as



#### 4 FROM YARKAND TO YPRES AND BACK

well as the Aryans of Circassia, on to the side of their Occidental cousins. Even the half-Aryan Arab lent a hand, whilst the Mongoloid Prussian, Magyar and Bulgar, and no less Mongol Turk, made the backbone of the enemy. Even those Aryan States whose every interest drew them to assist the German, I mean Afghanistan and Persia, held aloof throughout the war from the same racial instinct.

That remote region, cut off from Western industrial development by some of the most immense deserts and by the hugest glacier-seamed mountain ranges of the world, that we call Central Asia, has from the dawn of history been the very cradle of the horse-soldier, the home of all history, and the source of all those ethnic waves that have marked out the endless struggle between Aryan and Mongol.

When Attila, with that spark of genius that create armies and a system of tactics based on a novel if simple weapon, and one suited to the manpower, traditions, and temperament of his people and to their battle-fields, his Huns, the "White Wolves of Turan," swept all before them. At one and the same time the Mongol held Peking, Bagdad, the Arctic shore, and the coasts of the North Sea; when our own Dan Chaucer sang of the dread that their fame inspired in East Anglia, and when the fish markets of Grimsby were closed down\* on account of the ravaging of the homes of the Frisian fishermen by the Tatars so that they could no longer bring their herrings over the sea to the ports of Suffolk and Essex.

\* A.D. 1241. The year of the battle of Liegnitz or Wahlstatt, in Silesia, and also of the capture of Cairo by Khivan Mongols in the teeth of united Frank and Saracen.

For Attila's weapon was the horse, the tough, shaggy Kirghiz pony of the steppes, and his Mongols invented the stirrup, that was the simple means of mounting whole armies, and so of smashing even the disciplined valour of Roman infantry of the line and brushing away their few precariously bareback *equites* and their Parthian and Syrian levies, till checked by the Consul Aëtius at Châlons.

For several centuries the Dukes of Moscow paid tribute to their overlord at distant Karakoram, away in the steppes of the Gobi, whilst Mongol troopers impressed their stamp on the aboriginal women of Borussia; a heritage that endures in our own day.

In the crisis of the Great War, in the winter of 1917, the Prussian, rejected by the Aryan races of Islam, remembered his Hunnish, slit-eyed, beetle-browed ancestors, and imagined a great drive to the East. Held from Bagdad and Basra, he planned out a line, from Byzantium through Batum, Baku, and Bukhara, of advance against India.

In early 1918 a German Army Corps, ill spared from the West, was on its way to Baku, there to be backed by good Turkish infantry; in Northern Afghanistan, Osmanli drill-sergeants and Magyar gun-layers of the "Kaiserliche und Königliche Ost-Indisches Abteilung" laboured to drill the Afghan army and to cajole His Majesty of Kabul to wage war against the British. In Turkistan, in the remote prison camps of Kazalinsk, Perovsk, and Skobelef, emissaries worked to organize scores of thousands of Magyars, Austrians, and Germans, taken at Przemysl and in Galicia, into battalions and brigades, and to fit them out in good new boots

## 6 FROM YARKAND TO YPRES AND BACK

and uniforms under the complacent sway of the treason-bacteria that, incubated in Frankfort's hell-broth, had rotted Russia.

The while, Enver, the alien renegade, dreamed and sent his emissaries to summon hordes of sheep-skinned Bashkirs, Kipchaks, and every denizen of the "Chorasmian waste" to a predatory sweep into the plains of the Sutlej and the Ganges. It was a fine dream, and had the doing lain in the hands of a dozen young British subalterns, it would have materialized, and 200,000 Germans, Magyars, Austrians, Afghans, Tatars, and Turks would have hammered at the gates of India whilst Big Bertha was shelling Paris.

In January, 1918, these matters were only dimly discerned by us through the veil of the great deserts and immense mountain ranges, over which even the hardy caravan men of Turkistan and Bajaour now seldom came. So news and information was essential, and since there were tens of thousands of tons of cotton of Ferghana ready baled in the warehouses and on the wharves of Turkistan, it behoved us to take some energetic step to prevent this priceless raw material from reaching the nitrating shops of Germany, whether by way of Moscow or through Krasnovodsk and the Caucasus.

In accordance with the tradition of the British Army, there were opposed to this possible concentration of 200,000 the proverbial two men and a boy.

From Bagdad, Major-General L. C. Dunsterville and his exiguous forlorn hope made their arduous way to the Caspian shore. Farther east, up along the slender thread of the "East Persian Cordon,"

where Punjabi *jawan* and Semirechian Cossack, two men to every mile of unexplored, waterless Persian desert, watched the western tracks that sometimes carried German emissaries into Afghanistan, there went Sir Wilfrid Malleon and another tiny "Mission."

Farther east still, in Chinese Turkistan, ruled by a new-found set of Allies, Sir George Macartney was put at the head of the smallest Mission of all.

The soldiers of this Mission were some sixteen in number, and all but two belonged to the "Q.V.O." Corps of Guides. This was singularly appropriate, since the Guides had been the first of the King's forces to serve under arms in Turkistan and Siberia. As long ago as 1873, a troop of the Guides Cavalry and a company of the Guides Infantry, mounted on ponies, penetrated thereto as the escort to Sir David Forsyth's mission to King Yakub Khan, the Atalik Ghazi who had driven the Chinese from his country and founded a short-lived Khokandian dynasty over Kashgar and Yarkand. This little force, crossed the 18,000-foot Karakoram Pass and the drear Dipsang plains, far loftier than the Pamirs, where for ten days' march the traveller never goes below 16,000 feet and finds his way marked out by an unbroken line of skeletons. Not only did they reach the almost unknown cities of what is now called Sin-Kiang, but during the course of their work found themselves in the confines of Baber's kingdom of Ferghana, and in that great unvisited Siberian country that the Russians have since explored and named Semirechensk.

With this tradition in their minds, their grandsons marched up early in 1918 over the northern passes

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of Kashmir, still fathoms deep in snow, to the "happy land of Gilgit."

The little detachment, although called by us a platoon, was more accurately to be described as the nucleus of a company of mounted riflemen, since it was anticipated, and justly, that it would be expanded later on by the inclusion of locally found levies. The exact part that this "cadre" would play could not be foreseen, so care was taken to include men with the most varied accomplishments and qualifications. There were linguists, speakers of Russian, Turkish, Persian, Arabic, and even of French; a bomber, a machine-gunner, a signaller, a carrier-pigeon expert, two or three skilled topographer-scouts, a "first-aid" man, and a veterinarian, whilst practically every N.C.O. carried on him the scars of a protracted sojourn on the Western Front, and others had seen varied fighting in Africa, Persia, and on the Afghan frontier.

From the hospitable valley of Gilgit, which, on account of the deep snow and alpine conditions had been reached on foot with a long train of snow-porters, the Mission marched up through the remote and rugged valley of Hunza, where it met with a full-blooded hearty welcome in the castle of the Thum.

Hunza is inhabited by a fair-skinned people, iron-limbed, Greek in face, Macedonian by descent, endowed with a marvellous physical toughness and an Apollo-like symmetry of form. The tradition of Alexander lives as if he had passed this wild valley but yesterday. Up to the time of their "pacification" in 1892, they had been renowned for wonderful feats of raiding, across some of the



THE MINTAKA PASS : THE FRONTIER BETWEEN BRITISH AND CHINESE TERRITORY. HUNZA SCOUTS ON THE RIGHT.



CHINESE FRONTIER GENDARMES ON THE PAMIRS.



greatest glaciers in the world, into the towns of the Chinese.

They used to carry a fortnight's rations on their backs and cover immense distances over 20,000-foot mountain ranges, returning laden with gold-dust and jade, driving flocks of Kirghiz prisoners to be sold as slaves. Needless to say, some stalwart specimens of this cheery, smiling-faced people were enlisted into the party, whilst arrangements were made for a pigeon-post to be established, down the valley, to link the Pamirs with Gilgit. This, alas! was doomed to failure, since the many hawks attacked the wretched birds, which were all "driven down out of control" and "crashed."

Lord Kitchener visited Hunza in 1903, and so much does a Man catch the fancy of the man of Hunza, that, on the news of his death in the *Hampshire*, the Thum erected to his memory a shrine, that I saw perched high on a dizzy cliff.

The Pamirs were reached in about ten days' marching from Gilgit, up a narrow valley walled in by stupendous, precipitous mountains, and often the valley floor at 8,000 or 9,000 feet was overshadowed by a 25,000-foot peak. Crossing the "Pass of a Thousand Ibex" (the Mintaka), that forms the frontier between British and Chinese territory, the rugged valley and its frequent obstacles of glacier and mountain torrent gave way to the level Pamirs, a series of lofty plains, intersected by steep and bare ranges.

On the north slope of the Mintaka we met some Kirghiz and Sarikolis who had been sent over with yaks to assist our transport to cross the pass. When we all halted for breakfast at Lupgaz, the Hunza



## 10 FROM YARKAND TO YPRES AND BACK

men engaged them in conversation. Soon the talk turned to raids, and one of the levies reminded him of the day when Hunza sold six Kirghiz slaves for a single felt carpet. This infuriated the Beg of Karachukor to a frenzy. When he had cooled down a bit, the writer enquired the cause of his anger. The answer was: "The insolence of those Hunza blighters, selling us so cheaply!" The detail of being enslaved by a fighting race he took as a matter of course.

Our ceremonial escort of Hunza levies, armed with well-kept, long Lee-Metfords and dressed in homespun stone-coloured tweed, with the silver buttons of the frontier and topped by the quaint Dard cap with its silver ibex badge, handed us over to a guard of Chinese frontier gendarmes. These celestials, ungainly and slit-eyed, in baggy khaki drill wadded with raw cotton and black peaked caps with a brass dragon badge, were as much a contrast to the upstanding, alert, clear-eyed, clean-run men of Nordic race that they relieved, as their rusty, dirty, single-shot Mauser carbines were to the Lee-Metfords and well-dubbed equipment of the Macedonians' offspring.

On the third day's march north, at Tashkurghan, our party foregathered with the remains of a half-sotnia of Orenburg Cossacks that still held that post, ignored by the Bolsheviks who held sway in the plains. For forty years past the 5th and 6th Orenburg Cossacks, holding watch and ward over many remote valleys of Central Asia, had been the counterpart to the Corps of Guides, and many a time had N.C.O.'s and men of both regiments met on their inconspicuous missions, over that stark no-



A YAK—HIS KIRGHIZ RIDER.



OUR FRIENDS THE ORENBURG COSSACKS.



man's-land, when British and Muscovite held finger ready to trigger. Now both were allies, and festivities marked the occasion. There was much to admire in the turn-out and methods of the Cossacks. Their little shaggy ponies never felt the touch of a clipping-machine nor an enervating rug, and this in a Pamir winter of 40 degrees below freezing.

Bits are unknown—the Cossack has even to employ a German word when he wants to talk about one—and the plain iron snaffle is attached to a bridle far lighter than a British watering bridle. In spite of this, and of the stallions in the ranks, the Cossack's close-order drill is good. The best part of the Cossack's saddlery is his double saddle-bag: two bags, carried well up on each side of the saddle and joined to each other by a broad connecting piece passing over the saddle-tree. This is a vast improvement on the European way of having shoe-cases, mess-tins, nosebags, corn-sacks, and picketing pegs hung on all over the saddle.

All the frequently used items of the Cossack's kit go inside these saddle-bags, which come on and off in a moment, whilst the wallets hold articles that he does not often need, and which remain on the saddle. The only thing that goes neither in wallet or saddle-bag is the great coat (or felt *burka* in the case of Caucasian Cossacks). Rifle (over the right shoulder), sword, and bandolier are all carried on the man. A great point about this system is that the saddle-tree can be made much lighter, since it does not have to carry several stone dead weight attached to dees and rings on it. The Cossack saddle, though very light, is not good, since it carries the man too far off the horse's back and too

high: this is due to the tree being, for cheapness' sake, like the chair the Kaffir copied from the one he saw in the mission-house, made of a single piece of wood, with a padded leather seat. It has double leather girths, a foot apart, almost in New Zealand fashion. The stirrups are interconnected under the horse's belly to assist the rider in his Jigitovka displays, and the picketing chain is attached to the near ring of the snaffle. Cruppers and breastplates are universal. Nearly all the buckles are of the tongueless variety, and the whole of the leather is thin, pliable, and well tanned, much lighter and at least as strong as European leather. The bridle has but a single buckle, at the poll; and, shades of the Ordnance! its components are knotted together. Even if it were not adapted for knee-to-knee charges, or an English hunting-field, still there was much that was ideal for long marching over steppes, deserts, and taiga that our detachment eventually copied, though the Mongol-Manchu way of carrying the sword-scabbard, mouthpiece strapped to the front arch with the scabbard under the rider's left thigh and passing through a hole in the saddle-flap, seemed the best. When this was combined with a double saddle-bag to hold mess-tin, nosebag, corn, and picketing peg, with a sheepskin cloak over the saddle and under the surcingle, a forefoot shackle with its rope round the neck, and a single-rein snaffle in the pony's mouth, it made an ideal rig-out for the job, as soon as our wretched M.I. (or "Colonial") saddles were replaced by the 1902 pattern. Only two days were spent at Tashkurghan establishing an *entente* with the Cossacks, who to their misfortune were dependent for pay and supplies

on their enemies the Bolsheviks. Needless to say, they got nothing, and made up for it by living on the almost barren country, finding subsistence for men and horses in the almost miraculous way common to Cossacks and locusts.

Our detachment of Guides were now, some of them, mounted on that excellent animal the yak. This amiable creature has lost much of the credit due to itself by the reputation of the Tibetan variety. In 1904-05 it was found that the Tibetan yak could barely average ten miles a day, with frequent stops for grazing. The western yak, however, of the Pamir and Semirechensk, is bigger and hardier, and can cover as much as a pony, besides being infinitely better on glaciers, moraines, ice-covered rocks, and very high altitudes (say 15,000 feet and up to 22,000).

Feroz, my small Punjabi batman, here created a world's record by making a yak gallop. This he did with the aid of a sharp HB pencil of mine, to the vast dismay of the yak's owner.

I am sorry to say that we now stole a dog from the Cossacks, a vast Siberian wolf-hound, of ferocious aspect but inwardly amiable in the extreme. However, they stole him back next day.

Crossing four more passes and some rough boulder-strewn ravines, in ten days more the little Mission had passed through Yangi Hissar to Kashgar, encountering a ceremonial reception and many guards of honour of our new Allies the Chinese. Zahiru, a tall, deep-chested lad of Hunza, made like a Greek athlete, had attached himself to me. As we rode from the mouth of the last valley of Chong Karaul, out into the haze of the great plain, Feroz

decided to pull his leg. He remarked that the dusty mist was so thick that one could no longer see the mountains. Zahiru, who had never imagined that there could be a country that was not walled in by immense ranges and precipices, assented, opining that no doubt we should see the hillsides again as the murk cleared away. When, ten miles out, he at last realized that there were no more mountains, he was amazed, and his naïf remarks caused a lot of fun.

The Commander of the troops at Yangi Hissar, a Mahomedan Chinese Colonel, Ma-Tung-Ling, left nothing undone to ensure a hospitable welcome, and even marched into Kashgar himself with the party. At Kashgar all the troops were turned out in honour of the occasion. The Chinese Republican Army was a very different organization to that of the old days, though one may doubt if its fighting value has increased.

True, to-day, drill trousers and jackets of European cut, surmounted by peaked caps, replace the pig-tails and long silk robes embroidered with Chinese ideographs of the olden times, and Mausers supplant the Mongol bow and the quaint, old-fashioned halberds and partizans. We even saw a couple of Krupp B.L. field-guns of early date, sans teams, drivers, or serviceable ammunition.

The Chinese Army in the New Dominion (Sin-Kiang) is a remarkable institution. As the writer remembers it in 1914, it was just emerging from the stage of Drury Lane costumery and Heath Robinson weapons. In 1918 the revolution had made itself felt, and the troops were in pseudo-European kit with Mauser rifles and Germanic drill. Possibly the total numbers 4,000 to 5,000 in the

Six Cities of the dominion, excluding the distant northern metropolis of Urumtsi (Ti-Wah-Fu) and the trading centre of Hami.

\* \* \* \* \*

I well remember the charming spectacle that, coming suddenly round a corner, I once saw. The good-looking Awal Nur and Abdulla Shah sat on their ponies chatting in the most Occidental fashion with a brand-new acquaintance—a roguish-eyed, velvet-cheeked flapper of Kashgar, with her raven tresses in long plaits: she seemed to find the up-standing soldier strangers not unattractive, whilst they explained laboriously to me that they were just buying an apple or two.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Mission spent over a month in Kashgar putting itself abreast of the situation. During this time ceremonial visits had to be paid by, and returned to, the Chinese officials. The men had brought their review order especially for this, and even the unemotional Chinese were moved to remark upon their turn-out and drill, somewhat in contrast to their own. The Civil Chief Commissioner was a Confucian, whilst the Army Corps Commander, Ma-Ti-Tai, was a Dungan.

The Mission and its detachment made his formal acquaintance in a big new straggling *villeggiatura* that he had recently built for himself a few miles outside the city walls. Rough and tough, with a face that seemed as if it had been carved out of mahogany with a broad axe, he looked what he was. Liquor flowed freely, but the General had a high coefficient of absorption, and visions floated



into the minds of his guests, of the lively times there must have been in the heyday of the old *tapageur* amongst the rich caravans that bore sables, turquoises, gold-dust and fair maidens from Jungaria and Northern Sin-Kiang into far China.

He was a Vicar of Bray, too, in his own quiet way, for on his natty French grey tunic, rich with gold oak-leaves and bullion epaulettes, he wore two decorations, one on each breast. These insignia were of his own design: one contained his own portrait under a spring lid, the other was swivelled and reversible. On the outer side one found a miniature of the President then in power in Peking; on the other, one of the favourite backed to succeed him.

One would have to get up early in the morning to beat to windward of Ma-Ti-Tai, nearly as early as would be necessary to surprise the Chinese Commissioner who represented his country on the Anglo-Russian Pamir boundary commission of the nineties. This guileless mandarin affected an indifference as to the exact location of the Chinese frontier with respect to British territory. We claimed up to the north to Tashkurghan and a portion of the Raskam Valley: the Russians wanted us back on the crest of the great range, at the Mintaka Pass. The day was nearly won for the British case, when an ancient stone was discovered, almost buried, on the summit. This was covered with Chinese inscriptions, which, when translated, showed that when the Chinese first held the country away back in the dawn of history, this was a frontier pillar of their great empire.

This clinched the matter, and it was not till many

years after that the yarn leaked out. The naïf Commissioner had had the stone prepared in Kashgar, weathered, and planted beforehand for a simple European to find at the psychological moment.

At last permission came for three British officers of the Mission, *quorum pars parva fui*, to go to Tashkend, the capital city of Russian Turkistan, to treat direct with the Bolshevik Government there. Hitherto we had been categorically prohibited from quitting the territory of our Allies, the Chinese. It was quite clear that Chinese Turkistan was so cut off from Ferghana and Semirechia, that the intelligence which came through was of the wildest description. The power of exaggeration and the scarcity of veracity amongst the aborigines of those parts is immense, and it turned to our advantage. On the Pamirs our little army of sixteen was enlarged by popular report to 60,000. This figure spread over Central Asia and caused some unease to our adversaries.

So our little party rode off through the southern Tian-Shan, a distance of some sixteen marches to the Russian railhead, Sir George Macartney, the head of the Mission, following a couple of days later. With us came a charming lady, Madame R——, who combined the functions of Mess Secretary and Russian interpreter to perfection. She rather astonished us by laying in a store of 200 live chickens for the journey. We were relieved to find, though, that we were not expected to eat this number of full-grown hens: the victims were tiny Russian "tseplionoks," a few days old.

The Russian Colony gave us a Gargantuan send-off in their most hospitable style, and we trekked

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away to the west up the valley of the Kashgar river, the Kizil-Su.

I was mounted on a motor-bicycle, the first to be seen in Sin-Kiang, a two-stroke Triumph. We had prepared this with great care in the Rawal Pindi Mechanical Transport Dépôt. It was packed into five cases for man portorage, and fitted with an auxiliary tank so that it might run on kerosene, the fuel pipe being given a couple of turns round the cylinder. A good selection of tools and spares was tucked away into the corners, and the little motor-cycle journeyed on snow-porters' backs, camels, yaks, ponies, and mules over half a dozen passes for fifty marches till it arrived to *épater les bourgeois* of Kashgar.

It justified itself, though it spent much of its time on the low gear. The journey was not too easy, the machine lurching through the deep sand of the river-bed and bounding like the local ibex over the rough stones of the mountain slopes. In two days, however, it took me five marches; and what with the rarefaction of the air, the boulder-strewn track, and the steep gradient, it met its Waterloo on the east slope of the Kizil Dawan (the Red Pass), and went back to Kashgar in a Chinese cart, with the other wheeled vehicles of the party. It came in useful again later in the plains, running on an abominable raw-grain spirit distilled by the Hindu usurers of the city. Marching on with pack-ponies and riding horses, through the pleasant grassy hills of the Kizil-Su Valley, spending the nights in friendly Kirghiz *auls*, we climbed to Irkeshtam, where was the old Russian frontier Customs post, and a hospitable gathering of Men-

sheviks. The writer, being prostrated by a high temperature, spent the last two marches in a litter carried by two pack-horses in tandem. This is called in Persia a *takhta-rawan*, and is seen in Old English drawings of the Middle Ages. It is used by Cossacks to carry away seriously wounded men, and it is the only method that is any use to mounted troops unless they emasculate themselves with the encumbrance of wheels. For infantry use, in mountain warfare, it can be double-decked, so that two mules carry two men and their equipment, rifles, etc., and odds and ends such as water and surgical haversacks.

After Irkeshtam, we rose into higher country and in a touch of winter's snow to the bone-strewn Terek Pass. At the next stage we met a solitary Siberian rifleman, who had demobilized himself from his Pamir garrison by the simple process of walking away from it. As most of his comrades and his officers had done the same, one could hardly blame him. Meanwhile, the Bolsheviks were endeavouring to fill the gap by sending all the Czecho-Slovaks there that they could lay their hands on in Turkistan—doubtless this was to keep them out of contact with their "White" pro-ally comrades in Siberia.

At Gulcha, with its empty Cossack barracks, we met the postmaster and his wife in their little European house: they were to enter again tragically into our story. A few other Russians were getting away from the Reds into China and including a pretty young school-marm, so the night was filled with song and dance. Two days later we were in Osh, the home of the Emperor Baber, and found our first Bolshevik commissar, the local banker. In

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spite of his hirsute ferocity and the two pistols in his belt, he did not quite know what to make of us, so contented himself by doing nothing, in a typically Russian fashion. A couple of carriages took us from there along the forty miles of fair metalled road into the big electrically lit, cotton-milling town of Andijan, where we met the railway. A few days' stay in an insanitary hotel, staffed by invertebrately friendly Austrian waiters, brought us into contact with the situation, and incidentally with the Soviet of the town.

The situation, as we now saw it, was curious. A Red Government had established itself, almost bloodlessly in the first instance, at Tashkend in late 1917. Their oppressions and sequestrations brought them into conflict with the hardy and loyal Voisko, of Orenburg Cossacks, some twenty regiments, under their Ataman Dutof. Its operations, combined with the aid of the cadets of the Military College, gave them control of the city in March, 1918, but an evil genius prompted them to give the command to a lawyer, and they lost their gains within the day. They continued, though, to maintain a front across the railway, facing west towards Moscow, and south, at Aktubinsk, towards Tashkend. With only 7,000 men they maintained a gallant but isolated struggle for three years that was of no little service to the Allies. Fighting with swords and lances, short of cartridges, they barred the way to Turkistan from Moscow, and incidentally kept the tens of thousands of tons of Ferghana cotton, three years' crop, from the nitrating shops of Germany. It was one of our own tasks to do all we could to prevent this essential war material going westwards, either by way of

Moscow or across the Caspian. Now it rotted on the dock-sides and goods-sheds of Turkistan, or served as bullet-proof protection on the armoured trains of both sides. To the north-west the Ural Cossacks, the old truculent Voisko of Yaik, kept up a partizan warfare on the steppes of Emba, amid the oil-wells of Gurief, and on the Sea of Aral: the reader of the halfpenny press pictures to himself the Cossack as a cavalryman, yet Don, Ural, and Kuban Cossacks have a strong sea-faring tradition of which the gallant Kolchak was a testimony.

To the east, in the remote land that was the very fountain-head of the great floods that swept both Europe and Asia, a few hundred of a young Voisko, the Semirechensk, fought a Bolshevik force. In the south-east, in Ferghana, and in the Alai valley-pastures where we had passed, an enterprising Khokandian Uzbek (or Kipchak) leader, Irgash Bai, helped by Mahomed Amin Beg, with a sprinkling of Russian and even Austrian officers, claimed allegiance over, it was said, 20,000 Uzbek and nomad "partizanskis" who harassed the Reds, and destroyed any small party that ventured to leave the railway and the guns of their armoured trains. Indeed, this guerilla warfare continues to this day; though Irgash was killed, Mahomed Amin Beg succeeded in taking the city of Andijan in 1920. In the south-east, a revolt of strangely assorted Menshevik railway trades unions and Tekke Turkoman tribesmen had wrenched the city of 'Ashqhabad\* from the Soviet forces who were now at bay astride the Central Asian railway farther east. It was this little war that was to bulk very large in our adventures and

\* Map: Askabad.

to hold undreamt-of possibilities. To cap all, there had been 180,000 German, Austrian, and Magyar war prisoners in Turkistan in 1917. During that winter the kindly Soviet, since all were now comrades, released them, but discontinued the ration supply, so that 90,000 died of typhus and famine, whilst the rest worked for, or starved with, the easygoing Sarts and Kirghiz. Some of these, as we have already seen, the more adventurous, had already placed themselves under the "Imperial and Royal East India Detachment" in Kabul, and there were fears that this would become a serious menace.

A hundred thousand tough, hardy Afghan infantry are quite a sufficient handful to deal with, but when their corners are rounded off by a few hundred Staff Officers, gun-layers, telephonists, aviators, and armoured-car drivers, their fighting value may well be doubled. This was the picture that fronted our little party in midsummer, 1918, and opened up a new chapter of our adventures.







## CHAPTER II

### ON THE WRONG SIDE OF THE FRONT



*The Internationale.*

To get from Andijan to Tashkend it was necessary to get the Soviet to let us travel on the railway. This, on account of their suspicion, was an obstacle, but overcome in the way usual in "Sovdepia."

In the train, the month being July, the heat was excessive and the filth indescribable. Of course, no Bolshevik could demean himself to clean anything. The coaches were crowded; the vehicle we travelled in had once belonged to the Compagnie Générale des Wagons Lits, but it must have been some years since that firm saw any dividends from it. We found a couple of courteous Chinese merchants, and foregathered with them, the cleanest, best-mannered, and most clubable of all the human scum that crowded compartments and corridors. For three days our food was water-melons and an odd tin of sardines.

Our arrival in Tashkend early in the morning was rather startling both to us and to the Soviet. To us because, fresh from the Western Front, it

gave us a sort of "Alice-through-the-Looking-Glass" feeling to walk in streets full of a jostling crowd in "field-grey"; to the commissars, because the last thing they expected was a British Mission. Of course, we had to explain that we were civilian and semi-official to a remarkable degree, and that our reasons for being in their capital were other than they really were. The Lewis Carroll sensation was intensified in their case when three companies of the 1st Battalion 19th Punjab Infantry, plus some of the 28th Light Cavalry, irrupted into Turkistan, in response to an appeal from the Turkoman General Oraz Sardar and the 'Ashqhabad Provisional Government.

The Punjabis, on whom fell the brunt of the hard knocks, as always, when Punjabis are in the case, caused us intense joy by tumbling the Red Army into rout every time they met them. This joy, however, had to be concealed from the Soviet, in our various interviews with them, with some care. In fact we had to disown our very good friends the 19th by explaining to the Soviet that they were not His Majesty's troops at all, but pensioners and discharged Hazaras, Afghan subjects, who had left the King of England's service, and were fighting, purely as mercenaries, for the Mensheviks.

The Soviet, by no means a highly educated or enlightened coterie, accepted this explanation, but with some misgivings, since their imagination boggled at the idea of a British Mission coming to an enemy capital in the same week that a British army invaded the country, as well it might.

I remembered "what a tangled web we weave when first we practise to deceive," as one of the

hospital trains back from the 'Ashqhabad front, just after the action of Artik, brought wounded to Tashkend—amongst others, a well-educated Austrian *Gefreiter*.\* He, with his patrol, had been fallen upon by a patrol of Punjabis, and smitten hip and thigh. Though much out of breath, he had managed to escape with a mental picture of the Punjabi soldiers' ragged khaki uniform and accoutrements, that bade fair to give the lie to us when the Soviet heard about it. A strong party in that assemblage, headed by one Tobolin, whose father's name was Solomon, clamoured incessantly for a firing-party to attend to us. Tobolin himself ran a newspaper called *Sovietski Turkistan*, and in his leading articles he permitted himself to use some deplorable expressions in our regard. We still hope to meet him alone.

This made the matter of the Austrian lance-corporal somewhat ticklish, but personal contact with him, sweetened by some hardly-got beer and palm-oil, caused him to go back on his story, and we breathed again.

The Red Army was full of Austrians and Magyars, mainly the latter, with a few Germans. In fact, practically anyone who did anything in the way of going under fire or in reach of Punjabi bayonets was a Magyar or an Austrian. The very few survivors of the old Imperial Army, whether officers or rank and file, to their credit, almost to a man refused to serve the Reds. The hundred or so renegade Semirechensk Cossacks contented themselves with picturesque poses in the streets and the singing of excellent part songs. The strong Hebrew element

\* Lance-corporal.

was fully occupied with "indispensable" departmental and political work, out of range of the farthest-reaching guns, whilst the dregs of the jails and bazars, whether Christian or Mahomedan, that made up the numbers, had no use for a perforated integument at all. The Magyars and Austrians thus bore the burden, and they had the powerful incentive of fighting their way through to the repatriation, via the Caucasus, that the Soviet promised them, when they defeated the Imperialistic-Capitalistic Anglichanins.

On the 'Ashqhabad front was an army with a "bayonet" strength of 7,000, under ex-Company-Sergeant-Major Koluzaief, of whom some 5,000 were trained pre-war regular European soldiers, lavishly armed, equipped, and gunned in comparison with the tiny Punjabi force, less than an eighth their strength, that inflicted defeat after defeat upon them, and drove them over 200 miles in four months.

The Soviet of Turkistan were so perturbed by the reverses suffered by their troops that the mere mention of the word "Sipahi" made them shudder. In haste they sent for their crack corps, the Zhlobinski Polk. This engaging unit, some 3,000 to 4,000 strong, had been on the northern front at Aktubinsk, fighting against the Orenburg Cossacks, now temporarily quiescent.

They were mainly composed of ex-convicts, *forçats* who had been transported to Sakhalien, the Cayenne of Imperial Russia, and had been released by the revolutionaries.

Even amongst others of the Red Army, who were by no means little Lord Fauntleroy's, they were conspicuous for a cut-throat ruffianly swashbuckling.

Their commander, Ginsburg, was one of the very few Hebrews who ever went under fire, and he possessed, alone, some occult influence over them. He brought them by train into Tashkend. They decided to improve the shining hour, and called *en masse* upon the Soviet, in the "White House" that had been the residence of the old Governor-Generals, with a little request for five million roubles. "'Nikolai,' mind you, none of your Soviet stuff." A prolonged haggle followed, seasoned with a few pistollings, and at last the Soviet was prized away from the money with the stipulation that the Zhlobinskis should do as they were told, and get off to the 'Ashqhabad front. They agreed, but, two stations south of Tashkend, changed their minds and marched back to the "White House" for another five million, which they duly trousered.

During the second visit, one of the Zhlobinskis, thinking himself aggrieved in some small matter, decided to call upon the War Minister to obtain satisfaction. He took with him a bellyful of vodka to lend him eloquence, and a stick-grenade to emphasize his arguments. Clambering up the steep stairs of the office, he found the Secretary of State "not at home," whereupon a chorus of clerks and typists, quite understandably, projected him down again on to the hard, unfeeling pavement. When the broad, cobbled, poplar-lined avenue had ceased revolving and he had cooled his heated brow against the slender white trunks, he found the grenade still in his hand, and an unoffending aborigine messing about in the middle of the thoroughfare in front of him. Withdrawing the pin, he decided not to waste the bomb, so hurled it at the scavenger. The bomb

burst, and the stick coming back, with poetic justice, killed the Zhlobinski, the native remaining unscratched.

At long last they reached the south-west front, in time to be cut to pieces by the Punjabis at Kaakha. The regiment ceased to exist, and their commander died of his wounds. He was brought back to Tashkend for burial, to the genuine regret of the commissars, mingled with a rancour that showed itself in our direction. Meanwhile the Uzbegs and Kipchaks made progress in the south-east; the Reds lost ground in Semirechia and an Afghan Mission bullied them in Tashkend.

Life in Tashkend was never dull: every now and then, when the Soviet decided to remind the citizens with what they were ruled, an armoured car would hurtle through the streets, its powerful exhaust whistle shrieking, the gunner's thumbs on the double button of its twin Maxim guns, whilst the more cautious got hastily round a corner. Another comic turn was a Bolshevik battery of horse artillery manned by Black Sea sailors, that galloped up and down the cobbled streets. I was more than once roused out of bed at midnight by the fixed bayonets and raucous cry of "Ruki verkh, tavarish!"\* from a Red Guard visitation, though visits to the friendly and hospitable "White" Russians made these episodes seem like strange dreams. One damsel, who refused to let anything worry her, would cheer things up by the smiling remark of, "La vie est très dure et les pommes de terre sont très chères," after the newest piece of police oppression.

One night I was pulled up by a far from sober

\* "Hands up, comrade!"

and heavily armed Red Guard, disguised as an arsenal, for being out after curfew. He called me "Tavarish," and then "bourgeois," which annoyed me. I disclaimed the titles, and on his offering me the alternative of dungeon or the bayonet, I told him, in my very bad Russian, that I was a most intimate friend of Sirul, the "Commissar" of Militzie, as they called the police, and that if he liked, he could come along with me to the police headquarters. He became suddenly quite sober and polite, and remarked that it was a fine night for August. Sirul was in the habit of impressing his wishes on his subordinates with a pistol. He was always very courteous to Sir George and to me, and never failed to punish his men for interfering with us. At the same time, the ex-baker, for such he was, a tall, cadaverous, pasty-faced, yellow-haired Lett, had a sinister side to him. One evening, half a dozen commissars of adverse political views were supping in the garden restaurant of our hotel. Without the least warning, a dozen Red ragamuffins leapt on them with fixed bayonets, killed a couple on the spot, and dragged the survivors away to the police headquarters, where Sirul had them despatched messily amongst the typewriters and electric fans of his tidy inner office. This rather stamped the man: anyone but a roturier would have done it in the garden. His explanation to the Soviet, that the deed was done as a kindness in view of the injuries they had received on the way from the restaurant garden, did not somehow convince one.

Life was not all massacres in Tashkend. In that city of gardens everyone takes tea and dines out of doors during the summer, and I have memories of



many pleasant evenings with cheery Russians who were wonderful in forgetting for a brief space the bloodshed and atrocities of the Bolsheviks.

Sometimes Sirul, with a posse of ostentatiously grubby Red Guards, would ransack a restaurant for wine and liquor, though he seemed careful not to break up the bottles on the spot; and no doubt for reasons of tidiness, a string of his myrmidons with their arms full of confiscated flagons would follow him to headquarters, to deal with them there.

Every restaurant had an orchestra of Austrian prisoners, that played the "Marseillaise" with great unction. We stood up instinctively, to the slight annoyance of our Russian friends, who explained that the tune was now the revolutionary air. One evening as we walked into the *chashka chai*, the garden of the central square, where the statue of Kaufmann was replaced by a grimy red flag, an Austrian fiddler, wishing to show friendship for the British, struck up "Tipperary": we smiled as all the decent people stood up as to a national anthem.

At that period most of the "narodni commissars" tried to ape the French Revolution in word and deed, but the great differences between the two could not but impress us. What saved the French from the bestialities that characterized the upheaval in Russia was the French spirit, so typically Aryan, that shunned the ways of Semite and of half-breed Mongol.

Often enough, as I listened to the strains of the Austrian band, did I think of the great days of old, as the small boys hawked cigarettes to the cry of "Papyrōs-Tamerlānski Tabak." Tamerlane's is still a name to conjure with in Scythia of to-day.

We saw the Soviet, or rather various commissars thereof, perhaps a couple of times a week, and their outlook rather startled us. Demogatski, the commissar for foreign affairs, was not a really Red Bolshevik, but "Left Social Revolutionary," was pro-ally, and declared a wish to continue the German war.

Kolesov, the President, once surprised us by asking us what the "Vieliki britanski" (Great British) House of Commons thought of the "Socialisticheski Federativnaya Turkestanski Respublika." As he mouthed these brave words I wanted to laugh, and to tell him that the House of Commons had never heard of the Turkistan Republic, and probably imagined, like many better educated people, that Tashkend was a Tibetan town. Hilaire Belloc tells us that the Llama is—"a woolly sort of beast, with a supercilious look and an undulating throat, rather like an unsuccessful literary man, and must not be confused with the Lama, the Lama that is lord of Turkestan."

Some people's politico-geographic ideas of Turkistan are based on the bad boy's book of beasts.

However, we suppressed the laugh, and warmly assured him that the noble-hearted, if down-trodden, British Parliament extended their warmest sympathy and heartfelt good wishes to those newer democracies struggling like them against despotism, capitalism, imperialism, monarchism, militarism, and so forth. His leg was unpullable.

We met a few Austrian officers, many of whom were by nationality Serbs, Rumanians, Italians, or Czechs. A conspicuous figure was one Zimmermann, a Lieutenant of Saxon artillery, the head of a Mission

to organize and clothe German prisoners of war, and to orient them in the direction of Kabul.

A Danish Captain, also a gunner, named Brün, was engaged in looking after Austrians, and we got to know him very well.

So the two months we spent in the city were nothing if not cosmopolitan, and the period was an education in itself.

We now had one of the primary maxims taught to the young reconnoitrer well rubbed into us—that it is no use collecting information unless you can transmit it soon enough to be useful to the place where it will do most good.

We had been six weeks in Tashkend without having been able to get any useful message through to Kashgar, whence it would be sent by runner over the great passes to Gilgit and thence telegraphed to Simla. Some thirty to forty messengers had taken our money and slipped our messages into their great jackboots without tangible results. Doubtless the Reds caught some, and probably their courage failed the rest. The Sart and the Kirghiz were all out to be polite and to help us, or any monarchists, against the Bolsheviks, but this did not run to endangering their own skins. Afghans were, of course, out of the question, whilst Russian officers and soldiers were too conspicuous and easily watched by the teeming spies of the Soviet. An attempt to employ another means had failed in a way that cannot be described here, coming within just half an inch of costing a very useful life, so nothing remained but to go ourselves.

As it was clear that we could do nothing more in Tashkend towards winning the War, there was

nothing to keep us there any longer, however picturesque our adventures might have been had we stayed. An attempt to instal me as one of a Bolshevik Mission to Sir Wilfrid Malleson failed at the last moment owing to the enemy's suspicions of my *bona fides*.

Sir George's announcement to the Soviet to this effect rather upset them, as they had an idea of holding us as hostages, especially after the death of Mirbach in Moscow, and Lenin's direct order to seize all Allied subjects. The extreme party voted for the dungeon or the firing squad, but the more moderate feared for their own skins, if their many enemies should win the day with increased British aid. Finally, against their divided counsels, Sir George Macartney, by sheer force of his personality, won the day.

I well remember the scene when we discussed the matter with the fanatic Red President, Kolesof,\* in the great rambling White House, whose teak polished floors ill matched the frowsy Red Guards who trod them, and from whose gilded walls the stark realism of Verestchagin, depicting Skobelef's and Kaufmann's victories, looked down upon their successors.

To the onlooker, it was a wonderful sight to see the mastering, by the gentleman of a superior race, of the unwashed chosen of the proletariat, against their own desires.

So complete was the victory of the higher mind, that the Soviet even gave us a special train. At the last moment it dwindled to a special carriage, since the Punjabis had again defeated Koluzaief, and the commissars had scraped together the last draft and the

\* Killed on the ice before Kronstadt, early in 1921.

last armoured car, to send as a reinforcement by our train, against our own side. We parted from them after two days' travelling at Chernaievo, now called Ursatiefskaia, the junction with the Central Asian. They went, many to their end, in front of Merv, and we back into China. During all the three months that the officers had been in Russian territory the bulk of the N.C.O.'s and men remained in Chinese. We regretted very much afterwards not having brought some with us to Tashkend, as this would have solved the difficulties of getting reliable men to go in disguise with our messages. However, it was feared that they would be too conspicuous, and so the handful that came along were sent back into China. Here they found some scope for their talents and accomplishments.

One of the Guides N.C.O.'s had some astounding adventures in this period. While engaged upon a certain task, he, through the treachery of an Allied officer, fell into the hands of the enemy, who tortured him in a barbarous manner. In the evening of the day that this occurred, he was bound to the muzzle of a gun, in order to be blown from it at dawn. By a great effort he freed himself from his bonds during the night, stabbed the sentry with his own bayonet, and after months of wandering in disguise, even, for a period, with an enemy General as his groom, through several countries, hostile and friendly, arrived at a British post in the garb of a menial. Since he had no papers, he had to do the last few hundred miles of marching under a pseudonym, even though it was along a British line of communications.

The headquarters of the Mission, then, arrived at Andijan, in the train, early one morning, when

nobody was about, only to be pounced upon by a patrol of Bolshevìks, commanded by a Galician Jew. The truculent tone and manner of this wretch made it quite clear to us that he had telegraphic instructions from the Tashkend Soviet to "double-cross" us. It needed a supreme effort of diplomacy, not to say bluff, to shake him and his myrmidons off, but the episode had its thrills. What with room-to-room visitations, and with this sort of episode, I became quite unpleasantly familiar with the aspect of the business end of the slim, quadrangular, chisel-pointed Russian bayonet, pattern 1906.

We then spent four or five days in the caravan-serai of a friendly Mahomedan merchant, tucked away in the labyrinthine alleys of the old city of Osh, where the last district official of the good old days of Nikolai used to have his headquarters. This, I believe, put the Reds completely off the scent, for when we eventually pushed on to Gulcha the only Bolshevìks, the two telegraphists there, were obviously very surprised to see us, and as they were in a minority, abstained from any use of force. The wife of the late postmaster was still there, believing herself to be a widow. Her unfortunate husband had been spirited away more than a month before, and she had heard no news whatever of him, in spite of her frantic enquiries.

Under the Reds, this can only have one meaning. At Irkeshtam the Loyalists outnumbered the Bolshevìks, and we crossed over the Chinese territory without any trouble.

We had no tents nor any form of shelter or camp kit, and so fared as best we could in the few Kirghiz

encampments that still remained so high. The Kirghiz were always most hospitable when they found that we were British, and one charming young lady in particular, who had entertained us during our first journey up the Kizil-Su, found herself again our hostess.

It was on account of Bolshevik depredations that any Kirghiz remained on the higher pastures, instead of going down to the lower Alai and the valley plains of Samarkand. They told us a good deal that was of interest, especially about the Kirghiz rebellion against the Russians in Semirechia, in 1916 and 1917.

The Tsar's Government had had the very laudable intention of forming labour corps from the unwarlike Kirghiz just as we did from Hindustan and Southern India,\* and the French from Annam, to work on their Western Front. The Kirghiz were quite willing, flags were waved and bands played, and to start with all went well. But soon the police and gendarmes of those parts, true to the traditions of the civilian Jack-in-office, saw in this an opportunity for getting rich quickly. They used the conscription law to blackmail the Kirghiz and cozen them from their lands and property, in the manner of the *embusqué* all the world over. Oppression beget violence, and violence reprisals, and soon the old men and boys of the Cossacks, the draft-dodgers of the Mujiks and the "indispensables" of the towns, were waging a guerilla war against the more numerous Kirghiz of the country. The Kirghiz prevailed, massacring or selling into slavery, it is said, some

\* Note well that no true Punjabi ever enlisted in a labour corps.

10,000 Russians. Many women and children thus found their way as slaves as far east as Khotan, on the confines of Tibet, and up to Ti-Wah-Fu in the north. The revolution cut away the hope of applying any remedy.

In the Gulcha Valley, on the wall of a little rest-house, some Siberian soldier had scrawled:

Bog dat Adama,  
Ili chort zhandarma.  
(God made Adam,  
But the devil made the gendarme.)

\* \* \* \* \*

The track now leaves the Pamir cart-road with its telegraph line, and strikes southwards up the rough rocky valley which leads to the Terek. The lateness of the season had brought some snow, and the often forded stream was clogged with ice on its boulders. The crossing was not too pleasant: the pass is a knife-edge, littered with bones and skulls, and a howling wind always searches its summit. The south side is easier than the north, and another hour or so found us in the old rest-house called Katta Kamish (Great Reeds), now deserted. The valley was empty and bleak, the winter and the Bolsheviks had driven away the once prosperous Kirghiz of the Great Horde, and their herds of cattle, sheep, and horses. In summer this used to be a pleasant region to travel in; every grassy valley held a Kirghiz encampment, whose cream, koumiss and very best *yurt* were at the disposal of the traveller, and in these a British officer seemed especially welcome. Now the poison of Bolshevism seemed to have withered the very wild-flowers.



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The next day, instead of following the easy track down the valley, we zigzagged up over the ridge to the east into another side valley and down a smuggler's track, which goes through a defile of cliffs barely 6 feet wide and so jumbled with boulders that a mule can just scramble down.

This leads into another grassy open valley, and as we came down, on the opposite side there galloped a Kirghiz wedding on twoscore nimble ponies. They seemed cheery enough as they sped up to the north and out of this story. A mile down is K k-Su (Blue Water), where two rippling trout-streams meet, and where dwelt an old man of the frontier guard (called by the Russians Podgranichnaya Straja for short), with a cat and a samovar. The fall of empires and the slaughter of thousands had left him unmoved. He still caught fish in the brook and boiled his samovar, even though his two Kirghiz subordinates had sauntered away, leaving their rifles hanging from their accustomed nails. It gave one a queer pang to see these good weapons and their modern high-velocity cartridges lying discarded by the intensely unwarlike Kirghiz, whilst one's own men had been fighting world battles over Europe, Asia, and Africa with their obsolete snaphaunces.

Two more low easy passes, called Ikizek (the Twins), the track winding from valley to valley, saw us that afternoon at Irkeshtam. There used to be a post of some fifty Cossacks here in older times, furnished by the regiment at Skobelev. I had known there the 5th Orenburgs, in which I had several friends, most of whom were killed in Galicia. I always felt a fraternal sentiment for this regiment, whose permanent station was immediately north of

that of my own, and across the road, so to speak, only a few mountain ranges intervening. We stopped no longer than was needed to take a dish of tea with our acquaintances there, but rode on four miles down the valley, across the frontier, to the new Chinese post, where there is now a telegraph office whose line runs on to Kashgar, and thence, including a few sections tied up with string, to Urumtsi, Hami, and Peking. It takes weeks for messages to filter through this line, but still they do get through, even if they are unintelligible when they arrive. It was touching to see the King's English, in sturdy block capitals, on the instruments, announcing that they were made at Shanghai. A noteworthy point was that all the forms and papers are printed with either red or green ink according to whether they pertain to received or despatched messages. This is ahead of the British Army system of using tinted paper, and might well be copied by the Signal Service, since it is a great help to operators to sort out the printing on the form from the writing of the message. Of course, Chinese messages are sent by a number code, but the clerks are supposed to be able to transmit foreign messages in Roman characters. We spent the night here in the cold room of the telegraph office, made welcome by the courteous Chinese. On from Irkeshtam, instead of using the usual caravan path via Eghin over the hills north of the river, we went down the valley of the Kizil-Su (Red Water), intending to take a short cut to Muk Karaul on the Muk-Su, and thence on over the Kush Bel Pass and Kontimez to Tarning Bashi and Bulunkul. This valley has the accus-

tomed steeply sloping hills, but the floor is on the average nearly half a mile wide, and in it one reaches patches of grass, brushwood, and clumps of pleasant trees. One of these bosky retreats is where Sven Hedin was fond of resting upon his travels. Below, at the meeting of two valleys, we encountered the main track and the telegraph again at Nagara Chaldi (the Place where the Drum was beat); the map calls it Nagra-Aldi. A big ruined castle crowns a ridge just to the south, recalling the spacious days of Yakub Beg, his arquebusiers of Khokand, Punjabi musqueteers, and eagles trained to hunt the gazelle.

Several times up to here we forded the river, which in this month was deep and swift enough to make it a little difficult for the smaller ponies. A final crossing and a couple of miles more of pleasant turf found us in a Kirghiz camp among leafy plane-trees, where the Beg's comely young wife made us welcome in her tent. Although her face was flat (flat as your hat), she had a kind smile under towering white cotton headgear (*style François premier*), and she jingled with festoons of quaint Mongoloid silver ornaments set with garnets and carbuncles. Even her great big jackboots did not prevent her from being wholly feminine.

Our next march, still down the valley, took us to Ulughchat (the Great Water-Meeting). This is the first proper Chinese garrison that one comes to, and we exchanged visits with its commander, an Amban who combines civil duties on the border with the command of some fifty ragged Chinese soldiers of the Lu-Chun. Needless to say, along with his Occidental uniform of wadded black cotton he wore

the inevitable tin sword in a still tinnier scabbard, which the vile Hun has forced upon the several comic opera armies of Asia. Few of them, possibly only the Afghans, have the gumption to stick to their own dress and sidearms.

From Ulughchat and its smelly caravanserai we parted with cheery Madame X——, who had since Tashkend been such a welcome element of our party. Madame went straight on to Kashgar, escorted by her faithful Sart retainer, to whose good sense we owed a great deal. This is, however, another story, which cannot be told just now. Our modest caravan, now reduced to some six or seven animals, wended its way past Yessi Kitchik, over the low hills of the Shor Bulak Dawan (Salt Spring Pass) to Manshrap (the Place of the Drinking Feast), where we spent the night in a hut in a valley commanded by the ruins of a fort 300 feet above. We had long forgotten the languid Indian way of travelling; with double fly-tents and hungry Hindus to pitch tables and chairs and jail-made cotton rugs; and grimy *khansamahs* from Bareilly, with their jampots full of old and treasured bones, to be used in what passes in Hindustan for European cookery. This is how the present generation of servants in India gets its own back on the twentieth-century sahib for the high-handed ways of John Company and its people, in early Victorian times. He chops up a time-expired bit of mutton on a dubious board with a never-washed knife, moulds it with his grubby fingers into the shape of a potato, thrusts an ancient bone into the end, fries the whole in fat of uncertain antecedents, and calls it a cutlet. The preparation of (save the mark) coffee is another

form of hate with which the too-vindictive Dravidian pursues his English master. The whole business is one, however, which will some day be wiped out in blood, so why discourse further. Our way was different. Our cook, in his sheepskin hat and vast boots, bestrode an untamed mustang, caracoling along with a saucepan of stewed Pamir sheep under his arm. He always managed to arrive. We slept on the ground and ate off it, whilst washing was an event postponed until we arrived in a bigger village which owned a copper cauldron. We did not miss the "Persicos apparatus," and covered twice the ground, in comparison with the Indian pattern cortège. (*Note for Travellers*: Your cook should always possess the thrusting cavalry spirit and a gift for trick riding.) In any case, as it was good enough for my distinguished Chief, it was amply good enough for me, and, moreover, vastly harder commons were yet in store.

Next day at Tokkus Gumbaz (Nine Domes) we found that the Muk-Su route was not practicable, since there were no Kirghiz there, and it was most distinctly not good enough to sleep out in the open at 12,000 feet in October unless there is a definite reason for it. So we went on down the main Kizil-Su (Red River) Valley, leaving the ordinary caravan route which uses the Kizil Dawan away to the north on our left. Our track is very little known; I doubt if any Europeans had passed that way. A mile or two below Tokkus Gumbaz we had to ford the swollen river. For this camels were necessary, and we got them from the Kirghiz. The ponies just managed to scramble across without their loads. The south side of the valley—that is, the right bank

—is all covered with boulders brought down by the side-streams, and, I imagine, ancient glaciers, and is very rough going. Lower down the valley opens out into a glade called Shumkar, and begins to show signs of the approach of the Kashgar plain. Pretty late in the afternoon we came to a couple of Kirghiz tents pitched in a pasture called Ak Terek, a mile or so from the river, on the opposite bank of which lies the small village of Bure Tokai, hidden in the tufted poplars whereby one marks down a village from afar from Khurasan to Khotan. Next morning we were up betimes, knowing that we had a long march. It took us nearly three hours over a stony, waterless plain, which sloped down from the hills on the south-west, to reach the curious long rocky ridge which thrusts out for several miles like a spear towards the river now beginning to lose itself in the sandy plain. This ridge and the pass over it is not well shown on the Indian map. It should be narrower and run more nearly from west-south-west to east-north-east.

A climb of an hour up a rough stony ravine, at the head of which, fortunately for the horses, we found a brackish spring, took us up about 1,500 feet to a double pass called Kara Bel, the last 100 of which lay in steep zigzags. From this we had hoped for a good view of the last part of the march, but the haze disappointed us. The descent was shorter and less steep, and it soon took us down to another great sloping stony plain, in which we hoped to find Opal, our halting-place for the night. However, the vague track led us through a curious formation of loess hummocks, intersected by a maze of sandy runnels and each crowned by tamarisk and thorn.

This was heavy going: the hummocks cut off our view, and there was no sign of life. For four hours we plodded through this, the baggage ponies far behind, and in the afternoon reached a river which flowed 50 feet below the plain between vertical walls of clay. There were camel tracks here, and in front to the north was an isolated group of hills with some buildings. Following the river-bank, we began to have thoughts of tea, supper, and bed. But no: Opal was still far off. The buildings on the hillside turned out to be ruined fortalices, and the few patches of maize that we found near by were cultivated by people who lived miles away. We trekked on through vile loose sand along a well-used camel-track, following the skirt of the clump of hills. The sun sank rapidly and so did our spirits, since we had been marching for ten hours and the baggage ponies of this region take nearly half as long again over a long march than riding animals.

At last the big oasis came in sight, and after the fashion of oases in these parts, it took a long, long time before we were in it. Then the trees suddenly loom big, and in a few steps one passes from the desert to the sown. The inconveniences of coming into a town or big village after, say, twelve hours' marching are many. Much time is wasted when men and horses are tired in finding a billet, or even a space for a tent: there is an *embarras de richesses*. More is lost in stumbling in the dark along narrow lanes, often to find that the householder whose roof is offered, is away, and has taken the key with him. Lastly, the baggage usually misses the man you sent to guide it in, and fetches up still later.

Of course, if you do not have any baggage, you avoid this latter trouble. We found a rich merchant here who gave us his best room and fare, in the unobtrusive way of the hospitable Turk. The kit turned up too late to be of any use to us; we were already snoring on piles of rugs and felts before a cheery fire.

Next day we did an easy march of about eighteen miles over the undulating gravelly desert, so typical of the Sin-Kiang province, to another big straggling village called Tashmalik. All around the desert plains of the three Turkistans there are straggling poplar bowered villages, irrigated by many little canals which drink up every spare trickle of the glacier-fed torrents which race down the iron ravines of the foothills. Such a one is Tashmalik, which lies at the mouth of the Gez (Tamarisk) River. This stream, often unfordable, carries down the overflow of Bulun Kul, eked out by the meltings of one or two glaciers. The Gez is big and Tashmalik correspondingly rich. In the evening Major Etherton, now Consul-General at Kashgar, rode in to meet us, and we travelled all three together up the valley to Gez Karaul (Picquet), where there is a bridge; one must move slowly over the vilely stony river-bed and ford several times. If the river is too high for this, as in June or July, one clammers along the top of the high rough ridge to the east, and crosses nine passes before reaching the bend of the river at Kupruk Karaul (Bridge Picquet: map, Kauruk Karaul). There is no bridge here, hence the name. About ten miles down is Oitagh, where there are two or three Kirghiz tents and a hut or so. We lunched here and did not reach



Gez Karaul till late in the evening. There really is a bridge here, and it is needed, since the river roars down amid huge boulders between cliff-like banks: on the south bank is the apology for a fort which gives the place its name.

The next day's march above here is wild and austere. Lord Dunmore speaks pretty plainly about it in his description of his journey here in 1892. The valley sides are beetling yellow cliffs and the narrow valley floor is a wild medley of boulders of every size. One crosses two or three times before reaching Uch Gumbaz (Three Domes), which is half-way, and, strange to say, there are rough wooden cantilever bridges at the crossings. Since this is the most expeditious route from Kashgar to India, the Chinese official even goes so far as to mend the bridges. Except for a feeble attempt to grow a little barley below Gez, there is not a blade of vegetation to be seen between Oitagh and Tarning Bashi (Head of the Gorge); not even the tamarisk which gives the place its name: Uch Gumbaz is merely three ruinous and empty mud huts sometimes used by shepherds and their sheep. I have been into the plain of Kashgaria on various occasions by half a dozen or more routes, and nothing has seemed to be more striking than the wild declivities of the various routes through which one passes from the Pamirs to the foothills: the abruptness which one drops (or climbs) several thousand feet in a day's march is something to be remembered. Also very striking is the sudden change as one gets within a mile of Tarning Bashi from the barren precipices of the Gez to the grassy levels of the Pamirs. Suddenly the rushing torrent

becomes a rippling brook between turfy banks, the iron-bound ravine changes to verdant plain encircling the still mere from whose glassy surface a strange misty cloud ever rises. This is the impalpable loess dust, here strangely out of place, which is blown to and fro about the shallow basin of hills, lying in light drifts in their hollows, and swirling up inexplicably like steam from the surface of the lake. To the south-east towers Kungurdebe, 25,000 feet of black precipices; grander, to my mind, even than Muztagh Ata, the "Father of Ice Mountains," its neighbour. We had passed the snout of the Koxsel glacier which springs from Kungurdebe during our toil up the valley. So, preceded by one Nadir, we titupped on our woolly nags past the glorified stone sheep-pen with loop-holes which passes for a Chinese outpost at Langgtai, round the tip of a low spur, along the sedgy margin of the lake to Bulunkul Fort. Although Langgtai post has a garrison of one decrepit Kirghiz, and would be untenable against a barrage of well-aimed brickbats, it has more than once loomed large in *Welt Politik*.

The Quai d'Orsay, Downing Street, and the Nevski Prospekt, used to contemplating Gibraltar, Ehrenbreitstein, or Kronstadt, could not visualize an Imperial Chinese Fortress, "where three empires meet," as being an edifice unsafe to lean up against. Bulunkul Fort is just a trifle better, and as evening was drawing in we came upon it, set in its grassy plain, and encountering as we came up a salute from a guard of honour of six Kirghiz gendarmes under a Chinese warrant officer, disguised as a *Feldwebel*. There was a touch of the grotesque

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in their wadded black cotton jerkins covered with vermilion Chinese characters, designed to make their office quite clear to a population who speak Turkish and read not at all. The rusty Mauser carbines failed to bring the picture into the twentieth century.

Soon enough we snuggled down before the fires in the comfortable *yurts*, *akois*, *obas*, *kibitkas*, *kirghas*, *siah khanas*, *ailichiks*, or whatever you like to call them, that, unaltered in pattern, have formed the habitation of all right-minded men from Sevastopol to Harbin since the dawn of history and before:

From their black tents, long files of horse, they stream'd  
As when, some grey November morn, the files  
In marching order spread of long-neck'd cranes,  
Stream over Kasbin, and the southern slopes  
Of Elburz, from the Aralian estuaries,  
Or some froze Caspian reed-bed, southward bound  
For the warm Persian sea-board: so they streamed.  
The Tatars of the Oxus, the King's guard,  
First with black sheep-skin caps and with long spears;  
Large men, large steeds, who from Bokhara came  
And Khiva, and ferment the milk of mares.  
Next the more temperate Toorkmuns of the south,  
The Tukas and the lances of Salore,  
And those from Attruck and the Caspian sands,  
Light men and on light steeds, who only drink  
The acrid milk of camels, and their wells.  
And then a swarm of wandering horse, who came  
From far, and a more doubtful service own'd;  
The Tatars of Ferghana, from the banks  
Of the Jaxartes, men with scanty beards  
And close-set skull-caps; and those wilder hordes  
Who roam o'er Kipchak and the northern waste,  
Kalmuks and unkemp'd Kuzzaks, tribes who stray  
Nearest the Pole, and wandering Kirghizzes,  
Who came on shaggy ponies from Pamere.

Little could we foresee, on that drear evening in the wilds of "Pamere," that not many weeks later some of our small force would carry the King of England's badges in among those same Tatar hordes and long-speared "Tukas" (Tekke Turkman) to the roar of the Nieuport's 110-horse Rhône, the crash of bursting bombs, and the tattoo of machine-guns. This not too far from

The low flat strand  
Of Oxus, where the summer floods o'erflow  
When the sun melts the snow in high Pamere.

—strange regions for men who have newly learnt Swahili in the Rufiji swamps and Flemish amongst the shells of Ypres.

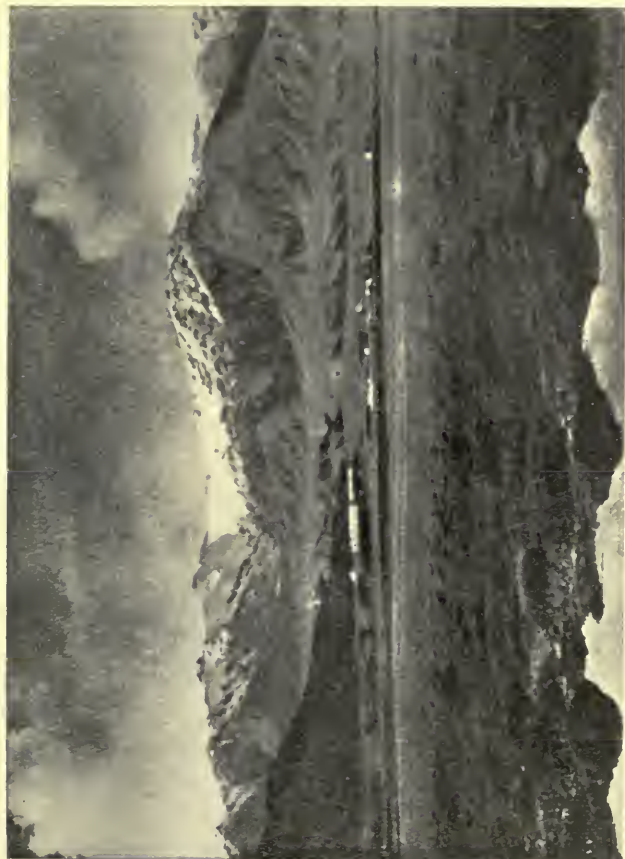
No stranger, though, than the thought of such Tatar hordes knocking at the gates of Vienna, nor than the vision of a Western world fighting for its life against barbarians striving again to tumble civilization into ruin, eight centuries after Chinghiz and Tamerlane.

Next day we halted at Bulun Kul, read our letters which a Kanjut runner had brought from Hunza, and amused the afternoon with mounted sports. Here the celebrated Nadir of Sariko was in his element. He had cheered our journey up from Tashmalik, gladdening the eye as he cantered along the levels on his shaggy pony; and complete with frieze jacket, caubeen, and ibex skin boots, looked like nothing so much as a Sinn Feiner returning from a Connemara race meeting. His experience as a self-appointed and unpaid British Consul for Sariko has gifted him with an immense capacity for administration. So

we watched the antics of the Kirghiz\* playing weird rough-and-tumble games of Baiga on ponies, where a dead sheep snatched from man to man formed the prize; and energetic foot handicaps run by tiny Kirghiz youths and maidens. Everyone present received a prize, and we and the Chinese warrant officer called ceremoniously on each other three or four times during the afternoon. So passed a cheery day. Early next morning, having discussed affairs of State, we said good-bye to the Consul-General, and pushed on with our modest caravan to the bleak marshy plain of Subashi (Head of the Waters), some twenty-seven miles.

Luckily we found a couple of *yurts* here, for it snowed hard during the night, and next morning we felt the first bite of a Pamir winter as we plodded through unbroken snow over the very gentle ridge of the Ulugh Rabat Dawan (Pass of the Great Rest-House). There is nothing but a ruined tomb here. All over the Pamirs, and indeed all over Turkistan, one comes to countless places with a name but with nothing else. The innocent map-maker jots down the name and alongside it puts the conventional sign for a village. Every subsequent wayfarer, who had hoped at least for a few minutes' shelter from a shrieking icy gale, curses that map-maker. Only about a quarter of the names shown on the Pamirs Sheet belong even to a ruined stone hut. A symbol is needed very badly for well-known spots, which may be, as on the Dipsang, eight days' march from the nearest deserted hut, but which have a definite name, and

\* The Kirghiz that I speak of are, of course, properly speaking, Kara Kirghiz.



RUSSIAN FORT OF PAMIESKI (MURGHABI).



which, in all probability, form the only possible bivouac for miles.

We were going to knock up against this still worse before we had finished. The weather improved as we approached Tagharma, pausing a few minutes at the hovel, misnamed a fort, of Kara Su Karaul. Tagharma is a great stony plain nestling due south of Muztagh Ata, and dotted with tiny hamlets of two or three huts each, which hide themselves away in the watercourses which seam the undulations of the valley. Such are Safsgos, Sarala, Kirchin, and Kok Yar. Next day's march was but a short one of some sixteen miles, and we met and followed the useful stream made by the union of these watercourses which one crosses just before it breaks its way through a gorge in the small but steep rocky ridge which divides the plain of Tagharma from that of Taghdumbash, and the Turki-speaking Mongol Kirghiz from the Sarikolis, Aryan in look and tongue. Just before the Tagharma stream meets the larger Tashkurghan River, suddenly in the gorge we came upon a very pleasant sight: six of our own Regular soldiers, who, with their buttons smartly polished and their rifles at the "carry," had ridden out from Tashkurghan to meet us. Now we were on the threshold of a new and startling episode.



## CHAPTER III

### A DASH THROUGH THE KUEN-LUN AND THE MUZTAGH

Jukta Rashid and Nukta Rashid, Jagalu, Alkhalkhal of China, with a force of twelve thousand men, fled. The Princes, pursuing after, reached the place called Kök Yar. There they fought for seven nights and days. Many Musalmen became martyrs. With all this fighting matters did not become right. Othman Bughra Khan, a son of the Holy Sultan, with sixty persons, met with martyrs' deaths. The infidels, fighting as they went, retreated to a town of China.—*From the "Tazkirat-ul-Bughra."*

WITH the soldiers Sir George and I rode the last eight miles through the fields of Tiznaf and Chashman to meet the Russian officers of the outpost, who also came out to welcome us. The sun was shining and everything seemed cheerful, especially as we had arrived at the metropolis of the Chinese Pamirs and intended to take a day's rest in a real house, with a stove in it and a door fitted to it. However, we had only just settled down to an early tea, when the non-commissioned officer of the detachment came in with a piece of news. He had heard from the Kirghiz, and from an Afghan merchant travelling with his caravan, that about a hundred armed men, apparently Afghans, led by Germans and Turks, had been seen going towards a couple of hamlets lying in the menacing gorge, where the Tashkurghan River breaks its way down

from the Pamirs into the lower mountain ranges and foothills.

The report seemed reliable enough, and action was called for. My own men only amounted to seven, so, leaving word to them to provide themselves with ponies from the village, I hastened round to the little Russian fort to invoke the aid of their officer. He was nothing loath, and soon had six of his twelve Cossacks ready in marching order. The Chinese Amban had put difficulties in the way of our obtaining cattle, but the Hindu traders were called upon and produced the necessary number of ponies. We did not want the whole world to see where we were going, so the patrol paraded in the dusk, accompanied by a single pack-horse carrying rations, and jogged five miles back down the flat valley past Tiznaf and Chashman to the shrine of Duldulhokar.

Here we had to ford, since the river plunges into a gorge and the left bank is impassable. We splashed through the icy water, and soon began to climb up and down the cliffs of the right bank. It was very dark, and the cliffs were rough and steep and traversed by only a goat-track, so that often the men were hauling on to the tails of their horses to prevent them sliding down into the chasm of the river. Thuswise in the gloom, slipping, sliding, and struggling, after six hours' toil we came to another ford. This was easy enough, and a mile or two farther down we came to Shindi, a wretched hamlet where humans and animals all lived together. It was three in the morning when we arrived, and there was no news of the party we were after, so we fed the horses and settled down for a few hours'

sleep in the hovels of the hamlet. I noticed now a change in the manners of the Cossacks. Shamed a little, probably by the soldierly bearing of my own men, they discontinued their off-hand "post-revolution" attitude towards their own officer, and began to stand at attention and salute when spoken to. I had always felt that the genuine Cossack of the old-established Voiskos was sound enough at heart, and that the revolution could not kill his pride in being a soldier.

A very rough goat-track runs north from Shindi to the uplands between the Kök Moinak (Blue Sparrow) Pass and Toile Bulung. In the morning we inspected it with care and found no tracks of anyone at all.

A few miles below Shindi the gorges of the river become impassable for man or beast, unless the stream be frozen, so that only the path to Wacha\* remained to follow. This took us through the region of Wacha traversed by Major Cumberland in the eighteen nineties, and again, I think, by Sir Aurel Stein a few years ago. The inhabitants are Aryans and live in houses, which distinguishes them from the tent-dwelling Kirghiz. Their Persian origin shows in their speech, which some of my men, who had served in Khurasan, could understand quite readily. It showed, too, in their ragged and untidy garb, very different from the Kirghiz, who takes a pride in his (or her) dress.

The Sarikoli dialect is little known, and I fancy that it borrows much of the speech of some earlier race.

Torbush is a hamlet a few miles south of the

\* Sven Hedin calls it Utcheh.

meeting of the waters, and a path runs from here over the range to Tashkurghan. Close by is a curious round flat stone resembling a milestone, set in the middle of the path, like a Tibetan *chhorten*. There is a local superstition about this stone, which they call a *kurtash*, which says that no bad or vicious horse can be brought to pass it by. However, our little patrol managed the passage quite well, both the shaggy steppe ponies of the Cossacks and our own equally woolly Pamir nags, though doubtless none of them would have passed muster at a Horse Guards guard-mounting. The range, 2,000 feet high, which divides this valley from Taghdumbash, though rough, is not impassable. The hills to the east are little known, though the Yamantars Pass is sometimes used by traders on their way to Yarkand. I imagine that the gorges and valleys on the eastern side of this range are very rugged and steep, judging by analogy and by the infelicitous name of the pass. The whole country is confused and the mapping somewhat hazy. This valley of Wacha seems to be a part of what is sometimes called the Mariong Pamir, from which it is only separated by an easy pass of some 11,000 feet.

A path runs from Torbush to Sherbus hamlet, which is on the lower reach of the Tashkurghan River below the gorge. This track is said to be so dizzy that strangers have to be blindfolded before they can pass along some parts of it.

We stopped at Wacha, a scattered hamlet of about a dozen small but quite decent cottages set in the middle of a broad and cultivated valley, encircled by hills, giving a scrubby grazing to

many flocks of sheep. Down the middle flows a gently rippling brook, its conduct a pleasant contrast with the rushing icy torrents we were all too familiar with.

We still found no trace or track of the gang we were chasing, and so, buying a sheep and some flour, settled down for the night on the felt-covered floor of the leading inhabitant, a Wakhi, who claimed a hazy British nationality.

To make everything quite sure I sent out a couple of small patrols to have a good look along the path leading to Mariong and that to Robat (which the map called Rahbut) and the Pichan Art. They came back at dusk, having drawn blank, and by this time a savoury mutton stew was ready for all hands. My men and the Cossacks, having tethered and fed their nags, dived into one large copper cauldron, and a great, well-boiled chunk was hauled out, by his long-gowned interpreter, for the Turkistan Rifle, officer and myself.

This same long gown was itself of the familiar azure blue of the facings of the Orenburg Voisko, by which one guessed that the man inside was a sort of regimental appanage. Two or three more leading inhabitants, Russian protégés as well as British and Chinese, came to pay their respects; and so we tore off fids of mutton with our fingers and devoured them in the centre of a little circle of polite burgesses squatting with both knees on the ground, and with each hand up the other sleeve, in the fashion which, in Turkistan, denotes courteous attention.

We were soon sleeping comfortably, replete after

the hungry time in which we had had no leisure to cook and eat.

Early next morning we had a short powwow. Since we were sure that our gang were still in being somewhere, I decided that the Cossacks should stop at Wacha, whilst my men went over the range (called the Kashgar range on the map) back to Taghdumbash to pick up the trail.

Saying good-bye to our friends the Cossacks, we scrambled off early in the morning along a track which we found took us over the crest of the range, about two miles north of the peak 18550, a fine massif of black precipices streaked with snow and ice. Our climb to the top took about two hours from Wacha. The sun was out and the morn was smiling, and the going easy, so we got up the 4,000 feet fairly quickly.

The hillsides above the vegetation are bare yellow sandstone, and the pass is a double one, both cols being the same height, roughly 16,000 feet, Wacha being about 12,000.

The pass is called Oghri Art, which means "Thieves' Pass," I suppose because not many honest people use it.

A path from Torbush meets the track we had used just beyond or west of our pass: this crosses the range by a similar pass, called Shor Bulaq (Salt Spring), just to the north.

We were all cheered up by the fine weather and a square meal underneath our belts, so we hustled along down into the Taghdumbash, enjoying a splendid view of the valley and the Sarikol range opposite. About 500 feet down from the top is a green patch of grazing on the arid and stony

right bank of the river; it lay on a true bearing of 260°. A little farther below, the path was less steep, and we were soon cantering down the slopes towards the flat plain of Taghdumbash.

We half expected to meet our headquarter party with the baggage moving along from Tashkurghan to Yurgal Gumbaz, the latter a ruined hut which marks the intermediate halting-place between Tashkurghan and Dafdar.

However, it seemed that they had pushed farther on. We struck the river at Taghlik Gumbaz, and crossed it without much difficulty.

Trotting along northwards again towards the Chinese Fort, we met our old friend the Beg of Dafdar, going south with one or two friends.

They did not seem to have much to say for themselves and seemed a bit sheepish, for a reason that we could very well guess at. However, we wanted our teas, so did not stop to worry things out, and reached Tashkurghan just as dusk was closing in.

Another square meal in a real house and a hearty sleep smoothed out our annoyance at not having found our gang, so, collecting the little kit we had left behind with the *Aksakal*,\* we were early on the road again to Dafdar. This is about forty miles, and small Kirghiz ponies cannot quite average five miles an hour in that altitude (about 11,000 or 12,000 feet), so we took a full eight hours, plus an hour half-way to loosen girths and give the nags a mouthful of grain at Yurgal Gumbaz, where we found the traces of the camp of our headquarter party.

Here one of my young men lost a charger of

\* British trade agent: literally means "white beard."

ammunition, which came out of his pouch just as he was crossing the river. This was the first loss in several weeks' trekking, and as .303 cartridges do not grow on the Pamirs, we were all very rude to him about it. The days are short in October in latitude 38°, so it was again almost dark when we got into the little hamlet of Dafdar, or rather Pisling, where the Beg lived, and where I found my Chief just sitting down to tea, on a bent-wood chair, alongside a stove made out of a Russian sheet-iron *chillak*.

This is a vessel which is used in the first case to carry some 8 gallons of kerosene, and in the second, for a multitude of household uses, just like the familiar kerosene tin of Indian domesticity.

The Russian article is made of black sheet-iron welded by acetylene along its seams, is very strong, and a convenient pack-pony load, so it finds its way into all sorts of queer places. Its familiar rounded sky-blue outline is seen from the Caucasus to the Tian-Shan wherever anyone needs a piece of iron or a stove.

Seated above an outrageous carpet concocted of aniline dyes, we talked over recent events, and decided that there was dirty work somewhere, so that, though people had been throwing dust in our eyes, there was in truth a gang about that needed catching. Sure enough, after dark, with a face like a stage conspirator, the Beg came in. Having looked behind the arras to make sure no German spy was concealed there, and also under the horrid rugs, he came at last to the point.

Fifteen wild and woolly strangers, mounted on big horses and with long rifles slung on their backs,



had, several nights before, crossed the pass variously called Sari Kuram (Yellow Gravel) or Pising, and at midnight ridden southwards through his village. This seemed to be about six days before. There was no object in recrimination, so we did not demand why he, being a British subject, had not told us this at the time. He confessed that the news was stale, but excused himself with his absence at Tashkurghan. He added that a shepherd, of known veracity, had seen the tracks of the gang in the snow at Ili Su.

This looked like business. The gang had, it was evident, come from the Russian Pamirs, and doubtless from Badakshan before that. The idea of their being honest traders was, of course, impossible. Honest traders do not frequent the Oprang Valley in winter, nor do they go about disguised as a siege-train. They might well be opium smugglers, but the facts seemed against this hypothesis. Opium smugglers would certainly prefer to bribe or dodge minor officials in order to take any of the half-dozen vastly easier tracks to the plains than that over the Ili Su. The third suspicion was that they were enemy agents frightened from Afghan territory by the news of the approaching Armistice, and bent on losing themselves in the wilds and deserts of Khotan. Fourthly, they might be smugglers of enemy propaganda sent from one of the several sources known to be at work in Badakshan, and bound to spread it in what must seem to them the fertile soil of Yarkand, Khotan, or Lan-Chow-Fu. The whole evidence tended to show that the facts lay between the third and fourth hypotheses, especially when we thought of von

Hentig, and of "Friedrichsen" and "Andersen," the two very sporting Prussian officers, who, passing as Norwegians, wandered somewhat incoherently from, as I remember, somewhere near Canton through Khotan to the Oprang Valley and the slopes of the Shingshal Pass.

Here, much to their relief, they were captured by an eager patrol of Hunza men and duly consigned to the barbed wire of steamy Ahmednagar.

Guided by the customary Teutonic psychology, or what is supplied to Teutons in lieu of it, their aim had been to subvert these very same Hunza men from their allegiance. The minor point that these Hunza men happen to be several degrees more loyal than Clydeside "ca' cannyites" had escaped the myopic observation of the professors of the Berlin "Seminär für Orientalische Sprachen," who had doubtless planned the adventure.

Still, all honour is due to those gallant Prussians who undertook such an adventure in such a country, whatever contempt one may have for the ham-handed *Wissenschaft* which directed it.

The matter having been well thought out, I received orders to deviate from our way to Hunza, and to push on south-east to Ili Su.

If I found any tracks or news there I was to carry on and pursue the gang till their capture, since I might be certain, from their very presence in the Oprang, that they were up to mischief. I confess that I felt a great relief at this: my task was clear, and it lay in my own hands to make a successful ending to the work.

Whoever the gang were, it was necessary that they should be taken; and so it proved.

That very night I sent on one of my N.C.O.'s, on the least tired pony, some sixteen miles up the Karachukor Valley, the road to India, to a spot called Payik, where the Chinese kept a small border picquet, and where we too had a dozen men of the Hunza company of the Gilgit Scouts.

This company, I should say, is commanded by the heir-apparent to the Thum of Hunza, a ruler of much character and commanding personality.

The N.C.O. was to call upon the commander of our picquet at Payik for half a dozen rifles and a pony-load of barley meal. Since we had been picking up food almost from day to day, we had nothing to spare for a plunge possibly of weeks' duration into the unknown. Hence the load of meal. The appointed meeting-place was to be the bleak pasture of Ili Su.

Early next morning we started out with the hairy Bactrian baggage camels to Ujadbai, a desolate bare patch of scrub where the Oprang River meets the Karachukor. Sure enough we met here a young officer, Amir Hayat, of the Scouts, and a tough and cheery half-dozen of his men, their elfin Dard caps and lovelocks, with their galligaskins of ibex skin, making a quaint setting for their antique though well-kept Lee-Metfords and bayonets. Amir Hayat had a wild and rakish Badakshi stallion that I rather envied as he pawed the frozen ground with dilated scarlet nostrils. His bridle bossed with silver, and the high-peaked saddle and embroidered cloth were well in the picture. The Scouts do not bother with transport: they came with what they stood up in. Homespun tweed jackets and knickerbockers of stone-coloured wool were their

garb. A long *choga* of the fine underwool of the ibex was rolled into a neat cylinder in the straps of their equipment, and their *pubboos* of ibex hide, lined with thick white felt to the knee, made a unique outfit to which just the needful soldierly touch was given by the bright silver buttons and silver ibex on the brows of their Dard caps.

The barley meal had not yet arrived: doubtless there was some discussion about the proper completing of the Chinese equivalent for AF G 994, together with its carbon copies in quadruplicate.

Commissariats do not differ much at heart all the world over: any subordinate true to his traditions will view the fall of a Kut-el-Amara or a Port Arthur with placid content provided that his returns are complete.

However, my N.C.O., though young in years, was a veteran of several campaigns, and had learnt not to take No for an answer when he wanted anything: so I got on to the business of fitting out my patrol with an easy mind.

A half-hour sufficed: we picked about ten of the best of the sorry nags of Dafdar; dug some tea, sugar, aspirin and quinine out of the camels' loads; each man strapped his sheepskin coat and a blanket to the strait saddle-tree of the Pamir, filled his mess-tin and his oil-bottle, thrust a length of "four by two" into his haversack, and was ready for an 800 miles' hunt through desolation.

Every man, including the Scouts, had a jade of sorts: a young and imperturbable retainer from Baltit, in Hunza, sat upon my exiguous saddlebag, in which I carried a razor, red sealing-wax, and a dozen envelopes crested with the lion and

the unicorn, wherewith to impress anyone who might seek to stop us in the misty future. I had learnt the value of a crest in 1914, when I had had to make a patent medicine advertisement fill the place of a "golden passport" from the Tsung-Li-Yamen of far Peking.

So, bidding farewell to our Chief, who promised to set the barley meal on the right road, we trotted southwards into the trackless, desolate, uninhabitable Oprang.

The sky turned leaden, on all sides were stone and snow: to the south the dreadful rampart of the Muztagh peaks chilled one's heart with their towering majesty.

Pinnacle upon pinnacle reared its 25,000 feet before us across a great wind-swept icy plain, almost ghostly in its vast loneliness. This was 13,000 feet above the sea, and no speck of colour could the eye catch. Soon wind-driven snow blew in our faces: an ancient burial-ground called Mazar Sultan was passed, with gaping graves and a few ruined stone huts beside.

We were glad of a few moments' respite from the blast. It took five hours to reach the spot where the trickle of the Ili Su stream meets the Oprang River in the midst of a great stony plain. Up in the dusk, a couple of weary miles to the east, we suddenly came upon a couple of the dull brown, ragged tents of the Kirghiz. Chilled and tired, we were right glad to meet the smile of a Kirghiz damsel and to crouch over her fire, which seemed a section of paradise. Once out of that icy blast we collected our thoughts and goods, and were soon busy over polite enquiries with the lady and her

sister, whose news set us all agog. Very clearly she told us that, seven nights before, fifteen well-mounted men, with rifles across their backs, had gone silently past her tents into the darkness of the Ili Su gully.

She, it seemed, was the wife of the shepherd who had brought the news to the Beg of Dafdar: he was now collecting his sheep from the slopes of the Zungan Pass in order to bring them, his tents, and family to a more endurable clime. If we had been a couple of days later we should have spent the night out in the blizzard, where our ponies were now cringing from the gale under a wall of rock. Our kind hostess and her sister soon had hot flapjacks on the fire; we ate, and, much to our joy, heard hoof-beats outside.

My N.C.O. had arrived with his two ponies, a hundredweight of the barley meal, a villager of Dafdar and the second pony, and a Chinese document a cubit long on transparent mulberry paper. The last my thoughtful Chief had extracted from the Chinese officer at Payik. The Dafdar man had a confrère who had come with us from Ujadbai, and they undertook to accompany us until we could change our cattle. Amir Hayat, too, had a queer, long-gowned, sheepskin-hatted follower, who turned out to be his private secretary, a far-faring merchant of Kanjut aggravatingly named Beg (an absurd name to have when every headman of three huts is called a Beg).

Our last worry had gone: our stomachs were full, our party all present and correct, and our prey ahead of us. It certainly had an immense start: seven days' journeying to be made up is no light task in the Kuen-Lun.

So we all snuggled down into the two tents in among the felts: Kanjutis, fair Kirghiz, Punjabis, and Pathans all mixed up together: the wind whistled through the chinks, but the thorns crackled merrily in the clay fireplace, and we and all our little bedfellows kept warm through the night.

In the morning it was still snowing, but, pushing up the narrow rugged mouth of the Ili Su Valley between black glistening walls of rock and over shaly slopes, we soon found good tracks of men and horses not yet obliterated by the new snow.

There was no trail to speak of, and we all struggled and floundered amongst the sharp rocks, the going got steadily worse, and it took four solid hours to reach the top. All this time the snow was lashed into our faces by the gale. The last 500 feet of the climb takes one up the face of a cliff, and, covered with ice as it was, it was next door to impassable for animals, quite apart from the lack of air, which makes breathing difficult. We struggled on, pushing and hauling the panting ponies, and when we got to the top the sun suddenly came out and the snowfall ceased. Right ahead of us lay a big stretch of gently shelving snow leading down the north-east side of the pass, and on it great deep prints of the feet of men and horses. This was the best of good-fortune. We examined them with care: there were just about enough for a party of fifteen. We were to know that same spoor by heart during the next fourteen days.

The descent was easy, the pinnacles and black precipices of the summits of the range gave way to a vile rocky valley shut in by steep walls of yellow and brown sandstone.

This pass of Ili Su is not far short of 17,000 feet; at any rate, well over 16,000. It is really a difficult pass, especially in bad weather.

Sven Hedin, as he describes in his book "Through Asia" (vol. ii., p. 685), made an attempt to cross it, but was deterred by its difficulties at the last moment.

However, my men made light enough of it when they got to the top; they were all chuckling over some joke made at the expense of the cavalymen.

Of course, if Sven Hedin had had a good class of man with him, and soldiers, instead of the flabby Yarkandis and Kashgaris that he used to trail around, he would have got over these passes without doubt, and across the Raskam too. There is a vast difference between soldiers and civilians in these matters of running into possible trouble: I have tried both kinds.

Naturally enough, a civilian wants to get money for what he does: soldiers (and sailors) carry on by "seeing life." They learn to do without money: in extreme cases they utilize other people's. Sure enough, our civilian got a bit troublesome here: he disliked getting up early in the morning without a nice cup of tea to ease matters, and said so. Not only did he say so, but sat down on a rock and suggested a halt for tea-brewing. Now we should have been delighted to find a trim-capped parlour-maid with silk stockings and a starched apron, to bring him (and us) a pot of bohea in eggshell china on a silver tray, with well-browned toast and fresh butter. However, she was not available, so instead of tea, friend Beg knocked up against caustic and scathing comments on his manners,



customs, morals, ancestry, and personal appearance, and those of civilians in general, from each man of the patrol as it filed past him.

Crushed and disconsolate at the lack of sympathy exhibited by the brutal and licentious soldiery, he gathered himself up and limped along in the rear. He could not understand how a man of means like himself could be so treated by mere soldiers.

In the upper part of the valley were several patches of grass, but it becomes more rough and narrow as one descends. The cliffs on either hand are almost perpendicular and quite impassable. Farther down still the valley floor fills with thickets of bramble and thorn.

Late in the afternoon we came to a spot where a biggish side-valley comes in from the north; this is called, by the Sarikolis, Mal Jeran, but by Turkish speakers, Itak Uzdi.

We saw some *burhel* here up this valley springing about on some of the vilest sort of yellow sandstone cliffs.

In the interests of the food-supply, I spent an hour trying to get a shot at one of these, but without any luck. This was a misfortune, since it cut short our day's march.

By the time the hunt was over it was dark and too late to push on down the Ili Su. Had there been grass and water at frequent intervals in the valley, I should have gone on and chanced finding grazing; but since the track was barren and the margin between life and death to our ponies was very small, it would have been unwise to have spent the night without grazing or water for them,

as would have been probable. The descent from the pass had taken six hours, making a total of ten from our camp at Ili Su.

So we lay down in the chilly wet snow where we were, under a tall cliff; there was enough brushwood to make a fire, and, making a dough of our barley meal, we spread it on thin flat stones and heated these until it was browned.

Thuswise we cooked enough to eat that night and the next day. There was enough tea and sugar to go round, so we did not do so badly. The ponies nibbled at the almost invisible scrubby herbage, scraping up the snow to get at it, and soon we were asleep. At midnight it snowed again, and very early in the morning the two Dafdar men went up the valley to round up a few strayed ponies.

We carried on with our saddling up and waited for them to come back. They took a long time, so a couple of soldiers went to look for them. By this time it was quite impossible to see 5 yards through the snow squalls, and it was clear that the men of Dafdar had given us the slip. They doubtless thought their hides too valuable for this sort of trek. We did not bemoan their loss, but the lack of the four ponies was a blow. Still, it was early yet, and we hastened on down the steep bank of the stream. The track was abominable, but yet a track, and soon the hoof-prints of our pursued became again visible. As we trudged along we studied the marks which showed up clearly that the party were mounted on the big-striding horses of Badakshan, a vast improvement on our sorry nags of Sarikol. One horse in particular left tracks like a waler. Of course, it does not follow because

a horse has big feet that he must be a big animal, but the deduction is sound enough. This rubbed into us the necessity for sparing no toil or labour to catch up. Naturally enough, we could not go out of a foot's pace and a very slow foot's pace at that: in fact, I doubt whether, in spite of our hurry, we covered more than a map mile in the average hour. If anyone thinks this slow, let him try the Raskam approaches himself.

Our only way, then, to catch up was to start very early and march without halting till late at night, and we did so. Lower down the snow ceased, but the valley bottom soon filled with a thick thorny jungle, through which we literally fought our way with pain and grief. One of the animals lost an eye, and all the others were cut about by thorns, which did no good to our clothes.

It was not improbable that the party we were after might stop and rest in this valley after their exertions over the passes, so every man marched with his magazine charged, whilst the "point," of a couple of men, 50 yards ahead, kept their bayonets fixed and finger on trigger. It was not impossible that in some way or other news might have got on ahead to the pursued that we were after them, and nothing would have been easier or have paid them better than to put up an ambushade for us.

Not only that, but it was quite probable that the whole movement was a trap or decoy to draw us off some other scent, just as the false news had been which took us to Wacha. However, on the frontier, if one does not pursue on slender information one seldom pursues at all, and fifty chases are needed for one capture.

So on we went. After two or three hours of this toil we passed an empty hut, where the one or two Sarikoli men who come over into Raskam during the summer, shelter on their way.

Farther down again, when the sun had come out and thawed us a trifle, the valley opened out into a little glade, and showed clear tracks and the ashes of a fire. We rummaged round and soon a delighted Scout picked up a new china tea-bowl broken in half, with a fresh clean fracture that seemed scarcely a day old; on the bottom was the legend "Made in Japan."

All was joy; the cup showed that we were not chasing a will-o'-the-wisp, and that someone of consequence was on ahead. Mere wandering shepherds do not own china cups like that; moreover, if they break them they do not throw the bits away, but save them up for the annual visit to some city like Kashgar or Yarkand, where they are riveted together again. Visions of a sudden joyous scrimmage with someone prefixed "von" came into everyone's mind. The thought of a "knock-down and drag-out" fight in the recesses of the mysterious and distant Raskam would indeed be something to write home about. We snatched a bit of bread here and were soon again on our laborious way.

The finding of the cup was an immense relief: it meant that, whatever else supervened, we were pulling our weight in the War and not wasting our time. It brought, though, a new vista. If our opponents were men of consequence they would not go to Yarkand merely to carry some letter or propaganda, but, on the other hand, made

desperate by the foreshadowed Armistice, would strain every nerve to escape to Shanghai, across the very heart of Asia.

This meant a turn to the south-east up the Raskam River and a plunge into the dismal, barren, frozen wastes of Karakoram and the untrodden Karakash. The prospect of marching for weeks without seeing a blade of grass or a human being, and that in the rarefied air of those regions, without supplies or baggage, rather gave me to ponder.

I had been over the Dipsang and down the Karakash in August, 1914, with one of my N.C.O.'s, and so we could imagine what it would mean in November. I talked the thing over, in the intervals of scrambles over sharp boulders and loose shale, with Amir Hayat and the senior N.C.O.'s.

They agreed with my deductions and accepted the prospect of the venture to Khotan with calmness, and even with amusement. Indeed, they were soon discussing how long our ponies would last when we had to eat them.

The pursued doubtless had a good number of days' rations with them. They had had plenty of time to think over their venture, and had not to prepare for it in half an hour, and doubtless they were in a position at least to reach Shahidulla, the Chinese outpost in the Karakash, without starving.

However, whether we starved or did not starve, it was clear quite that the men had no thought of hesitation in following across those vast mountains to Khotan, and on to Shanghai as well.

After nearly eight hours' hard going we came to

Issiq Bulaq (Hot Springs). A big valley comes in here from the south, affording a few hundred yards of level, soil-covered ground holding three little huts. There a few little patches had been ploughed and three yaks wandered loose. Down near the stream the plough was trodden flat. Another joyful search for clues found a little heap of pigeon's feathers, a few empty cartridge-cases, and the droppings of a very fair number of horses. These were certainly not seven days old, as the tracks at Ili Su had been. In fact, after much examination and deep thought, the considered opinion of all hands was that we were only five days behind our objective. We roped in the three yaks to help us along, and were soon on our way again, though dusk was drawing in. Below the warm spring of Issiq Bulaq the cliff-sides closed in, and the track ran in a gorge, now high on a shale cliff, now splashing through the cold, tumbling stream. Soon it was quite dark and the going too abominable for words, through the close-knit jungle and slithering over the loose, sharp shale. It was nearly ten o'clock at night when finally we reached a pleasant glade called Baital Jilga (the Valley of the Mare).

The altitude here was much lower than we had been for weeks and weeks—in fact, it must be under 10,000 feet. Though cold enough, it was temperate compared with our last few nights. We lay in high, warm, protecting grass and cooked by blazing fires of the abundant brushwood.

The horses champed the tall herbage pleasantly to the ear, and soon we were all asleep and happy, except the sentry. Early next morning off we

went again, much helped by the three yaks we had acquired at Issiq Bulaq.

Very soon after the start the trail led up a cliff atop of a slope of broken shale, and there the wonderful Raskam Valley burst upon our view. The immense clear slope of the north bank towered up smooth and unbroken like a wall for 12,000 feet. This is the western buttress of the great Kuen-Lun, a worthy peer to the mighty Muztagh that succeeds it to the south. The fact that appals the eye on seeing this towering crest is that its face is smooth and unbroken right up to the very pinnacles of the range. No side-valleys distract the view, and the crest of the range never drops below its 20,000 and odd feet till it is cleft by the mighty Raskam River. Tirichmir, Rakaposhi, and the great Muztagh Ata are isolated incidents in comparison with the two mighty ranges of Kuen-Lun and Muztagh. I had covered 7,000 miles of Central Asia without seeing anything to rival it, even in Zanskar or Hunza.

A short hour and a half took us down into the sandy river-bed scattered with shingle and boulders.

The excitement was immense: if the tracks led up the river-bank to the south-east, we were bound for Khotan; if across the river, we were for Yarkand or Karghalik.

To add to the tension, we lost the trail in the shingle, but soon picked it up where it led to the river's edge. We halted and spent a few minutes in having a good look round. The river was broad, deep, swift, and uninviting: there was no use in risking the drowning of some of the party unless

we were quite sure that we were following the right trail.

Soon there was no doubt on this point, and we commenced the crossing. The river was high and swollen by the melted snow through the summer. We crossed ten yards below where the Ili Su stream flowed into the big river. The rifles and ammunition were an anxiety: we could not afford to lose any. So I decided to pick out the bigger and stronger ponies, and that a man should ride each of these over, carrying two slung rifles. The rest of our scanty goods and ammunition would occupy a second trip; the smaller ponies and yaks would have to go over barebacked as best they might.

This plan succeeded well. The whole business was a very anxious one for me: we had nothing that we could afford to lose, and if a beast had stumbled in the swifter part of the river, both man and animal would be swept away and drowned in a breath. I had seen that happen before in an easier river than the Raskam, which was at this time the size of the Thames at Kingston, swollen with melted snow and very much swifter. However, we got over, though the ferrying took two hours that we could ill afford, and though several of the small animals were swept off their feet, luckily in the slower but deeper part of the river, on the inside of the bend.

It was a relief to take one's clothes off and get a sun-bath during the crossing. Though the altitude was 10,000 feet and the month October, it was no hardship to paddle about in shirt and shorts in glacier water; no doubt this was due to our having been somewhat acclimatized. The renewal of ac-



quaintance with one's feet after not having seen them for many days is full of joy, and recalled similar rencontres during the first winter in France.

Across the river the trail was again hard to find amongst the shingle and boulders of the river-bed, but, once found, it was clear enough and took us slantingly up the immense smooth, clear slope of the head of the Kuen-Lun.

Now we had to leave behind what might be described as a by-product of the dog industry, that Abdulla Shah or someone had attracted away from the Pu-Li Amban, who no doubt had it earmarked for culinary purposes. The soldier's subconscious habit of lifting other people's horses, cattle, and dogs had been strong enough to overcome my men's Puritanical Mahomedanism.

Instead of going south-east, we were pointing due north: this meant that we were not bound for Khotan, but for either Yarkand or Karghalik; the balance of probabilities tended towards the former.

The climb was big enough up to the pass called the Tupa Dawan (Sandy Pass), but easy, since the grade was steady. The scene was wonderful. Below us the great mysterious river swept round into a vast chasm formed by towering perpendicular cliffs of a yellow sandstone, whose sheer height was to be measured in thousands of feet from the water which foamed below them. Above us on all sides were solid walls of untrodden mountains, topped by ice-bound peaks of stupendous height.

The map scarcely conveys to the mind the due impression of the dizzy slopes of all these ranges.



CROSSING ONE OF THE GREAT GLACIERS OF THE HUNZA.



A PATROL OF GUIDES ON THE PAMIRS.  
"PREPARE TO MOUNT."



"MOUNT."

*To face page 76*



The vertical interval between each pair of form lines, however, is 2,500 feet.

It is not every map which finds room for vertical interval of this sort. The map so far, though on a very small scale (one-millionth), had been extraordinarily good, considering the very few intelligent human beings who have been even within several days' march of this desolate spot.

I believe Deasy's expedition in the late nineties took angles to some of the peaks of this end of the Kuen-Lun while moving from the Mariong Pamir down towards the Asgansal Valley—that is to say, from the other side of the Raskam gorge. Sven Hedin, too, had crossed some miles below the canyon, so far as I remember in summer, at, or near, Tarim Boko. This was after he had come back from his attempt at the Ili Su.

The summit of the Tupa Dawan appears to have been fixed by Deasy at something over 14,000 feet. We arrived here in a couple of hours from the riverbed and found ourselves on the crest of a knife-edge spur. We took a few bearings with our prismatic compass, in the interests of science.

The main range of the Muztagh filled the sky to the southward, buttressed by the mighty peaks of Oprang and Hunza; to the east the no less huge masses of the Karakoram; to the north lay ridge upon ridge unrecognizable from the map; and to the west the secrets of the untrodden gorges of the Raskam were unfolded.

Again we were faced with the lottery of our next move. Tracks led a couple of hundred yards eastwards to the edge of one of the dizziest precipices I have ever seen.

That was not the way. I knew that the Quoquoi Quotchkor Pass, that had been crossed by Etherton in 1909, was somewhere in the neighbourhood, and it seemed likely that we would cross it. We found that our trail plunged steeply down a slithery shale slope into a narrow rock-bound gorge filled with a thicket of thorny trees. Our gang had left the traces of a night spent here.

We scraped together some brushwood and *argol* and cooked our frugal meal of barley flapjacks. Up the valley lay the track to the Quoquoi Quotchkor, but the spoor led down the V-shaped gorge, through close-knit, spiky jungle.

We made our midday halt where they had spent the night. This showed that we were gaining on them, and indeed the horse droppings that we examined seemed fresher. For two solid hours we fought our way through that tangle of undergrowth, and then, to our immense surprise, came to a little clearing which held a couple of tiny mud huts. Standing on the edge of a microscopic patch of plough was an ancient Kirghiz dame addressing a little old wizened man at very considerable length. Nothing abashed at the sudden sight of thirteen armed men, she turned the flood of her eloquence upon us. The little old husband preserved what seemed to have been the silence of years. Out from the encyclopædia of facts offered us, our parleyer with dames, a large and stolid ex-bandit from Khurasan, now a Regular cavalryman, named Kalbi (or Kerbelai) Mahomed, sorted the news that the lady's name was Fatima, and that the pursued were only five days ahead. How she and the little old husband had got to that remote spot no

man knew, but she was prepared to sell us the hide of a kid filled with barley, on ridiculously easy terms.

This pushed starvation a little farther away, since if we could feed the ponies even for one day, we could also feed on them if the worst happened.

As we did not know where on earth we were going to, every little helped.

Surprise, too, followed surprise. Bidding good-bye to Madame Fatima, we peeped into the second hut and found there sitting, most unostentatiously, a young and chubby Kirghiz aged about sixteen.

He did not belong to Madame, and protested an ignorance of all that country and of all mundane matters; in fact, he protested his ignorance so much that we thought he had better come along with us and show us the way about. This reticence explained itself later. Father was guiding the enemy.

Matters now seemed better. We all had mounts of a sort, either yaks or ponies, some food in our saddle-bags, and the nightmare gone of a hungry winter journey across those eerie plains of Dipsang, Kara Tagh, and Yurung Kash, where the traveller fights for breath and the track-side for half a hundred leagues is banked with skeletons.

Our way now lay down the narrow grey valley running almost north and bounded by quite small, though steep and shaly hills, scarcely more than 1,000 feet higher than the valley bottom. The altitude must have been about 12,000 feet, and judging both by the map and by the general look of the country, we imagined that the plains of Turkistan were only a few days' easy march away. We soon found that we were wrong. However,

the map shows heights as low as 7,000 and 9,000 odd feet barely twenty miles away, so we had some excuse for our idea.

A few miles down the valley opened out a little and filled with tall grass. Here we found signs that our gentlemen had bivouacked there, and not so long ago either. Fatima's estimate of five days was not far out, and we had the satisfaction of thinking that every time we passed beyond one of the bivouacs of *ces autres* we passed a landmark that showed we had gained ground from them.

The hoof-marks led us on down this gently sloping valley, which seemed as if it would debouch into the Raskam in about latitude  $37^{\circ} 7' N$ . This is probably the case. However, as we were scrambling along a cliff-side of loose shale, on the west side of the valley and some fifty feet above the thorny, close-knit thickets that filled the valley floor, the spoor ended abruptly.

We cast about to find it again for nearly an hour. The walls of hills that bounded the valley were obviously impassable, the jungle below almost equally so, and there were no tracks forward either on the hillsides or through the thorn-bushes. It seemed that the gang must at that moment be lying hidden in that same tall scrub; indeed, the Hunza havildar asserted that he was sure of it. In any case, it would have been a good way to shake off our pursuit if they had got wind of it, so, to make certain, all hands fixed bayonets and combed a way through the thorns in extended order.

Thus we worked back to the bivouac site, two miles up. Still there was no sign, and we began to think that they had vanished.

However, in poking about in the thickets, the Regular dafadar came upon a narrow cleft in the rocky wall which proved to be the mouth of a side-valley, and it was up this that we found the trail.

It seemed an ideal place for an ambushade, and as we knew that the others were not far ahead, it behoved us to be on our guard, since it would have paid them very well to have laid out two or three of our men by a sudden burst of fire. So a "point" moved on ahead with bayonets fixed and cut-offs open, and every man had his magazine charged. Owing to the roughness and the windings of the valleys, we had rather lost reckoning of our direction, but now we seemed to be going almost east. The valley climbed steeply as the afternoon wore on, and we were soon at an altitude of about 14,000 feet, in a ravine-like valley, walled in by sandstone cliffs. The few tussocks of coarse grass got fewer and the brushwood scantier as we went on.

Soon the trickle of water gave out, and the patches of snow were hard and frozen.

It was now dusk, and we had been going hard without a break since the early morning, except for the hour and a half we had halted for food in the Quotchkor ravine. The animals were exhausted, and as night was drawing in we found a spring about 500 feet above the source of the little stream. We had expected this, as it is very common in these hills to find such a combination. Here there was another tiny patch of grass and brushwood, so I decided to bivouac at once under the shelter of a tall cliff.

We might, indeed, have pushed on for another hour or two, but there would have been every



chance that the ponies would have had to spend the night without a morsel of grazing, and possibly without water, and as we carried no grain, they would have been so weakened that we should have lost ground rather than gained it.

In a few minutes a fire was burning, the ponies were loose and grazing, and our new-bought barley meal was being cooked into thick girdle cakes. As we had no cooking gear other than the men's mess-tins, we were always forced to use thin flat stones for the baking, which answered well enough, in the good old frontier fashion. This, indeed, is the way that the bread called *kharg*, that is a staple all over Waziristan and Baluchistan and South Afghanistan, is made. It is very suitable for raiders and robbers of all sorts.

It was cold enough up here; though we had no meat to eat, and but little tea and sugar, we were well enough off, as we were lying on dry ground, and not in snow.

Everybody was cheerful, and the spot received favourable comparison with the trenches before La Bassée in February, 1915. We were not worried by heavy howitzers here.

Next morning we continued to climb: a long, steady pull up a winding valley (in which I shot a coney with a pistol) on to the roof of things again. The valley changed its direction three times, which was exasperating, when we knew that our destination was north-east. However, the trail was excellent and visibly fresher than before, and at midday in a small patch of grass, conspicuous amongst the snow, was a little heap of miscellaneous property. A copper kettle, a cauldron, some felts, and, best of

all, a kidskin full of excellent butter, had evidently been too heavy for the party in front, and they had jettisoned them. This looked as if they had news of our being out after them. We did not worry; the butter consoled us for a lot. Taking half, which was as much as we could carry, we be-thought ourselves of the section of the Army Act which deals with plundering, and inserted sundry silver coins into the half which we left behind. At this the young and rotund Kirghiz displayed a certain emotion: he had affected not to know to whom the dump had belonged.

After a short halt for food our way took us to the top of a snow-bound pass called Furzanuk, of some 16,000 or 16,500 feet. Though high, this is not difficult, and there are no avalanches to worry about or snow cornices. From the top one could see the lie of a good deal of country, and I took a few more bearings. To the south-east ran the main range of the Kuen-Lun, on the crest of which we now stood. The range splits up at its north-western end into a set of spurs spread out like the fingers of a hand. Across the tips of the fingers there runs the canyon of the Raskam, like a sweeping sword-cut, 5,000 feet into the ground.

In between the fingers are deeply cleft, steep valleys, barren of all vegetation and walled in by iron cliffs. To the north was crest after crest of the abominable steep-sided ranges of the Kuen-Lun.\* A breakneck descent led down into another chasm-like valley, in which towards afternoon we found

\* The snow-line in October is at about 15,550 feet, hence higher than that of the Pamirs, and lower than that of the Karakoram plains.

a spot of grass. This is called Furzanuk, and afforded another instance of the wickedness of map-makers. Just as along the whole length of the desolate, uninhabited, upper Raskam are many little circles, with names attached, which would delude the unwary to imagine them to be villages, so here is a circle with a name attached, and also a spot height which seems to indicate that it was observed probably from the north bank of the Raskam in the nineties by Deasy's party.

This matter of showing places such as Furzanuk on maps as if they were villages is a serious one for the traveller, and an offence that we had met before at Ulugh Rabat.

It is comic in the Raskam Valley. It was about three in the afternoon when we reached Furzanuk, and once more we found ashes and traces of recent occupation: hoof parings, a dead quail and his little straw cage. These two last told us plainly the land that some of the gang came from, if not all. It is a pleasant little peculiarity of the Pathan to carry about tame quail and partridges in odd folds of his raiment. We were pretty certain by now, though, that it included no German. All the same, there are other races beside the Germans capable of villainies, and the mere fact of their being in this abominable region proved that they were up to mischief. Our orders were distinct and contained no provision for abandoning the chase.

Furzanuk is a small level patch of grass about the size of a tennis court, springing from a little rivulet whereof the source is a few hundred yards up the valley.

We could not stop more than a few minutes here;

the trail led down the valley for about a mile, then up a gully to the north-east, and we soon found that we were in for a spell of savage toil. We had been marching since the early morning; it was now past five o'clock, and in front of us was what proved to be a sheer 4,000 feet or more of dizzily steep climb over slippery stones. *Noli regina infandum renovare dolorem.* The ponies had almost to be hauled by main force to the summit, and I wonder that some of them did not die on the way up. We also wondered whether they were any use to us, except to eat later on.

After great pain and grief we came up to the lung-racking crest, and in the beams of the frosty moon looked down into a wide, drear, "hanging" valley covered with snow. Quite an easy descent led slantingly through banked-up drifts to the edge of a dry watercourse. This spot must be at least 15,000 feet in altitude.

If the Pamirs are the Roof of the World, without any doubt we were now clambering about amongst its chimney-pots.

There was no grass, no water, and no fuel except a little *argol*, or yak-dung, that we managed to scrape up from under the snow. Turning the animals loose to fend for themselves, we scraped hollows in the bank of the ravine and sheltered from the shrieking wind. A miserable fire made us some tea and we champed our dry bread and slept. In the morning the ponies were still alive. Again northwards over the ridge in front of us, which, however, was traversed by no proper col. We merely scrambled up amongst the boulders. From the top another prospect of jumbled, desolate,

and snowy ranges, but we did not stop to look, as the wind was still blowing. Immediately we started upon 3,000 feet of the steepest descent that I have ever taken ponies down.

Again we came down into a narrow rocky valley hemmed in with a labyrinth of cliffs. In this valley, after we had turned uphill again to the north-eastwards, we very happily came upon a spring surrounded by just a tiny patch of grass and brush. We ate here, sitting where our gang seemed to have bivouacked. The food question had come to a crisis. We had one and a half days' rations in hand: that is to say, about a pound and a half of barley flour for each man, and a very little tea and sugar; no meat, no vegetables, nor anything else whatever, except a little of the butter that we had acquired on the way up to the Furzanuk Pass. I found, too, that the men had quietly been making contributions out of their own rations in order that I should have more. We had a few words on this point, and it was emphasized that this practice must now cease. We went on half-rations of flour from that meal. There was no point in halving the other rations, as there was nothing to halve. The day before I had a lucky snap-shot at a young *burhel*. Before his blood had ceased flowing a brushwood fire was lit, he was skinned and grilled in a twinkling, and we were all sitting round like cave-men and gnawed his bones inside ten minutes. This was our only meat for a week. Several of the ponies, too, were moribund; my own was so thin that his girth had to be put across his breast. The next day was his last.

Another thing we had to contend with was the fact that we had only two proper saddles, my own

and Jemadar Amir Hayat's, the latter of Badakshan make.

Four or five of the men had the rough wooden saddle-tree of the Pamir village, others had to make shift with bundles of reeds tied up with twine. Naturally this did not help progress, and we thought bitterly of the fine horses and equipment of the well-found party of von Hentig, whose dash through Yarkand we had heard about in May.

We stopped here just an hour and a half, which had by now become a sort of routine time for our one and only daily halt which comprised our one and only daily meal. Each morning just before starting, and each night just before sleeping, we munched a hunk of dry bread, since that was all we had time for. At about two o'clock we pushed on up the ravine, still north-eastwards.

After leaving the spring there was not a patch of grass or any living thing to be seen. Very soon emerging from the gully walled in by black cliffs, we found ourselves climbing slantingly up and across the immense slope of the range that we were about to cross. This was rough, bouldery, and seamed with snow, through which the ponies struggled.

The way became steeper, and then we started another steep and dismal climb, zigzagging up a great spur.

This was worse than any we had yet been over. The height was very great, and both men and animals were exhausted by their privations.

Foothold there was little, and on our left was a great chasm. This pass, if pass one can call it,

is named Kandek. On the summit was a high snow cornice piled up by the wind from the north.

Across the face of this we had to dig, with our hands and bayonets, a way for the ponies. We might have saved ourselves the trouble, since two of them died ten minutes later. Even at the risk of getting frost-bitten, we had to stop and rest a few moments on the farther slope. This was comparatively easy, except for the deep snow in which the ponies floundered desperately for the first 1,500 feet of descent. The snow lies about 500 feet lower on the north side of these hills than on the southern slopes. We tramped on till the evening down a valley, which, though shallow, was still some 15,000 feet in altitude. At dusk we came upon grass and traces of humans. A little later we turned into a bigger valley called Pilipert, which seems to take its origin in the crest of the Kuen-Lun and run due northwards into the Raskam Valley, somewhere near Sanglash. We halted near an immense boulder, under which we bivouacked. Just below were the round traces of two or three Kirghiz tents, and their cold fireplace, and the litter of goats. It was clear that this spot, just under 15,000 feet, was a summer grazing-ground on a small scale, and that one or two families of Kirghiz visited it in July or August, probably from Kulan Aghil or the middle course of the Raskam. It seemed as if we were returning to the world of men, to look at the scraps of felt and the round bare patches where the tents had been some weeks before. We slept under the rocks here, and the weather was a little less inhospitable than that of

the few nights before. The food question again pressed: we supped off a few ounces of barley damper cooked over an *argol* fire.

We were hungry when we started in the morning, and crossing the main Pilipert Valley, scrambled up a side-ravine over the ice-glazed boulders of the torrent-bed. We had descended 1,000 feet or so into the Pilipert Valley, so that we had fully 3,000 feet to climb to the top of the seventh pass, called Paik. The climb is steep all the way, there is no track whatever, and the upper part was covered with snow and great stretches of gravel frozen into solid sheets of ice. The scramble across this *verglas*, steeply sloping, was a desperate matter for the almost utterly exhausted ponies. We lost two more thus: one died on the spot, and one was left on the northern slope on a patch of grass, which might possibly help it to survive. Our two yaks still managed to put a foot forward. This pass, too, had a snow cornice on the top. From the summit we could see a great open upland valley clothed in grass, away to the east. This seemed to be the upper part of the valley of Chup, which the map shows as a dreary blank. The valley we had dropped into runs east-south-east into the big valley of Kulan Aghil (the Grazing-Ground of the Wild Ass): the map spells it Kulan Urgi. It had, we knew, been traversed before by a European (Etherton, 1909), and we could see that it was full of grass and scrub, so we hoped for the best, the more so since from the map it seemed that we had to cross only one more comparatively low (16,000 feet) pass, the Sandal Dawan (Chair, or Anvil Pass), into the Asgansal Valley, and so to the plain of



Yarkand. We did not follow the map path which goes over a low sandstone ridge (9,950 feet) to a spot called Issiq Bulaqning Aghzi (the Mouth of the Hot Spring), but sent a couple of men that way, on the freshest horses, in search of food and remounts.

This was because our Kirghiz boy told us that the spot was inhabited. The two men had orders to follow us northwards after carrying out their job. We pushed on down the steep ravine, crossing and recrossing the rivulet and wrestling with the jungle.

At the bottom our stream joined the fairish brook, some 10 yards wide and 2 feet deep, of the Kulan Aghil.

Here was a big coppice of thorny, close-knit trees, and, to our joy, a flat patch of ground as big as a tennis court, that seemed as if it had once been ploughed years before. The valley is narrow and rough and walled in by rocky precipices, and its floor is laced with thickets difficult to penetrate.

However, there were trees, grass, and comparative warmth: these were very welcome to us. Most of the animals could scarcely stagger by now, so the commander of the Kanjuti Scouts and I pushed along, fording and refording the stream many times, and fighting through the thickets for some three hours more. Suddenly we came upon a joyous sight: a patch of barley, a little hut of loose stones built in under a cliff, and a donkey tethered amid a half-dozen stacks of barley. We hitched up our nags, and inside the hut we found a hearty and buxom wench of some nineteen summers.

Nominally she was a Kirghiz, but actually, I fancy, a daughter of some obscure aboriginal tribe. Her features were truly Mongol, however, and very little Aryan, and her complexion more glossy and apple-cheeked than I have ever seen on a human being. She was a little frightened and coy at first, but the Kanjuti subaltern soon put her at her ease, and she weighed out with pleasant smiles rich yak milk and a bowl of boiled wheat. Amir Hayat did not know what "vitamines" were, and I did not care, but swiftly we gave that batch a kind home, and felt much the better. A prolonged diet of barley meal makes one appreciate something a bit fresher.

Amir Hayat recuperated enough to get his "glad eye" into action, but I led him gently away.

We left some of the milk and the wheat for the men who were close behind, and rode on a couple of miles down to the hamlet that the lady told us of, called Poenak.

Had we been travelling slowly in pursuit of pleasure, the mud huts of this habitation would have tempted us to linger. The site was certainly wild and romantic. Perpendicular rocky walls close in round the dozen fields, leaving only a few hundred square yards of level. After the towering cliffs of Raskam the hills here seemed low. A few wild trees dotted the lower hills, and with the scrub and grass that skirted the village made the scene quite peaceful and suave.

We bought as much barley as we needed, and a fat sheep, and slept happy in the knowledge that the gang were only three days ahead, and in the thought that we had just a straight run in to Yarkand

over the comparatively low (16,000 feet) Sandal Dawan.

In the morning, bright and early, under a welcome sun we trekked along down the valley, guided by the now accurate map. The altitude here is about 9,000 feet and the scenery very typical of the lower Kuen-Lun—steep, bare, almost vertical hills of yellow sandstone, and a narrow but level valley floor, in this case dotted with small fields, trees, and patches of tall, yellow, reedy grass. We found several horses and now discarded our yaks for good, as well as nearly all the exhausted nags which had come from the Pamir.

A few of the best we kept. Every now and then we passed a hut, sometimes with a family in it. These form a much scattered hamlet under the name of Yaghzi. The trail was still distinct and apparently straightforward, when, quite contrary to expectation, it turned to the east two miles above the spot called Beldir on the official map.

This took us into the valley of Chup (on the map, Chop), and here under a cliff our gang had bivouacked, as was evident from the ashes of their fire and the litter of their horses. The trail led up the wide, grassy valley and opened a new vista of the chase. Chance had suddenly put an end to the hope of a straight run in over the Sandal, and once again were we to dive into the unknown.

The map shows no paths at all in this valley nor any villages, nor even in the big valley of Shaksu beyond, which, by the way, it misspells "Chukush." One suspects this mangling of being the crime of one of the bad type of Hindustani surveyor: it does not seem to be a transliteration, badly done, of

Bogdanovich's Russian. Russian has a plentiful enough supply of double consonants of this sort to put matters on a certain footing. Moreover, it is hard with the materials at present at one's disposal to be sure that Bogdanovich came this way at all. The valley has been sketched in, roughly enough, but not too badly, doubtless by a surveyor that Deasy sent here in the nineties.

He had considerable trouble with one of his men, who was sulky and contumacious, so that no doubt the lack of paths and villages in the map of these two valleys is the result of the same excellent qualities. One should be very grateful to have a map at all, though, in this sort of tract. The quality thereof is evidenced by the fact that after four days' hard marching, starting every day at sun-up, halting only an hour and a half for food, and bivouacking well after dark, we had covered a "map distance" of just over sixteen miles. In a fact, in the latter three days we had done about nine miles on the map in nearly sixty hours of marching, climbing, and scrambling, during which time I reckoned that we had climbed up and down about 54,000 feet. No doubt the relative positions of the Raskam, Kulan Aghil, and Chup Valley are incorrect: there has been mighty little theodolite work in these parts, and when the topographer does a rapid traverse up such a valley as one of those that lie under the Kuen-Lun or the Muztagh, he is very apt to over-estimate the distances from the town he started from. Hence the giant ranges get cramped into something less than their fair share of elbow-room. All the same, Sheet 51, the scene of many toils and privations, is wonderfully good.

Contrast the maps of Khurasan (Sheets 22, 23, and 28, "India and Adjacent Countries Series"), a comparatively easy field and easily reached from the railway.

Except for that part actually surveyed by the Russians, the map is, or was in 1918, mostly made up of interrogation marks, and they in the wrong places.

Chup is a great, wide, grassy valley, nearly a mile wide at its mouth. A stream half as big again as that of the Kulan Aghil flows down it, though in October it was nowhere difficult to cross. The valley bottom narrows as one ascends, and the hillsides everywhere preserve that steepness which is characteristic of this region; it is, however, fertile, dotted with fields and huts, and so easy going. A mile or two up we came upon a little water-mill working merrily. The miller was at home, and sold us another bag of meal for ourselves and of barley for the horses.

The sight of our horses eating real grain made us feel quite rich and civilized. On from here the valley ascended almost imperceptibly, though it became distinctly narrower and more rugged at every mile.

Our noontide halt this day was in far more pleasant surroundings than before. We stopped by a little homestead some three hours' ride up from the mouth of this Chup Valley, and ate amid grass and cheerful thickets and bushes. Better still, we found a piece of tough yak's hide wherewith to mend our torn footgear. Kalbi was particularly useful in cozening old ladies for milk in this valley. He would say in Turkish, "Anna, sut bar,"\* with a

\* "Got any milk, mother?"

guileless face. Whilst the old lady was occupied boxing his ears, another apostle of self-help would find out where the milk was. When loud gurgles announced the discovery, the old dames usually put a good face on the matter. The valley was certainly shut in by granite cliffs, but the whole scene was very different from the drear cloud-bound heights of the Kuen-Lun's backbone.

We found a few more loose horses up this valley, which formed a welcome accession of strength, and at about five in the afternoon came to a village high up in the valley, where is found the Yuzbashi (Head of a Hundred Families) of the tribe of Kirghiz, who graze in these parts. We touched him for some more ponies, leaving our own emaciated animals behind.

By the same token, the tribe who inhabit Chup are certainly Kirghiz, though of strangely settled and house-dwelling habits. Perhaps the climate of this valley is just the happy medium that is not so hot as to force the Kirghiz to higher altitudes in summer or towards the foot-hill pastures in winter: at any rate, in very few places indeed does one find genuine Kirghiz living in houses, and growing barley with not a tent to be seen. The inhabitants of Poenak were of a different race, more Uzbek than nomad; and so, too, were the little population of the hamlet that we were to reach in the morning. I would suspect a strong aboriginal or pre-Uighur strain in both these.

We passed two pleasant hours in this Beg's house, and at seven in the evening pushed on again with a couple of his men to show us the way over the pass that we were to cross that night. All our

ponies were fresh, and there was a bright moon, nearly full, so we made good progress. Above the village the valley, which for a few miles had been narrow and cliff-bound, opened out again to a width of nearly a mile. The valley floor became covered with pebbles and small boulders instead of the sharp granite rocks found lower down, and the hills loomed big, rounded, and steep, so that with their covering of turfy grass one's thoughts were carried back to the Pamir, or rather, perhaps, to some high valley of Ladakh, such as the Rungdum Tsangpo in Suru, or even some of the valleys in the Kurd country of Northern Khurasan. At the same time, to the experienced traveller, there is always an indescribable intuition, quite apart from the shortness of breath, which keeps impressing on his mind great altitudes that he travels in. Perhaps it is the strange clearness of the air. For two hours then we marched steadily up this wide, level valley and then suddenly turned up the hillside towards the north-east.

At once the stony valley gave way to a very steep hillside of loess covered with close, tufty grass. Up this we went, climbing hard for two and a half hours.

At each pause for breath a more wonderful scene unfolded itself in the strong moonlight over great tracts of untrodden mountain country.

The path lay in a deep runnel worn down into the soft loess by ponies' feet, so that the real surface lay waist-high. To the right, the hillside fell away into what seemed a sheer drop of 2,000 or 3,000 feet.

The last half-mile to the summit of the pass is

level, but one must scramble along the lip of this chasm, and in one or two places the track is difficult. Just at midnight we reached the col, and looked out to the south and east over ice-bound peaks, and virgin snow-fields, and glaciers, as far as the eye could reach, every cranny showing up clearly in the bright beams of the moon. The dark lower slopes were misty to the eye, so that these great mountains seemed to be floating in the air—an effect of weird beauty.

Ahead of us, to the north, were deep and gloomy gorges, unknown and shrouded in deep gloom. Into one of these we plunged precipitously, through ankle-deep loess dust, choking in spite of the cold wind. A couple of thousand feet down was a spring, frozen over, but welcome to clear our dusty throats. This at last flows into the little-known and scarcely mapped Shaksu.

The descent continued less steeply, but now in a narrow, rocky valley, whose hillsides were soon dotted with a very few scrubby and stunted pines. One valley led into another, and another, each bigger than the first, until at about two in the morning we began to pass a few tiny rock-strewn fields which had held barley. Then a hut or two, till at about three o'clock, very tired and sleepy, we came to a tiny hamlet called Bulun, of about four families, and a dozen small poplar-trees watered by a tiny brook. This lies in north latitude  $37^{\circ} 5'$ , east longitude  $76^{\circ} 42'$ , and on the bank of the Shaksu stream. We had been marching for fifteen clear hours that day, and were glad of the six hours' sleep we got in the Beg's house in Bulun. The pass we had crossed at midnight was the Agasha



Yailak, though it appeared to be a trifle farther south of where it is shown on the map, more where the Kara Tash is marked.

In fact, the men of Chup knew of only one pass crossing this range, so it is not impossible that the two shown on the map (Sheet 51) as Agasha Yailak and Kara Tash may be one and the same. In the morning there was an immense hullabaloo outside. The villagers were so excited at having seen two batches of strangers inside forty-eight hours that they all talked at once at the top of their voices. When we restored a little order out of the din, I found that the pursued were now less than forty-eight hours ahead. This was immense cause for congratulation; it meant that we had gained five or six days on them in the last eight. On the other hand, they seemed to have a straight run in down the Tiznaf Valley to Yarkand, and I was very anxious lest they should be lost to us in the maze of alleys of that hoary city. However, to our surprise, the villagers of Bulun insisted that they had not gone straight down the valley, but over the hills eastward to Ak Masjid.

This was startling, but the peasants' sheep and goats had smothered the trail, so there was nothing to do but to follow the villager who consented, for a price, to show us where the gang had gone.

He took us up a narrow side-valley of yellow sandstone, up which led a clear footpath which soon started to climb up pine-covered slopes.

The hills and scenery were remarkably like those on the Ambela (Umbeyla) Pass, which separates the Chamla Valley of Buner from the plain of Yusafzai.

The same firs and junipers propped up on the same sort of yellow rock let one imagine oneself beneath the Crag Picquet, on that famous pass, or on the slopes of Kutal Garh (the Place of Slaughter, so called from the heavy fighting there in 1864). It was on the climb up to here that we found that the men of Bulun had lied to us; it was clear from the absence of tracks that our gang had not passed this way.

This was desperately disheartening after our savage toil of the last few days, and the proposal was mooted of shooting the two liars then and there. A little reflection, however, showed that we should gain nothing by this, and might stand to lose. The liars, however, were green with fright by the time their fate had been decided: the cavalryman in whose charge they were was considerate enough to translate the proceedings for them into Turkish. It was too late to go back: it seemed better to push on to the Pokhpu Valley by what seemed from the map only a slightly longer route, trusting to be able to pick up the trail again by cutting across it from the eastward.

The pass that we were on seemed to be well over 15,000 feet, possibly 16,000, and we had climbed well over 4,000 feet up to it. The rough descent led down into a straight, narrow valley with steep, straightly sloping hillsides still dotted with pines. At about midday we came to a hut with as many fields around it as would total up in area to a suburban back-yard. There were no men here, only two women and three small children. They were of the little-known tribe of Pokhpu, who are supposed to be aborigines of pre-Uighur times, and to speak

an unknown and lost language. They certainly were not Kirghiz, nor yet Sarikolis, and differed much in feature and bearing from the ordinary Altisharlik of the plains, of Uzbeg race. We had no time for scientific investigations, however, and asked them our questions in plain Turki, so that the solving of the mystery of the Pokhpu language did not receive any aid from us.

The tiny stream in the bottom of this valley was now dry, but a slightly brackish spring afforded a little water.

We made our midday halt here, and hastened on down along the steep, straight, pine-dotted slopes of the V-shaped valley. We soon came to the sizable Pokhpu flowing down a large valley at right angles to our course; that is to say, it ran north and south roughly. There was a tiny habitation here, and it seemed as though we should go downstream to the northwards. However, no vestige of a trail could be found on the river-banks, and the sides of the valley lower down seemed to close in to form an impassable canyon, so we were, by fear of getting into a cul-de-sac, forced to follow the track across the main valley and up a steep, dry watercourse of yellow sandstone on the east side. It seemed from the map that the stream we had just crossed was the Pokhpu. The climb became more and more steep towards the summit, which was clear of snow and of a height that I judged to be over 15,000 feet; there was snow on the hillsides right and left of the crest.

The climb was exhausting and of over 3,000 feet. The pass seemed to be unknown and nameless, both to geographers and to the very few inhabitants

of that region. The descent took us down a steep, winding valley in which grass-covered slopes of shale and loess replaced the yellow sandstone and straggling pines of the ascent. From the summit we had looked out over a dismal series of steep, almost vertical ranges unbroken by a single tree or any sign of life, and rendered the more uninviting by the deep shadows thrown by their dark wall-like spurs.

This descent, on the whole, is easy, and towards afternoon we came down by a side-valley on to a tributary of the Pokhpu River. This was about 10 yards wide by 2 feet deep here, flowing some five miles an hour in October. Again the question arose of following this stream to the north to meet the Shaksu, and again it was abandoned on account of the closing in of the vertical wall-like cliffs. Both banks of the river are desolate.

As soon as we had crossed we found ourselves again following a steep trail up to yet another pass, the third that day. However, there was nothing for it, so we toiled desperately upwards to the summit. This pass is the Sakrigu, which means Deaf (or Soundless), and when one stood on the crest in the awful solitude the name seemed well chosen.

The height of this appeared little short of 16,000 feet, and we were very weary by the time we had finished the climb and commenced the heart-breaking descent into another bare, deep gully of loess.

Soon the herbage disappeared from the slopes and the gully became a gorge. This became deeper and still deeper, and after a time we found ourselves toiling over huge smooth boulders where there was

not the vestige of a track, along the narrow bottom of an abyss between walls of cliff that towered up to the very stars. The windings of this dreadful chasm seemed in the dark night to have no end, and we could well have believed that we were treading some path of Tartarus, or Inferno pictured by Doré. Weary to the very bone and crushed, as it seemed, by those titanic and ghostly cliffs, suddenly we came upon a giant excrescence of rock jutting out some hundreds of feet above, and, lit up by a single moonbeam, it showed like a perfectly formed ace of spades.

This we took for a good omen, and soon after, following a sudden turn, at midnight we came out upon the stony desolate valley of the Kalisthan River (this signifies "the place where a robber was hanged"). The Sakrigu Pass seems from the map to be not more than 15,000 feet, but I should be inclined to estimate it at 1,000 feet more. The Kalisthan Valley is wide and level, and a sudden contrast to the chasm we had just come out of.

On the river-bank the map marks apparently as a village a place called Chiklik: nothing now exists, except a ruined stone hut. We could find neither grass, fuel, nor shelter, and though it was midnight and we had been on the move since eight that morning, decided to go on over what the man of Bulun called an easy pass, to Ak Masjid.

After the nightmare of this fourth pass we were numb and dizzy with fatigue, and it was in a sorry plight that at four in the morning we threw ourselves down in a deserted, but in a sandy, waterless valley called Jibrail (the Archangel Gabriel).

During that appalling single march I estimated

that we climbed upwards, and toiled downwards, something like 30,000 feet, between seven of one morning and four o'clock of the next.

In the morning, just mounted, we surprised, coming round a corner, a very old Kirghiz with a small tail of armed men. He was a Haji by his green turban, and of some consequence, from his silver trappings, but we gave him no chance to ask us any questions. Instead we demanded to know what he was doing. He was rather taken aback by superior force, and we fell upon him with an insistent demand for his name, grade, and business; and as he did not like the look of the posse of savage-looking, hirsute, and ragged men that confronted him, he complied amicably. He explained that an important Chinese mandarin had sent him to meet a certain "guest." Now "guests" do not usually come into Chinese Turkistan via the Raskam, so here we smelt the Boche again. I informed him that I was the guest in question, and would be glad of his onward company. He had too much gump-tion to decline this polite invitation, and in due course we became great friends. The height of the hills lessened rapidly, the valleys opened out, and became level, thirsty, sandy stretches. In a hut in the valley of Ak Masjid a kindly old dame gave us all a drink of water out of a gourd that had come several miles on donkey-back. As we had drunk nothing for thirty-six hours, it was most welcome. Nightfall saw us in the big village of Kökyar, back again amongst human beings and reasonable food; we filled up on melons and corn-cobs, and replenished out many a corner that had been hungry for many days.

We were still behind in the chase; we had lost ground in spite of that last immense march, so we were off again at midnight, after five hours' sleep. We marched by compass north-eastwards over the low range of sandy hills that divides the Kökyar Valley from the Tiznaf. I hoped to cut back obliquely on to the trail we had lost; by the time the sun was well up, with good luck and careful steering we dropped down into the village of Arpat Bulung. Still no trace of the pursued. I told off one of the men to investigate a trail that led to the westwards. A reliable villager was sent into Karghalik town, three marches to the north, there to make certain unostentatious arrangements there, and the main body pushed on again. All that afternoon and night and next morning, fighting against sleep, we marched across the sand-dunes of the desert, dotted by a few infrequent hamlets, sprung from the attempts at irrigation made by some energetic mandarin towards Khan Langar, a big village of plains. Here we struck the trail again, halted for a very few hours' sleep, pushed on again at night, dodging about amongst the many channels and intricate irrigation ditches of the great Raskam River in its maturity.

It was in the evening of that strenuous day that, in a stone sheep-pen, lit by a blazing fire, I rode up to a tall, broad-shouldered shepherd. He seemed to understand little of our talk as we asked for news, and his aquiline features and fair hair, on which the firelight glinted, in contrast with those of the pudgy Yarkandis, remained long in my memory. It was not till long after that it struck me that he must have been one



A VERY NORDIC ARYAN OF THE AFGHAN PAMIRS.





of that far-strayed Nordic tribe that science suspects still to lurk in the unmapped wilds of Pokhpu.

At midnight, in a labyrinth of water-cuts, I told the Haji to find an inhabitant who could show us the way without delay. Coming to a house, we hammered at the big locked courtyard gate with rifle-butts. Soon a harsh, croaking voice within told us to keep away. The Haji demanded admission in the name of the "Chinese Republic," whereupon the awful voice said that we might kill the inmates before they would allow our ingress. This seemed most suspicious; in a moment the gates were forced, and we rushed in to find a weird emptiness where we had expected a struggle with armed men. An N.C.O. ran up a ladder to the flat roof and there found a dreadful handful of lepers in the last stages of their mutilating disease. It was in silence that we marched on through the night. Posgam, a stage east of Yarkand, was reached in the early hours, and by the time the sun was well up the detachment had cantered the remaining dozen miles to the Chini Bagh, a walled garden, a few hundred yards outside the ramparts of ancient Yarkand. One of the men went in, disguised, to fetch out an acquaintance of 1914, who, as we hoped, was able to tell us that a party of suspicious strangers had come into the city some eighteen hours before, and was now probably in the Sarai of Badakshan. Before the sleepy inhabitants of the narrow alleys of the depraved city knew what was happening, we had cantered inside the walls and thrown open the great iron-studded gates of the Badakshi Sarai.

Its hundred or so ruffianly Afghan denizens sprang to their feet, but their hands went up above their heads in a flash when they saw behind the bayonets gleaming in the morning sun the sixteen gaunt, wolfish faces of Pathan and Punjabi, Kanjuti, and Hazara.



THE UPPER VALLEY OF THE OXUS.



## CHAPTER IV

### YARKAND TO MERV

Listen in the North, my boys, there's trouble on the wind;  
Tramp o' Cossack hooves in front, grey greatcoats behind,  
Trouble on the Frontier of a most amazin' kind,  
    Trouble on the waters o' the Oxus.

\*           \*           \*           \*           \*           \*

Hurra, hurra, it's nor' by west we go !

Hurra, hurra, the chance we wanted so !

Let 'em hear the chorus from Umballa to Moscow :

    As we go marching to the Kremling.

    KIPLING, *The Mutiny of the Mavericks.*

THE great moment had come, and our quarry was, after all our desperate toils, at last in our grasp. The Afghans were struck so dumb with amazement and the sudden bolt from the blue that foiled all their plans and hopes, that no hand was raised to strike a blow against us. One great deep-chested, black-bearded Bajaouri, in the rich gold-laced velvet coat that marked him as a leader, sank down with his head on his knees, burying his face in his hands. So plain was his misery that the soldier standing over him, touched by it, withheld the bayonet prod that he had earned to make him keep his hands above his head. To our great disappointment there was no German in the party—a cruel stroke of luck after what we had been through. The whole wild adventure seemed like a nightmare, and I am convinced that we could never have carried it through

except for a sort of moral exaltation that lifted our minds away from bitter cold, hunger, and the extremes of bodily exhaustion. We had during the summer and autumn chafed furiously under the feeling that we were not doing our full to win the War, and it was this bottled-up fury that carried us through. It is a wonderful thing to have your enemy in front of you and to storm along to grips with him unfettered by nothing more than the limits of your own endurance. It was the first time for years that we had known this savage back-to-the-Stone-Age sensation, and it was strong meat.

To make up for the absence of a German amongst our prisoners, we were comforted by the feeling that we had obeyed our orders and carried out our task: we felt that no one could have done more. I was grateful to Providence that, close though things had been, all the men had been brought through alive: a mistake in direction, or even a piece of bad luck, would almost certainly have cost the lives of the whole party. Had I not learnt it already in the hard schools of Neuve Chapelle, of Ypres, and before the Aubers Ridge, I now could realize a little of the gallantry and unswerving devotion of the Punjabis and Pathans it was my privilege to serve with.

It took us some hours to put each of the principal men separately through his interrogation and to ransack their effects. Their arms, Austrian rifles and bayonets, and the markings on them, showing the Royal and Imperial Regiments that they had come from, were of the most interest. Meanwhile a great crowd of the goitrous offscourings of mid-Asia collected in the alleys outside, and were kept

from the gates by the ready rifle-butts of a couple of my men.

In the middle of it all trumpets sounded in the streets, a richly dressed man rode up with a dozen cavaliers, asking what it was all about. He was brusquely admitted and explained that he was the Bong-Bong, the diplomatic secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Yarkand, a mandarin about whom I entertained a few suspicions. He commenced to display some excitement about what was going on.

However, remembering that in case of trouble my sixteen bayonets were more than a match for the whole Chinese army in that region, and not forgetting the advice of the dear old Thum of Hunza, always to ride the high horse with the Chinese, I told him icily that *inter arma silent leges*. This took a good deal of translating into Jagatai Turkish. I added that when I had quite finished, and enjoyed a little leisure, I would let the mandarin know the upshot of the matter. This made the Bong-Bong pause to cogitate, whereupon young Kalbi, with the ready resource that is a tradition of his Corps, told him that I was a very big man at home, the commander of 2,000 soldiers way back in Mardan, and addicted to shooting first and arguing afterwards. Then, remembering that if there was to be any exchange of official visits, I should need some Chinese visiting cards, he pressed a few coppers into the gorgeous Bumble's hand, and commanded him to hurry off and get some printed in the city. The town clerk reeled away, very flustered, with the bewildered expression that one might expect to see on the face of the Lord Mayor of London's myrmidon if a savage-looking Mongol soldier were



suddenly to thrust some coppers and an errand upon him for his Captain.

However, the visiting cards materialized in due course: there are times when a little *Schrecklichkeit* pays, when not overdone.

The prisoners were soon well and truly chained up, and we marched out with them between armed men and the gaping faces of the teeming, astonished crowd, to the Chini Bagh, that we had made our billet. In this a strongly shuttered room was their abode, with a Hunza sentry over the doorway.

During the afternoon of that eventful day, the various merchants of Yarkand that were British subjects turned up with courteous speeches and presents of fruit, candies, and all sorts of sweets.

Some of them were Bajaouris, but a Pathan is always a sportsman, and they bore us not the least ill-will for having captured their compatriots.

To such an extent does the Pathan carry this feeling of sportsmanship, that if, in the give and take of scrapping on the frontier, a civil functionary should pick up a rifle and kill a Pathan, he will become the victim of a blood feud. On the other hand, a soldier officer may shoot as many as his skill and nerve will let him without incurring any hate even from the dead man's blood brother. The Pathan says that this is his job. However, in case any pink-cheeked young lad from the R.M.C. should indulge in day-dreams about putting nicks in the butt of his rifle *ad lib.* on the frontier, he should remember that the Pathan is in the habit of getting his shot in first, and of dropping his man at ranges where European street-bred eyesight can see nothing at all.

The Sheng-Kwang (the mandarin) sent his cards over with an invitation to lunch on the morrow, so next morning we spent several frantic hours sprucing ourselves up. To cobble some more clouts of yak hide to our gaping boots, we collected an ancient cobbler from out of the city. To my great surprise he told us that he had been with Deasy's expedition thirty years before that had touched some of the ground that we had covered, though rather lower down the Raskam. I interrogated him closely, as I was rather interested to see how much of the ground that we had covered was really unexplored. It was rather surprising to find that Chup, Shaksu, and Pokhpu were, after Yettim Qozi and its neighbouring valleys, the most completely unknown portions of that stupendous region. Bogdanovich seems to have traversed the Kulan Aghil and the Asgansal in the latter part of the nineteenth century, though his sketches become nebulous where they approach our route. The main discovery that we had made was that of a mountain range, whose existence appears to have been previously unsuspected, lying between the Sakrigu and the unnamed pass east of Bulun.

This cost us a sore struggle across a difficult pass that added to the exhaustion of a terrible day's march.

The lunch with the Amban of Yarkand was less trying than I had anticipated. Except the guard over the prisoners, I took all the men with their buttons and bayonets well polished, and their clothes and boots mended as well as possible. They made a brave show, and as they were all well-grown lads, quite overshadowed the somewhat scraggy Chinese guard of honour that presented arms, with

a roll of drums, at the seven carved Yamen gates, whilst the Tung Ling's mortars banged out a salute.

The Amban spoke a little Russian, and had a Sart interpreter who spoke it quite well. My Russian was by no means pedantically accurate, but we carried on somehow, eked out by occasional bits of Yarkand Turkish.

The lunch was excellent, cooked and served in European, or rather quasi-Russian, fashion, and the detachment had a hearty spread next door, along with the Dungan officers of the Chinese battalion of the garrison. The Amban was quite enthralled by yarns of the War in the West, especially when I told him of experiences in the Flying Corps. He remarked that he thought that I ought to have been in the Submarine Service. The joke took a little understanding until I remembered that, in Turkish *balik* means "fish," and that my Chinese card, lying by his plate, read "Ba-Lik-Erh." This pleased him a good deal, so we all laughed immoderately. The wine circulated, and at last the business of the prisoners, casually mentioned as an afterthought, became quite easy.

He made no bones whatever about agreeing to treat them as British subjects, though they were mostly Afghans, especially when I made a little speech about the solidarity of the Allies, China in particular, in the Great War.

In fact, he became most cordial, and even went so far as to lend me four mounted gendarmes to save my tired men some of the fatigue of escorting the prisoners to Kashgar.

We parted the best of friends, though I rather suspect that he was a little peevish next morning

when his head had cleared, and wrote a stuffy despatch, which found its way to Peking.

However, my conscience was clear, though no doubt some bone-headed *rond-de-cuir* in an office minuted his valuable opinion that I should have communicated with the Chinese authorities before irrupting under arms into the city. Just as though a British platoon on the Somme should have communicated with the Mayor of Pozières before mopping up that erstwhile village. In that case my hope of catching the gang would have been about equivalent to that of the celluloid dog attempting to pursue that asbestos cat in Hell.

That afternoon I spent very pleasantly, teaing and supping with the tiny community of the Swedish missionaries of Yarkand. After the wild experiences of the pursuit, and the Badakshi Sarai, and the pomp and celestial garishness of the morning in the Yamen, it gave me a most curious thrill to step into the quiet of a Western European house, quiet and homelike, where there was nothing to even hint of world wars, and the clash and strivings of savage races and their primeval passions, except my own somewhat ragged uniform. The kindly Swedes made me feel at home again, though it was rather a shock when they described von Hentig's dash through Yarkand in 1916, on his way from North Afghanistan to Shanghai. This was before China came into the War, and he spent the night with them, resting from his hurried ride from Kashgar, where the Orenburg Cossacks were hunting for him. He covered the 155 miles in two days, on a fine, raking Badakshi horse that he said the Amir of Kabul had given him.

It was bitterly cold next day when we marched out under the great ramparts of the city, accompanied for a few miles by a couple of score of the British subjects doing business in Yarkand, who, being up against the hard facts of the world, realize a little of what they owe to the soldier.

Our next move was clearly to get back to India as soon as ever we could in order to rejoin our battalions and squadrons then in Palestine, Mesopotamia, and on their way to Afghanistan and the Caspian. I remembered Sir Aurel Stein's description of his journey over the great ranges at this season, so determined to lose no time before the worst part of midwinter fell on us. The men, who had had a few good square meals of fresh mutton, ample fruit, and the round half-leavened buns of the Yarkand bakers, looked far fitter. I knew the road well, having marched along it in 1914. The days were short, and our horses were still tucked up, so we had to march till the early hours of the morning. The night was clear and we went straight towards "Yetti Yildiz," the Great Bear. Afterwards, when all the stars were clouded over, and the track became very difficult to distinguish, we stopped to water the horses at a well in the desert, the only human handiwork in a day's journey.

On resuming the march, I had become rather tired of peering into the dark ahead to try and distinguish the very faint track, so told our tame civilian, Beg, to take on the job for a bit. He started off in his slap-dash manner, and in a moment utterly lost his head, cantering off in a great circle till he had made a complete turn round the well

buildings. He looked a perfect fool, and we told him so in several languages, so that he might be quite sure of it. Then Ahmad Shah took on the task, and with his extraordinary knack of making a success of the most unlikely job, guided us without the slightest hesitation for several hours till we came to an oasis.

Had we lost the track it might have had serious results: it is only too easy to get lost in a desert where there are no landmarks whatever, and where a wind will blot out tracks in an hour or two.

Etherton and the Russians were a little surprised to see us when we suddenly appeared in Kashgar, booted and spurred, after two and a half days' marching from Yarkand, though he had had some inkling of our doings from a message that the Tashkurghan trade agent had sent him. The business before the house was firstly, of course, the disposal of the prisoners. This meant a State visit to the Do-Tai's *yamen*, and a lunch with the hilarious old man, who rather, to my mind, resembled a Deal boatman.

It was a convenient "formula" that the gang were opium smugglers: this enabled the Do-Tai to score off his old enemy Ma-Ti-Tai without raising any hornet's nests in far-off Peking. Of course, it was not very likely that Austrians would have gone to the expense of arming opium smugglers for their private ends.

When it came to the crux of handing over the fettered Afghans to the Chinese, I felt a little twinge of remorse: there was something unnatural in giving Aryans, ruffians and enemies though they were, into the hands of an alien race.

The old Do-Tai, having cooked the Afghans' goose, was genuinely appreciative of the labours of the detachment, so next day he turned up with an immense bag of silver, so heavy that one man could scarcely lift it, and he proposed to distribute this to the men. It took a good deal of tactful explanation to make him understand that our men were above receiving tips for doing their duty, but he took it in good part, and carted the bag back to his *yamen*.

We had to get some fresh horses for the trip back to India, and it was no easy job to hire them at that late season.

However, at last we raised a dozen and squared up our financial business with the Consulate Treasury. Though we had paid for everything we had had, we had got so little that I doubt if any party ever did such a trip so economically.

Just as we were going off on our long march towards India, a runner came in from Gilgit with news from the Western Front. This was not very up to date, but it gave us an idea that the end of the Germans' resistance was not far off. A very knowledgeable officer of the General Staff at Army Headquarters had prophesied this to me, when I was there in February: he even mentioned the exact month, but I am sorry to say that I did not believe him. We all felt rather sick that we were going to be "out of it" again; I little dreamt that there were several more wars ahead of us.

We returned to the Pamirs by the Gez route: though it is the shortest, it is a vilely rough track, and we did double and treble marches. The hospitable Do-Tai had sent out to the Beg of Tashmalik

to make arrangements for rations and the like, and we found everything there that we wanted, and the Beg was most polite. When, though, after a long and weary march we came to the little fort of Langg-Tai, we were in Ma-Ti-Tai's sphere, or rather more particularly, that of the Pu-Li Amban, who had behaved discourteously, not to use a worse word, to Sir George in October. Riding up to the fort, in a gentle drizzle of wet snow, I found three *yurts* pitched outside the gates, and a corporal of Kirghiz gendarmerie standing by them. This was a man who had been pleased to see us in October, so I passed the time of day with him and asked him where the Da-Ring was. He replied, rather shamefacedly, that the latter, who was the warrant officer commanding the detachment, was sick, and inside the fort. Suspecting nothing, I gave him my card and a message to the Da-Ring, telling him not to trouble himself to come out to receive me, if he was unwell. Of course, it was up to the Da-Ring to ride out to meet me, and to turn out his guard under arms for my detachment.

However, a Chinese gendarmerie post on the Pamirs is not quite the King's Guard at St. James's, so one makes allowances. The corporal, in a rather off-handed way, pointed to a tent for me, and to a couple more for the N.C.O.'s and men. I tied up my horse to the lee of the tent, and, going inside, found a young Kirghiz damsel within. This was a little unexpected, but she was quite comely though rather flat as to her poor face, so we smiled sweetly at each other across the brushwood fire in the middle of the tent. Meanwhile the men had settled themselves down, so I went to enquire



about the matter of firewood, and a sheep, and some barley for the horses. I met the corporal again who had been to the Da-Ring, and he answered somewhat curtly that there was nothing for us here, and that we should go up a side-valley, several miles off our route, towards the Ak Berdi Pass, where the Beg of the tribe there would give us supplies. This rather took my breath away, as Kirghiz make a sort of religious duty of hospitality and offer any traveller everything he wants as a matter of course. I concluded that I had misunderstood him, so I went back into the tent to find Feroz and the Kirghiz girl billing and cooing together, and making some tea, using one of the china bowls that one sees dozens of in Kirghiz tents, ready for a chance traveller. Suddenly into the gloom of the tent there lurched a villainous, squat Mongol figure with great ridged eyebrows like Attila: an animal face distorted with rage. A sheepskin cap was over his eyes, he was muffled in a long, greasy sheepskin robe, and he trampled over my blankets in his great jackboots to launch a torrent of gibberish at Feroz, whilst the girl shrank terrified into a corner. Feroz, though half his size, eyed him with the contempt of a Jehlum "Salt Ranger" for inferior races, and made a few quietly incisive remarks in pure Punjabi. These did not wither the "squarehead," as well they might, since he did not understand them. Instead he grappled with young Feroz, who, nothing loath, landed him a shrewd dunt on the chin, followed by a cross-hook to the jaw and a straight left to the mark. Thus overwhelmed, the burly Mongol collapsed on to his hands and knees. Feroz fol-

lowed up his success by the violent impact of his well-nailed ammunition boots to the elevated hinder end of the intruder, who was soon bleeding profusely in the cold snow outside.

In a twinkle the fair Kirghiz was suffused in smiles as she turned up an admiring face towards the bashful Feroz. A moment later a hustling man-Kirghiz hurried in with a great bundle of firewood, another brought a huge bowl of milk, bags of barley began to appear as if from nowhere, and then the Kirghiz corporal led up a fat sheep, with a very different expression on his face from that which had adorned it ten minutes before (the corporal's face, not the sheep's, who anticipated becoming mutton very soon). This was a marvellous change, that seemed somehow connected with the chastisement of the ugly one, so I enquired from the lovely Kirghiz who he was. In a rather hushed tone she said: "He is the Loya."

This defeated me, and explanations were needed. It seemed that a Loya was a Chinese military dignitary of uncertain grade, and by no means an unimportant Kirghiz.

Here was another bush of thorns. I foresaw myself butchered to make an ambassadorial holiday, in an "international incident." The Chinese are very touchy about having their soldiers knocked about, probably because they so often need it.

As I drank the tea I cogitated, and the worthy Thum's advice came into my head again: I decided to take the initiative, and to ride the high horse. I sent the corporal to tell the Da-Ring that I wanted him at once. The corporal came back repeating

that the Da-Ring was sick and could not come. So I sent the invaluable Kalbi, who had a way of achieving results, to bring the Da-Ring to me and to brook no refusal. In a few minutes he came, in his best uniform, with his sword on, closely followed by Kalbi, who looked as if butter would not melt in his mouth. We politely told him to sit down by the fire and to take a cigarette. He did so, and rather heatedly began to declaim about the man-handling the ugly Loya had received.

Coldly I remarked that that was not what I had sent for him about, but to demand an apology in the matter of the Loya having laid his dirty paw on Feroz. This took him aback, and he could only stutter that the punchee was a warrant officer and senior to him in rank, so he could not make him apologize, especially as he had just come up to take over the command of the detachment of sixteen from him, on relief. This complicated matters a bit: the hammering of a private soldier was serious enough, but that of a warrant officer a hundred times more so.

Incidentally it transpired that he was of the Lan-Chow-Fu Dungans, a truculent lot. I pointed out that Feroz was also the commander of sixteen: at this Feroz stifled a guffaw by stuffing his handkerchief well into his mouth, as he knew as well as I did that in his case twelve of the sixteen were mules, since he was a transport driver. However, there seemed no need to go into domestic details of that sort with the Da-Ring, so I rubbed it in that Feroz was in uniform with the lion and unicorn on his buttons, whereas the Loya had no right to expect to be treated as a soldier at all,

as he was garbed as a "lousy civilian," in every sense of the phrase.

The Da-Ring was now quite humble, especially when I added that if I did not get the apology at once, I would put the Loya under close arrest and take him myself under escort to the Pu-Li Amban, and that I would see that a suitable cable was sent from Simla to Peking about the conduct of both of them. The Da-Ring began to have visions of his head falling into the sawdust, and Kalbi improved the occasion by recounting an imaginary experience of his, wherein a Chinese mandarin was decapitated for churlishness to a Yang Kweitze, or "foreign devil." At last the Da-Ring said that he himself would apologize, as the Loya was too sick to do so. I said, "I suppose sick means drunk," and, with a sheepish grin, he acquiesced. So I told him that I would not think of taking an apology from him, with whom I had no quarrel, but insisted on a personal first-hand one from the Loya. Eventually he said that the Loya would apologize in the morning when he had slept off the effects of his hammering and of the drink. This was good enough, so we gave the Da-Ring some tea and cigarettes, and parted very good friends. He was not really a bad sort of youth, but it was now quite clear that the Dungan party of Ma-Ti-Tai were out to make trouble for us, both in order to score off the Do-Tai, and to revenge themselves for the capture of the Boche's agents, with whom they were in league.

What made this certain was the fact that there was no doubt that the Pu-Li Amban had been the man to betray Ghulam Ali to the enemy in July,

and, too, he had been clumsy enough to show his hostility to Sir George. Another episode a few days later made this even more sure.

Very early next morning I went into the fort with Kalbi, to meet the now sycophantic Kirghiz corporal, whilst Ahmad Shah marched off the party. The corporal explained that the Loya was still asleep in a little room under the fort wall. We went there, to find a stove nearly red-hot and an immense pile of sheepskins on a platform by the wall. From under this came snores, and on the wall were hung in a row the carbines of the garrison. The air was nearly solid, so we kept the door open, and gusts of snow-laden air came swirling in. The Loya was evidently under the heap. Prodding it produced no result, so the corporal was made to haul the sheepskins off. The biting blast produced a sort of consciousness in the brute-like figure that now groaned. It was in a thin cotton shirt, so that the fresh air had the maximum effect. A few brief words explained the object of our visit, only to produce more groans. So the corporal was made to prop up the battered hulk and to prize open the contused eyes with his fingers. He seemed to like causing pain to his superior officer.

When the Loya saw the fixed bayonet of Kalbi and his uncompromising face, he began to realize that things were serious, and at last stammered out an apology in Chinese. This was not good enough: the corporal nudged him again, Kalbi told him some home truths, and at last his bruised lips framed an apology in Turkish. We slammed the door and left him to his frowst, happy in the thought that in the event of a diplomatic Donny-

brook, he had acknowledged himself, before witnesses, to be in the wrong.

That was a load off my mind, but the next trouble was the bitter Arctic climate, and the fact that the Kirghiz had moved away into warmer valleys.

A long march took us to Subashi, where we were lucky enough to find a couple of their tents under the lee of some rocks, and we were glad enough to get out of the blizzard. Next day we reached Tashkurghan, for the fourth time that year, and avoided somehow or other having an open row with the Amban. Here, too, we got some news of the Czecho-Slovaks who were garrisoning the posts beyond the range, on the Russian Pamir. The Bolsheviks had sent them there to keep them away from joining their compatriots in Siberia, who were causing the Reds some inconvenience.

Some of them eventually deserted to India, with the machine-guns of the posts, but no one in India seemed to know what Czecho-Slovaks were.

After Tashkurghan the weather became, if anything, worse, and to add to our troubles influenza appeared. We had picked up a few men of the Hunza Company of Scouts at Tashkurghan, who had been living in houses for some time, and no doubt they collected the germ for distribution to my own men.

Every man of the detachment except myself and my orderly were attacked by it, but with the very great fortitude that I had come to expect from them as a matter of course, they all continued to ride their horses through the very long marches we were compelled to make. Imagine yourself, dear reader, who scurry to a warm bed, with an

eiderdown over you, a blazing fire, and a jorum of toddy, when you feel a bit queasy, compelled to force nerve and sinew to sit a rough Kirghiz pony for twelve or fourteen hours a day over a stark, frozen plain with the thermometer away down below zero, a howling, biting wind blowing across the very Roof of the World, and a single torn blanket to wrap yourself in, when you reached the shelter of a ragged *kibitka* under a rock. The epidemic was no light one, since many of the Sari-kolis lay dead in their homes, and I believe that it was only the Spartan conduct of my men that saved more than one death in the detachment. Had we halted to nurse a case, the germ, which seems to flourish under the shelter of a roof, would have had fuller scope to do its deadly work. At last we came to Payik, where the broad, swift river was frozen over and nearly 3 feet thick, and the leg of a sheep that Feroz carried slung on his saddle for the evening meal froze solid at midday. Feroz's comments in Doric Punjabi were instructive to listen to. The altitude here is about 14,000 feet, and the cold blast blowing straight from between the worlds made one think of interstellar space.

At night, planets, no longer walled off from man's sight by the turgid layer of the lower atmosphere that oppresses plains-living mortals, blazed like young suns from a jet-black vault over the universal mantle of snow and ice, pierced here and there by cliffs and pinnacles of iron rock.

The men of the Scouts at Payik had been reinforced to make up for the detachment that had gone off with me, and they were very pleased to see us and their comrades again. They had several

bits of news for us. The first was a fresh rumour from the Western Front about an impending German collapse; secondly, the Chinese, doubtless under orders from the Pu-Li Amban, had been obstructive; and, lastly, an officer and three British soldiers were expected to come up from the direction of India the next day. The row with the Chinese Da-Ring was about some three or four Bajaouri merchants, who were British subjects, and from whom the Da-Ring was trying to extract some bribe or blackmail.

This was another instance of Pu-Li Amban's hostility that seemed to need notice, and in any case I did not approve of undeniable British subjects being messed about. So I sent for the Da-Ring, informed him that I was the senior Allied officer on the spot, so his military superior, and that he had better try to stand properly to attention when he was spoken to, and to salute when he came into the tent, not to mention getting his buttons cleaned and his hair cut. This little speech reduced him to a state of complete malleability, so that when I added that if he had anything against British subjects he was at liberty to refer the matter to the consulate at Kashgar, he meekly agreed. Very soon the Bajaouris had their Tung-Shan-Piaos properly endorsed for their onward journey. So that was that. I decided to halt next day to wait for the British party in order to exchange my horses for theirs, and to give them Chinese taels for their Indian rupees. They turned up about noon next day under a subaltern named Henry, who had just been promoted from mechanist-sergeant-major. They were bound for Kashgar for a special duty



in the consulate. When the three "other ranks" arrived they looked most forlorn and tucked up with the cold, having come up from some warm station in the plains of India.

They were very glad to get inside the tent in spite of the crowd of Bajaouris, Chinese gendarmes, and Hunza Scouts already there, and the fresh carcass of a sheep that they were going to share in.

The tale of their experiences on the way up from Rawalpindi, wretchedly clad, without a map, expecting to find a line of post-houses all the way to Kashgar, would have been funny had it not been somewhat tragic. We parted early next morning, and they managed to reach Kashgar, though well after the Armistice.

As for us, the crossing of the Mintaka was abominably cold, and when we got down to lower levels, a night in a half-roofed sheep-pen between the great cliffs of Murkushi seemed almost stuffy even at 12,000 feet. Passing Misgar next day, we found the telephone line built up to there, though the instrument was not in working order. In any case, the line, having been built by civilian arrangements, was ready weeks too late to be of any service to the Mission.

After crossing the primeval green ice-cliffs and hummocks of the great Batura glacier, nearly a mile wide, our next halting-place was at Gircha, where at last, after many weeks, we slept on beds, with a complete roof over our heads, and away from the snow. This was in the house of an hospitable old uncle of the Thum's, who had, for some misdemeanour, been banished to this out-of-the-way village.



THE CASTLE OF ALTIT IN HUNZA.



CROSSING THE GREAT BATURA GLACIER.



Next day we met the Thum, who received us like old friends. I got on to his telephone, and ringing up the Political Agent at Gilgit, was able to say that "I was on the Pamirs the day before yesterday," which sounded rather strange when talking to a man who was sitting in a civilized house, with glass in the windows and brass knobs on the doors. The great news came down the wire, "The Germans have signed an armistice." The War had been "over" a good many days, and we were starting to lose the peace. I thought of the day way back in 1914, when I was also in remote Turkistan, on which I heard, a fortnight after the event, of the outbreak of the War. We did not know whether to be pleased or not, for to tell the truth every one of the Regulars wanted to be back with the regiment, hammering the Turk, and giving back a few of the hard knocks that we had received in the bloody days of 1915 and 1916.

To cheer us up we played polo all the livelong day, galloping, as the Hunza men do, the steel-wire Badakshi ponies on the rock ground. It is strange that so few players in these games are ever killed. Stone reefs stick out of the field, everyone "crosses" at a gallop, and everyone brandishes his stick in every direction. How any quadruped can stand being galloped for three-quarters of an hour on end, at that altitude and on such rocks, boggles the imagination: but they do it. After the polo we had dances, and the Thum introduced me to one or two new *sarnai* tunes, especially "Sultan Aziz Jan," the love-song of a poor Kabul carpenter who loved a princess of the King's "Andarun."

The Thum was hugely taken with the story of

the pursuit to Yarkand: it brought the good old days back to him when the gallant Hunza lads raided with sword and bow over the great glaciers of Shingshal and Baltoro, to loot the Chinese towns and put the fear of God into celestial Mandarin and Kirghiz Beg. But when Feroz described the punching of the hulking sergeant-major from Lan-Chow-Fu, he slapped his knees and roared with delight. Feroz became one of the family from that moment.

Many details stamp the Hunza men as Nordic: the frequency of blue eyes, their straight noses and clean limbs, as much as their round brooches, long, even curved bows of yew and ash, and the scarlet, green, and brown patterns on their stockings that resemble so closely those of the jerseys of the Fair Islanders.

Two days more saw us back in Gilgit and complete civilization, having completed the rough journey from Kashgar in ten days' march: not bad going for winter, over high passes. We got some money here, and some socks and boots; then, collecting kit left behind, we were soon on our way back over the Burzil and the Tragbal into Kashmir. We had more trouble with the influenza at Astor, since we needed snow-porters, and the epidemic had laid them all out.

At last we got enough to go on with, and they gave us trouble, sinking down in the snow and refusing to go on. Even when one or two of the weak ones were left behind some miles out in the snow, the more robust objected strongly, in the animal-like Kashmiri way, to go back to help them in. Their objections were overruled.



CROSSING THE NAGBAL RIDGE.



THE LAST BIVOUAC SOUTH OF THE PAMIRS.

*To face page 128*



Then, at the telegraph post, the clerk, doubtless a Gandhi-ite, thought fit to be impertinent to one of the N.C.O.'s. He, too, laughed on the wrong side of his face. The Burzil was easy enough, but the weather was bad on the Tragbal, and as the month was now December, we were pleased to be down in the Srinagar Valley and rolling towards Rawalpindi, in two of the motors that ply along that road.

From Rawalpindi the men went off on leave, and poor Feroz suffered a cruel blow in the death of his mother, of whom he was very fond; another of the ravages of the deadly wave of influenza, which carried off many a hearty lad whom the War had spared. I went straight on to Delhi to hand in my reports, and to draw some maps of the unexplored country we had traversed. Meanwhile events had been moving in Turkistan: Merv had been taken by our troops after sanguinary fighting, and we hoped soon to advance to the Oxus to free Tashkend and the whole of Turkistan from the Red yoke. But we little dreamed of the intrigues and devilish plotting that were working against us.

I had not been more than a few days in Delhi before I received an invitation to betake myself to the Merv front. Of course, I jumped at it, as my battalion had finished with war and was now doing peace-time garrison duties at Palmyra (Baalbek); the second battalion was also now at peace, and the newly raised third seemed to have no immediate fighting future.

I decided to take my old and trusty band with me, and in response to a telegram from the Chief of the General Staff, we all met again, girded for



war, on the platform of the loopholed station at Lahore. We spent Christmas Day of 1918 in the train running through the desert *en route* for Quetta. At this metropolis few people seemed to have any clear idea as to where the War was, or anything about it: this is a system of the curious outlook that so many suffer from in India. I have met highly placed diplomatic functionaries who could have told you straight away the name of the third wife of the Raja of Kuchparwanipore, but firmly believed that Tashkend was in Tibet, Semirechia west of the Caspian, and that the world ended at the edge of their rather antiquated map of India.

As for Czecho-Slovakia, Iugo-Slavia, Esthonia, and the like, they were convinced that these were merely musical comedy names or from William Le Queux's novels.

In December, 1918, there was a good deal of doubt as to where the railway went. Some thought as far as a favourite snipe marsh just outside Quetta, others voted for Isfahan or Tehran, whilst the most sanguine opined that through trains for Paris would shortly leave Karachi.

I had difficulty in getting fresh clothing for my men, especially greatcoats. For some reason, too, that I have never been able to understand, clothing was issued with only bone or trouser buttons on it, in lieu of brass buttons bearing the Royal Arms.

However, leave men and sick of British units had been coming back in large numbers to India, from Mesopotamia, where they had received excellent clothes with brass buttons.

These, especially the greatcoats and boots, they sold in large quantities to obtain beer.

Driving back from the clothing depot in a hackney carriage, after an unsuccessful quest, my quarter-master-havildar and I came upon a party of aboriginal Brahui labourers, nearly all wearing excellent greatcoats, with brass buttons. We both had the idea at once. Pulling up, I asked the leading labourer whether he knew that it was a criminal offence to be in possession of Government clothing. His jaw dropped, and he goggled blankly. I invited the whole lot to accompany me to the court of the chief civil authority, who would be only too glad to send them to jail for a period of years. Awal Nur added a few artistic and convincing details. The Brahuis were aghast: escape was impossible, so they threw themselves on my mercy. My hard heart was at last melted by their prayers, and I consented mercifully to take over the greatcoats, and say no more about the matter.

Awal Nur made himself very nearly ill with laughing when he told the rest of the men how we had got greatcoats for them.

Remembering Marbot in 1812, I also took care to obtain sheepskin pelisses for the men, for without these no soldier is properly equipped—outside Lower India, at any rate. How we got those, however, is another story.

It took us two days and two nights to get to the end of the railway, which broke off abruptly in the desert, by a clump of tents. Under the able hand of General Dickson, order was just beginning to evolve out of the most extraordinary chaos that even India can produce.

The first half of the 700-mile march was dry, hot, and arid, but at Birjand we exchanged our camels for a wagon, and got rid of a mass of coolies termed a field ambulance.

We had five passes to cross, and found snow on all of them. At Birjand I picked up an interesting young gentleman, Mahomed Rasul "Pervy" by name, Prikaznik by rank, of Daghestan by nation, belonging to the Daghestan Horse, of General Bicharakof's forces. Incidentally he was under arrest for being mixed up in a drunken brawl in 'Ashqhabad wherein a British officer was nearly shot. With us he behaved very well and made himself liked by the detachment, and I practised my Russian on him. He came in handy for getting some extra food for the men, especially meat, which they needed, the "Indian" ration being only 4 ounces a day. I drew "European" rations for him, as he hailed from Europe, and of course the rest of his mess shared therein. The fact of his being a Musalman, whereby he drew *hallal* meat, caused immense consternation in the supply accounts offices, whose imagination boggled at the combination of "British" rations with Mahomedan meat.

We got to Meshed on a cold, drizzly day, spent a few days there, and soon marched off again to the front at Merv: the fourth time that I had entered Turkistan from other countries, though never without a little thrill of what the future would hold. As all the men were mounted, there was no point in trekking along by the main road, which went six marches in the wrong direction to Kuchan, and thence five more by well-graded zigzags across

the ranges northwards to 'Ashqhabad; instead, we took a little-used mountain track, that, crossing the Kara Dagh, led us, in four marches, to the railway. The weather was quite unlike the "shiny East": dull, leaden skies were overhead, with snow everywhere on the uplands, and slippery, wet clay in the valley bottoms, whilst sleety wind-flurries made a toil of the long marches. We were always very glad to get into a building at the day's end, and to enjoy tea made from the steaming "samovar" that young Feroz always conjured up from nowhere. We had to cross a low but quite rough pass called the Ghif Kotal in a snowstorm, and thence down a rocky valley the path led through a few tiny encampments of Kurds and Baluchis, and a hamlet of Hazaras, to the frontier village of Qaratigan. The last few miles ran over a jumble of low clayey hills and alluvial valleys, and the whole journey was of interest, since the tract is almost unexplored. As we came down the valley of the Garm Ab, that rises in a hot spring north of the Ghif Kotal, the snow and mist cleared away, and as we entered the level valley of Chachha, a wonderful sight confronted us. This is the rock wall formed by the inner scarp of the range that, running in a dead straight line, divides Persia from Turkistan. About 500 feet of sheer cliff spring up from the undulating downs of Chachha and the valleys around; the whole structure seems to have been lifted up by some cataclysm, without regard to the shape or lie of the country around. Impassable for any but trained cragsmen, with crampons and ropes, it runs for hundreds of miles from Gifan in the Kurd country to Sarakhs by the Afghan border.

Pierced only by a few narrow gorges where streams have forced their way through, such as that of Qaratigan, it has for centuries kept warlike Mongol Turkoman and Uzbeg, not to say Russian, from getting at the convivial and engaging Persian as forcibly as they would like.

A line of vertical cliffs of this extent is in itself remarkable, but when you have added to that the wonderful regularity with which it runs, in a straight line from point to point, and the entire lack of any break or gap, except for the few stream gorges, the whole thing becomes a wonder of Nature.

As we marched into Qaratigan, away to our left to the north-west, there towered the miracle of Khurasan, the stupendous rock fortress Kelat-i-Nadiri that it was to be our good-fortune to penetrate into a few months later.

Qaratigan is a biggish village with a mixed Kurd, Turk, Persian, and Turkoman population of perhaps some 300 or 400 houses. We put up in quite a decent room, built up, as is so often the case in Persia, on the roof of a *sarai* looking down into the stable-yard.

The innkeeper, a Turk, did not seem to worry much about Bolsheviks or anyone else: he seemed to think that sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof, and made himself quite polite to us.

Next day we came over a few hills to the gorge of Haji Bulan, the next opening in the barrier range north of Qaratigan. Here was a Customs-house, and the polite Persian Customs man invited us to an excellent meal of *œufs à la coque*. He spoke very good French and entertained us with stories of life in Tehran—the city he longed to go

back to, like a Frenchman sighs for Paris. Just as we were going to bid him good-bye, he broached the subject of paying Customs dues on our kit and the men's, that was coming along on mules. The idea of an armed party, on its way to join a force fighting in the neighbourhood, having to pay Customs to leave a country that it did not want to stay in, rather took our breath away.

However, we could not very well shoot the lad, as we had been his guests—in any case, it would have been rather Prussian; so regaining our breath, we parleyed. At length, like a true bureaucrat, he consented to waive the matter as long as we would give him a "writing." So that was that: we let in His Majesty for about half a crown on a paper IOU, and marched off through the gorge, accompanied by the polite Customs man on a squealing stallion and a few of his cap-à-pie Turkish preventive men.

Outside the frowning scarp that walls in Khurasan, smiling downs, green with the first promise of spring, rolled down to the immense plain. We cantered easily along the grassy cart-track marked out in verst posts by some optimistic engineer. They seemed rather close together, and we rather suspected that the contractor had been paid so much a verst for that bit of road. It was still daylight when we trotted over the rank grass of the battle-field of Dushakh, where in September the Reds had been badly cut up by our troops. Skeletons littered the ground, mixed with empty *trokh linie* cartridge-cases made by Remington and the U.M.C., that showed us where a squadron of the 28th Light Cavalry, taking advantage of such an open-

ing as every cavalryman prays for, had speared 200 Bolsheviks.

A couple of miles on lay the little village, its white-washed cottages still splashed with shrapnel ball and nickel-jacketed bullet, and as dusk fell we rode to the station. We had marched for 800 miles since last seeing a railway, and the sight of signal-lamps and water-towers made us feel as if we were back in England.

A Russian railway in Turkistan was far more European than its Indian counterpart. The all-pervading dirt of the latter, the perfunctory pretence at cleaning, and the square wheels, make the "iron road" of Hindustan a thing to be shunned at all costs.

A train came in after dark and we clambered on board. Our horses went into a couple of trucks, and we all scrambled into a fourth-class waggon such as is used to take emigrants to Siberia. Waking up in the morning, we found a lance-corporal and three British soldiers of the 9th Warwicks had been in already. One of them was shaving in a precarious fashion, another cooking something over the stove in the middle of the car, whilst the other two had already established an *entente* with Abdulla Shah and Aslam, and they were all four making tea in a great tin for the public benefit. All through the War, I have noticed how British soldiers, when they are real fighting infantry or gunners, are always ready to make friends with Pathan or Punjabi soldiers in particular.

CHAPTER V  
THE MERV FRONT  
MAROUSIA



Noch buil tyomni:  
Ogon boiusia,  
Pravadite mnia, Marousia,  
Pravazhal e zhalk astala  
Pravadile e zabuile  
Porūchik chikki, Porūchik chikki  
Ūchik, ūchik, ūchik chikki.

*Russian Marching Song,*

It was morning by the time we got to Merv. I had seen a few Tekkes in Tashkend, where they seemed to inspire much awe amongst the Russians, just as a Pathan does in Calcutta; but here we had them in crowds. All the old books and romantic stories about their wild *alamans* and the terror they drove into the hearts of the Persians



came back to my mind, so I looked forward to a close acquaintance with them.

At Bairam Ali, a dozen miles east of Merv, we found Brigade Headquarters installed in the palace of the Emperor, a summer residence in the midst of his estate. This is a large area irrigated by very up-to-date barrages and canals, recently built by skilful Russian engineers at a place called Hindu Kush, some miles up the Murghab River. These works replace the old Turkoman dams and channels of Sultan Band, that for centuries past made the oasis to bloom and flourish, as O'Donovan and Curzon tell us.

Not only does the Murghab River irrigate the land, but it provides electric power and lighting for the cotton mill of the estate, and this is, or was, brought in by several miles of high-power transmission line carried on tall steel lattice-girder masts.

The estate was farmed out to a large number of colonists, nearly all of Asian race. Strangely enough, three of the men of my own regiment, who were now with me, held land on this estate of the Tsar's, and the chances and changes of the War had brought them back over scores of weary marches to their own tilth. These men were Hazaras, whose fathers and grandfathers had served in the Corps, and whose ancestors, to the number of a thousand families, were of Chinghiz Khan's armies, and colonized by him in the valley of the Oxus. In later centuries they spread southwards into the centre of Afghanistan, forming the racially alien community of the Hazarajat. The Amir of Kabul tried to exterminate them, and as a result of his oppression a good number emigrated to North Khurasan, and some into Transcaspia.



A TEKKE : HIS WIFE AND TENT.



LESGHIAN AND TURKOMAN CAVALRY AND THEIR RUSSIAN COLONEL.



OUR BEST ARMOURD TRAIN AND ITS MINE-BUMPER TRUCK.



The Bolsheviks on this front had been severely handled at Artik, Kaakha, and Dushakh, whilst we were in Tashkend parleying with their Soviet.

At Dushakh the whole brunt fell on the 19th Punjabis, who lost 50 per cent. of the effectives and all their British officers, and on the 28th, who had charged the Magyar infantry over the grassy downs.

A young Yusafzai sepoy of the 19th had been in France, where he had been twice wounded whilst attached to another regiment. When he rejoined his own unit in Transcaspia he was somewhat supercilious and inclined to jeer at side-shows and "small wars." At Artik he collected another slight wound, but stuck to his opinion and his platoon. At Dushakh he received a nasty one, and publicly recanted in view of an 800-mile camel journey with a compound fracture.

This victory of Dushakh reflects no little credit on the troops engaged: separated by 800 miles from their railhead; enduring the bitter cold of the "drear Chorasmian wastes" in khaki cotton drill; rationed on what they could pick up in the barren country; deficient of Lewis guns, grenades, and everything that one is accustomed to associate with modern war—they attacked and routed ten times their number of trained, well-found European troops, backed by abundant quick-firing artillery and dozens of machine-guns. Almost without a pause they drove them back to Merv—a great achievement, the fame of which resounded all over Central Asia, for was not Merv the "Queen of the World"? At Bairam Ali, an eastern suburb in the Merv oasis, the Bolsheviks received another blow, and were driven out into the desert between

Merv and the Oxus. Kipling's allusion to the dream of every British soldier of the eighties was now fulfilled, and it was to my platoon of the Corps of Guides, now attached to the force, that the honour fell of "cooking their camp-kettles in the palace of the Tsar," where they were billeted.

During the intervals between these fights the little force eventually developed and crystallized from the band of insurgents out of which it had grown. The commanding General was a Tekke Turkoman chief, now Sir Oraz Sardar, K.C.M.G., who was the son of the chief Tagma Sardar, who lost his life in defending Geok Tepe against Skobelev in 1882. The victorious General had found the boy and sent him to Petrograd, where he was admitted to the Imperial Corps of Pages, and eventually became a Russian General. The real fighting portion of the force were the 19th and 28th, backed by some Russian guns, mounted on armoured trains, and manned by Menshevik ex-officers and non-commissioned officers. There were a couple of regiments of Turkoman horse and a battalion of foot, more apt for looting than fighting, whilst afterwards a squadron was formed of loyalist Russians trained or armed by us. Finally, when active operations had almost ceased, a section of 18-pounders of 44 Battery, R.F.A., reached Bairam Ali, whilst a company of a British battalion did duty on the "lines of communication" in 'Ashqhabad, where wild comic-opera revolutions and counter-revolutions had been seething, and irresponsible legislative assemblies comprising every known and unknown shade of thought had been guided towards sanity by one or two young British officers.



THE EAST PERSIAN DESERT.



MARKET AT BAIRAM ALI: RUINS OF OLD MERV IN DISTANCE.



The armoured trains had been a prominent feature of the operations from the beginning. Neither in their build nor in their tactical employment did these resemble the armoured trains of 1900 or 1901 in South Africa, nor yet the heavy guns on railway mountings of the Western Front. They were a sort of cross between the two. All the artillery of each side—in our case only Russian field-guns and 4·8-inch howitzers—were mounted on trucks, and protected either by steel plates or, *faute de mieux*, by bales of cotton compressed for shipment. The guns' crews lived on other coaches on the train, which usually mounted a machine-gun or two on the roof.

The infantry and cavalry, however, were lodged in separate unarmoured trains. The Bolsheviks had a similar arrangement, except that the moral atmosphere of their trains, which they called "échelons," left a good deal to be desired. In fact, to say that the males and females therein lived like beasts would be an affront to the beasts.

It soon became clear that, since the single line ran for hundreds of miles amongst the sand-dunes, some 20 to 40 feet high, of the Kara Kum Desert, it was necessary to have a bend in the line in order to fight a battle or to make a stand. For when one side attacked, it was usual for their armoured train to open the artillery action by steaming round the bend out from the cover of the sandhills, with its guns in action, in support of the infantry attack over the desert, whilst the cavalry operated thirstily on the flanks.

When the Bolsheviks were defeated and got on the run down a straight stretch of railway, they



could not make a stand until the line formed a bend again, and so gave cover for their armoured train. During the whole of the 1918 fighting, and in January and February, 1919, the Reds were much superior in artillery, whilst their very numerous machine-guns were well kept and handled by carefully selected teams of trained soldiers.

A favourite gambit in these operations was the time-honoured jest of blowing up the line in rear of the enemy's trains. To do this, a formation colloquially known as a "Pol-sot" (*i.e.*, *Polu-sotnia*—half-squadron of non-regulars) would provide itself with some gun-cotton, and proceed on a long, weary, and very thirsty *détour* across the dunes of the desert for many miles until they reached the line behind the enemy. The rest was easy, except that the return journey was usually even more drouthy than the outward. Before very long a bright brain realized that a contact mine left under a rail offered a far better result for the trouble expended, in that one could hope thus to bag a gun-truck. The counter to this was the placing of an empty truck or two in front of the leading gun-truck to take the force of the explosion. The attack were again driven to put on their thinking-caps, and devised a mine that only responded to the tender caress of something weighing several tons, such as a gun or a locomotive. This was a trump card that took several tricks, until another expert used a truck loaded with old rails to take the bump. Now, not only did the subtle ones realize that the blowing up of 5 tons of old iron was a poor result for a half-squadron with their tongues hanging out almost permanently, but that the

engine-drivers' eyes stuck out as on stalks and became so marvellously penetrating that they could spot a mine, however well hidden, in time to stop the train. So the final act was neat and effective. No explosive was used, but one bright morning the Bolshevik engine-driver found himself bumping along the sleepers whilst his wheels were still between the rails. The "Pol-sot" had opened out the gauge for an inch or so over a length of several hundred yards, spiking the rails neatly down again and covering up their traces.

These experiments in practical railway engineering had cost a certain amount, and all along the line from 'Ashqhabad to Merv and beyond, the casual traveller saw battered, blackened trucks and coaches lying on their backs by the side of the line, with their wheels in the air. The Russian railway engineers certainly showed wonderful skill and speed in getting things going again after the various crashes and explosions.

To the civilized Western accustomed to regard a railway as a sort of unerring mechanical brand of Providence, and as something to set one's watch by, it was a strange sensation to have a complete broad-gauge modern railway at one's beck and call, with whole trains and locomotives to play about with and to blow up. Railway warfare in Russia was something *sui generis*, and a novel experience for any soldier.

Towards the end of January, 1919, the Bolshevik commander, ex - Company - Sergeant - Major Koluzaiev, emboldened by the apparent inactivity of our force, which was really due to orders from home, permitted himself to attack our position

near Bairam Ali, whereupon a well-timed counter-attack drove his troops back in disorder and gained a good deal of ground.

However, the order which forbade our troops to follow him up to the Oxus saved him, and a static warfare set in. On our side a little cluster of wired and sand-bagged strong points and artillery observing-posts were held by a portion of the infantry, watched by cavalry patrols, whilst the artillery and the rest of the infantry remained in their trains ready to be moved up in support. The Bolshevik arrangement was similar, but they seemed to prefer a continuous front line to the mutual support of our little redoubts.

During this period an interesting cavalry skirmish took place. A patrol of fourteen Salt Range Punjabis of the 28th Light Cavalry, working out in the desert, coming over the brow of a sandhill, encountered two half-squadrons of Bolshevik cavalry in open column. Without pausing to think, their dafadar led them at a gallop straight through the centre of the enemy squadron, breaking all four ranks, killing several men, and scattering the formation in confusion. He himself lost three men missing, owing to their horses having been killed, and these eventually rejoined, the last after months of wandering over half Turkistan.

The lull of February gave us time to look round. We had three Turkoman regiments of horse and a battalion of foot. The best of the mounted units was that of Colonel Karaz Sardar, a venerable chief of the Akhal Tekkes, whom everyone liked very much, but on the whole all four lacked discipline and training almost entirely. In fact, at the

Dushakh fight they had lost us a good part of the fruits of victory by rioting away to loot a train instead of pursuing the Bolshevik fugitives. Another misdemeanour of theirs was the slitting of the throats of about fifty Magyar and Austrian deserters who were on their way over to us, in response to the patient and oft-repeated appeals of our intelligence branch. Needless to say, this rather choked off any more would-be deserters, and caused much peevishness to the officer who worked those particular strings. What the Turkoman units most suffered from was the fact that sundry of the "politically-minded" class, lawyers and such-like, had insinuated themselves into the nominal commands of squadrons and troops. Naturally, the old surviving N.C.O.'s, both Russian and Turkoman, of the former Imperial Regiment of Turkoman horse, that had served on the Galician front, abstained from joining, and this worked on in a vicious circle, to the damning of the regiments. The Turkoman were good material at bottom, though no amount of training, discipline, or equipment would bring them up to the level of Pathans or of good-class Punjabis, since, being nomads, they have not that attachment to the land that leads the cultivator to get himself killed in defence of it. Anyhow, they were keen and willing, so most of my N.C.O.'s were put on to drill and instruct them, especially in the handling of the Lee-Metford rifles that we had issued to them. The results were really most promising, though the work had to be carried out actually on the position where a Bolshevik aeroplane once displayed such *outrage* as to bomb Aslam and Abdulla Shah when they were

putting squads of Turkoman through the "standing load."

Meanwhile the "intelligence" part of the platoon were getting into touch with the Turkoman. This was not difficult, since they have much in common with the Punjabi beyond their common Sunni religion, and my two senior assistants were both Punjabi officers. They are far from being as Mongoloid as their genealogy would seem to indicate. In fact, actually they are about half Mongol and half Aryan, with possibly a touch of Arab. This is no doubt a result of their old raiding habits when their *alamans* rieved fair Aryan damsels from over half Persia and from well into the Caucasus. Naturally one finds some individuals fully Mongol in visage, whilst others are hardly to be distinguished from pure Aryans.

They are above all hospitable. Any stranger coming into their felt tents finds a meal for himself and his horse, and a bed, at any hour of the day or night, just as amongst Pathans.

The weak points about them as soldiers are twofold. Firstly, the fact of having been robbers and raiders for so many centuries has ingrained the habit in them of avoiding casualties, the which a band of rieviers cannot afford to sustain without compromising its withdrawal.

Secondly, when their territory is threatened, as by the Bolsheviks, it is fatally easy for them to pack up their tents and move off to the next immense grazing-ground west. If they had been an agricultural people, they would not have left their patches of ploughland to an invader without a struggle.

With training and discipline, they would be far from being useless mouths, even if they could never rise to the heights of the Guides' immortal defence of the Kabul Residency, or to the sublime conduct of that Punjabi Company of the 57th Wilde's Rifles, that died to a man where they stood, during the hell of First Ypres.

As it was, they had no hesitation in facing Bolsheviks, hammered as they had been by the 19th Punjab Infantry. The garb they wear marks them out from all other tribes of Asia. Imagine a Guardsman's bearskin of the largest size, made of black sheep's fleece. This is their headgear, light, comfortable to ride in, warm in winter, and by no means as apt to lodge a surplus population as might be expected.

The leaders wore white ones, whilst the men of the old Imperial Regiment had theirs dyed to the purple-grey of the old Russian greatcoat.

Below this a long, wide-sleeved, collarless flowing robe of heavy red silk reaches down to the ankles. The thick material, from Bukhara, is of a surpassing strength and excellence, dyed to a bright Turkey red with cochineal, and seamed up and down with fine yellow hair-lines about half an inch apart. Under this would be worn a short Russian cotton blouse, hooked up to the neck, and crimson or blue cotton trousers, often wadded, thrust into Russian knee-boots. The stately robe is girded into the waist by a long silk scarf, tied several times round, holding an automatic pistol or two, and the universal *pichak*—the single-edged, gently curved, ivory-hilted Turkoman dagger, that in its green shagreen sheath bears a curious family resemblance to the straight

Afghan *chhara*. A man of importance usually wore a curved sword, of precisely similar pattern to that of a British General, whilst the ordinary trooper contented himself with the Cossacks' regulation guardless *shashka*.

The ladies of the tribe wear the long jumpers and the immensely wide trousers of the Moslem fair, the whole coiffed by a sort of tall white turban bound round the face in a nun-like fashion. On Sunday-go-to-meeting occasions you see them wearing plaques and breastplates of raw silver, fringed with Russian coins and studded with topaz and garnet. They spend their time tending the herds, and weaving the miracle of the Turkoman carpet—that gem of art that, when it penetrates to England, is called a Bukharan rug.

The women are distinctly more Mongoloid in appearance than the men. This is one of many indications which have made me think that, in a mixed race, the characteristics and especially the temperament of the higher race are carried on by the males. Far be it from me to suggest that the Mongoloid is an unpleasant fellow. He can be most cultured, courteous, and engaging, and it must be recognized that, besides the Aryan, the Mongoloid is the only race that counts in the struggle for world supremacy.

The horse fills a very large arc of the Turkoman's horizon, larger than does his lady wife, and with some justice.

The horse has been for centuries the weapon and the pivotal point of the Tekke's life. The type does not appeal very much to the cavalryman of to-day, who dearly loves a heavy-boned waler, with a stern

like that of a 15-inch monitor, on to which he can hang halberds, hangers, whingers, whangers, and the squadron typewriter (the machine, I mean, not the damsel). The Turkoman is of another type. Free-moving, clean-limbed, with the broad forehead and the small velvet muzzle of the aristocrat amongst horses, he at once calls to mind the English thoroughbred. There is a sort of vague idea abroad in England that the English horse of blood has Arab ancestry, though there is mighty little resemblance between a typical Arab and any Irish or English animal. When one has seen the Turkoman, and recollects the "Byerly Turk" that the Crusade brought to England, there can be little doubt about the origin of our horses, and that their sire was a Turkoman. The various nationalities that confronted our ancestors in the Crusades are sloppily lumped together as Saracens, though certainly many were Kurds, Turkoman, and the tribes that are now called Punjabis. Go into the rugged valleys of the gallant Salt Range and get any old soldier talking, and you will soon hear old legends of the *preux chevalier*, Salah-ud-din, and of his knightly adversary, Richard of England.\*

Just in the same way, the Turkoman horse has penetrated to England under a garbled name.

During this period I was lucky enough to become the possessor of a thoroughbred Turkoman mare. During a drunken *rixé* in Merv, her previous

\* This shows what nonsense was talked by those who called the Palestine campaign one of Cross against Crescent, forgetting that in 1918 Christian and Saracen were united against the common Mongoloid foe, the descendants of Seljuk and Othmanli. Indeed, such a combination often occurred in the Eastern wars of St. Louis and of Richard, as in 1241.



owner, a squadron-sergeant-major of Daghestan Horse, came to a violent end from an overdose of lead. My own squadron-dafadar-major, Ahmad Shah, who, being a Jehlum man, had an eye for a horse, if ever anyone had, moved in the matter, and the upshot was that the "Wachtmister" bequeathed "Marushka" to me. Like Ninon de l'Enclos, the years had passed her over lightly, nor did her lurid past prevent her from being wholly charming in the present. Her youth had been spent as the mount of a Tekke chieftain, and she had seen a good deal of miscellaneous fighting, or raiding, in this sphere. Shortly before the War, she came into the hands of a Sotnik (subaltern) of the 1st Semirechensk Cossacks. During the early years of the War, she saw, in Khurasan, many a skirmish with German emissary and Afghan raider. The Lieutenant left his bones on the scene of his fights, the revolution broke out, and Bicharakof's turbulent but loyal Lesghian and Daghestan Muslims appeared on the scene. Marushka, now the long-tailed comrade of the "Wachtmister," saw many kaleidoscopic changes of fortune. "Red" revolutions, "White" counter-revolutions, comic-opera legislative assemblies, and the weird "Centro Caspiski" Dictatorship, that government without a foot of land whereon to set its foot, passed over her well-bred head, and left her unperturbed, if somewhat hungry. Till I had the honour of making her acquaintance, I never dreamed to what extent a horse could fill one's thoughts as a friend and a comrade.

The wayward old lady has never been trained, but, on the other hand, she is a living proof of the fact that training is only needed for low-bred

animals. A perfect "ride," she leaps like a deer, and will scramble up sheets of rocky hillside, covered with *verglas*, in a way that would make the Alpine Club lift their eyebrows. She has a real eye for a country, and is so inured to war that, whilst a mounted man appearing on the skyline leaves her unmoved if he be unarmed, yet if he have a rifle in his hand she will prick her ears and gently intimate the fact to her rider.

Besides our Turkoman friends, whom we got to like very much, especially their stately grey-bearded chiefs, we saw a good deal of the Russians. The bulk of them were ex-officers and N.C.O.'s of the Imperial Army, and an excellent lot. One day, to my surprise, on my way up to our little array of trenches, I met at Annenkoff Station a face that seemed familiar. It was the town-major, a certain Captain R——, whom I had last met in a troop train, travelling night and day over the immense steppes of Turgai and Orenburg. This was years before, and he was on his way, in September, 1914, to the Austrian front, in command of the machine-gun company of his regiment, the 3rd Turkistan Rifles. Needless to say, we rejoiced that the fortunes of war had brought us together again after all these years of campaigning.

It has become the fashion in certain circles to sneer at the Russian "White" armies. These jeers, though, usually emanate from those whose southern aspects have been firmly glued to office stools, in some Capua of South Russia. When one thinks of the hardships and never-ceasing struggles of some of the Cossack armies, such as that of Orenburg, one cannot but admire the grit and

pluck that bids them hold on. Starved of all necessities during the Great War by the canker of a traitorous administration, they endured very much what our wretched people went through in Mesopotamia. Then, betrayed by the Jewish revolution, they were surrounded on all sides, islets of loyalty to their Crown, in a sea of treachery, and fought almost hopelessly, cut off even from half-hearted Allied aid against the overwhelming swarms of Reds.

Some old officers of this type were with us; in fact, they manned, with Turkoman aid, nearly all the artillery. When their time came they died like gentlemen.

The other side of the Russian picture was not so pleasant. Whilst the bodies of gallant debonair Punjabis filled great graves in the lonely desert, and whilst barbarian Turkoman left their tents and wives to shoulder a musket for the "great white Tsar," hordes of young shirkers filled the brothels and cafés of 'Ashqhabad. A great proportion of them were Armenians whose hides are notoriously valuable, but there were many Russians amongst them of the new Board-school type that has no hesitation in letting others bear the burden of its defence.

There was once a famous Admiral who, not many years back, went down with his flagship. He was in the habit of reading the Bible every evening in his shirt-sleeves, since the sight of the broad gold ring on his coat-sleeve made it difficult for him to realize the existence of a Superior Being. In the same way, many a herring-gutted undergraduate of the newer type of University has suc-

ceeded, by diligent use of the focusing screw, in sighting a bug in a microscope, and from this, like H. G. Wells, deduces the non-existence of an Omniscience, since who can know more than he? Having overturned religion, our young biological "conchy" has no more trouble with loyalty, patriotism, or the shouldering of any inconveniently altruistic burden. The bone-headed soldier can do that for his princely stipend, and be called a "gilded popinjay" to boot.

This cocksure, if pigeon-chested, class is a fine fair field for the Jew, who uses it to disseminate his catchwords amongst the even less instructed slaves of lathe, pot-bank, and mine. Here we have Karl Marxism, "anti-militarism," Syndicalism, all ready to help to make the worker and the cultivator the bond-slave of the despotic Hebrew.

So it was in 'Ashqhabad. Whilst rag-time legislative assemblies and frenzied crowds were discussing weird doctrines, and talking of liberty and the rights of man, someone else was risking his skin in the firing-line.

Not the least interesting of the unwritten stories of the War would be the tale of the guiding of these law-making "Dottyvilles" towards comparative sanity by one or two young British officers. Later on, a single company of the 9th Warwicks arrived from Baku, and acting as a cold douche to the thousands of "hot-heads," simplified the task of their keepers.

Meanwhile, up at the front, life did not lack interest. After the last fight, in which the Reds were driven back nearly to Repetek, only a station or two west of the Oxus, the fighting was limited

to an occasionally mild shelling by the armoured trains, and the dropping now and then of a home-made bomb from a Bolshevik aeroplane.

It was the first time during the War that I had lived at a headquarters, even of a brigade, and I confess that I did not despise the luxury, especially as it helped me over some trouble that I had been having during the winter, in about the twelfth vertebra, the result of too close an acquaintance with a 5·9-inch shell in its business hours, in the old German trench hard by Neuve Chapelle.

We were dependent on the Russians entirely for our food, and we did not do so badly on the fat sheep of the country, though the British Tommies in 'Ashqhabad groused at getting too much caviare. We did not, but fresh caviare is rather uninteresting without butter, so we cast about to get some. At last, some twelve miles south of Bairam Ali, towards the Afghan frontier, we found the remarkable phenomenon of a German village. This Lutheran colony of Kizilkovski had been planted down about two or three decades ago by Kaufmann, and had made itself quite at home. We used to ride there, through Turkoman *auls* and a very Asian scenery, to find ourselves suddenly in a bit of Central Europe, face to face with a Lutheran chapel. As I possessed a fund of ungrammatical German, it fell to me to make these excursions, and to purchase excellent fresh butter from poke-bonneted Teuton dames for "Askabadski" rouble notes.

Both men and women were far from being unfriendly; indeed, they always had some coffee to offer us whilst we sat and listened to their guttural tales of oppression by roving Turkoman.

The Turkoman included a few truculent elements, who were quite as ready to side with the Bolsheviks, in return for the offer of rapine and loot, as with us, who merely held out the satisfaction of enabling them to "do their bit."

The toughest of these was one Aziz Khan, who claimed allegiance from the Tejend Regiment. In fact, it was not always certain from day to day in whose "daily state" this unit would figure. Aziz Khan was a man of low birth, a shepherd in his youth—a job that he had abandoned for brigandage. He ended with his neck in a bight of hemp, as many a better man before him.

Another surprise encounter was with a certain Zimmerman. He was a Lieutenant of Saxon artillery, who had been conspicuous in Tashkend, where I used to see him almost daily, in the undress uniform of his regiment, a spruce frock-coat with a very high collar, well-fitting overalls with the broad red stripe of the gunner, and a cap with a smart white cover, that contrasted with the frowsiness all around him.

Coming back to Bairam Ali one evening I found a very large and uncompromising Sikh sentry over the door of one of the billets, and inside was poor Zimmerman, in ragged civilian clothes. The glory had departed, and the young lad, who was a gallant officer, faced a firing-squad like a man very soon after.

We were pretty comfortable in the Tsar's summer palace, surrounded by a big garden, especially as there was a big bath lined with tiles let into the floor, and a great wood-heated boiler to fill it from. The men played hockey now and then, the gunners

of the 44th Battery organized some mounted sports, and we made trips to Merv and the ruins around. Merv was the "Queen of the World" in her spacious days of youth, and around the Merv of to-day there lie the battlemented ruins of four or five great ancient cities built by Macedonian and Mongol, Turk, Tatar, and Arab. Nowadays, in spite of her immense age, Merv, with her wide poplar-lined streets, laced with electric wires, looks like some modern mushroom town of the American West.

We spent a market-day there, and saw a good deal of the real Turkoman, not to mention many Armenian carpet sellers out to turn an honest penny, and possibly something besides. One of the features of Merv was the little teashop where the spies of both sides would foregather to construct circumstantial stories for their respective paymasters.

In February British occupation of the Caucasus began to consolidate itself and our communications with Baku were established. From here ordnance stores and excellent clothing began to find their way to the troops, who were in sore need of them. In March rumours supplemented the material arrivals, and everyone was agog with guessing what was going to happen next. The more ardent spirits hoped for permission to go on to Tashkend, and to smash the Red power in Turkistan for good and all, but the more worldly-wise guessed differently, and, as it proved, our dreams of going on to shoot the cloudy tiger of Turkistan in the reed-beds of the Oxus, and to eat the famed melons of Charjui, melted away.

To our shame, be it said, we were to abandon our rather feckless Turkoman allies, and to withdraw into Persia.

Before the black day dawned an episode commenced, a story of adventure and endurance that was no whit behind some of the almost legendary lone-handed exploits of Guides of past generations. The hero was Awal Nur, nobly backed by Kerbelai Mahomed, and even the shade of Rasul Khan, who, with sixty Guides and his mother-wit, took the great citadel of Amritsar from a whole regiment of the King of Lahore's Sikhs, would not have been ashamed to grasp him by the hand.

Bukhara, a romantic name to English readers, is a great country, the size of Belgium, rich from prosaic commerce and the wealthy corn-lands watered by the Zarafshan, "the gold scatterer."

Its ruler, an Uzbek prince of ancient lineage, bore no love for the Bolsheviks. Even when in February, 1918, Kolesov, the "sea-green incorruptible," the Anacharsis Kloutz of Turkistan, let hell loose in the streets of the city with his armoured cars, Austins by the same token, so that the alleys ran with the blood of the faithful, the Uzbeks failed to acquire the love that the Reds hoped to inspire for their methods.

The once hardy race had fallen a victim to the god of Cobden, and too easy victories of commerce had plunged them into the facile path of sensual debauchery and silken lolling in the fruits of their far-faring caravans. Needless to say, their once ready swords had become the gilded ornaments of the sleek Court and the languid *andarun*.

Added to this, modern civilization and all the



blessings of Christianity, high explosives, machine-guns, poison-gas, aircraft bombs, and "Staff work," had grown up unheeded by the fat traders of the ancient cities of Mid-Asia. In a word, Bukhara was defenceless: the Red armies had free passage along the railway that traverses the middle of the State and every town teemed with Soviet spies, whilst thick-lipped hook-nosed canaille hectored the descendant of Tamerlane at his own Court.

The Amir of Bukhara had many Turkoman subjects, so naturally he looked to their allegiance, nor was he disappointed. When the British forces became the allies of the Turkoman, the making of common cause with Bukhara was a natural and foregone conclusion. Even the horrible circumstances of the doing to death of Stoddart and Conolly in the forties by the old King Nasr-ed-din were forgotten in face of the hatred of the Reds.

The Corps of Guides have had for nearly a century past many links with Bukhara. Not the least of these was the fact that Timur Jan, the heir-apparent to the throne, had, ousted by his younger brother, enlisted as a simple trooper in the Guides, working his way up to wear an officer's stars, just as not a few Central European princelings had found their way to Sidi-bel-Abbès, the Spartan home of the *Légion Étrangère*.

So it was not surprising that when the Toksa Bai, the Amir's venerable white-bearded envoy, asked our General for arms and assistance, he received a full measure, and the task of seeing them to Bukhara was entrusted to Company-Quartermaster-Havildar Awal Nur.

Awal Nur was a sprig of perhaps the most aristo-

cratic family of Yusafzai. He had a brilliant war record, having been three times wounded in France, where he went through the murderous ordeal of half a dozen Flanders battles. Added to this a small frontier campaign, and the better part of a year in East Africa, in one of the battalions that shared the praise of their generous enemy, von Lettow-Vorbeck.\*

The task before him was an immense one, but none better could have been chosen for it than this slim, unassuming youth, a boy in years, but a veteran in wars.

Not only did a full 600 miles of the most awesome desert lie between him and his goal, but the Soviet lines and their widely spread patrols barred the way.

It was no mere matter of a few unencumbered men slipping through, but this precious charge was carried on a round hundred great long-haired Bactrian dromedaries.

Late one night, moving by circuitous paths, the secret caravan assembled in the desert outside Merv, and as I said good-bye to the staunch-hearted lad I had not much hope of seeing him again alive. We had served together in five campaigns.

The tale of the outward journey alone forms an epic in itself: endless waterless marches over innumerable sand-dunes that stretched to the horizon all around. Several times desperate searches were made to find the lost trail, or some tiny saxaul bush that marked the way to a foul well of salt and bitter water.

When the crux came of passing the enemy's outposts, there was no possibility of cutting the Gordian

\* See "My Campaign in East Africa," by von Lettow-Vorbeck.

knot by falling upon the Red picquet and exterminating it. Such an act would have warned the fiendishly cunning commissars that something untoward was afoot, and their spies would have had a clue to track down the caravan as it approached the Oxus. So one awful march stretched out its anxious length to ninety-two waterless miles, as they made a *détour* around the well watched by the Red post. Even as it was, a happy chance alone guided them, their tongues black and swollen with thirst, their haggard faces worn with exhaustion and toil, to the next foetid well.

They were glad enough, after many days, to reach the green line that marked the bank of the Oxus, even though this set a fresh obstacle in the way of the party. They crossed midway between Charjui and the remote fastness of Khiva, and as they clambered up on the far bank the challenge of a strong Red patrol rang out. Promptly the undaunted Awal Nur answered with a shot, and in a few minutes the way was cleared, and the enemy left his dead on the ground.

Another purgatory of parched sandy desert dotted with saxaul scrub remained to be crossed before at last the weary, tattered band staggered into Bukhara, their charge intact.

Though the Amir was delighted with his new arrivals, decorating Awal Nur and Kerbelai with a high grade of the *Ashpara-i-Nishan*, the Star of Bukhara, and making the young Yusafzai a Colonel in his army, their troubles were not yet over. Owing largely to our withdrawal, and the crushing of a "White" counter-revolution in Tashkend, the Bolsheviks had been able to force themselves still

further upon Bukhara. The town teemed more than ever with their spies, and the Amir himself was watched at every turn. The whole wildly romantic story cannot yet be told: how the Amir hid the two soldiers in an unvisited village away from the city; how spies brought the news to the Soviet of a "British Colonel" hidden in Bukhara; how a British officer, one of Sir George Macartney's late Mission, hiding from the Reds, disguised himself as a Rumanian officer of the Austrian Army; how he obtained service under the enemy's counter-espionage, and in this guise was sent to track down the British officer of Bukhara, who proved to be none other than his former fellow-soldier Awal Nur.

This all spread itself over months of time, in which the two young soldiers' lives were not worth an hour's purchase.

At length, nearly a year afterwards, British Major, Pathan Havildar, Hazara trooper, and Serb Lieutenant set out again from Bukhara together for a fearsome camel journey back to the British lines in Persia. This was no less arduous than the outward passage: indeed, they had to draw water from wells in the desert 750 feet deep, with leathern bucket and rope hauled up by a camel. They dodged through the settlements of the Murghab, and another brisk little skirmish on the Persian border was the prelude to their safe and sound arrival at our force headquarters.

Meanwhile we had a few days in which to observe the Caucasian troops that were going to relieve us. The more senior officers were a good handful, who had won their spurs against German and Austrian, and even if somewhat over-decorated, they had a

real pride in their profession of arms and a hatred of the Reds. The junior officers were mostly promoted N.C.O.'s of the same mettle, and loyal to their Crown. The Staff rather surprised us by an enquiry as to whether we found it necessary to beat our men very often. This, whilst it flabbergasted us, opened our eyes to the class of troops we were dealing with. When we actually saw the regiments and battalions, from a little distance, in spite of a strong "Chocolate Soldier" Gaiety chorus appearance, they seemed none so bad. When one looked into their faces, there was the hang-dog look of vice, the cringe of the fawning slave, and the eye of the slum-bred, scrounging parasite. What a contrast to the straight-backed chivalrous Punjabis, whose hand was never lifted against a weakling, and whose keen eyes looked you straight in the face. The riff-raff of Armenia and the Near East had no intention of dying for their own or for anyone else's country.

An interesting thing that I saw in Merv, that the Caucasians had brought with them, was a horse mountain battery. I think that this is quite peculiar to the Russian Army, and a thing that we might very well copy.

Normally the battery took its good little Schneider Danglis quick-firing guns in draught behind a team of two ponies in tandem, as ours sometimes do. But with our batteries the ammunition remains in pack, whereas the Russians, using their spare wheels, converted their ammunition-boxes into limbers and small wagons. This releases a number of animals that can be used to mount gunners and drivers. The unit can then trot in order to keep up with a mounted brigade of Cossacks.

Nowadays, in countries cut up with roads and railways, the tank and the aeroplane have ousted cavalry from its former importance. The mounted arm must go farther afield to find its sphere, into rough mountainous country, and out on to those immense plains that cover most of the old world, where no tank nor armoured car can find petrol to subsist on, away from their own small radius of action.

Take a map of Asia, Africa, or Russia, and colour in red a band of 150 miles wide on either side of any metalled road or railway: this will give you the area over which the most highly developed tanks of to-morrow can operate. Even if you double it, the red part will still be ridiculously small. Nor can it be extended by using supply tanks, since they, too, need petrol, and if driven to their limit of fuel capacity, will carry no useful load to the fighting tanks.

This is where the cavalry of to-morrow must find their sphere, out, away, and over the sky-line, with their wounded carried back by the aeroplanes of their ammunition supply. To do this they must be able to subsist on any country like Cossacks or the silladar cavalry of the sixties and seventies, and they must traverse mountain ranges where no wheels can go, and where the Alpinist begins to think of a rope and an ice axe. That is why we should have "horse mountain" artillery for our cavalry brigades of to-morrow.

Incidentally, our school of military thought is far too prone to think of a mountain range as a barrier wall, instead of a way out on to the plains beyond.

We packed ourselves into trains to 'Ashqhabad,

the cavalry marched south to Meshed by the short cut that we had, in January, explored through the Kara Dagh, and the gunners, with their great American mules, went back to their ship to cross the sea from Krasnovodsk.

I had not been in 'Ashqhabad before, and there was much of interest to see in the couple of days we spent there. Notably in the cathedral square were four brass guns with King George IV.'s cypher on them. This made us think a little, until we remembered that the Russians had taken from the Afghans, at Panjdeh in 1885, a number of guns that we had given them, and here they were, trophies of war in Turkistan. Doubtless the uncivilized young *mujik* recruit of the Turkistan Rifles used to be told that they were captured from the British in the Crimea.

We marched along the fair broad metalled road, gradually ascending over pleasant rolling grass country from which we looked down on to 'Ashqhabad, the city that meant so much, and that had cost us such pains to attain. Strangely enough, the little village of Christian Russian colonists that formed the stage is called Molokan, pronounced Malakan. This is the last place of any consequence on the metalled road leading out of Russia towards India, whilst the corresponding spot, on the road leading from India into Russia, is called Malakand. More bizarre still is the fact that the last railway station on the Andijan branch towards the Chinese frontier is Jalalabad, whilst that on the actual extreme northern frontier of "administered" India is Jalala. Still more, another Jalalabad is the last outpost of Afghanistan towards our territory.

After the next stage, at Kurd Su, we climbed up, past another little Christian village, then to a crenelated granite fortalice, and so over a barren ridge down into Persia again.

As I rode down towards the little huddled village, half European and half Asian, of Bajgiran (Baj-Gir-i-Iran, the receipt of taxes of Persia), I little dreamed that I was going to spend a winter and a summer there, looking down to an enemy post.

Someone has said that a good deal of the War consisted in going to a village that you had never heard of before, and never forgetting it all the days of your life.

We marched on to Kuchan in a pouring rain over slippery mud in company with a wing of our very good friends, the 19th. A very memorable thing occurred here: thanks to their kindness, my men and I shared in the first (and last) batch of "comforts" that we struck in seven years' campaigning.

Kuchan is a pleasant little town of quite a new type. It lies in the middle of the very open valley of the Atrak, that flows from there into the Caspian, flanked by grassy downland of charming aspect under its spring coat of green. Some seven miles down the river is old Kuchan, or rather its ruins, since it was so often razed by earthquake that the inhabitants rebuilt the town twenty or thirty years ago on its present site. Strangely enough, they got a Russian engineer to lay out and plan the streets, and in consequence they are wide and pleasantly regular, intersecting, as they do, at right angles, quite unlike the squalor of the ordinary Persian city.

Overlooking Kuchan is the tall mound of Alp



Arslan, marking the site of one of Nadir's pyramids of 10,000 heads and of his own bloody end.

The inhabitants of the country around are Kurds of the Topkanlu tribe. They were brought in from Kurdistan, to possess nearly all the country between Kuchan and the Caspian, by the great Shah Abbas, Elizabeth's contemporary. The idea was that they should hold their land in fief, free of revenue, in return for protecting it against the marauding Turkoman. This is a very sound principle, especially in undeveloped countries; incidentally, the Russians brought it to a very high degree of development for their Cossack Voiskos. These gave them not only 600,000 mounted men for a great war, but energetic adventurers, like Yermak, the Drake of Russia, who would thrust out and conquer distant lands with a handful of men. Not the least benefit of the Cossack system, that brings the men's stake in the land so well home to him, was their sterling resistance to Bolshevism. The various Cossack communities were the nuclei of all the White armies, and they may yet pull Russia out of her mire. A point that has escaped notice is that, apart from the full-blooded Mongol communities—Buriats of Za-Baikal, for instance, or Bashkirs of Orenburg—the Christian Cossack is far more free from the Mongol strain than the ordinary Russian *mujik* whose ancestors were under the Mongol's heel for several centuries. This makes them more independent and more robust in resisting oppression.

Such a system was once in vogue in Rajput Upper India, under the name of *jagir*. The term survives, but the principle has degenerated to a mere word,

since the holder of a *jagir* need nowadays do nothing actively in return for it.

At Kuchan we met the beginnings of a new corps, the Kurdish Mounted Levy, like the South Down Militia "the terror of the land," that were going to prove very useful to us later on.

The Kurd is an interesting individual; he not only is an Aryan, but, like the Pathan, he belongs to the Nordic branch of that race, and his language contains many words that are surprisingly like English, just as Pashtu has many surprising resemblances to Russian. There was a young Pathan orderly at Mission headquarters in 'Ashqhabad who, after only a few weeks there, could talk Russian down the telephone, and get the exchange damsel to put him on to the right number as well as any Russian interpreter could. Doubtless a long-haired professor had helped to bring about this quick result. Of course, the Pathan is racially very little different from the non-Mongolized Aryan Russian. The Kurd, on the other hand, has—in Khurasan, at least—become a good deal mixed with both Mongol and Persian, and, besides, he takes a lot of opium. On the whole, he is a degenerate being, but retains enough manhood to lick fifty Persians, though he could scarcely compete with the Turkoman on his own ground. They behaved well in our service, and filled a gap better than anyone else could have done, and when a difficult, trying time came later on, they showed an admirable loyalty to their salt.

Some ninety miles of marching over a level alluvial valley, bounded by the Hazar Masjid and the Aleh Dagh to north and south, took us to Meshed, where the force concentrated.

We had a short breathing-space between wars, and time to look around us. The countryside was only roughly mapped, much of it was frankly labelled unexplored, and the rest but nebulously sketched in piecemeal by various travellers.\* Hence it was up to us to fare far afield, to reconnoitre routes, and to make sketches in view of what the future might hold for us.

\* It interested us to see that practically all the pioneer mapping of Northern and Eastern Persia had been done by men of the Guides, whilst the Prince Taimus, an N.C.O. of the Guides Cavalry, had been responsible for the exploration of the out-of-the-way parts of the Herat Province. He was the sole survivor of the Defence of the Kabul Residency, by the Corps, in 1879.

## CHAPTER VI

### KELAT-I-NADIRI, THE FORBIDDEN FASTNESS OF THE EMPEROR

In Xanadu did Kublai Khan  
A stately pleasure dome decree,  
Where Alph the sacred river ran  
Through caverns measureless to man  
Down to a nameless sea.

COLERIDGE.

DURING April all was quiet, and our situation seemed secure enough, at any rate for a few months. Kolchak, Yudenitch, and Denekin were doing well, and there seemed no reason why General Lazaref's army should not only hold the Merv front that we had handed over to him, and even go on to monarchist Bukhara.

Our own immediate task was to secure Khurasan against any inroad from Turkistan or Afghanistan. Fortunately for the convivial and unwarlike Persian, the great natural cliff rampart, wonderful alike for its sheer, stark steepness, and for its almost unnatural continuity, runs along, and indeed defines the Persian frontier from Turkistan throughout nearly all its great length, at least from Gifan in the Kurdish marches to Sarakhs, hard by the country of Badghiz and the King of Kabul's dominions. As we have already seen, it has helped to prevent not only Mongol, Tatar, and Turk,

uncouth adversaries of pacifism, from getting at the feckless man of Iran as effectually as they would like, but it has hampered, too, raider Turkoman and Academy-bred Russian Generals.

Wonderful as is this Nature-built wall, the natural cliff-girt stronghold that the Persians called Kelat-i-Nadiri forms a still more astounding outwork of it. It is shrouded in mystery by the Persians, who ward off prying eyes from that habit they have, like the Chinese, of attaching overweening importance to fortresses, ignoring the hearts and hands behind their parapets, and I rather suspected that the stories we heard about the place owed a good deal to the *omne ignotum pro mirifico* atmosphere.

When we actually set eyes upon it even Persian hyperbole seemed less than the truth. Gibraltar was but a circumstance to the mysterious hold where the vast treasure of gold and jewels lay hid. This store, worth even in those early Georgian days seven millions sterling, was the plunder that the shepherd-boy Emperor, Nadir, ravished from Delhi, the bride of Kings. For Nadir started life on those very rocky hillsides, but a few miles to the westwards, and his patrimony was but a single camel colt and a half-dozen sheep and goats.

Scarcely had he become full-bearded but his empire stretched from aristocratic Aryan Tiflis to thick-lipped Dravidian Hindustan, and in Delhi to this day a "Nadiri" is a synonym for the ruthless massacre by a tyrant's troops. For no doubt he inherited from some almond-eyed forbear on the distaff side a relentless merciless savagery that he



INTERIOR OF KELAT-I-NADIRI ON MISTY DAY, LOOKING NORTH TOWARDS  
DARBAND-I-NAFT. JA-I-GUMBAZ IN MIDDLE DISTANCE.



united to the driving power of the Nordic race of which the Kurd is a branch. Ruthlessness and forcefulness go a long way towards making a conqueror in any age.

On a sunny April morn the Commander of our little army and myself set out from the bright *maisonnette* just outside the city rampart that was "Force Headquarters" in our new acquisition, a specimen of the second best car in the world. We had, since leaving Turkistan, been brought up to date by the receipt of a Tin-Lizzie, driven with skill and address by a former employé of the London General Omnibus Company, who was just as much at home exchanging badinage in Atkins-Persian with the *izdvoschiks* of Poltaratsk and the *arbachis* of Meshed city as with the burly blue and silver figure at the top of Regent Street.

Lizzie once passed through a stormy episode at the hands of a distinctly temporary doctor of Parsee race, who, in spite of a University upbringing, had trouble with the points of the compass, publicly confusing the north with the south-east. This he did when journeying in Lizzie to the succour of a wounded man. A cross-country effort designed to catch that demned elusive north resulted in Lizzie rushing bustle over hairpins like the Gadarene swine down a steep place, not indeed into the sea, but *patte-en-l'air* into a *karez*, a precipitous hollow in the ground leading to an underground water-channel, for in Persia the water is underground and reached by mining operations. An unkind Afghan once remarked that Persia would be a better country were the water above ground and the Persians below it. The first part of Lizzie that hit the bottom was



her windscreen. But little things like that would not stop Lizzie: set on her legs again, minus windscreen, she clanked away, and now rattles on in to our story.

The horses' fodder and rations and our kit had gone on the day before with the horses under Aslam, my much-scarred young veteran of Artois and Africa, to a little village called Razan, at which point the track ceased to become possible for wheels. Aslam remarked that he was far more used to the lorries and limbered wagons of Occidental war than to the pack-mules native to his own country. The cart-track led out through the green waving crops, through the ruts and dust of the alluvium, past the blue-tiled dome of Khwaja Rabbi's shrine, that glistened in the morning sun, and now and again the passengers descended to push Lizzie heartily and profanely through water-cuts. Very gradually, having crossed the river on an ancient brick bridge, we climbed out of the alluvium on to gentle gravel slopes, rising, past Andarukh, into foothills and dotted with the towers the Persians of the last generation had built as refuges from Turkoman raiders. An extremely obese Armenian in a singularly inappropriate straw "boater" hat, perched on top of a grossly overloaded mule on mattresses and kettles and parrot-cages, was a rather unexpected encounter. The mule, who had been finding the journey somewhat dull, brought his sense of humour into play, and pricking his ears and swishing his tail, pretended to mistake the Ford for a tiger. The next few minutes were very jolly for the mule, but the Armenian hit Mother Earth in a parabolic way and with a most

disconcerting bump. When the mule had had his little bit of fun, we collected the pots and pans and parrot-cages, and piled them and the Armenian again on to the mule, who now agreed to be serious for a bit. The Ford had one or two hairbreadth escapes now as the track became steep going into Razan, but we were soon on our horses and Lizzie dithered back to Meshed. The track soon roughens, since the several ranges that here compose the Kara Dagh run athwart the trail, and it scrambles laboriously up along the gorge and water-courses that burst their way abruptly through their iron cliffs. We had hardly left Razan before we were engulfed into the first of these grey-walled defiles. This is called the Tang-i-Kardeh. Though the track was strewn with boulders and interspersed with rough rocks, the stream-bed was dry, and so our horses could trot, and half an hour more took us over the little ridge at the head of the gorge, past a Persian graveyard, with its tall thin headstones that point towards Mecca, to the saucer-like valley full of smiling corn and barley, wherein lies Kardeh.

This is the last Persian village, and the next ridge was to take us from Iran into Turan. At Kardeh we dismounted for a few minutes to renew the clenches on a loose shoe, and the pleasant-spoken Katkhuda brought us a tray of melons. Feroz, my orderly, smiled his engaging Punjabi smile. He liked melons, though he reflected that they had the drawback of making the ears so wet. My dear old mare, too, was passionately devoted to melons on a hot day. She had a different method of dealing with them, though. Gripping the tip of

a lengthy slice in her pearl-like teeth, she would flap the other end upwards against her velvet nose. She found that this kept it delightfully cool, and so in her case this pastime took the place of the powder-puff to which the biped fair is so addicted. With little sighs of regret, Feroz and Marushka tore themselves away from their third water-melon to scramble into the next defile. As we trotted on from here the track got rougher and rougher. Rounded foothills gave way to scarped ranges, and soon we were plunged into a succession of rough gorges, and into this remarkable wall-sided canyon, the Tang-i-Shikasteh, that took us eventually between vertical cliffs on to the pleasant wind-swept grassy uplands of the main range. Once or twice we would pass a hamlet embowered in pleasant plane-trees or girded with ranks of poplars, such as Al. The grey granite gave way to yellow sandstone and black volcanic rock. Out of the gorge we came to a valley that widened out to fill with brushwood and vegetation, and here a side-valley came in from the west. Perched on the very summit of a steep hill at the junction was an immense rock with sides so absolutely perpendicular that for a moment one mistook it for a great building of Cyclopean masonry. As we crossed the stream just to our right hand, there loomed a great smooth rock face on which was carved in the fair flowing script of the olden days of Persia the legend of the rock. A Shah of the old times, riding with his silken-cloaked, diamond-plumed retinue on their long-tailed curveting stallions, laid a wager with his courtiers as to who should guess the weight of the

great stone. The Shah won. Kings commanded respect in those days, and the rock was dubbed "The Stone of Thirty Pounds Weight," no doubt to place on record the estimate of the Court Fool. From this we rode again into more yellow-cliffed gorges of harsher scenery, and late in the afternoon rode up to the stones of a ruin where again two valleys joined. Not to overstate the case, the map was somewhat vague; bald patches abounded, the omission of a 6,000-foot mountain range was as nothing to it, and the few villages that were shown might well be six or eight miles from where one expected them. Up the right-hand valley there ran the track that we knew was to take us on the morrow to the Kelat, but the little hamlet that we had designed for the night's resting-place lay up the big green valley to the north-westward. The hamlet, called Balghur, proved to be several miles farther up the valley than we had expected, and the valley itself lay in one of the bald patches of the map, so that it was dusk before we started to scramble up the steep, dusty goat-track that led up from the little stone-walled fields to the tiered, loopholed houses of the village. Balghur perches irregularly several hundred feet up above the field of the valley bottom on the crest of a precipitous wind-swept spur. It was quite a surprise to find ourselves among Turks, who loomed up in the dusk in the narrow alleys in the gloaming in their tall sheepskin bonnets and long cloaks of wadded cotton and crimson silk. The villagers and their headman were very far from permitting the wars waged by their Othmanli cousins from inter-

fering with their courteous hospitality, and very soon our horses were tied up and champing good dry lucerne under the *bala-khaneh*\* of the two-storeyed house of the chief, and in a few minutes a big brass samovar was boiling, and over a cheery fire supper cooking under the able management and bustle of bobbed-haired Feroz. Though he was ten years junior to me both in age and length of service, like a true Punjabi he never hesitated to treat me as if I were his young nephew.

Next morning, saying good-bye to our pleasant Turkish hosts, after a last look up the pleasant green vista towards the clustered pine-trees of the head of the Balghur valley, we scrambled down the spur again and over a granite ridge back again to the bridle-track that was to take us to the fortress. All at once the Zao-i-Pirzan (the Gorge of the Old Woman), the most gloomy and forbidding of the clefts that we passed through, closed in on us. In the very heart of it the black rock walls are so close together that a loaded mule had only just room to pass. It was a pleasant relief to climb out from this cranny up the torrent-bed, that steadily got steeper and rougher and beset with thorns and thickets to the breezy grass-covered uplands, smooth and rounded, that formed the crest of the Great Divide between Turkistan and Persia. An easy little pass, though of some 9,000 feet in altitude, led us away again, to the eastward, and the path sidled along the flank of the range that formed the northern wall of the great chasm of an unmapped valley that runs in a straight line towards Murghab, the river that waters Merv. A few hundred feet

\* "Balcony."

above the crest of the range again becomes steeply scarped for several miles, and to our right giddy grassy slopes swept down to the rocky torrent-bed. Suddenly we turned to the north again, and in a hundred yards or so, scrambling up a few score rough feet, we were on the crest of a razor-backed col called by the Turkish name of Diveh Boiun, which means the Camel's Neck. A great wind whistled and shrieked through this gap in the ridge, but soon from the knife-edge we clambered down 500 feet or so to another great valley whose rolling downs carried flocks of sheep, and in the midst of which by a little pond was set in the red soil the little hamlet of Bardeh. This again was Turkish, and we had cause to realize the fact that night, for a considerable floating entomological population shared our blankets. This valley is much more open, but next morning, riding on a few more miles over its downs and through the sticky clay of its soil, we came to another pass easy enough to climb on the south side. A tiny spring trickles on its very summit; and from here the trail plunged steeply down into a most extraordinary straight valley that might very well have been the Valley of the Roc. Not only did it run straight as a line for several miles, but its walls are formed by a straight strata and bare rock faces all tipped on end by some ancient upheaval. Down a couple of thousand feet through this extraordinary place we forded another stream and turned into yet another strange gorge, the Tang-i-Jaour (the Gully of the Unbeliever). Here must have lived the remains of some ancient devil-worshipping sect before the Arabs brought the civilization of Islam to Central Asia. Craggy

fantastic outlines formed the walls on both sides, and as we rode round the corner there sprang across it, as it opened to our view, a straight-crested tooth line of stark cliffs. Dumb with astonishment I realized that this was the thousand-foot rampart of the Kelat itself.

A very short distance took us out of the gorge, and now, through the poplars and little fields by the sedgy stream-bank, where it flowed past the hamlet of Hamman Kala, and was fed by its hot springs, there rode out to meet us the eldest son of the Khan of the Kelat. His father had sent him out to offer us the traditional welcome of the Turks, and behind him there rode a cavalcade, waist-bandaliered and cross-bandaliered, black-bonneted and silver-bridled, rifle across back—the escort that the never-ending conflicts and feuds of Turk, Kurd, and Turkoman demand. In this rough frontier region, where the writ of the League of Nations does not run, every man remembers that “whoso tarrieth on the draw, and landeth not his bullet on the correct button, that man shall be planted ere his prime.” His courteous message delivered, we all rode on together round another corner, and now we were under the very cliff walls of the fastness itself, skirting the shale slopes that buttressed its declivities. Nowhere was the hand of man shown, except in one or two dizzy watch-towers silhouetted against the sky. More wonderful than anything else was the fact that this sheer cliff wall ran for several miles to the north-west and the south-east in a line as straight as an arrow, and the green fold spurs and valleys of the natural run of the country it seemed to ignore, and one could

imagine them surging like wintry breakers against a sea-wall about its flanks. A mile or so farther we turned out away from the bleak granite-speckled hills of the outer world, straight into the heart of the cliffs. Past a clump of stumpy trees a stream ran into the fortress through another narrow cleft called the Gate of Argavan the King. This, too, was only a few yards wide, but some former ruler had built a great masonry rampart across it, that now lay half ruined. Once inside, smiling fields, green pastures, and rows of poplars, whose tall trunks gleamed white in the sun, cheered the eye in contrast to the rough hills outside. A little hamlet clusters just within the gates, a couple of brass field-pieces flank a ramshackle guardhouse, and past this we cantered into the heart of the mysterious hold. In the narrow lanes that separated the tiny stone-walled fields, as it might be the Alpes Maritimes, we passed an occasional Turkish or Kurdish girl, her head in a shawl of tartan weave, astonishingly Scottish. Colonel MacGregor, who away back in the early seventies was the first, and very nearly the last, of the tiny handful of Europeans who have ever seen the inside of this strange place, remarked wonderingly on these same tartans. But when one recollects that the ethnologists of to-day place the Kurd in the same Nordic clan that inhabits most of Scotland, it is not difficult to believe that the same tradition has kept the weave and pattern alive for so many hundreds of years in the two far-sundered mountain regions. Barely three miles from the gate we came to the little hamlet girded round with pleasant green trees, set in the midst of pastures on the



bank of the rippling stream, that is by way of being the chief village of the Kelat. The Khan himself met us at his great stone outer gateway, and we rode into a big cobbled courtyard flanked by shallow archways. Straight in front of us there towered another portent: a round pillar, fluted and cabled like a Greek column, reared itself up in front of us in massy squared ashlar to some scores of feet, dwarfing the buildings round. This is the Makburra-i-Nadir, the Treasure-House of that eighteenth-century tyrant. The Khan, though a Turk, like his son, scarcely shows on almost pure Aryan features any trace of Mongoloid blood. He led us round through a great stone-walled garden, thick with rose-bushes, to a guest-chamber under the very foot of the mighty tower itself. The Khan and the tribe of Turks that give him allegiance hold the valley that is the Kelat, and some neighbouring districts without its walls, in fief direct from the Shah of Persia. They were brought here by the great Shah Abbas in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, to protect this frontier from the inroads of the Turkoman of the plains, and they have performed this duty in return for a free land tenure. This is a system of escuage which appeals most strongly to simple tribes of a fighting temperament, who loathe the intricacies of a bureaucratic administration, and the thousand intrigues and peculations that follow revenue collection in the East.

Nothing could exceed the courteous and well-bred hospitality of the Khan and his followers. Next morning we climbed up the reddish slopes of one of the plateaux that make the Kelat what is called a "benched" valley, and from this breezy

prairie, cantering a couple of miles over its levels, past the stone ruins of Nadir's summer pleasure and the traces of the dams that he built to catch the rainfall, we climbed again to the summit of the peak, of some 5,000 or 6,000 feet. This is Kamar Kisht, that forms a part of the very northern wall of the fortress. From it, after a certain amount of mutual ill-feeling amongst the stallions of our following had been put an end to, we began to get a conception of the wonders of the place. The perimeter of the cliffs that hedge it in cannot be less than fifty miles. Sometimes these face inwards and sometimes outwards, but their regularity and the regularity of their crenellations are beyond belief. More wonderful still is the continuous and unbroken line of these same ramparts, pierced only by four or five narrow paths difficult even for the most part for a loaded camel. The most important of these was the Argavan Gate by which we ourselves had entered. The stream we had followed burst its way out through the northern wall by an even narrower cleft at Derband-i-Neft. To the east at Derband-i-Haji-Bulan, to the south-east at Choubast, and at the north corner near Dehchah, other even rougher tracks offer an entrance. It is said that light guns may be brought in by the crack of Choubast, which is more of a pass than a gorge. Almost under our feet was a goat-track, by which an agile man, using his hands now and then, could scramble over the cliffs. The region is shaped like a shoe, the broadest portion being four or five miles wide, and the greatest length fifteen or sixteen miles. A hill even higher than that on which we stood—to wit, Baba Kamagli (the Helping Father)—

rears its rounded head over against Choubast. We ourselves could look down for immense distances on to the Atak of Turkistan, the immense boundless plain that sweeps on northwards to the very coasts of the Arctic ocean. To our right we could see the tiny black spot in the desert that marked the oasis of Dushakh, where the 19th Punjabis had fought their hardest battle; to the north in the dim distance another such marked the village of Artik, where Punjabi blood was first shed in the country of the Turkoman. Straight in front of us, it seemed almost at our feet; little puffs of smoke showed us where the armoured trains of loyalists and Bolsheviks were locked in their not very deadly conflict. The defence of the Kelat, in spite of its miraculous natural strength, would be no easy matter. Against any enemy or any guns that could be brought against it a defender's energies would probably resolve themselves into a series of hand-to-hand struggles in the defiles of the entrances, since the perimeter is too vast to be dealt with by anything but the thinnest watching line of outposts. The garrison could be fed indefinitely, since the pasture of the plateaux within nourish great flocks of sheep, and corn is grown round each of the six or seven villages that dot the interior. Though the stream bisects the stronghold, yet its waters are undrinkable for a very strange half-chemical, half-geological reason. Even as we stood on the peak, sketch-block in hand, a Scottish mist came down over the mountains, shutting out the view, and it was followed by a hearty downpour. This prevented our seeing as much of the place as we could have wished for, but in the afternoon the Khan

himself took us round his village of Ja-i-Gumbaz, and into the bright-tiled, great domed mosque that is another bequest of Nadir, the Emperor.

Next day the leaden skies poured down upon, and mists swirled round, the peaks, so that we were kept to the inside of the Makburra, where the Khan's hospitality and his store of old-time legends and histories of the Kelat kept us vastly interested; whilst we sipped his Turkish coffee, the memory of which runs through succeeding years like the silken strand in Alpine rope, and we pondered on the violent end which seems fated to overtake despots like Nadir and Trotski.

Of our party was one Ali Akbar, a trooper of "B" Squadron of the Guides. The Khan recognized him at once: he had in "civil" life been one of the many distinguished bandits of Northern Khurasan. In fact, in spite of his youthful appearance, he had had a lurid and involved past in the band of the celebrated Mahmud of Nishapur, a brigand who ran to artillery and an armourer's establishment of his own. In company with his cousin Kerbelai, of the same squadron, who was wounded in the leg in the proceedings, he had taken part in the filibustering attack on the Russian Consulate of Gumbad-i-Kabus in 1912. The Khan reminded him gently about all this, to Ali Akbar's intense annoyance and the amusement of the Punjabis. He opined unkindly that as Ali Akbar now wore the Lion and Unicorn, he had left brigandage behind him for good. "Last night yet had drawn on a border thief: to-night 'tis a man of the Guides."

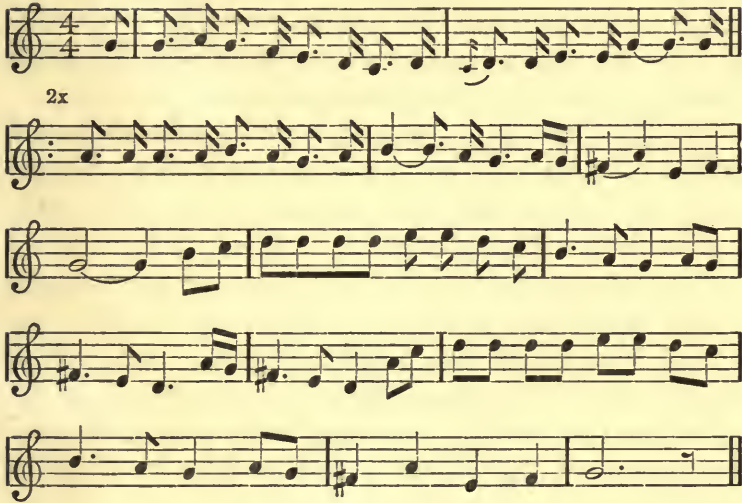
For two days more the deluge continued and the

mountain streams outside flowed into impassable torrents, whilst the clay of the valleys became slippery as ice. Our explorations were brought to a sudden end by an insistent and rather startling message from the staff at Meshed that told us we were plunged in still another war, and into yet another "Lewis Carroll" situation.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE THIRD AFGHAN WAR

ذاخمی دل



There's a girl across the river,  
And her cheeks are like a peach,  
But, alas ! I cannot swim,  
Though we all know what would happen  
If a Pathan hove in sight,  
And if he could only reach.

*Zakhmi Dil.*

As soon as we got back to Meshed, where Force Headquarters were still in their pleasant villa just outside the principal gate of the fortifications, the Ark Darwaza, we found that, as the sailors say, all was guff and gaiters.

Young Amanulla had succeeded to the throne of

Kabul, and had decided to cut his milk teeth on the Government of India.

The situation was curious all round, and more still, from our own particular point of view, since our tiny force of only one Regular battalion, one regiment of cavalry, and two somewhat "catch-'em-alive-oh" levy corps, was confronted with a whole Afghan division, scarcely ten easy level marches from us, complete with a brigade of cavalry, a machine-gun company, several batteries of breech-loading guns, and a Bolshevik alliance.

Needless to say, it was the Soviet who organized the third Afghan War, as well as the riots of *Kamins* and other non-Punjabi Dravidians, in April, 1919, on our lines of communication at Amritsar.

These riots had a double object. The first and most important was to discredit the gallant and loyal Punjabi, of whom some 50,000 or more freely offered volunteers had found distant graves in the German War and its sequels.\* By promoting disturbances in the slums of towns like Amritsar, it was hoped to provoke headings in the easily prostituted English press, such as "Rebellion in the Punjab." This succeeded in a way that must have exceeded the wildest hopes of the "impresarios."

The Soviet could scarcely assist the Afghans in any more material way than this, since they had a good deal on their own hands that soap and water could not remove.

The second object that the Reds' agents worked

\* I include, of course, in the Punjab, those few contiguous districts that are predominantly Aryan in race, and so ethnically akin to it, such as Kohat, Mardan, Mirpur, and Garhwal.

to attain, in Hindustan and in the South Punjab, was the more obvious one of crippling the railway that fed our troops in the Khyber, and drawing troops away from the fighting-line for internal defence work.

As events showed, it was the Punjabi who turned out to be the King's man in all this. Not only this, but it was Punjabis who very willingly laid finger to trigger against disloyal alien crowds who blackened their country's name.

The whole business was precisely similar to "Sydney Street," and the publicity it received parallel to the dubbing of that battle a "revolution in London."

The repercussion of all this was even felt in distant Khurasan, where the teeming white *fainéants* of supply depôt and canteen drank more beer and did less work, if possible, than ever, whilst the hordes of snarling, thick-lipped platyrrhine clerks stole in harmonic progression.

As far as the troops were concerned, it was even possible that we should have had to retire westwards over the immense tract that separated us from Tehran and our force in North-West Persia.

This would certainly have been the case had the Reds taken Merv sooner, in order to join hands with the Afghans, and if the wily and volatile Afghan had scratched up any enthusiasm for Amanullah's little war. However, "if ifs and ans were pots and pans," he did not, luckily for us, since with all his faults the bold Afghan is a sportsman and a first-class fighting man, except when he happens to be a Regular soldier.

My detachment were soon in the middle of it all,



finding out what we were up against, and filling one of the many rôles that the Corps of Guides was designed for. When you have even a little party of picked men and an eighty-year-old tradition of reconnaissance in an enemy's country, you get to know a good deal that you would otherwise miss. The business is, of course, much helped out when your tried fighting men, accustomed to work on their own, depending on their own cool nerve against a vigilant and unhesitating enemy, are blended with a leavening of trained soldiers whose homes are in the very country that you are scouting over.

The troops of the Afghan Army in the Herat Province had been so remote from India that little was known of them hitherto. Now we are able to get right down to it, and soon I could print off "orders of battle," nicely coloured, as if we had been on the Western Front. My N.C.O.'s were all of them what the French would call *débrouillards*, unravellers of the obscure, who took a whole-hearted interest in sorting out details of the home life of the enemy.

Few people realize that only quite a small proportion of the population of Afghanistan are Afghans, just as only half of those who live in the Punjab are Punjabis. This is fortunate for the peace of Asia, and is especially pronounced in the Herat Province that the jackbootery of the Afghan raped from the easygoing Persian only a few decades ago.

Of the division that faced us across the way, only about three battalions and one regiment of cavalry, plus the artillery and a dozen odd companies of infantry, were genuine Afghans. Most of the rest were Turkoman, Uzbegs, Hazaras (these

especially in the Engineers), Taimuris, Taimanis, Firoz Kuhis, and even half-breed Persians. Even the drivers of the artillery were not Afghans, though most of the gunners were.

In campaigns against Afghans two points are of prime importance: first, that the guerrilla warfare of the tribesmen is far more formidable than the pitched battles waged by the Regular Army; and secondly, that, as Francis I. found in Spain, a large army starves and a small one is overwhelmed. Add to this that the troops were far more interested in getting rid of unpopular commanders and securing some of their arrears of pay than in working up any "hate" against us, and this will account for the fact that we had no open fighting on our frontier.

All the same, small patrols of my men came often into contact with Afghan outposts, and one way or another, several excellent little horses came into our hands. Anyone who knows the Afghan will realize how very early in the morning one must rise in order to prise away anything from him, above all a horse.

One of the regiments that we encountered was the "King's Own," the Shah Yar Rissala; another an infantry unit called "Shah Murad Khan's Regiment." I seemed to have heard that name before, and it was an unusual tally for an Afghan regiment, so I went into the matter more deeply. We found that it was the same regiment that, under the command of Colonel Shah Murad Khan, had confronted Alikhanof's force at Panjdeh in 1885, and had held their trenches to the last man in the most gallant fashion.

As a reward, the name of their fine old Colonel

was handed down to posterity, in the title of the corps, as we might speak of Ligonier's Horse, or Coke's Rifles.

Alikhanof, by the same token, had a bizarre career. He was a Muslim of the North Caucasus by race, and rising to the rank of full General in the old Russian Army, wrested Takhta Bazar and Panjdeh from the Afghans in the teeth of Gladstone, who strove, courtesan-like, as Martial says of his light-of-love,

*Tanquam qui vincere nollet,*

to save his politician's honour. The victor was cashiered, as far as I remember, for drunkenness. He was then held to serve in the ranks as a private, whence he worked his way up, step by step, to full General again.

The Afghan War gradually subsided, and we lost interest in it, as it became quite clear that the Herat Division were not going to attack us. A few Austrians fell into our hands, as they escaped from Kabul to try to get home through Persia. The famous von Gröden, however, won into Transcaspia, where he came to a sudden and quite uncalled-for end at the hands of some irresponsibles.

When things were quiet, in June, we planned a little trip to Nishapur, by way of a pilgrimage to the tomb of Omar Khayyam. The map was particularly nebulous in this region, and it afforded a good chance to sketch in something. So we took a topographer with us, a cavalryman, complete with a big waler horse.

Our first day's march led for a couple of miles between the gardens enclosed in high mud walls

that surround Meshed, and then for ten miles or so over an arid plain, dotted with the infrequent ruins of "Turkoman" towers. These are round mud structures of some three storeys, into which the inhabitants were accustomed to flee on the occasion of an *alaman*,\* a Turkoman raid. The attackers were always mounted, so could waste no time in the escalade of towers. The Persian was quite content to save his life at the expense of his herds and crops.

As we rode along we caught sight of green valleys tucked here and there, embowered in tall poplars tucked away inside the drab folds of the forbidding hills. This is quite typical of Northern Persia; it is not until you look inside the hidden valleys that you realize that the whole countryside is not a desert. The path turned into the Jagherq Valley over a low spit of rocky ridge that jutted out into the plain. On the crest of this was a tall cairn, dotted with rags of all colours—votive offerings—and from here we could just see the sun glinting on the great gilded dome of the shrine of Meshed.

On all the roads that lead into the sacred city there is just such a cairn, where the great golden ball peeps into the eager view of the pilgrim for the first time.

As we rode round the corner and dipped into a deep, almost dry, river-bed, a mile or so upstream, there stretched a mighty dam of ashlar, the work of the men of old, when Persia flourished. It still held enough to irrigate a half-dozen smiling hamlets around (Turkbeh and Naudeh), and to spread a rich carpet of emerald over the skirt of the lower hills.

\* From this is derived the French word *allemand*.

The valley became narrower as we ascended, and thick with close-grown trees, pleasant to the eye and refreshing in their shade. After the blasted plain outside, the beauty of such a scene strikes with tenfold vigour. Now and again we passed little steep-pitched stone-walled fields full of tall meadow-grass, and here and there orchards and vineyards rich in fruit. The village of Jagherq, a beautiful little cluster of almost Swiss huts, lies down at the bottom of a valley, and we climbed several hundred feet up a spur to a glorious view of the great Meshed plain, overlooked by the peak of Izhdar Kuh, and backed by the great precipices of the unexplored Hazar Masjid. Here was a little two-storeyed, wood-floored house, that belonged to the British Consulate, and in it we spent the night, with our horses picketed around. Next morning we were early astir, and, forsaking the valley road, climbed up a long spur of grassy slope that leads up to a 10,000-foot peak. Once or twice during the long march we passed a spring by which some nomad Kurd family had pitched their ragged tent and watered the fat sheep that they grazed on the hillsides. We climbed to the very top of the peak, to a wonderful outlook over both valleys of Meshed and Nishapur, the last stretching out mistily over boundless, level *kavir* to the purple horizon.

After we had lunched in a hollow of some rocks, we found the rough track down to Dehrud village, on the far slope. The keeping on the high ground of the ridge, for the sake of seeing and sketching in the topography of the country, had cost us a long *détour*, and it was late in the evening before we got into the straggling village, which, buried in

foliage and great plane-trees, is almost as lovely to the traveller's eyes as Jagherq.

We had dropped down from 10,000 to below 4,000 feet, and next morning, with our ears full of admonitions to beware of a gang of brigands doing business in the parish, we descended down another gentle slope to the immense level plain but some 3,000 feet in altitude. It was abominably hot, especially in contrast with the coolth we had enjoyed at Jagherq. It has always seemed to me, in India for instance, that anywhere up to 4,000 feet is practically as hot as the plains. As soon as you get above 4,000 feet it starts to get very rapidly cooler. Here we were in a more northerly latitude, and so the critical height seemed about 3,000 feet.

It was not a very long march, but what with the glare and the heat, and the monotony of the level, dusty road, we were bored almost to the point where mortification sets in, before we reached the shady mat-roofed main bazaar in under the east gate of ancient Nishapur. We found a billet in a small whitewashed *sarai*, and languished in the abominable heat.

Next day it took us quite a search to find the tomb of the poet amongst the ancient buildings that dot the plain to the south-west of the city. The half-Turkish *sous-officier* of gendarmes who came to see what we were about did not try to conceal his amusement at the idea of worrying over a fourth-rate poet like Omar, nor did he have anything but a vague idea as to where his burial-place lay. After drawing blank at one or two imposing domes, we turned back towards the city, to come upon a long rectangular walled-in garden with a quasi-ecclesias-

tical building inside. A bystander told us the name of some saint of which it was the tomb. We had a look inside, and here was our goal. In a humble alcove, flanking the more imposing tomb of the unlettered saint, was a plain whitewashed block of brickwork, lacking even an epitaph. Under an arch of red brick, here lay he that was honoured by Fitzgerald.

Omar is not popular in Persia, partly on account of his name, that of the Sunni oppressor, and partly owing to the fact that his verses, in Persian, lack the merit of Sa'adi or of Hafiz.

Two days saw us back in Meshed, since we took the valley road this time, and we were just in time to find a corpse dangling from the tall gallows in front of our villa billet. This was some poor wretch who had not enough to escape the exactions of the Persian police.

The 19th Punjabis, after their five solid years of tough campaigning in the awful deserts of Khurasan, were now being relieved by an Indian regiment of the Hyderabad contingent, now called the 2nd Battalion, 98th Infantry. Besides this, a battery of Punjabis—mostly Dogras, mountain artillery, not Regulars, but of the Maharaja of Kashmir's army—had come up to expand the force. These batteries have an interesting history; a couple of generations ago they were led and instructed by French officers, in the service of the Sikh King of Lahore, to whom the then Raja of Jammu and Kashmir was feudatory. When the corrupt dynasty of Ranjit Singh crumbled in 1849, the Jammu Army, with its artillery, came over to us, as indeed did several batteries and regiments of the Sikh Army, that are now the 21st,

22nd, 23rd, and 24th Mountain Batteries, the 51st, 52nd, 53rd, and 54th Sikhs and the Cavalry of the Punjab Frontier Force. This artillery and its infantry never joined the Royal forces, but remained on in Kashmir: until a couple of decades ago their officers could drill the batteries in French, and to this day they preserve many customs of the French Artillery Service.

This battery had served with two of its sister battalions of infantry in East Africa, where they proved themselves far above the usual run of "Imperial Service" troops. It was the Kashmir Rifles, Punjabis, and Gurkhas that earned the praise of von Lettow-Vorbeck for their stubborn resistance in the hand-to-hand fighting in the streets of Tanga.



## CHAPTER VIII

### EXPLORATIONS TO THE NORTH-EAST

Turkistanning yerinda khâli imâs eranlar.

Harbir kulach yerinda yatur mardan eranlar.

(In the land of Turkistan there is no lack of heroes.

In every fathom of her soil there lie the bones of great men.)

*Jagatai Saying.*

EXCITEMENT over the Afghan War died down in September, as his lieges did not seem to have much use for young Amanullah's ambitions.

The desire to fill in some of the blank, bald patches on the map was strong in our breasts, and our Force Commander looked upon it with sympathy. As we had about a quarter of a million square miles to play with, there was no hope of doing it all, so we compromised by tackling a bit at a time. The order of priority of the bald patches was governed by the two factors: the likelihood of fighting or marching in that particular area, and the scientific interest of it—that is, the extent and degree of our geographical ignorance about it. After this I had to dovetail in with the military situation of the moment. The big bare blank on the maps between latitude  $36^{\circ}$  and  $36^{\circ} 30'$  N. and longitude  $60^{\circ}$ - $61^{\circ}$  E. was high up on the list, especially as it lay across a possible route for a Bolshevik inroad.

So in the middle of September I took a small party through it, on what proved to be a most interesting journey of exploration. As topographer

I took Subadar Afraz Gul, a young Yusafzai, who is the best hand at rapidly plane-tabling in large unexplored areas that I have ever met. He had seen most of Central Asia from Kara-Khoto, in Mongolia, to Karategin, in Bukhara, under Sir Aurel Stein. After him came my jewel of a squadron-dafadar-major, Ahmad Shah, who looked after the "Q" department, whilst young Feroz, the Hazaras Ali Akbar and Baz Mahomed of "B" Squadron, a young Punjabi plane-table humper, and a Herati groom, completed the gang. Needless to say, dear Marushka did me the honour to accompany me, and she enjoyed every bit of it.

We marched off due north to a village, or what had been a village, called Parmai—still in the Meshed Valley. This was formerly a biggish place of several hundred houses, but endless raids and despoilings of gangs of brigands had made the unfortunate inhabitants hopeless, and they had gone elsewhere. We found a pleasant little grove of poplars to bivouac in, that gave a welcome shade to us and the horses, who did not go short of lucerne. In India there is a quaint superstition that a couple of pounds of lucerne is enough for a horse. Marushka did not share that opinion: she knew of a kind home for 15 or 20 pounds a day, and flourished on it.

Next morning a little stony glen with a few hamlets of Hazaras in it led us up to a steep ridge. The last few miles up, where we put up some coveys of fat partridges and sandgrouse, were wild and rough, but to my great surprise I saw bits of a track built upon the hillside on an embankment of good squared stones quite out of keeping with dilapidated

Persia of to-day and with the amount of traffic on it, perhaps six donkey drivers a week. The track went on in well-planned zigzags, gradually climbing to the typical grassy upland country of North Khurasan as it approached the top of the range. As far as the mapping went, the first bit from Parmai had been plain and straightforward, but now we began to find that most of the country was new. As we got up it became difficult to find known points to resect from, but near the summit of the pass Afraz Gul got a couple of shots back to peaks called Tabat Khan and Izhdar Kuh, which saved the situation for Science.

When I saw the drop down on the north side, I saw why the pass was called Sanduq Shikan (the Breaker of Boxes). It would have been a hearty box that could have been carried down that without getting a corner knocked off. There was nothing about our meagre baggage that would spoil, and we slid down without any greater disaster than a rent in the southern aspect of Ali Akbar's superfine "cotton cord" breeches. The like of them had enriched many a "Cuthbert" of the Clothing Department of Hindustan.

Now we were in the long narrow valley of Khaur, walled in by black frowning cliffs, but smiling and green with plane-trees and walnuts below.

We had come up from a bare stony outer valley, and the contrast was very striking. There are several hamlets dotted on each side of a clear bubbling stream, smothered in pleasant foliage and girdled by little fields and orchards. It was a pleasant little camp that we made here, and as we surrounded milk, peaches, and good mutton, I



TYPICAL HILL COUNTRY IN SOUTH-EAST CASPIAN REGION.



GAU KOTAL IN KARA DAGH, NEAR KHAUR VILLAGE,  
BETWEEN MESHED AND TEJEND, LOOKING NORTH-WEST.  
UNEXPLORED COUNTRY.

*To face page 198*



thought of the wretched denizens of the big cities of Western Europe, scrabbling for their rations of margarine and mummified meat, the slaves of what is called civilization.

The valley is only a few hundred yards across, though several miles long, and both walls form part of that extraordinary cliff rampart of Khurasan. Next morning we climbed over the second wall by a pass called the Gau Kotal. To get the country properly mapped in, and to resect back to another known peak, Afraz Gul and I climbed with the plane-table to a steep hill a couple of thousand feet higher than the pass, just to the east of it. The upper part of this was, as usual here, scarped, and we had to scramble up with our hands, using the plane-table legs to haul each other up by every now and then—an unauthorized use of Government stores, I regret to say. Up amongst the thorn-bushes and boulders at the summit we had a splendid view of what is so dear to the heart of the traveller—hundreds of square miles of unknown country. We could see the hills round Meshed, the plain of Turkistan, and in front of us, to the north-east, the wild, bare mountain country that we were going to explore.

We meant to spend the night at a village marked on the old map called Zao. When we climbed down from the peak and the pass, Afraz Gul went along a bridle-track that led northwards down another rocky valley of red sandstone, choked with endless boulders, whilst Feroz and I rode down a gully by which a little stream forced its way through yet another wall of hill and cliff running parallel to the valley of Khaur. Soon the torrent-bed narrowed

till the cliff walls were only arms'-length apart, and the boulders formed 4-foot steps down which Marushka and Feroz's mare had to leap like Rocky Mountain goats. No waler could have got down that vile crevasse at all, nor any cavalryman mounted on the heavy-boned beasts that cavalry nowadays are so fond of. The crevasse turned out to be a short cut, for although we got very wet and out of breath, we were at Zao an hour before Afraz Gul and his party arrived.

Zao is another gem of foliage and greenery in a setting of wild tumbled cliffs and arid slopes. The stream-bed is arched over with the great old trees, and gorgeous vineyards full of splendid grapes lined the lower slopes. To bring us back to the realities of a harsh world, the ridges and spurs on both sides of the deep vale that held the village were crowned with loopholed towers and strongly walled enclosures, whilst the inhabitants, who are mostly Turks, go about bandoliered up to the eyes and rifle across their backs.

A very few miles next morning saw us away from the bosky dells and out on to the glare of the sun on arid downs covered with yellow burnt-up herbage. That day was a long waterless march under a sky of brass that produced a thirst such as no one who has spent his life in the comfortable West can even imagine.

After we marched out of Zao in the early morning, till we reached an outlying hamlet of Chachha at dusk, we saw no sign of human life, except the dismal sight of the deserted village of Targutain. As we drew up to this, I hoped to find some water for the horses in a dank reed-bed below the bones

of the houses, but the animals recoiled from the black brimstony pools in disgust.

I for one was glad enough to get into Chachha, which is a small and intensely squalid village, lying just inside the point where a hill-stream, flowing down from the north side of the pass we had crossed in February, bursts through a narrow gorge in the outermost cliff wall of Khurasan.

I halted the next day here, as the map was a little in arrears and needed some inking in, and we had to resect our position with great care. Up till now we had crossed country that was very roughly sketched in on the map, villages and mountain ranges being away from their true position.

Next day we should enter country that was entirely unexplored and unknown. I knew from previous experience that risks should not be run needlessly, when crossing unexplored tracts, as no one can tell just how many days the journey will take. So I determined that the horses should rest a day and have their fill of lucerne. We had to think of the Bolsheviks here, as their post was only a few hundred yards down the gorge. Afraz Gul and I climbed up the barrier range to have a look at it, and to get a view of the stark countryside that we were going to plunge into on the morrow. As we came down we met a little party of Turkoman, who gave us their unexpurgated opinion of Soviet rule.

I remarked to one of them that it was a nice little horse he was on. With a bitter laugh he replied, "This is no horse; this is a mare," meaning that it was all the Reds had left him, it being very derogatory for a Turkoman to ride a mare.



In the next march we were right in the blue, and in a most unearthly country. As we marched eastwards, close at hand to our left was the cliff wall, always frowningly impassable, towards us, though now and then we caught glimpses of the easy grassy downs of its outer slopes.

Away several miles to the south ran the scarps of the main backbone of the Kara Dagh, its knife-edged ridge towering to nearly 8,000 feet. The space in between was filled with a jumble of little parched valleys running oddly in every direction in the blue clay.

Now and again as we breasted the hump between one desolate glen and the next, some strange bluff, jutting up with vertical sides, would come into view like a sea-girt rock.

Thirsty and sun-baked though this land was in September, there were signs that after the heavy rains and snows of early spring it would carry quite a cheerful coat of green herbage. As it was, with the usual contradictoriness of Central Asian landscapes, a tiny hamlet lurked away in a cranny of the hills, watered by a pleasant rill. Below this, in a field of luxurious grass and lucerne, shaded by apple-trees, we made a charming little bivouac.

That day's trek had been short and easy, but the next was atrociously long and abominably hot. An almost endless switchback over countless whale-back ridges and along the depths of rough ravines, into which the sun beat remorselessly at noon, led to a great, sloping, stony plateau. I was very surprised to see, three miles away to the eastward, across this, trees and gardens, that marked a village. When we got there we found quite a little clump of

hamlets, unknown to the world, ensconced snugly behind the wall of the Kara Dagh.

To round off the pleasant surprise was a Persian prince, in exile there, who was glad enough to see strangers, and whiled away a cheery evening with tea, melons, and amusing stories, that Ahmad Shah tactfully extracted from him, whilst Afraz Gul plugged away with paint-box and Indian ink over his map.

A few miles on, over strange bare slopes of sheet rock we came to a glimpse of the spacious days of old. The prince had hinted about the origin of the little lake that we found, called K l Bibi (the Lake of the Lady). It was formed by a dam across the mouth of a little glen. Fed by a reed-girt spring of sweet water, though salt itself, it made a joyful sheet of water in a thirsty land. The lady was none other than the daughter-in-law of Tamerlane.

The country had opened out, and though we were a little closer to the Kara Dagh, the outer wall of hills now lay more to the north and farther away from us. At noon we made our halt in the shade of a cliff that flanked the valley of Shurrukh. We were back in the world again, for through here runs a camel-track from Meshed to the Persian outpost of Sarakhs, and as the *jawans* and I ate our melons and mutton chops, a great herd of goats came to drink from the brackish trickle in the sandy ravine-bed, and a camel caravan of Baluchis halted around their chief's green standard, topped by the Crescent that warlike Islam snatched from pacifist Byzantium.

During the afternoon the slanting slabs of rock gave way to a dreary undulating tract. Not a vestige of green was in sight; the range to the north

melted away in the purple distance, leagues away, by Sarakhs, and the Kara Dagh to the south became lower and more confused.

All at once, riding down into a shallow arid depression, I saw a thing which filled me with wonder.

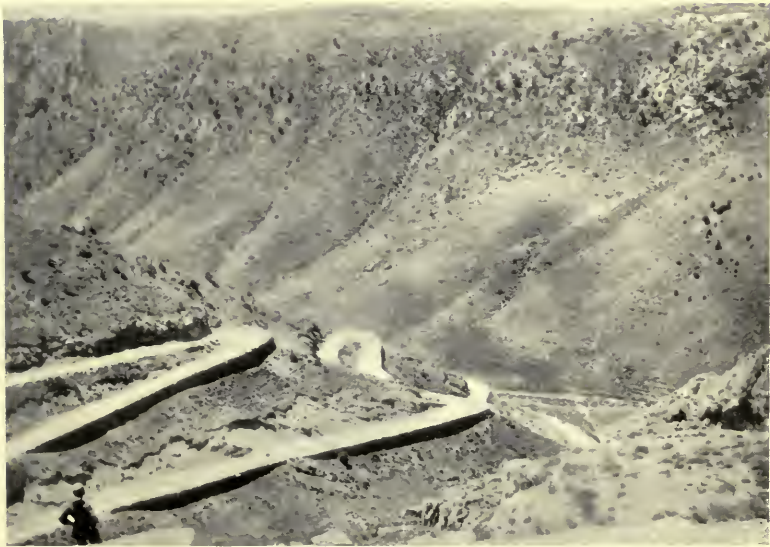
After many miles of waste and desolation, and the struggle of squalid, filthy humans to keep alive in their hovels, there burst upon our eyes a faery fort with clean-cut corner towers of bright red brick. Its curtain walls were pierced by graceful arches whose beauty was the setting for panels of fresh blue tiles that seemed as if they had been laid but yesterday.

As I rode closer, followed by my little troop, silent with the Punjabi's admiration for a fair building, I saw that the crenellations of towers and walls had crumbled, and that the inner courts were choked with tumbled masses of fallen masonry and rank plants. We had no time to explore all of this strange relic of the past, but I noticed—what I have never seen elsewhere—that its round corner towers were joined to their curtain walls by little clean-cut salients of the same fine burnt brick-work.

A dry, ruined tank just to the east showed whence the garrison drew its water in the palmy days of this shapely pile before Heaven sent the blight of drought to stay the blood-stained baboonery of mediæval Asian tyrants. This place is known to the infrequent goatherd who visits this track as *Robat-i-Sharraf*, and it dates back to the days when the kings of the olden time, Alp Arslan, Hulaku, and the Arab Kutayba, travelled to and fro by this lost



GORGE OF DUSHARASI IN THE KUPEH DAGH.



THE RUSSIAN ROAD FROM TURKESTAN INTO KHURASAN.



trail from their capital at Merv to the outer kingdom of Khurasan.

We made our camp a few miles on at the mouth of a forbidding gorge, called Dehana-i-Chakudar. The dirty pool of water that we found here was brackish. This was now the third successive day that we had to drink bad water, and as it contained a good deal of Epsom salts, we found life somewhat trying. All the same, matters were going to be worse before they got better. Added to this, as we had now dropped to scarcely 1,000 feet above sea-level, the heat and the glare of the sun were both intense, whilst horse-flies and vile insects of all sorts began to afflict us.

Next day, after climbing gradually up from the dry, bouldery stream-bed walled in by high banks, we crossed two easy passes. The second of these, called the Mazduran (the Pass of the Labourers) took us over the backbone of the Kara Dagħ down again into the valley of the Kashaf Rud, the Meshed River, but several marches below the city.

A pair of watch-towers of the same material and workmanship as the fort of Sharraf crowns the ridge where the road crosses it. Again, as on the Sanduq Shikan, I found the remains of a broad embankment, carefully graded and built up on masonry. A vision of a gilded court, young plumed princes, hawk on wrist, on fretting Turkoman stallions, with fair, hazel-eyed, chestnut-haired princesses behind the brocaded curtains of the horsed litters, came into my mind as I thought of the vanished glories of the old conquerors, riding down the ancient causeway.

Just down below the brow of the hills, a clear

spring gushes out and is carried on a hoary aqueduct of lichened masonry to water the tiny hamlet of Mazduran. A patch of green grass, the shade of a few trees, and a draught of decent water seemed "Paradise enow" to each of us.

An hour later we rode down a slanting rough cart-track into a dreadful valley, a very abomination of desolation.

As we neared the plain that bordered the meandering black river, a black-bonneted horseman appeared round a corner, and I sent Ali Akbar to ask from him whether a village existed in a certain spot that I was not sure about. He galloped out in his swash-buckling way, but drew rein as he approached. We trotted up to them, to find the strange horseman hailing Ali Akbar as an old friend. Ali Akbar seemed to have a good deal on his mind, more especially when his old friend addressed him very distinctly as Ali Abdulla, and to be much relieved when our informant passed on his way. The dafadar-major, with a Punjabi's flair for quiet humour and a twinkle in his eye, put a few leading questions to young Ali Akbar concerning his murky past. He had concealed much of it from the rest of the men, because a Punjabi has a way of compressing a deal of scathing comment into three words. Since he was a freebooter himself but two generations ago, he is apt to poke more gibes than anyone else at one who was a bandit but yesterday, and to come the law-abiding citizen very heavily.

However, Ahmad Shah was a very old soldier, and the cat came out of the bag. The strange horseman was a former fellow-bandit of Ali Akbar's, in the famous gang of Mahmud of Nishapur, wherein

Ali Akbar did business under a *non-de-plume*, shall we say? On the night before, at Dehana-i-Chakudar he had seemed inclined to admit to the dafadar-major that the spot was not strange to him, but was reticent about details. Now we learnt that he had passed through there at dead of night some three years gone, and in a considerable hurry, since the Swedish gendarmerie were hot on his heels. As they were egged on by the Russians, the crib having been cracked over the frontier, Persian *far-niente* was off, and our hero had to hustle along. In fact, this Dick Turpin of Khurasan did not draw rein till he reached Jagherq, four solid days' march on.

This little confession was a priceless opening for young Feroz's wit, and he did not stint himself. Ali Akbar squirmed for about forty-eight hours when he heard my batman's embroidered versions of his "civil life."

This atrocious valley of the Kashaf Rud into which we had descended has but one good point: it comes to an end in time. Imagine a foul, brackish stream, girt with dank reeds, confined between high, treacherous banks of dark mud, and flowing sullenly down a Tartarean plain, efflorescing with saltpetre and overgrown with camel thorn and poisonous euphorbia. Place this between parallel ranges, all bare, stark and desolate, split up into countless labyrinths of tiny branching yellow spurs and foothills, a nightmare tangle that makes it seem impossible to thread a way through, and you have something like the country that we had to traverse.

In the few spots where a handful of tiny hovels formed a village, the people lived in a squalor such



as is equalled in the case of no other Aryans, except in the slums of our big cities.

No doubt the picture seemed gloomier to us since we were all much weakened by the results of the liquid mixture of mud and magnesia that we had to absorb as drink.

The villages were abandoned ruins and the horses went short of fodder. Next day I for one was almost too weak to mount my mare. Afraz Gul stuck to his mapping like a little man: the next day's camp was a trifle better, though the water was still bad. The last march in, of some thirty-six miles, took us into the cultivation and trees of the oases round the city. The sight of this bucked us up so much that my mare cantered nearly the whole way and covered the distance in just six hours—something of an achievement, considering the heat, and that she had been short of food and drink for several hard days.

We were pleased to get in, not only in order to get a decent drink at last, but to gloat over our 700 square miles of really unexplored country mapped for the first time. The magnesia had corroded my own boiler tubes and clockwork to such an extent that I had to spend several days on milk and Benger's Food before things got right again.

Now we heard the story of M——, one of our young levy officers, and a fair Persian damsel. He had been out on a reconnaissance journey towards Turbat-i-Shaikh-Jam and Kariz, and whilst he lunched in a shady grove one day, a cheery little Persian girl, some eight years old, strolled up and made herself very pleasant, as little Persian girls

can well do. A week or two later, as he sat over his company accounts, back in Meshed, a letter arrived, written in a Persian scrawl. He handed it to his Subadar for translation. The old officer went into the light outside, and came back in a moment, whispering to M——, and wagging an avuncular finger: "Sahib, this is from a lady, and very affectionate too." It took M—— a long time to live this down, and to get people to believe that the writer was his little eight-year-old friend of Turbat-i-Shaikh-Jam.

My men and I settled down again into our billet with its walled garden just outside the city ramparts, and now I made the acquaintance of Ivan.

I had to go to Kuchan to discuss some points concerning the collection of intelligence with the officers of the Kurdish Mounted Levy there. The Commander of our Signal Troop, which had newly received a couple of motor-cycles, had telegraphic business there, too, so we went together on the "stink-bikes." For ninety miles we bounded from rock to rock and rut to rut, and reached the outskirts of the town after dark. The Borough Council had seen fit to dig a trench some 4 feet wide nearly across the road. We did not actually crash into this, but the sudden swerve on the brink developed into something of a catastrophe, and when we disentangled ourselves from the wreckage, a good many outlying components of the machines had been knocked off. We chunked into the mess billet, after a fashion, and the ingenious armourer of the levy effected many cunning repairs. He had been the ordnance branch of Mahmud & Co., of Nishapur, and so a fellow-bandit of Ali Akbar's; he knew how

to make bricks without straw, and to mend motor-cycles with a cold chisel and a drum of stolen paraffin.

As we sat the next day in the courtyard of the billet, to us there entered a dilapidated figure on one leg. He seemed to be a more or less white-skinned Aryan of sorts, and from a khaki peaked cap he produced sundry papers. He asked for a job, and his documents showed him to be Sergeant Ivan Valkovich, of the late 17th Siberian Rifles, wounded through the chest in Galicia in 1916. He had been conscripted by the Reds to labour on the Turkistan Railway, and had escaped into Persia with a large and septic hole in his foot. I offered him a job as my groom, at the princely stipend of £1 13s. 4d.—*i.e.*, five tomans a month, and all found. He jumped at this, and turned out to be a sterling youth. When we shipped him into the Meshed Hospital on a wagon, and a doctor poured a noggin of brandy down his throat prior to clearing up his foot, he mistook it for heaven and said so. In a few days, after a shave, a hair-cut, several washes, and a new outfit of clothes, he looked a new man.

When we got back to Meshed, a few days later, the whole of the Indian infantry battalion had arrived, and the Punjabis, after their five years' campaigning, were ordered back to India.

The 19th had a whole company of Yusafzais, which includes about eighteen havildars and naiks, so my lads, with all a Pathan's taste for a merry night, bade them to a smoking concert, to celebrate their departure home. I was also invited, and the Force Commander's orderly, a Punjabi, too, on account of his histrionic talent. The proceedings

opened with a Gargantuan repast, mutton pilao with pistachios, chickens stewed in butter, mountains of flapjack bread, and conical piles of rice and raisins. Innumerable melons of all sorts, peaches, pears, grapes, and great china bowls of tea finished it off. The Pathan is nothing if not a trencher-man, and soon the guests, visibly distended and "tumbling home," as a sailor would say, from the waist upwards, were sitting on many borrowed chairs around sumptuous borrowed carpets. A Pathan shows his Western origin and characteristics by being able to sit with comfort in a chair. In this he differentiates himself from all Easterns, who must inevitably curl up.

I saw dimly through the curling cigarette smoke that a Persian city police officer was one of the guests, and wondered what prank this signalled. A Pathan does not make friends with a policeman without some very good reason behind it.

The *sarnai* band of the battalion was now at work, and Aslam, who directed the revels, had asked me for my preference in tunes. I chose the cheery Khatak melody:

Nun khó, bal' ballah shí,  
Sabáh báh fariaduna wi.

(Now let dance and song go on,  
For the lads will be scrapping the morn.)

This was the overture, and as the last note died away a quaint figure appeared behind a table in the far end of the garden.

This was a Hindu of the Hinduest, in dhoti complete, caste mark on brow, pen behind ear, muttering strange Dravidian invocations to a Demon pantheon. He turned over myriad leaves of imagi-

nary account books, gibbering like a very Gandhi over the dullness in the blood-sucking trade. As his monologue went on, I recognized a hefty Yusafzai havildar of the 19th, cast in the rôle of an Indian commissariat storekeeper. Then just behind us comes a volley of Saxon oaths, freely mixed with Tommy's only adjective and his solitary participle, and to him enters Sergeant Whatshisname, also of the same corps, breathing heavily. Critical observers notice that his sun helmet is on the wrong way round, otherwise Sowar Sardar Khan's rendering of the part is flawless. The pride of his corps laments the unconscionable rise in the price of whiskey, demanding in consequence important sums from the storekeeper and a share of his peculations. The babu in a twinkling becomes the "poor man" of Hindustan, protesting his extreme poverty far too vehemently. Funny business follows, and the knockabout part is just going to commence, when a familiar whirring noise is heard.

Everyone recognizes the lifelike arrival of a Bolshevik aeroplane "over." As its machine-gun starts its phut-phutting, the babu drives for shelter under a scandalous umbrella, in which we recognize the Persian policeman's contribution, whilst the sergeant, having had a Board-school education, selects a thick tree. Gifted ventriloquists in odd corners produce excellent shrapnel and high-explosive effects. Soon this dies away; the sergeant soothes his shattered nerves by lambasting the prostrate speculator with a "Harry, Lauder" stick. The babu invokes Gandhi and Ganesh, the gods of Usurers, and the sergeant a certain "Pussyfoot Johnson," whom he vows to follow in future.

As in the best Hebrew-handled London halls, more music follows this turn:

“Wale, Anwar Beg”—in other words, “How now, Enver Pasha!”—a tune composed by the minstrels of the immortal “Piffer Brigade” in Mesopotamia to celebrate the capture of Bagdad, that had cost so many lives of debonair Punjabi and Pathan.

This was followed by the Peshawar singer’s lament for a raider:

Murshu Hakim Khan-a  
 Murshu Hakim Khan.  
 Wur Sara dër wuh Mohmandan,

celebrating that day when the gallant Hakim and his band died before the rifles of a company of the Guides, and a couple of 10-pounders, near Abazai in 1913.

Then a young naik of the 19th gives a scurrilous and wholly insubordinate imitation of his revered Adjutant handing over a battalion parade to the Colonel.

Pathans must be allowed to be libellous every now and then, like the King’s jesters of old, or else they would burst from a rush of wit to the heart. Even Colonels are not exempt from metrical criticisms of their increasing girth or lack of coherence when addressing defaulters. Generals would catch it, too, but for the fact that in a Pathan soldier’s eyes they are, as a race, far less important than a subaltern or a bustling Captain. The trans-border tribesman knows only too well that a subaltern will often strafe him with half a company, when or where he least expects it, whilst a General has to spend many days chatting with Simla and collecting

babus and bhusa before his heterogeneous cortège can set out on its ponderous journey into the hills. In a regiment the young lad who has been up to mischief knows that a subaltern will invent wholly original ways of making things much more uncomfortable for evil-doers than can all the inky lightnings of a court-martial.

More tunes, "Taza ba taza, nau by nau" ("Freshly fresh, and newly new"), "Sultan Aziz Jan," the Kabul carpenters' love-song, and the skirl of the "Zakhmi Dil," took us on to the early hours of the morning. Then the N.C.O.'s of the 19th shook hands all round, told me that I would be welcome in their lines if I lived to be a hundred, and strolled on to put their equipment on for the day's march that was to initiate their 700-mile "Anabasis." Then I turned in to get a couple of hours' sleep before riding out to see them off, and to dream of the cheeriest night that I had ever spent with Pathans, which is saying a good deal.



PASS BETWEEN BAJGIRAN AND JIRISTAN IN THE KURD COUNTRY OF NORTHERN KHURASAN. SCENE OF AMAL BAZI FIGHT.



DURBADAM VILLAGE NEAR KUCHAN, NORTHERN KHURASAN.





## CHAPTER IX

### WINTER IN BAJGIRAN

The sons of the Prophet are hardy and bold  
And quite unaccustomed to fear,  
But of all the most reckless of life, I am told,  
Was Abdul the Bulbul Ameer.

If you want just the man to encourage a van  
Or harass your foe in the rear,  
Or to take a redoubt, you need only shout out  
For Abdul the Bulbul Ameer.

\* \* \* \* \*

He could imitate Irving, tell fortunes on cards,  
He could play on the Spanish guitar,  
In fact quite the cream of the Muscovite Guards  
Was Ivan Petruski Skivar.

IN August, thanks to the treachery of the very large Armenian element amongst them, the Volunteer army lost Annenkoff and Merv, that the 19th Punjabis had so dearly won.

Many of the Imperial officers that we had known died like gentlemen, and the survivors led the sound portion of General Lazaref's army back westwards, retiring step by step before the Red advance. It was an episode of this phase that the Colonel and I had watched from the crest of the dizzy rampart of Kelat-i-Nadiri.

By October the Bolsheviks had reoccupied 'Ashqhabad, and this was a matter of great moment to us, since it laid bare the head of the only road really practicable for wheeled traffic that leads from Turkistan into Persia.

The enemy, after massacring the leaders of the Menshevik party in the 'Ashqhabad administration, had every intention of making an inroad into Khurasan, and whilst they were utterly incapable of meeting our Regular infantry, however much the odds in their favour, they were overwhelmingly superior in modern war material, of which indeed we had none at all, unless one reckons as modern, four mountain guns designed in the eighties of the last century.

So long, then, as the issue depended upon staunchness, steady discipline and training, and upon that tactical skill and use of mountainous ground wherein our native infantry excels, and upon push of bayonet—a weapon very apt to the hand of Johnny Sepoy, as the Prussian Guard learnt at Messines, and as the Rhinelanders discovered in March, 1915, at Neuve Chapelle—we had nothing to fear from the Red army.

Now the case was altered. The Reds had a road up which they could use modern means of transportation, and, as Kipling tells us, "transportation is civilization," especially in war. They were no longer tied down to camel-tracks and bridle-paths and steep hills which their vice-sodden infantry flatly refused to climb, and in which they would stand no earthly chance face to face with our hardy clean-living *jawans*.

They could put their troops from their foetid armoured trains into lorries, bring their numerous armoured cars and their overwhelming artillery into action against us, and cover all with their aeroplanes. It is an ill business pitting bare flesh and blood, however staunch, against chrome-steel plates and trinitrotoluol.

However, we had to make the best of what we had.

Since Ashqhabad was lost Lazaref was no longer in touch with us, and as the Afghan War was now not important I received orders to take my little following to Bajgiran, to watch 160 miles of rugged mountain frontier against Bolshevik penetration, and to find out all about them and their intentions. This promised to be a full-time job, especially since my scouts and emissaries would have immense distances to cover over wild virgin country where roamed turbulent and often hostile tribes.

I hurried on ahead with Feroz in the General's car and reached Bajgiran (the "receipt of custom of Iran"), about 150 miles from Meshed, in one day. This is good going over Persian tracks, and Feroz and I had to ride in over the last twenty miles, since horses could move quicker straight over the mountainous country than could the car, which had to follow the meanderings of the graded Russian road.

In Bajgiran village I found a company of Indian infantry under a Captain of about five years' service, a platoon of Mongol Hazara levies under a Subadar seconded from a Regular regiment, and a handful of Kurd *jigits*, paid, armed, and clothed by us. Two or three Persian officials were people that counted. The Deputy-Governor was a young gendarmerie Lieutenant, of Arab descent, with the manners of a gentleman and a sense of humour. Although he had graduated in the Turkish Army, he was friendly to the British without being in any way sycophantic: he was a sportsman, and we always got on well together.

Ahmad Shah, my squadron-dafadar-major, approved of him, and Ahmad Shah's friends, as I found by experience, were always of the right mettle.

Next after him was Hassan Khan, the Reis-i-Gumruk—that is, the Director of Customs. Hassan Khan was a Persian, very widely read and *instruit*, not parrot fashion, like the Hindustani babu, but as an Aryan is. Hassan Khan, always known to everyone as the Gumruk, was nothing if not jovial and convivial.

He had a very useful coefficient of absorption, which, to continue the engineering simile, was often stressed, not to say strained, at times. He was sincerely pro-British, and I do not think that he was any the worse a Persian for that.

The Karguzar, a sort of human blanc-mange, we saw less often.

The outstanding feature of life at Bajgiran was the *shilluk*, a phenomenon of almost daily occurrence. To the Persian a *shilluk* means a disturbance or breach of the peace of any magnitude, from the mutiny of the Bengal Army down to the squabble of two old women over their marketing.

I arrived in the middle of a *shilluk* of some interest. A rough morning's scramble to the east was a little hamlet, right on the Russian frontier, named Kalta Chinar, in a valley inhabited by a colony of Tekke Turkoman, immigrants from Russian territory. A quarter of a mile away in the open was a Russian frontier guard post, and in Kalta Chinar hamlet, D—, the Captain of the infantry company, maintained a standing patrol of four Kurd levies to watch the track that here crossed the frontier.

At Kalta Chinar, too, there resided a personage of whom the local people spoke with bated breath and a twisted half-smile, as if they did not quite know what he would do next.

Let us call him Ivan Petruski Skivar. He had commanded, since Imperial times, the squadron of Russian frontier guards stationed opposite Kalta Chinar: when the Reds came along, he stepped over the frontier and lived with a bosom friend of his, a Tekke chief of that valley.

When I came into Bajgiran a Kurdish lance-dafadar had ridden in from Kalta Chinar to report to D——, with a bullet wound in his arm, a saddle-bag full of recently won "souvenirs," a brand-new Russian rifle and pistol, and a complacent look on his visage, as who should say: "I may have a bit of a hole in my arm, but you should just see the other fellow."

The other fellow, it transpired, had been a petty Armenian commissar, in charge of the Bolshevik post at Russian Kalta Chinar, who had acquired the habit of fraternizing with an ill-conditioned Persian subordinate entrusted with the overseeing of Customs on the Persian side. Now, Ivan Petruski did not approve of Bolsheviks, and still less of fraternization with them, so he intruded upon a bun-struggle or chin-wag between the Armenian and the Persian.

Ivan was a downright sort of fellow, so in a very short space of time the room was full of the smell of burnt nitrated cellulose, plaster was dropping from divers perforations in the walls, and the Armenian, with his cronies, was running *ventre à terre* back into Turkistan, bloody and out of breath and minus three ponies, some weapons, and other

properties that they had had not leisure to remove.

The sculptor of gravestone marbles leant on his chisel and smiled:

More work for the undertaker,  
Another little job for the tombstone-maker.

This was well enough from the rude, rough soldier's point of view, but *la haute politique* demanded that affrays with the Reds were to be avoided at all costs, and we had very stringent orders on the subject. We were not at war with the Bolsheviks, and, for that matter, had never been; and a dozen "occult" forces were fishing in the troubled waters of the relations between the King of England and the murderers of His Majesty's cousin.

It was no use explaining this to the young Kurd, who was very pleased with the tangible results of the scuffle. "Columbia," our newly-fledged doctor from Madras, took him in hand, whilst D—— and I put on our thinking caps to straighten out the international situation, or at least to explain it away sufficiently plausibly.

The matter was made worse for us by the fact of Ivan Petruski having recently been paid by D—— to keep him informed of doings in Kalta Chinar: this made D——, in a way, answerable for Ivan's ebullitions. On the other hand, the Armenian had put himself in the wrong by coming into Persia. So we drafted a suitable report to Mission Headquarters, explained to the Kurds that "this practice must now cease," upon pain of "blood and iron," and cogitated upon what to do with Ivan Petruski Skivar.

Fortunately the Armenian concealed the scuffle from the Soviet, and so the whole thing blew over, except that our side retained the swag.

Ivan Petruski Skivar was clearly a personality and a moving force, and I wanted to know more about him, as he would in future be under me, if we kept his services. My men arrived a day or two later, amongst them young Abdulla Shah, an N.C.O. who had been in my company in the old war-time in Artois and Flanders. I had the fullest confidence in his gumption, he had something above the eyebrows, so I sent him off on his little chestnut horse to Kalta Chinar. Here he put the breeze up the Kurds, introducing them to good order and a modicum of military discipline, whilst he foregathered with Ivan Petruski.

He came back a day or two later with a Pathan's crisp word-picture of the situation at Kalta Chinar and praises of Ivan Petruski, of whom he had acquired a very favourable opinion.

Moreover, his history had been elucidated. He was a volcanic Georgian by birth, of good family, and born in 'Ashqhabad, where his father had been a high military officer. He went to the wars as a Captain in a Caucasian regiment and was very severely wounded on the Galician front, in Austria. He became, by way of "light duty," the Commander of a frontier guard squadron just as an R.N. Lieutenant might go to coastguard service with us. He was stationed on this border, where in his boyhood he knew all the local Tekkes and their chiefs, amongst whom he had many friends.

In the revolution his brother was barbarously murdered by a Jew commissar, and now he himself



was in our service: officially described as "umptieth Tiflis Grenadiers, attached Guides."

At my request he rode in to see me, and this decided the matter. In a few days he had established himself in the esteem of all my men, and we were happy to count ourselves in the small circle of his friends.

Another focus of trouble was a sort of Dick Turpin named Ali Khan, who led a small gang that plundered wayfarers on the valley tracks towards Kuchan. A fair number of refugees were now escaping from the Transcaspian Reds into Persia: most of these came through Bajgiran, along the metalled cart-road, a few chose the Darragez-Muhammadabad track, and a handful fled through Khairabad or Gifan, five or six days' march to the west.

Here I should mention that the front of 160 miles that had to be patrolled by my handful of men, much wider than the British front in France and incomparably rougher, was flanked on the right by the retainers of the Turkish Governor of Darragez, whilst its left rested upon the territory of the Kurdish Sardar of Bujnurd, another feudal vassal of the Shah. Both these magnates were responsible for looking after long sections of the border: in fact, the "sowars" maintained by him of Bujnurd prolonged my line practically to the Caspian.

The refugees were destined to become an increasingly difficult problem.

Straight away I found that most of them were destitute, if not actually starving. They had to be sent on to Kuchan under an escort that looked after our weekly ration convoy, else Ali Khan

would have taken them and sold the women as slaves. This was a four-day journey, and the poor creatures usually had nothing of their own, so the kind-hearted sepoys used to give a portion of their own meagre rations to hungry Russian and Polish women and children.

This did not seem to me quite right: by insisting on their moving under a guard, we had assumed responsibility for them, and so for feeding them. Soon I managed to get sanction for the issue of rations. Even this was limited to French and British subjects and to Austrian or German soldiers, but I could use my discretion in the matter of necessitous cases amongst Poles, Serbs, Russians, etc.

When the winter began to close in, and the stark hillsides to cover with snow, the half-naked escapers suffered very much from lack of clothing. They came from a plain 4,000 feet lower down into a climate that got more rigorous each day. Again I had to use my best bureaucratic eloquence to get a small allowance of inconceivably inferior clothing for *bona fide* soldiers, not before they went through some very terrible hardships from blizzards and frost-bite.

When I say "Austrian" soldiers, one must understand that the old-time Austrian and Hungarian armies comprehended a vast medley of nationalities: almost as many as does the curiously named "Indian" Army. Apart from the actual "Reichs-deutsch" and Magyar ranks, most of the rest, no small percentage, were on our side, or claimed to be, as the power of the Allies waxed. Such were Serbs, Rumanians, Italians, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks,

Slovenes, Wallachs, Croats, and even a Moslem or two from the Sanjak of Novi-Bazar.

Apart from late enemy soldiers and officers, whom we were bound by the custom of the Service to feed and clothe, whether friendly or hostile, and glad to do it, a great number of hard cases turned up, mostly ex-soldiers from strange parts of the old Russian Empire: we gathered in, besides Russians, Cossacks, and Turkoman who had fought alongside us on the Merv front, Georgians, Lesghians, and Tatars of the gallant Bicharakof's army; Lithuanians, Letts, and Estlyanders from the distant Baltic; and even an odd Kalmuk or two, and an Osmanli Turk from Siberia.

Next, after my principal job of collecting intelligence about the Bolsheviks, it was my task to classify all this wonderful miscellany: to smell out and reject enemy agents, "communist" or "Pan-Turanian" propagandists, or those inclined that way; enemy civilians who pretended to be Poles, civil internees masquerading as genuine prisoners-of-war; and to solve a hundred other strange puzzles. I have a fund of ungrammatical German and Russian, a smattering of Turkish and Persian, besides my "stand-bys" of French and Pashtu, and I needed every word of each. I have a lively recollection of sitting round the cheery cedar-wood fire in the mud-walled, earth-floored hovel that was our mess, trying to sustain a polite tea-table conversation in three different tongues with escaped officers of as many different nationalities. It is not always, in these cases, easy to remember which language to speak to which.

The many scores of enemy soldiers that passed

through my hands behaved very well indeed, if one excepts the fawning of one or two town-bred Hamburgers. The civilians were a nightmare.

Perhaps the most trying case, which cropped up later on, was that of a young pair of Bohemians, man and wife. My interrogations and discreet enquiries showed that Mr. Bohemian had remained in Russia in 1914 to dodge the Austrian conscription, and took some pride in the fact. I asked him what Russian regiment he had honoured by joining, and was answered by a blank stare. Needless to say, he had shirked Russian service as well, subsiding into a mild sort of civilian internment in Tashkend. Yet he seemed to expect to receive rations and clothes at the expense of the British taxpayer, just as if he had been a straightforward, above-board Austrian *soldat* or Turkish *nafar*. He was disillusioned, and took it very badly. As he was a civilian, it was the affair of the Persian authorities to let him into their country: they did not mind his coming in, but had no intention whatever of feeding destitute immigrants. He funked going back to Bolshevik rule and eventually scrounged his way to Meshed, and Heaven knows what happened to them there. It flabbergasted me to think that, having shirked everything in the War and betrayed both sides, he expected to share in one of the few privileges a soldier has.

By December the winter had really closed in: a deep snow, which made the road impassable for wagons, cut us off from our "support," fifty-six miles back, at Kuchan, for weeks at a time. D—— built stone "wind breaks" for his half-dozen *sipahi* sentries and snug dug-outs for the line of sentry

groups, that spread athwart the 'Ashqhabad road, and made good the crest of the bleak ridge that formed the water-parting between the Caspian basin and that of the Aral Sea.

This line, its right-hand post on a craggy peak of some 7,000 feet, looked down upon the tiny Russian village of Gaudan, otherwise known as Bajgir-i-Rus (the receipt of custom of the Russian), 3,000 feet below.

Its central group, the examining post on the road, was but a musket-shot from the castellated granite *fortin* that in Imperial times had held a troop of Cossacks in its clean little whitewashed barrack, with glazed windows and smartly painted doors. Now an insanitary gang of Red Guards lounged about, spat on the floors, and broke the windows in their drunken orgies. Another half-mile farther south, also overlooked by our sentries, was the tiny Russian village. Here a few families of unorthodox Molokani had been planted here as a colony by the Tsar's Government. They were untiring cultivators, and their presence here was part of Kuropatkin's scheme to create autochthonous reserves for the two Turkistan Army Corps that dreamed of invading India. Their Lutheran tenets had been a thorn in the side of the *chenovniks* of Russia, so Kuropatkin killed two birds with one stone. Other tiny settlements of the same sort were to be found in the green valley of Kuropatkin, two or three miles south of Russian Kalta Chinar, and at Samsonovka and Skobelevka, three marches or so to the west, over against my standing patrol that watched the frontier at Khairabad.

Some of these farmers were of German descent.

like the inhabitants of Kizilkovski, near Merv (see Chapter V.), and it was a never-ending wonder to me how these people managed to scrape up a livelihood from their stony steep-pitched fields under the brazen summer sun of Persia or in the bitter snow swirls of its northern winter. They managed to exist, though very little better than the indigenous Persian or Kurd, and now, in exchange for the endless form-filling and inquisitions of "Dilly" and "Dally" of Imperial times, they kept a parasitic horde of rapacious Jew commissars whose business hours were devoted to "nationalizing" the hard-won crops of the Molokani, and to squeezing the tatterdemalion Persian donkey drivers who scratched up an infinitesimal living by carrying firewood and charcoal across that inhospitable frontier.

So the infantry company maintained month in and month out an unceasing watch and ward for the three most important miles, nearest the road that tempted the Red General Staff. The remainder of the 160 miles that I was responsible for were patrolled by my handful of Guides. I could use but a bare dozen for this duty, and so fifty-six sheepskin bonneted lads of the Chapashlu, Topkanlu, and the Zainadillu, enlisted with their tribal chiefs into the Kurdish Mounted Levy, were placed under my orders. Four border villages, into which came camel-tracks or bridle-paths from the Russian side, were selected for the location of small standing patrols, and the more important of these were commanded by a Regular Punjabi or Pathan N.C.O., who disposed of half a dozen of the Kurds under him. These standing patrols

lay some thirty to forty miles away from each other, a day's ride, and every day from each end of the line there would set out a small patrol, that not only caught spies and propagandists crossing the frontier, but relieved a portion of the next post. By this system a constant turnover was effected, every trail abutting on the frontier was explored at least thrice a week and at uncertain and irregular intervals, whilst an important message could be carried from headquarters to the extreme flanks, nearly 120 miles away, in under eighteen hours.

In these months blizzards were constant, the whole countryside lay under snow, immense drifts blocked the passes, and *verglas* made a nightmare of the precipitous slopes.

The men, in spite of hardships and privations, were wonderful. My imperturbable havildars, youthful veterans of seven campaigns, would turn out at a moment's notice at midnight into a snow-storm, to lead a patrol of Kurds to some unmapped and unexplored valley upon some perilous quest, with the same nonchalance that they would display for a battalion parade. The Kurds, newly caught savages, half devil and half child, tasting discipline for the first time in centuries, hung on their lightest word, and doubled about for them like Whale Island Sub-lieutenants.

One day a spy brought circumstantial news that a certain Turkish Captain, Kazim Beg, had arrived in the valleys wherein roved the Goklan Turkoman, subjects of the Persian Shah. Captain Kazim was a fine, well-set-up officer of the Turkish artillery: an Osmanli, whose features scarcely showed the Mongoloid origin of the Turk. He had been edu-

cated in Paris, and spoke French and German fluently: he was credited with Pashtu as well, and there was every reason to believe that he knew Russian and Persian. He was a patriotic Turk and Enver Pasha's stand-by for propaganda in all broad Turkistan. It was obvious that he was up to no good amongst the Goklan: there could be no other explanation of his presence there than that the Soviet were employing him to appeal to the Turkic antecedents of these tribesmen, to turn them against the Aryan, whether British or Persian was immaterial.

Kazim was credited with a good share of brains and capacity, and doubtless had all the staunchness of the true Turk, so this could not be allowed to go on.

Abdulla Shah was, at the moment this news came in, at headquarters. He had been one of the cream of the battalion bombers in the old war-time at Ypres and Festubert. He was the man to deal with the gunner Captain. Within half an hour, accompanied by the young Hazara, Ali Akbar of "B" Squadron, and half a dozen picked Kurds, he was to horse and away over the sky-line. I could give Abdulla Shah but very brief instructions. I knew where his man was only to a score or so of miles each way: no surveyor had visited that countryside, and the task was made much more difficult because we were absolutely prohibited from crossing the frontier into Russian territory. Our Foreign Office wished to give the Soviet no pretext for reprisals into Persia. The patrol trotted and walked and tramped and climbed unremittingly for four days and the best part of four nights. They



lived on the country, buying a sheep here and a bag of flour there from friendly villages, and on the third day they entered the country of the Goklan.

This tribe, in their remote unmapped valley of the Chandir, were friendly enough, and put the Havildar on the track of the Captain. Others, however, Yamuds and the like who had come over uninvited across from Karkaralinsk and the salt deserts that engulfed Lomakin's army, were hostile. They had been talked over already, bristled with machine-guns and rifles, and were in a thoroughly truculent mood.

Karl Marx did not interest them so much as the near prospect of looting the yet fat valleys of Khurasan. Abdulla Shah marched through their *auls*, teeming with swashbuckling bandoliered braves, trusting to a bold front, the mother-wit of a Pathan, and that Fortune who has so often smiled upon a lone-handed man of the Guides in a tight corner.

He marched on over snowy passes, treacherous ice-sheeted scarps, and pathless scrub-filled valleys until he came in sight of the sea. It was a forlorn hope, and, as was almost inevitable, Captain Kazim Beg had been warned by his myrmidons amongst the Yamuds and had hurried back to the Russian railway.

*Omne ignotum pro magnifico.* The unexpected apparition of an armed band at dead of night, behind a grim Yusafzai face, is apt to startle unsophisticated nomads. No doubt Kazim Beg was told that Abdulla Shah had a whole regiment of cavalry to back him, and the prestige that the Punjabi had won on the stricken fields of Dushakh and Annenkoff had done the rest.

It was a pity to lose Kazim Beg, and I am sure that Abdulla Shah would have "copenhagened" him, had he ever got within bare striking distance. As it was, his job was like looking for a needle in a bottle of hay: it was several hundred to one that the pursued would be forewarned.

Abdulla Shah came back more slowly, to give his horses a chance; but even so he had covered over 450 rugged and precipitous miles in just under nine days. This was equivalent to an average day's march of eighty miles of ordinary easy European countryside.

Though the seams of their boots gaped here and there, and shirts showed through holes in breeches and elbows, yet when he marched in, the havildar's men had their saddles gleaming with soap, bits scoured with sand, buttons and buckles polished, and their arms *sans reproche*, as if they were going to furnish a Sovereign's escort.

The horses, a mixed lot of Badakshis and Arabs, late of the Afghan cavalry, Kurd and Turkoman stallions, and a Punjabi country-bred or two, were nearly as wonderful as the men.

During months of endless patrolling they were never sick or sorry, except when now and then a too warlike young stallion pulled up his pickets to eat the face off a friend who had displeased him. The Regular cavalry in Meshed were mounted on half-bred walers from Mona and Sargodha. A patrol of seven of theirs was sent into Kelat-i-Nadiri: on the third day out, what with falls, stumbles, and lameness, only two were fit for duty. The lumpish, hairy-heeled waler may be well enough for the rolling downs of that rare piece of topography

called "cavalry country," but when it comes to rough-and-ready work in rough and rugged country, a tough Kabuli, a wild Waziri, or a shaggy Kirghiz pony from Orenburg is worth half a dozen of him.

In 99 per cent. of Asia, Africa, and Russia, bar camels, the only thing that will carry an armed man and subsist on a barren desert countryside, is the tough little horse of Mid-Asia. Tanks will not.

Abdulla Shah's venture was only one of very many, though it was about the longest. Seldom did a week pass without one of my trusty henchmen bringing in a neat packet of, say, five hundred scarlet leaflets, or a couple of dozen Marxian pamphlets, with the imprimatur of the "Politicheski Oddiel" of the 'Ashqhabad Soviet. Accompanying these would be a beaky Armenian or astrakhan-capped Tabrizi Turk in many-pleated frock-coat, as greasy and unwashed as they make them, with an N.C.O.'s heel rope round his neck. As matters developed the propaganda took a pronounced anti-British turn, appealing to the oppressed multitudes of India to shake off their "capitalistic, imperialistic" oppressors.

One of the most interesting things that Comrades Paskutski and Baranof, the leading Transcaspian commissars, pushed into Persia was a 5-foot lithographed poster, depicting in several colours three naked, emaciated Dravidians harnessed into a plough at the tail of which stood a ginger-whiskered John Bull, in white drill jacket and sun helmet, complete with projecting incisors and bulldog pipe. In one hand he brandished an automatic pistol, in

the other a *nagaika*, and the legend, in Russian, Persian, and Turkish, told one that "this is how the English plough in India."

Even the Turkoman, who had rubbed shoulders with our Punjabis, laughed derisively when they saw this, and it was far too mutton-fisted to take in the nimble-witted Persian.

Verestchagin, who went down in the Tsushima battle, painted a most vivid picture of the punishment of the ringleaders of the Akali rebellion of 1877. Kipling makes his old captive Sirdar allude to the affair in "On the City Wall," where he says of the British, "that you had learnt too well the trick of blowing men from guns." In the painting, a battery of 9-pounders is formed up as in action, the white-robed fanatics lashed to their muzzles, and the British artillerymen standing to attention, lanyard, rammer, sponge, and handspike in fists, whilst a white-helmeted, gold-laced gunner Captain looks at a stop-watch. The vivid realism of Verestchagin, the glaring light of the picture, and the modern full-dress uniforms make it a very striking scene.

I think it was Wassmuss, a thorn in our side in and about Shiraz, after the fall of Kut, who conceived the idea of having several hundred copies of this chromo-lithographed in the best Nüremberg manner, to be circulated for Persian consumption. The idea was to show the simple Persian what brutal blood-stained hooligans were the British. The Persian saw it and reflected, "Bismillah, and by Gum! we always thought that the English were a cheery, easy-going sort of crowd, not too hard to humbug. If they really go in for this sort of fright-

fulness, and Wassmuss says they do, we had better not thwart them."

Propaganda can come home to roost at times. In the early spring, though, the Orenburg Cossacks having lost their grip on the Moscow-Tashkend line, a strong Hebraic Mission was despatched by the Moscow despots, with the avowed object of substituting "Red Terror" for the milder bloodshed of the Turkistan Soviet, and to instil more brains into the organization of propaganda, the Reds' main weapon, especially with regard to India and the British.

Their productions became far more subtle straight away, and the reorganized bureaus and railway trains for its dissemination developed into a very remarkable institution.

By the spring they had half a dozen such trains moving slowly about the railways of Turkistan, from town to town, each called after a Jewish "communist" such as Karl Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, Maxim Gorki, and so forth. Each train carried a printing machine for leaflets and brochures, a litho. press for posters, a "communist" library, a cinema with a selection of Bolshevik films, and a staff of lecturers. It was said that some of the trains had bathrooms, but we did not believe that. The *modus operandi* was to halt at a town, collect all available inhabitants, and treat them to the train's whole repertoire, willy-nilly, machine-guns being provided to ensure a good box-office and to respond to hecklers.

Not only the Red Army but the Soviets themselves underwent a very thorough spring cleaning. Many of the lukewarm Christian commissars came

to a sticky end after being superseded, and the departments of Government took on an elaborate organization, especially the political section.

The very efficient brains of Moscow had realized, as a result of the shock to their nerves caused by Kolchak's advance to Perm, Denikin's to Oral, and Yudenitch's to Tsarskoe Selo, that there really was such a thing as military art and science, and that Yid chemists' assistants could not really handle divisions and brigades. They were compelled to conscript the surviving officers of the old Regular Army, and the war with Poland gave them a good pretext to overcome these officers' scruples. Of these Brusilof was the chief, whilst an Anglophobe puppet, Novitski, was dubbed Commander-in-Chief of Turkistan.

The defence of the old Russian frontiers was cleverly set off against allegiance to the Crown. To make quite certain, their wives and children were held as hostages in the towns, whilst a communist commissar was appointed to supervise every Commander, to be present at all his interviews, and to countersign every document from his hand.

Just about now the Star of David, the interlaced triangles of Solomon's seal, began to make their appearance on Red Army cap-badges and on the innumerable rubber stamps that covered multitudinous papers, passes, permits, and forms that flowed in a spate from their now countless bureaus.

A donkey driver with a hundredweight of charcoal would come up to our examining post with a handful of documents each countersigned by four or five officials.

Credible reports averred that in Tashkend alone

there were 400 Government offices. 'Ashqhabad, now renamed Poltaratsk, after a Bolshevik commissar executed there by the Mensheviks during the August, 1918, counter-revolution, was credited with 180.

The Red Terror, directed by Iliava and Broido, was no figment. A "witch hunt" in 'Ashqhabad led to the discovery of a supposed "counter-revolutionary plot," and in one week forty ex-officers and their friends met their end against a blank wall.

The remnants of Lazaref's army, purged of their baser element, but pitifully weak in numbers, continued to make good a slow retirement westward towards the sea. Every now and then the Reds, having repaired by slave labour the line that the "Whites" blew up behind them, would overwhelm them on both flanks. They made a last stand at Bala Ishem, in the desert. From this very few of our old acquaintances escaped alive; guns, trains, and aircraft were lost, and in a few days the Reds occupied Krasnovodsk, and a train-load of sailors, searchlights, and naval guns was on its way to establish coast defences at that port.

Now and then a handful of Russian or Cossack officers in British soldiers' service dress and trench boots would escape from a Red prison, or a desert patrol, into our outposts, and they had strange tales to tell. During one week, the Poltaratsk newspapers, *Kolonkol* (*The Tocsin*) and *Sovietski Turkistan*, were full of headlines that read "Tommy from Tomsk."

Their leader-writers gloated over the processioning through the streets of Tashkend of hundreds of alleged British soldiers, stated to have deserted

or been captured, from Kolchak's forces in Siberia—from Tomsk, to be poisonously precise.

Sure enough, other deserters came into our lines, in the web equipment taken from "Tommy from Tomsk." We knew, of course, that Colonel John Ward's battalion was in Siberia, and we had heard of one or two Indian battalions being directed there, but I was not prepared to believe that they had all gone "Bolshie," though certainly they might have been surrounded by overwhelming numbers during Kolchak's retreat. The Soviet made great play with this amongst the ignorant *Sarts* of the towns, parading their captives through the streets in uniform till they were weary.

The solution to the puzzle came from a Serb officer who had served with Kolchak. He had been captured at Perm, taken to Tashkend, and escaped to us after a very long and toilsome journey.

He explained that the prisoners were Mongol Buriats, clothed and equipped by us.

Their ignorance of Russian or Turki gave an opening for the cunning commissars, and they made the most of it. No one could contradict them, and there was the Lion and the Unicorn on the Buriats' buttons to prove it.

This Serb officer was an interesting arrival, being a Moslem, and in spite of a University education, thoroughly loyal, staunch, and monarchist.

He belonged to the Royal Serbian Medical Corps, and being a cheery and convivial youth, got on very well with the two or three Punjabi and Pathan officers at Bajgiran. His journey from Perm to Persia had been the occasion for many an exciting adventure, and he had a heap of yarns to spin.



He told me a good deal about the inner history of the fighting in Siberia and the relations between Kolchak, the Allies, and the Czecho-Slovaks. Especially interesting were a few picturesque details about one Allied General whose railway carriage headquarters was described as a *bordel roulant*.

One spring day, in February, I was riding, with a few men, to show our posts to the new Commander of the Kurdish levies, when we approached a familiar village. It seemed a little strange, and when we reached a point a couple of hundred yards from its houses, we espied some forty Kurdish lasses, smiling and buxom, in their best clothes and ornaments topped with snowy linen coiffures. We approached, and suddenly, with loud cries, giggles, and squawks, they sprang at us, seized our bridles and stirrups, and hauled us off our horses. My old mare would have eaten the face off any mere man who would venture to lay rough hands on her, but she seemed now in league with her own sex, and stood quite quietly, a roguish look in her eye. When the din died down a little, it was explained that for the first ten days of their New Year, Kurdish women chased their own menfolk out to roost on the hillsides, and seizing all strangers that come near their villages, make them pay their footing. We paid in cash; but I noticed a great eagerness amongst my N.C.O.'s to go out on patrol during that period.

Aslam and Abdulla Shah, my two Yusafzai N.C.O.'s, had both served in the 3rd Lahore Division during that desperate and immortal counter-attack, into the German gas, on April 26, 1915, in which it regained so much ground. On their way up

to the attack, our *jawans* encountered a Moroccan division, that afterwards earned the proud title of “La première division de la France.” Many of the *tirailleurs* were Berbers of the Atlas, who are of the same Nordic branch of the Aryan race as Pathans, many Punjabis, and most British officers.

The khaki-clad, red-*chéchiaed* Moroccans were as surprised to see brother Moslems in the khaki of the Punjab as the Punjabis were to see them, but it did not prevent their becoming fast friends on the spot, especially since each division was proud of having spilt the most blood and burnt the most powder of their respective armies.

In March, 1920, my two stalwarts were patrolling the Russian frontier with a little following of Kurds.

Suddenly they came round an abrupt corner of a cliff-walled, rock-bound valley upon a little ragged group sitting under a boulder, sheltering from a bitter wind. As they approached, a figure in what had once been *bleu-horizon* politely remarked “Bon jour,” and was visibly surprised to be answered by a ready “Bon jour, monsieur,” from Abdulla Shah.

It then took no time at all to explain that the escapers, seven in number, were Moroccans and Algerians, mostly sappers of the 2<sup>ième</sup> du Génie, who had contrived to get away from the Reds, and that three of them were survivors of a fine counter-attack made by the Moroccans just after that of the Lahore Division at Ypres on April 26, 1915.

Joy was unconfined, escapers and rescuers fell on each other's necks, and all hands proceeded forthwith to the snug billets of Bajgiran, where the

tirailleurs found no difficulty in providing a kind home for several bottles of that wine of Nishapur that is sung by the jovial Omar.

This perhaps rather flabbergasted the Puritan Punjabi. Our comrades of the Salient explained that, in consequence of a shameful betrayal best left undescribed, they formed part of a French force that fell into Red captivity at Odessa in 1917, on the occasion that an Allied battleship hoisted the red flag.

They were sent to Moscow, where the Soviet hoped to train them for propaganda amongst Musalman sections of the Allies. Thence they found their way to Tashkend as Red Army conscripts. Sent to Poltaratsk, they seized an early chance to escape into our lines.

Their tale brought home to me once again the extraordinary clash of race hatreds that underlay the War of 1914. The backbone of one side were the Mongoloid Prussian, Magyar, Bulgarian, and Turk; on the other, the characteristically Aryan, French, British, and Italians. Purely from a racial instinct, too, Punjabi, Moroccan, Circassian, and even the more Aryan sort of Arab, ranged themselves alongside their Occidental cousins, against their co-religionists the Turks, and to such a hearty extent that, for instance, the three best districts of the North Punjab lost as big a percentage of their men killed on voluntary enlistment as any English county did on conscription. They sent some 300,000 fighting men into the army, of whom some 30,000 lost their lives in their seven years of the Great War and its sequels.

Our two Mongoloid Allies, drawn into the con-

flict by financial interest, did not precisely wade in blood on our behalf.

Were there any doubt that the race hatred of Mongol against Aryan was the real driving force of the War, one has only to cast one's mind back to Ploegsteert Wood, where Saxon confronted Saxon. Here the two breeds of Aryan *Homo alpinus* sustained a most gentlemanly, not to say genteel, type of struggle: flags were waved before firing started, whilst Mr. H. G. Wells, war correspondents, M.P.'s, and Bishops strolled up the sumptuous communication trenches, down which mess secretaries cycled to buy butter and eggs.

That the strong capacity for devotion to a cause and for allegiance to their Crown of the cleaner-bred Moslem races, was not confined to Punjabi and Moroccan, was taught me by an episode that occurred later in the spring.

An ex-guardee Captain had been conscripted by the Soviet to command a Red Army formation dubbed the 1st Independent Turkoman Cavalry Brigade. He had a Kirghiz Brigade Major, a Tatar Staff Captain, and a following of a dozen or so young Cherkess and other Caucasian Musalman who were much attached to him.

What upset the Soviet was the fact that the Turkoman, loyal to their allegiance to the Tsar, refused to join the brigade, which never exceeded seventy of all ranks.

Put to supervise the Brigade Commander was a hook-nosed, thick-lipped commissar of unpleasant habits, who picked his teeth with his fork and would have drunk his bath water had he thought of such a thing as a bath. Tiring of seeing this

creature's feet in the trough, Brigade Headquarters shot him, and after losing some men in an encounter with Red picquets, reached a detached post of mine in Persian territory.

It was quite clear that the men preferred to sacrifice their own lands and homes, and to face starvation in the deserts of Persia, rather than accept the offers of the Soviet and the fleshpots of the Red Army.

A very welcome arrival was another upon whom Abdulla Shah had an early opportunity of airing his French.

This was a French artillery Captain whom I had known very well in Tashkend in 1918, where his engaging personality had won everybody's heart (except the Bolsheviks).

He was so often in jail that we called that grim establishment the "Hôtel de la Mission française."

He had had a very hard time in getting away from the Reds, and was so weak and exhausted when Abdulla Shah found him at Kalta Chinar that he had to rest there two days before being able to do the single march into Bajgiran.

He spent a wholly delightful month with us, brightening up society in that isolated spot several hundred per cent.

Of a very different type was a quaint trio that suddenly turned up: an old Russian lady—the widow of a Tsarist General, so she said, and she certainly had some unimpeachable references—with her daughter, a very comely damsel indeed, and, Heaven help her, the daughter's fiancé. He, forsooth, was an Armenian of mawkish aspect, a

painter by profession, almost certainly guilty of cubism and suspected of dadaism.

An unwholesome creature, he wore his yellow hair long on his shoulders, and over it he wore a quilted cap with a flap, day and night. My intelligence bureau informed me that he had been a sanitary official of sorts under the Poltaratsk Soviet, adding that seven million roubles missing from their funds would probably be found sewn into the quilted tea-cosy-like headgear. Ivan Petruski warmly advocated shooting him and running through the tea-cosy, adding that a beauteous damsel like that was wasted on an Armenian, and that it made him sick to watch her making goo-goo eyes at the wretch all day long.

I could not acquiesce in his plan; besides, an armful of Soviet roubles was worth nothing in any case.

A day or two later there turned up a very decent pair of Austrian officers, one of whom was a Tyroler of an Alpine regiment with an edelweiss on his collar badges, the other a sapper.

We brought them in to tea and they told us of their adventures. Casually, I asked the sapper if he had heard anything of the old lady, her daughter, and the Armenian in Poltaratsk. "Oh yes," he replied briskly; "why, I married that girl myself only a few days ago."

Loud laughter ensued from the cheaper parts of the house, as he explained that a woman would assume Austrian nationality by marrying an Austrian officer, hence this Bolshevistic hedge-wedding would assist her to get out of Soviet clutches into Persia. He did not regard himself as being a Benedict to

any appreciable extent, nor she a matron, but it was a thoroughly post-revolution episode.

Meanwhile scores of Central European soldiers continued to arrive, and I acquired a pretty fair first-hand knowledge of the multitudinous national differences of the newer States and their subdivisions.

The mental attitude of a Croat towards an Italian or of a Wallach towards a Transylvanian German was part of the atmosphere of my daily task.

Interlarded with the interrogation of countless deserters, and the sorting of their papers and private property, and the smelling out of spies, were the regularly occurring *shilluks* of North Khurasan.

An interesting specimen occurred in Kuchan during the winter, that went down to history as the "six-shahi shilluk," that sum being roughly equivalent to a penny farthing.

At Kuchan, besides a company of Regular infantry and a squadron of Regular cavalry, there were the headquarters and some two squadrons of the Kurdish Mounted Levy. In accordance with custom, one of these cheery lads had pawned his saddle at a tea-shop in the main street to buy opium with. He was unexpectedly warned for patrol and had to redeem the saddle. He was six *shahis* short of the needful amount and demanded credit.

The shopkeeper refused to trust him and an altercation ensued. The trooper's friends chipped in and the commercial element sided with the financier. As luck would have it a cart rumbled down the cobbles, laden with firewood, ready cut into billets

about 2 feet long. The temptation was too much for the Kurds. They seized the handy staves, and in a moment Donnybrook was in full swing, and several score pates had been cracked over six *shahis*. A Regular patrol restored order.

Nearer home a bigger movement was in progress. Zaberdest Khan, the Governor of Darragez, had his chateau at Muhammadabad, in the big wide fertile valley that opens on to the Central Asian Railway at Lutfabad.

There was much coming and going across the Russian frontier, since there was no natural obstacle, though Meshed could only be reached with difficulty by means of a couple of bridle-tracks, of which one expresses the traveller's relief at getting to the top by its picturesque name, Allah-ho-Akbar (God is great!).

With the coming and going, naturally a lot of news was to be had at Muhammadabad about Bolshevik doings. An ex-hawker of potatoes, of Tatar origin, named Mursal, had been useful as a minor sort of interpreter to the Mission, whilst at Poltaratsk, and on our withdrawal into Khurasan, he dropped into the job of news-writer at Muhammadabad.

For all his spud-vending youth, he was a clever man and made the most of his opportunities. He had his pay raised several times on account of his excellent reports, and so began to be ambitious.

Zaberdest Khan, who claimed allegiance from a few score ragged and raffish moss-troopers, seeing that he was well thought of by the all-powerful British, decided to keep in with him. Very soon Mursal was installed in a good house, with a brass



bedstead and a spring mattress—unheard-of pomp in Persia. He interviewed many of the Russian refugees who, with a few hardly saved jewels or trinkets, came his way, and with suave, courteous phrases speeded them towards Meshed and the British lines. Then a swift intimation would go out to Zaberdest Khan, a few of whose scoundrels would rob the wretched party in the first lone mountain defile. Mursal would deplore these occurrences on paper whilst he divided the booty with Zaberdest.

Gradually he got bolder: I began to hear reports of his flying a Union Jack over his abode and calling himself British Consul. Muhammadabad and the Darragez Valley were three marches away and out of my sector, and I was expressly forbidden, not unnaturally, to meddle with internal Persian affairs. A callow and unfortunately gullible subaltern was sent to enquire into the truth of the early rumours about Mursal. The cunning Tatar was an expert at window-dressing: the Union Jack was hidden, divers apparently casual and disinterested passers-by testified almost too spontaneously to his probity, the esteem in which he was held, and his lack of unearned increment. In other words, he worked what Kipling calls the Indian "gharib admi" swindle.

The credulous youth returned and wrote his report, whitewashing Mursal, who thereby grew bolder.

One bright May morning a deputation of Turkoman patriarchs from Duringar and Kalta Chinar waited on me, and explained that Mursal had dictated to Zaberdest Khan the appointment of

one Oraz Mahomed to be his bailiff at Duringar. Oraz did not content himself with collecting rents from all the hamlets in the valley, whether Kurd or Turkoman, but robbed and blackmailed as well. He usurped the title of Deputy-Governor and dispossessed the hereditary Kurdish Beg of the village, a friend of ours. The usurper had spent his youth as a brigand, was of a truculent disposition, went about with a loaded Mauser pistol slung well to the front, and kept a gang of "gun-men" with magazine rifles. In fact, he behaved as if he had bought the place.

I comforted the old gentlemen, wired to headquarters so that a reprimand might be administered to Zaberdest by the Governor-General, and told my young Arab friend, the Deputy-Governor, that this sort of thing would not do. Mahomed Khan agreed with me, but prophesied trouble.

Probably Zaberdest Khan, being a vassal of Tehran, did not let the Governor-General's admonitions keep him awake. Perhaps Mursal had become pot-valiant and imagined himself secure; perhaps he thought that I was another callow subaltern instead of being a sour and cynical Field Officer. Anyhow, things got no better—in fact, worse, and the Kurd levies of our standing patrol intimated that Oraz Mahomed's pin-pricks were being directed against them, whilst flirtations were going on between him and the Bolsheviks.

Matters were made more difficult for me by the fact that Muhammadabad was too far for me to visit without being several days away and getting out of touch with Red Army activities in Poltaratsk directed against us.

Mursal and his friend Oraz were badly given away just at this time by a whole column of poor journalese which appeared in the Poltaratsk newspaper *Sovietski Turkistan* just at this time. It described how a certain capitalistic, imperialistic, *angliski* officer named "Blakker," assisted by a vile Georgian counter-revolutionary, was oppressing the innocent inhabitants of the Kurd country.

Another venerable Turkoman deputation advanced matters, whilst young Ali Akbar came in from a patrol, and as he had been a practising bandit in those parts he could tell me a good deal about Oraz Mahomed, and did.

*Inter alia*, a cousin of his lived near Muhamma-dabad, and from him Oraz had lifted a cow. This was a little too thick; Oraz could not be permitted to trample on the toes of men of the Guides with impunity. As if this, on top of the robbing of men of the levies absent on duty, were not enough, one of Ivan Petruski Skivar's Turkoman cronies rode in from Kalta Chinar to announce that Oraz had made away with an excellent pair of boots belonging to that officer: Russian *sapagees*, no less.

I thought of Bombastes Furioso, but the case was not quite parallel, and I dared not smile when Ivan Petruski was about.

Now Ivan and Ali Akbar were an officer and a man directly under my command, so I could not ignore Oraz's attack upon them: the matter ceased to be an internal Persian affair, but a personal one between him and me. However, the situation was very delicate; a trial of strength was on the tapis between the Governor of Darragez and British prestige.

I determined to ride over with D——, scotch the snake for better or worse, and stand or fall by the upshot of it. I expected nothing less than a court-martial if I went beyond my orders: I could expect nothing but the total failure of my work if I did not keep up my prestige and my subordinate's prestige in Duringar, which was in my sector.

Besides politics, some important topography and the mapping of some unfixed points was called for in that vicinity, so this was an extra reason for action.

Now Ivan Petruski Skivar had long held the theory, and given voice to it, that I should be an absolute dictator in the south-east Caspian frontier region, pistolling at sight anyone who thwarted my plans. He was warmly supported by these plain, bluff soldiers, Aslam and Abdulla Shah, who would have found much joy in heaving a dishful of chocolate éclairs into an aeroplane propeller. This, however, was hardly the idea that my military superiors held of my job, still less the Politicals, so I was forced to modulate their enthusiasm.

We—that is, D——, Ivan Petruski Skivar, Feroz, the other Ivan (my groom), D——'s batman, half a dozen Kurds, and myself—rode out one fine day over the great mountain of Baba Asalmeh to Kalta Chinar. A steep rocky path took us to the 7,000 foot grassy uplands that formed the crest of this massif. Afraz Gul and an assistant topographer came with us as far as the summit, from which we could look down for miles to the plain of Tataristan, that stretches away unbroken to the Arctic. In the haze of the distance loomed the city of Poltaratsk, intersected by the black line

of the railway: closer at hand, it seemed almost beneath us as we looked down on to the little white-washed Russian cottages of Kuropatkino and Samsonovka, 6,000 feet below, amongst the smoothly rounded turfy foothills, dwarfed and foreshortened by the height.

All around the towering bulk of the mountain is buttressed by precipices and sliced abruptly off by perpendicular scarps, from the brink of which we looked down into the fair valley of Kalta Chinar and the slender white poplars of Duringar hours before we could clamber down to them.

We passed the little stone shrine of the saint who gave his name to the mountain, here in single file along a trail skirting a precipice overgrown with stunted cedars and wild juniper, then cantering over a stretch of springy turf, suspended as it were amongst the clouds, and now taking our horses warily across the steep-pitched snow slopes that still filled the sheltered gullies in spite of the warm spring sunshine.

Leaving behind us the brushwood shelter, against a tiny spring where the countless droppings told of the watering of Kurd and Turkoman flocks, we rode along the 9-inch path that sidled along the flank of a steep spur.

Suddenly, a hundred yards ahead the two Kurds of our "point" dismounted like a streak and exchanged a dozen rapid snap-shots in the off-hand Kurdish fashion with some wandering ruffian on the opposite spur.

The blood-and-iron party, headed by Skivar, had expressed the idea, wherein the wish was father to the thought, that Oraz, with some of his people,

would lie up for us on the road. They were very anxious that this should happen, and, indeed, it seemed to me to promise an excellent solution of the problem: that was why we only had a small party of six rifles with us, since a larger one would have scared off Oraz's watchers.

For these occasions I devised a way of counterbalancing the slowness of an automatic pistol in comparison with a revolver in getting off its first shot. I used to charge up the magazine of my .450 Colt, then put an extra (eighth) round into the chamber. This left the hammer at full cock, but instead of applying the safety catch, which means fumbling and delay at a critical moment, I let it carefully down to half-cock, replaced the magazine, and kept the safety catch in the "fire position." I could then let off the first round, quicker than with a revolver, and fire eight aimed shots even at a gallop, in less time than one could discharge the six chambers of a Webley.

Needless to say, I never let any of my men use the foolish "double-action" mechanism of their "hand-howitzers" any more than they would wear their holsters in the comic fashion devised apparently by London tailors.

They had reason to appreciate these little points later, and the ample mounted practice that we went in for.

The "point's" fire came to nothing: the aggressors, who seemed to be people of no import, scuttled away over the crest-line, leaving a couple of thousand feet of cliff-walled chasm between themselves and us.

So we rode on, rather wondering whether Oraz Mahomed was going to show his teeth or not.

The descent was a most precipitous scramble over granite rocks, slippery vegetation, and steep cliffs for quite 5,000 feet, and it was time for a little food when we reached a tiny rill that flowed in a pleasant glen towards the larger valley of Kalta Chinar.

This was a very memorable occasion, because Marushka, after tiffin, so far forgot herself as to kick me, and with both feet.

I must say I deserved it, and the mode in which she administered the reprimand with her dainty hoofs made me want to apologize to her.

Contrary to English custom, I used always to unsaddle her, as she liked it, for a halt, even of half an hour. When the time came to move off I started to saddle her up, and with unpardonable clumsiness allowed the off stirrup to get for a moment under her blanket on to her bare back. She loathed anything unusual to touch her back, and so, swinging round, she applied both fairy feet where my waistcoat would have been had I had one. Even in a moment of pardonable heat, she was careful not to overdo it, so after picking myself out of the thorn-bush that is always so handy on these occasions, I made amends for my ham-handedness, and perfect amity was restored in a moment.

Some days before, she had projected Ivan parabolically for quite 20 yards, upon his attempting to ride her bareback to water.

Half an hour later we were in Kalta Chinar under the roof-tree of a patriarchal Turkoman, a friend of Skivar's, where we sat in sight of the Bolshevik post listening to the lurid details of the

rape of the boots. The horses had a splendid time in a lucerne patch, and next morning, still in readiness for a brush with Oraz's gang, we trotted up the charming little green valley, between the rough stone walls of little fields and vineyards, to Duringar, that lies beyond an almost imperceptible ridge in the middle of a little plain, studded with poplars, whose waters flow toward Muhammadabad, below the iron cliffs of the Kizil Dagh. Here Nadir the Emperor, when a boy, pastured the single camel and half-dozen goats that were all his patrimony. Sure enough just a score yards outside the village was Oraz waiting for us, with his fist on his Mauser and his bravos behind him.

To his great surprise, I cut him dead, and so did everyone: we rode on past him into the house of our friend Mahomed Beg, the rightful chief.

This baffled friend Oraz beyond words: he could not understand it. Inside over a cup of tea and a cigarette, Mahomed Beg and his old father acquainted us with the latest developments, whilst odd Kurds and small boys popped in every few minutes to tell us how Oraz was looking.

Ivan Petruski still continued to urge me to shoot him and get it over, but mindful of that general court-martial hanging over my head, I thought of a better plan.

At the corner of the village was the mud-walled enclosure that housed the corporal's guard of Swedish-trained Persian gendarmerie that were supposed to attend to law and order in the valley.

I sent for the under-sized, sallow, knock-kneed *dahbashi* (corporal), who came into the Beg's room and saluted with his hand to his grubby sheepskin



cap that bore the brass Lion and Sun. He seemed a little overpowered, not to say bewildered, when I explained that I had a complaint to prefer against an individual named Oraz Mahomed, in the matter of, firstly, a pair of excellent boots; secondly, a cow belonging to ranks under my command; and would he be kind enough to deal with the matter by apprehending the named individual. At this the corporal's knees took on the aspect of a buzzer armature, and he opined that when "constabulary dooty's to be done, a policeman's life is not a happy one"; in other words, that Oraz and his merry men would certainly shoot him and all his gendarmes at the first breath of the opening syllable of the word "arrest."

"Oh," said I, "that will be all right; you can take the precaution of calling upon my lads beforehand to assist you in the execution of your duty." The burly lads in question grinned a cheerful assent, but still the corporal displayed symptoms of a strong vertical breeze. Then a tall Kurdish dafadar whispered into his ear a few sweet nothings, touching upon what might happen if he failed in his duty, plus a few little additions of his own.

To comfort the little man, I gave him my charge in writing. He decided that he had to see it through one way or the other, and made his exit, up stage, whilst the grinning troopers followed to see the fun.

The corporal's quick Persian wit came to his assistance in his time of need. He enticed Oraz alone into the gendarmerie yard, the sheepskin-bonneted, jackbooted tough never thinking that the policeman would venture to dream of arresting him. A dozen willing volunteers closed from be-

hind various dark corners upon the gateway, and Oraz was trapped. Ivan Petruski Skivar was frankly disgusted at the pacific upshot of the whole business, but the whole village buzzed with excitement as I walked very languidly into the little mud police station to chat with the bravo. He was pale green with fright and the sudden collapse of his power, so much so that it was not even necessary to remove his automatic pistol.

When I asked him who he was, he plucked up courage to say that he was the Deputy-Governor of Duringar, and produced a commission to that effect, scrawled on a half-sheet of notepaper, and signed by Zaberdest Khan.

It was politely explained to him that he might be half a dozen full-blown Governors, yet not be allowed to monkey with my men's footgear or their cousins' cows.

In less than half an hour the now thoroughly deflated tyrant had his ankles lashed under the belly of a sorry nag, his wrists bound behind his back, and was proceeding towards Kalta Chinar in tow of the gendarme corporal, who looked as if he had lost sixpence and picked up a threepenny-bit. His pallid face showed that he was torn between the two emotions of fright at the consequences of the dangerous business he had mixed himself up in, and of relief at having got rid of his "Old Man of the Sea," with his own cuticle still unperforated.

At any rate, all the world had seen Oraz Mahomed tied up like a sack of potatoes on an old jade, so his prestige was ruined, the bubble was pricked, and many years would be needed for him to live it down.

As luck would have it, an important Bolshevik commissar had chosen that moment to visit Kalta Chinar from Poltaratsk, and as we rode past, his following and mine showed their teeth at each other over a couple of hundred yards of temptingly level green turf, and fingers itched at triggers. Ivan Petruski looked like an insecurely plugged volcano.

We clambered back to Bajgiran without incident further than D——'s foolish young pony falling down a smooth, slippery sheet of rock, thereby making rather a gore-stained mess of himself. As I expected, ready tongues had borne the tale to Mursal and Zaberdest Khan, and from them a galloping courier carried an indignant bleat to the Governor-General of Khurasan.

True Persian hyperbole described how a domineering, swashbuckling British officer had made an unprovoked onslaught on a *bona fide* Deputy-Governor, a lamblike and innocent official of the State, shooting up the countryside the while. A longish telegram from headquarters called upon me for an explanation. In the Army, as "The Young Officer's Guide to Knowledge" tells us, no one is ever called upon to furnish his reasons in writing unless it be well known that he has none to offer. Now this was the exception that proves the rule, and I was able to explain, rather smugly, that the episode in question boiled down to my making a perfectly ordinary charge against a common or garden miscreant to a Persian policeman, just as I might have done to a London bobby about a pick-pocket. My very law-abiding reputation came in on my side, and my action was approved.

In March a most welcome occurrence made a

change from the usual run of *shilluks* and Red Army preparations against Khurasan. I had had occasion to eject from Persia an unpleasantly Hebraic, astrakhan-coated individual whose record showed that he was up to no good, whilst his celluloid collar and be-diamonded fingers marked him as a parasite. He was officially provided with a notice of ejection, whilst, unofficially, I believe, a sepoy's number eleven boot applied to the southern aspect helped him down the hill into Sovdepiia, his spiritual home.

Now in Tashkend in 1918 we had often met and been cheered by a very fearless lady, a compatriot of mine, whom we shall call Miss K. When the Moscow Mission arrived there in January, its hook-nosed element was bent on making the Red Terror even redder, and conscripting everyone for everything. She was conscripted to teach in the Soviet schools in Tashkend, under their commissar for what they called "education," one Uspenski. Soon afterwards Uspenski, who knew her well, was sent to Moscow, and a Tatar or Turk acted for him. Miss K. by then had had enough of the intensified Red rule and determined to escape to Persia, a good many hundred miles away. She disguised herself as a very commonplace Russian girl, called upon the unsuspecting *Ersatz* Minister, and with a plausible tale secured a transfer to Poltaratsk, plus a permit to travel by rail to that city. After having received transfer it was discovered she wanted to escape, but they intended letting her proceed to Samarkand on a troop train and arrest her there; however, she travelled on a "special" which was taking some engineers to Kushk, and

got to Poltaratsk before they thought she had even left Tashkend. She got as far as an intermediate station, a journey of several days in the crawling, dirty trains, and having guessed that a hue and cry would be after her, and that the train would be searched on its arrival at Poltaratsk, slipped off into the city. Here she met my deportee, who never dreamed that she was an escaper, and indignantly showed her his order of ejection, signed by me. She read it without outward sign, and realized then what point she should make for, and she was able to slip away unostentatiously at night, to the *sarai* of a Poltaratsk merchant from the Caucasus, who, as good luck would have it, was in the habit of executing, for a consideration, sundry minor commissions for me amongst the enemy.

He put her in touch with a very decent Turkoman chief, who smuggled her through the picquets with which the Red Army ringed the city.

A long and arduous journey on a rough pony in sleet and rain, with a Turkoman escort, took her through unfrequented gorges and defiles of the Gulul Dagh, to an inaccessible smuggler's cave, high up in the cliffs. Here, amongst eagles and jackals, was spent a cold, wet, cheerless night, and in the morning, Kurds, smugglers by trade, took her from the Turkoman and brought her by another toilsome track to my standing patrol at Jiristan. She was now safe in Persian territory, and my N.C.O. sent a man galloping in with the news of her arrival. No one of us three combatant officers could leave Bajgiran on account of Red Army activity on our front, so our young Madrassi doctor, "Christopher Columbus," was set upon a levy's

horse, with a dresser and a couple of Kurds, and the *tout ensemble* given into the charge of a young and hustling Punjabi N.C.O.

Now, horses are not much used in Madras, and not at all by the *indigènes*, and the young Punjabi hustled to such good purpose that after twenty-two bouldery miles our young M.O. lurched exhausted into the post, muttering: “My God, how I hate horses!” His patient-designate applied first aid, and next morning they all made their joyful entry into Bajgiran. We were extraordinarily glad to see her safe and sound, and to congratulate her upon the happy outcome of her flight from the Bolsheviks, and on the courage which had carried her through everything.

Just as welcome was the safe and sound return of Awal Nur from Bukhara, a little fine-drawn, perhaps, after all he had been through, and carrying a nasty dose of the malignant Bukharan fever on him, but scorning even to think of “war-weariness.” He left that to lesser breeds.

The unstinting and tireless energy of my patrols had made it so unsafe for the enemy’s agents, emissaries, and propaganda carriers to cross the frontier, that the Soviet could find no one for the job. They had to think of some other way of bringing on the “revolution” that they yearned for in Persia and India. Over the door of “First Red Army” headquarters in Poltaratsk ran the legend: “Our mission is to set the East in flames.”

They remembered the efforts of their marionette Mirza Kuchik Khan, Major-General Dunsterville’s adversary in Gilan and Mazanderan the year before and resolved to imitate that scheme in Khurasan.

The commissars now mostly belonged to that race which, unlike the American who never learns it, the Irishman who refuses to forget it, and the Englishman who never remembers it, not only remembers history, but profits by its lessons. Perhaps this took them back to 1799, when another Red Terror exploited, armed, and subsidized Citoyen Tippoo, in Seringapatam, against the British.

One Khuda Verdi Sardar, a petty chieftain of the Topkanlu Kurds, owned a castle in the inaccessible crags of the Aleh Dagh, near Shirwan. Before Cossack and sepoy came upon the scene, he had derived a comfortable livelihood from brigandage. The loss of this made him a ready tool to the Reds' hand, and they decided to make the most of the little man, who strongly resembled a stag-beetle in his personal appearance. He was far from devoid of a certain driving power, energy, and ruthlessness, and he happened to be in 'Ashqhabad in the spring. The story of his effort needs a chapter to itself.

During all these months I had carried on with the mapping of the unknown and half-known bits of North Khurasan that lay within a week or ten days' march of us.

Afraz Gul was my technical assistant for this part of the work, and he was given the services from time to time of a couple of other Pathan officers and two or three N.C.O.'s who had topographical training. They all worked extraordinarily hard and showed the utmost devotion to duty: for one reason or another the work was constantly being interrupted and topographers taken away from mapping to deal with *shilluks*, the brigandage

of Ali Khan and others, for patrols for watching the Bolsheviks, and by actual fighting. During the winter the weather conditions were abominable; sleet, snow, and blizzards were the mapper's daily lot, and they frequently had to work in quasi-hostile country. Besides my journey towards Chachha and Rabat-i-Sharraf, I was able myself to go out for a few days at a time upon one or two other mapping expeditions, notably beyond the valley of Jiristan, out on to the 10,000-foot pastures of the Gulul Dagh, by Sarani, where great drifts of snow blocked all progress for man or beast. Most of the work was done by young and energetic Sardars and N.C.O.'s with the minimum of supervision.

During 1919 and early 1920, in spite of many interruptions from blizzards, deep snow, constant rain, actual fighting, and minor disturbances, they dealt with nearly 14,000 square miles of country, of which an appreciable proportion was up till then not only unsurveyed but unexplored. The details of this work would fill an article by themselves, but it may be of interest to show how such a large area was covered by an average of only two to three topographers in the time.

The essence of the matter was mobility. The topographers, assistants, cooks, and escort were all mounted and armed. As the country was unsettled, each party had to include six rifles, and four or five of these were usually Kurdish levies in our pay, armed and clothed by us. They were most useful as interpreters, messengers, and especially as foragers for the party, which, of course, lived on the country, except for tea and sugar. The surveyor's



assistant who carried the plane-table, and his cook, were fortunately both Punjabis, so could ride and carry carbines. Hence there were no unarmed mouths to be provided for. The *modus operandi* was this: the operator set up his table and made his first fixings from two or three peaks near Meshed which had been fixed by the Afghan boundary commission in 1885. The regular survey section that was employed on the line of communications very kindly went out of their way to fix a few more peaks in the Hazar Masjid Range for us. From these the plane-table could be set up with a very fair accuracy, and well enough to fix peaks many miles farther afield as points to hang more plane-tableing on.\*

The plane-table itself was not used for the whole area, of which nearly all was covered by work on cavalry sketching-boards; where there were Russian maps already of an area, the sketching-board was the only tool used for filling in detail. In short, we used the plane-table where the regular survey section uses the theodolite, and we used the "cavalry board" where they would use the plane-table. The accuracy thus obtained was amply sufficient for needs of the fighting troops, since there was nothing remotely approaching static warfare and the consequent squaring of maps for the artillery. In this way most of the valleys were traversed by a mounted N.C.O. with a "cavalry board," at the rate of some five miles an hour. The result of this work was then adjusted by means of the pantagraph to the

\* As an instance of the natural aptitude of the Pathan for topography, one young Yusafzai was able to make a useful plane-table sketch after ten days' instruction.

net made by the plane-table, sometimes with the aid of a pocket sextant. Important heights were obtained clinometrically on the plane-table, but less important ones by aneroid. We were careful, however, not to rely upon the latter instrument except for relative differences. Each topographer carried a hypsometer, which he boiled at his night's bivouac. Calculation in correcting boiling-points for air temperature was avoided by employing a graph drawn on squared paper, whereon the ordinates are altitudes, the abscissæ are degrees and tenths, and whereon several lines are provided, of different colours, at convenient differences of air temperature. The hypsometer height thus corrected was plotted on squared paper again, using the back of Army Form C 2121. On this the ordinates are again altitudes and the abscissæ times—*i.e.*, days and hours. The topographer not only plotted his hypsometric heights on this, but also his barometric readings, being careful to read and plot his aneroid whenever he boiled his hypsometer. The resulting curve made it extremely easy to correct the aneroid heights by inspection and a pair of dividers. A little work was done by traversing in narrow alleys on the subtense method, using a pocket sextant and a lance. This instrument was of use in places to replace a theodolite, and is certainly excellent for rapid work where great portability is important.

To reproduce the maps required for the immediate use of the troops we used ferrotype paper in a home-made printing frame. The results were not as satisfactory as we should have liked, since the paper is too fragile for much use in the field, especially as we had to employ the kind giving chocolate lines

on a white ground, to admit of roads, etc., being coloured in by hand. This was the best we could do, and we were fortunate enough to be able to prepare and print maps of the area in which fighting soon after occurred in time for issue to troop and company Commanders concerned.

The months that we spent at Bajgiran were not all work, nor alarums and excursions. For one thing, the hospitality of the Persian functionaries had to be returned, and especially when Hassan Khan, the Reis-i-Gumruq, was concerned, the proceedings were anything but dull. Hassan, like the tent-maker of Nishapur, did not spurn that alchemist who transmutes life's leaden metal into gold, and his conviviality was irresistible. Whether it was fiery arrak distilled from the rice of Mazanderan, or the golden fluid that the Nishapuri vintners squeezed from their grapes, was all the same to Hassan Khan, to whose tongue it brought erudite quotations from Molière and Hafiz, Sa'adi and Shakespeare, mixed with twentieth-century drinking songs in half a dozen tongues. Perhaps he was most addicted to a ditty called "Hassan Beg, chi guft, chi guft, to zun Kunid, Hassan Beg," though he was not averse to joining in "We are Fred Karno's army, no bally use are we," etc., etc.

When he was being taken home in the early hours, the dignified frock-coat and white waistcoat of an Imperial *fonctionnaire* did not prevent him from executing weird and warlike dances in the snow and mud of the main street, until the unsympathetic voice of Mrs. Hassan Khan would say from behind her door, in a tone that foretold several domestic

thick ears for her lord and master: "Hassan Khan, nasha shud?" (Hassan Khan, drunk again?).

We all liked the Gumruq, even though he did celebrate every imaginable occurrence, from a visit by another jovial soul, the fat "Commandant" of the gendarmes, to the innumerable birthdays of every member of the British and Persian Royal houses, so that at three in the morning our billet would be awash with the spilt arrak.

Ivan Petruski was another element of briskness at these gatherings: Georgian dinner-party etiquette seemed to involve his sitting down bristling with weapons from a Nagant to a Kinjal. There was no great depth to his potations, but his accommodation for them was shallow, so that on one occasion of his becoming warlike it was only the missing fire of a cap that saved the untimely demise of an esteemed guest. After that we always made him leave all guns and bowie-knives at the door.

Not the least appreciated phase of life in Bajgiran was one to which we were indebted to the Soviets of Turkistan and Transcaspia: and I refer to the succession of entertaining, vivacious, and usually not uncomely, Russian damsels that they sent to us for espionage purposes. Surviving commissars concerned will please accept this, the only notification of our thanks.

Meanwhile bigger events were moving over the frontier, a short thirty miles to the northward, in the city of Poltaratsk. When the Bolsheviki took the port of Krasnovodsk in February, they took a few weeks to settle down to the new conditions. The Moscow Mission lost no time in brisking things up in Turkistan, and so it was not long before they

turned their attention towards the invasion of Persia, a country they intended, and still intend, to use as a jumping-off place for their "psychological warfare" against British rule in India, and against the supremacy of the Nordic Aryan. The Red Army had the utmost aversion, after its experiences with the 19th Punjabis, to facing our troops, though torn with a desire to loot the yet fat valleys of Khurasan. The wool and wheat of fertile Darragez were almost irresistible in their attraction for the starved, ragged, and verminous Soviet forces.

Several times during March, April, and May did they effect concentrations of troops, aircraft, and artillery at Poltaratsk, and their objective was only too plain. Repeatedly these movements came to naught, usually because the wily Afghan became unfriendly and threatening, so that long trains full of Red troops had to be hustled painfully back from Poltaratsk to Kushkinski Post as fast as the ramshackle railway would allow.

Baku was still beyond the reach of the Reds, so that crude oil fuel was lacking for the locomotives. During the winter they had burnt in the fireboxes great stores of dried fish that had accumulated in the wharves of the Aral Sea; later on they commenced to burn every alternate sleeper of the permanent way, whilst travellers by the weekly passenger train had to descend every now and then, when the pressure failed, to dig up saxaul bushes in the adjacent desert, so that their monstrous, disproportioned fibrous roots might serve to raise steam again.

Their troops got very weary of being carted to

and fro across Transcaspian deserts. They lost a good many by desertion, not the least being the A.D.M.S. of one of their divisions, a pleasant-mannered Magyar who had had his medical training at Guy's Hospital. He told us the story of how Heaven sent Michael the Archangel to enquire about the Russian Revolution. Michael reconnoitred, but could, as a soldier, make nothing of the chaos. Then Gabriel, another Gentile, was sent out to scout, with a similar result. At last, Elijah, the prophet, went, and returned smirking. He announced, in a Yiddish accent: "Fse kharasho, nash' fse v myestakh"—that is to say, "All is well, every one of our tribe have got good jobs." Some say that he added: "I myself have a billet in the food control department."

The Soviet, however, egged on by Moscow, never lost sight of their goal in Persia (which they have since reached). For reasons of "propaganda" in Europe they avoided the idea of a simple invasion by troops of the established Red Army. They intended that Khuda Verdi Sardar should start an insurrection of the Kurds against the Persians: if it succeeded, he would invite the Soviet forces to help establish his national independence, thereby affording splendid material for Bolshevik pens in the Occident.

During April, May, and June, they smuggled no small quantities of modern weapons, of which they had no lack. Though the Kurd gun-runners led their great raking mules by night across any one of the hundred remote smugglers' tracks that crossed the mountains, the N.C.O.'s who commanded my patrols and detached posts contrived to keep me

informed of all these comings and goings and of the movements of Khudu, as we soon came to call the insurgent leader, and of his younger brother Allah Verdi Sardar.

But we were not allowed to stop these smugglings by force of arms, since higher authority laid down that it was an internal affair of Persia, and no doubt it was politic to give Khudu and the Reds enough rope to hang themselves with.

The affairs of the spring called for great and unrelaxing vigilance from all the outpost troops, and for the utmost diplomacy in my dealings with the Reds, since they would not fail to make great capital out of the least *faux pas*.

To watch Khudu the gendarmerie in the Shirwan district had to be strengthened, so our friend the young Arab Lieutenant, Mahomed Khan, was moved thither, and replaced by a brother officer of low birth, bad manners, and a crooked, treacherous character. This individual was subserviently over-polite in our everyday dealings with him, but lost no chance of intriguing against us behind our backs. He seemed to be descended from a long line of maiden aunts, and found a hundred cunning ways of impeding the work of the troops and manufacturing grievances against the men. We were rid of this creature by a *deus ex machina*.

In May, in order to give the men some relaxation, D—— and I got up sports for our combined commands. We had tent-pegging and tugs-of-war, horse-jumping and pony-jumping, sprints, high jumps, long jumps, and *khud* races, with wrestling on muleback, "alarm" stakes, and an obstacle race to provide comic relief. The *jawans*, Pathans,

Punjabis, Indians, Kurds, and Hazaras were hugely enthusiastic, and enjoyed themselves tremendously, whilst a couple of tent-pegging and jumping teams of Sikh cavalrymen paid us a visit from the next post, farther back at Imam Quli. On the second day the British officers were "at home" to the Risaldars, Subadars, and Jemadars of the troops, and to the Persian officials, whilst a few Kurd and Turkoman chiefs came to join the merry throng and to take tea with us. Amongst the guests were, of course, the supply sergeant and the one and only British soldier for many miles around. He was a young gunner who belonged to our Signal Troop, and sat long hours every day buzzing messages into Kuchan and Meshed.

The Deputy-Governor-Gendarme-Lieutenant, for reasons best known to himself, made it his business to help the young British gunner to more of the *vin blanc* of Nishapur than was good for him. To make matters worse, when dusk came and the meeting was breaking up, he took him to his quarters in the gendarmerie barracks, and there plied him with arrak.

D—— and I were tired with the business of arranging the sport of the day, so we used much profanity when the supply-sergeant came to tell us that the gunner and the Deputy-Governor had passed from carousal to a *rixe*, and from that to blows. The Lieutenant's jaw was half unshipped, and he lay groaning on his bed: the gunner, his arrak-fuddled brain half sobered by the realization of having struck an Allied officer, was in a curiously violent mood, and might well go on to bloodshed.

So his rifle was taken away from him, he was put



to bed without his boots, and the doctor had to supply a sedative to keep the lad from further mischief.

This was another *shilluk*, and one that promised to lead to no end of trouble; the least would be a rupture with the Persian administration—far from a desirable state of affairs when a Bolshevik invasion was imminent.

We were both distinctly annoyed, but a little thought reassured us. Though a despicable creature, the Lieutenant could not be divested of his status as an officer, nor could he be judged by any other standard than that which would be applied to a British officer. Now if a British officer drinks with a private and comes to blows with him, it is the officer who faces a court-martial rather than the man.

So the matter was reported to Meshed in a telegram that hinted at this point of view.

The young Signal Troop officer rode in haste to Bajgiran. After due cogitation he, too, realized that he could only charge his man with drunkenness, since the Deputy-Governor was the man to answer for the fracas. The young gunner, to his immense astonishment and relief, was fined half a crown.

The Governor-General superseded the gendarme officer; an awkward situation turned into a blessing in disguise, and we all breathed again. The thorn in our side was removed, so we could now devote all our time and thought to the Bolsheviks.

Soon the minor worries and the more pleasant humours of life in Bajgiran were replaced by the clash of arms.

## CHAPTER X

### THE STAGBEETLE OF GILYAN

SEVERAL large cargoes of arms—mainly of Russian *trokh linie*\* rifles, and of "Territorial" Lee-Enfields, but comprising also a dozen machine-guns—were run through from Poltaratsk to the castle of Khuda Verdi Wurkh, hard by Gilyan, during these three months of April, May, and June, 1920. It was even reported that a couple of Q.F. mountain guns and a Bolshevik commissar had found their way to the prospective insurgent's hold.

The situation was very ticklish, and I had every reason to be grateful to my Pathan Guide N.C.O.'s for the discipline and self-restraint they displayed.

Many people who ought to know better, and soi-disant soldiers at that, seem to think that a Pathan soldier is characteristically undisciplined. My own experience, after having seen him in eight campaigns and in six of the bloodiest battles of the Western Front, is that the Pathan knows what real discipline is, and plays up to it better than any other race I have ever seen. At the same time, he will not tolerate or respond to an officer who cannot shoot and climb, or whose chief asset is book-learning. Another superstition about the Pathan—a nation that, like the French in Europe, has in Asia burnt more powder than any other—is that he is treacher-

\* This means "three-line"—i.e., .300-inch calibre.

ous and unreliable. Historical facts tell us that not even Ulster or New Zealand showed a higher percentage of voluntarily enlisted killed to total population, in the German war, than did the two gallant races of Yusafzai and the Khataks.

Behold a banner of truce and a voice that spoke:  
 "Come, for we know that the English all are slain.  
 We keep no feud with men of a kindred folk;  
 Rejoice with us to be free of the conqueror's yoke."  
 Silence fell for a moment, then was heard  
 A sound of laughter and scorn and an answering word:  
 "Is it we or the lords we serve who have earned this wrong,  
 That ye call us flinch from the battle they bade us fight?  
 We that live, do ye doubt that our hands are strong?  
 They that are fallen—ye know that their blood was bright!  
 Think ye the Guides will barter for lust of the light  
 The pride of an ancient people in warfare bred,  
 Honour of comrades living and faith to the head?"

HENRY NEWBOLT.

Even on that bloody day of Givenchy,\* where the ground was entrusted to Punjabi and Pathan, it was maintained, in spite of some of the cruellest losses of the War. †

Heaven alone knows what a mental ordeal it must have been for those young Yusafzai N.C.O.'s to restrain themselves and their newly caught Kurdish following from making an onfall on to each of those cargoes of rifles that they knew were going to be used against themselves not much later, especially when they had to watch for these same smugglers in the precipitous labyrinths of the Kupeh Dagh, that they crossed by any one of a thousand rough and remote tracks, over a front of a hundred miles.

\* December 21-23, 1914.

† See sketch-map on p. 165 of Sir James Willcock's "With the Indians in France."

Besides this, their duty was to dog and shadow the filibusters and to keep me in touch with their movements.

Needless to say, the Persian authorities did nothing to help. Weak, corrupt, and vacillating, they preferred to drift with the tide, and to accept the enemy's bribes rather than run the risk of stopping a Kurdish bullet.

Meanwhile the Soviet were not idle. The ice of the Volga had melted; destroyers and even submarines, laboriously transported by rail piecemeal from Kronstadt, were quartering the Hyrcan Sea. Krasnovodsk was safe, and the poor remains of the Volunteer fleet, bereft of a home port after the fall of Baku, cruised about till their oil fuel was exhausted, whereupon they subsided into internment in Enzeli port. We even heard that they had offered their ships and crews for hire to various seaboard States either for war or commerce.

Two ships, I believe, *Kars* and *Australia*, went over to the Bolsheviks, after the customary massacre of officers, whilst the wretched port guardship at Ashurada was taken by boarding.

Krasnovodsk is in the heart of the wild nation of Yamud Turkoman, less civilized than their Tekke neighbours, and called "man-eaters" by the cultured Persians, just as are their Ural Cossack northern neighbours, who were driven to cannibalism by the sufferings in the desert of the survivors of an unsuccessful raid against Khiva in 1748.

The Yamuds did not put up much opposition to the Reds, probably on account of the distances over which were spread their *auls*, but away on the sea-girt sandy isle of Cheleken, amid the untold

wealth of spouting oil wells, there dwelt their liege lord.

Nikolas Nikolaievitch, the Christian chief of the Moslem Yamuds, had mingled in his youth a study for the Bar with a little military service of the more courtier-like kind. These chaotic years found him back in the country of his forefathers, and he now dreamt of creating a Turkoman State on the Caspian coasts. Perhaps by this his dream has materialized, and no doubt every Turkoman, Yamud or Tekke, lends a more willing ear to-day to the *iradeh* of Khan Yomudski, as the Russians called him, than to a Soviet's *prikaz*.

Captain Kazim Beg had been busy amongst this people earlier in the year; in fact, it was his propagandizing mission that my young N.C.O., Abdulla Shah so rudely butted into. The Captain seemed to have little success amongst the Turkoman; no doubt they, unsophisticated and hard-shell Moslems, distrusted the arrak-bottle projecting from his coat pocket, as he preached a *jehad* from Trotski, as much as his Frankish clothes.

He turned his attention nearer home, to the slums and foetid bazaars of Poltaratsk, Samarkand, and Bukhara. More, no doubt, by prospects of loot with safety, than by any dreams of a return to the days of Timur and Hulaku, the "white wolves of Turan," he collected, did this Othmanli Falstaff, 4,000 sorry knaves, the offscourings of Mid-Asia. They had no lack of modern artillery and arms, even if the commodity known as "heart" were wanting.

This army, officered by tub-thumping, astrakhan-capped lawyers, auctioneers, and actors of Tatar

race, collected itself at Poltaratsk: later it moved up to Firuza.

Meanwhile the cunning commissars cajoled the wily Afghan. The Soviet-Afghan defeat in the Jallianwalla Bagh at Amritsar, on the Khyber line, and in the storming of Spin-Baldak Fort by the Duke of Wellington's and the 22nd Punjabis, had rather disgusted our sporting Aryan cousins of Kabul and Kandahar. During late 1919 and early 1920 they mistrusted the Reds, their late allies, and even threatened to attack them at Merv and on the Pamirs, where a Red detachment had mobilized for an inroad into India. Soviet diplomacy kept them quiet by a promise to cede back not only Panjdeh and Takhta Bazar, but also the sub-Pamir countries of Shignan and Roshan, formerly a portion of the kingdom of Kokand.

Afghanistan has an Alsace-Lorraine, in the shape of Qunduz, Kataghan,\* and Balkh, that they raped from the Uzbek Princes in 1877. The Reds made much of this, to prevent any chance of the volatile Afghan helping his far less warlike coreligionist of Bukhara or Khiva, and border raids, skilfully promoted amongst the simple Jamshedis, kept the Afghan frontier Governors busy.

By this means, and by intrigues in Herat itself, by securing the arrest of military Governors respected by the troops, they were able to create a situation on the northern frontier of Afghanistan, which permitted them to rail most of the First Red Army westward to Poltaratsk, just in front of us, and, in truth, in sight of our outpost sentries.

\* Where the horse of the Kataghan places his tread  
The quick have no dwelling, no cerecloth the dead.

*Jagatai Saying.*

The Reds showed by a thousand unmistakable signs that they contemplated an invasion of Persia. It was my job to place myself in their shoes to follow their thoughts and generally to intrude myself, vicariously, into their home life; and soon I became convinced that they did not intend to march Red divisions, with the seal of Solomon on their new Potsdam-Hulaku headgear, up the main road into Persia, pot-valiant with guns and equipment though they were. Our few platoons of sepoys were more than their match, and they knew it.

It was on this account that they stage-managed the Kurdish insurrection, much on the lines of that other of theirs that was run by Mirza Kuchik Khan. It would be directed against the Persian Government, but this was equivalent to calling it an anti-British outbreak. When the revolt developed, Khudu, as we now called him familiarly, would, of course, proclaim his self-determination and a Kurdish republic, independent of Persia. Then, as in Azerbaijan, and in a hundred other countries, the patriot liberator would invite a Red army and its Soviets to help him maintain his independence against Capitalism and Imperialism.

Incidentally, the Kurdish insurrection, west of Bajgiran and in the South-East Caspian region, was calculated to draw our troops away from the guarding of the strategetically vital main road.

This incursion into Persia was the first that the Soviets had planned against any country that had, in the old days, been independent of Russia. To the Occidental juggins they preached the comradeship of the worker, disinterestedness, and pacifism; in the East they planned conquests. The legend

over the doorway of First Red Army Headquarters in Poltaratsk still ran candidly enough: "Our mission is to set the East in flames." For a few months our squalid frontier village was the centre and focus of world politics. The faith of even the most fatuously idealist believer in Bolshevik purity of motive could not but be shaken by their attack on Khurasan, and it was on Bajgiran that their efforts focused themselves, both political and military.

I was less cynical then than I am now. Rumours of an impending British withdrawal from Persia had been current since about March.

Every Staff Officer and soldier had preserved the most stringent secrecy in the matter, but a "temporary" fat-head in the accounts department had sent a long wire in "clear" dealing with the financial arrangements for the move.

Even the Red newspapers touched on the matter, and no doubt their commissars arranged revolts and troop concentrations accordingly.

At the end of June the Bolsheviks' preparations were nearly ready. Poltaratsk was full of troops and guns, and the "Adalat" force had overflowed into Firuza, the little hill-station only a few miles from the Persian frontier and the Kurdish marches. It was through Firuza, the valley of turquoises, that Khudu's gun-runners had set out, and in the old time of the Empire it was here that the hill-captains of the second Turkistan Army Corps had pursued the gay grass-widows of 'Ashqhabad.

Early in July the political atmosphere was electric. The Kurds in their Alpine pastures, and in their towered loopholed villages of the valleys, were



as polite and hospitable as ever to British officers and to my patrols, but we knew that the storm would soon burst. More than this, we even knew pretty well what tribes would take the field against us.

Aslam one day came back from a patrol, and as he was reporting to the dafadar-major, Ivan Petruski came to me, and with a portentously solemn face said: "Aslam has brought in a Persian wife." I burst out full of fury, to find a poor old dame of about seventy, that he had picked up exhausted in the crest of a pass, and brought into his billet.

July was only a few days old when D——'s subaltern, together with "Christopher Columbus," our little doctor, went off to Jiristan to pay a visit to the cheery Persian Customs man there, and incidentally to inspect the detachment of our Kurds, and, as far as the doctor was concerned, its sanitation (or the Kurdish equivalent for it).

The post, of only six men, was the nearest to headquarters at Bajgiran, and hence had been for some time without a Regular N.C.O., as these had all been needed for more important jobs farther afield.

The two officers rode in with an orderly or two and a couple of Kurdish troopers as escort, at about tea-time.

Very soon it became clear that the hilltops all around were being occupied by watchers, rifle in hand, whilst here and there armed men seemed to spring up from nowhere. A gun-running was in progress, and the subaltern with some eight rifles was in the middle of it.

As if to make matters quite clear, a polite brigand of the Topkanlu rode in with a note indited by

Khudu himself, in which he gave the subaltern half an hour to clear out of Jiristan, and the British twenty-four hours to clear out of Persia. He added that he had several hundred rifles at his call. The subaltern continued his tea with the doctor, and without undue haste. As he explained later, he was built for comfort rather than for speed. After tea he felt that since the morning's ride had been a long one, forty winks would not be amiss.

Then he dictated a polite response to Khudu, deploring his inability to comply with the "Stag-Beetle's" wishes. After dark he and the doctor decided to ride back to headquarters, as it had become clear that the gun-running was on a very large scale indeed, and that hundreds of Kurds were under arms and about.

The rough bridle-path from Jiristan to Bajgiran leads up a level-floored valley to the hamlet of Namanlu, three miles off, then it climbs amidst boulders up a narrowing valley, between rough slopes that, shelving steeply, at last leap sheer up into naked black and yellow cliffs of 10,000 feet. This climb takes the traveller to a pass of over 7,000 feet, and the descent skirts and sidles along the lower slopes of still another cliff-walled valley. At Bardar, a village eighteen miles from Jiristan, the valley widens and becomes really rideable, and a last lap of rolling stony plateau leads into Bajgiran.

It was pitch dark as they rode into the defile east of Namanlu, and here a sudden ragged volley blazed out at them.

The subaltern was the first casualty, but points were soon to be notched against the home team.

A leaden bullet from a "Berdanka," as the old Russian equivalent of our Martini-Henry is affectionately called, glanced off his pistol-butt and struck him in the hip.

The Kurds that laid the ambushade did not follow up their volley nor show any desire to close with the little party, so our young subaltern was able to ride into headquarters and to put us abreast of the situation.

In a few hours, indeed by daybreak, the whole countryside was up and doing. Every moss-trooper of that rough frontier was to horse on his little shaggy stallion, and cross-bandoliered and waist-bandoliered, riding to the standard of his chieftain. Several hundred men, all with magazine rifles, and half a dozen petty chiefs, joined Khudu.

Our patrols bumped into parties of insurgents, and a dozen skirmishes took place in a few days. The more distant detachments under the Regular N.C.O.'s marched in from their remoter valleys, alternately bluffing and hectoring their way through hostile and half-hostile villages. The wariness and bold front of their leaders carried the matter through, and soon all were concentrated at Jiristan. The houses of this cluster of mud abodes were put into a state of defence by the energy of the war-taught Abdulla Shah, and next day a couple more troops of Kurdish levies under an Indian Captain, with two or three more Regulars to stiffen them, rode from Kuchan to reinforce the threatened point, which, indeed, lay within striking distance of "Enver Pasha's Own" at Firuza.

A company of ragged, starved, cur-like Persian infantry came along with the levies.

Soon Jiristan was completely invested by Khudu's forces: D—— and I were the only unwounded combatant officers left at Bajgiran, and we, together with the Regular infantry, were strictly forbidden to leave that post, on account of the massing of the Red Army on the road in front of us.

The whole position was a little ticklish: the decisive point was Bajgiran; Jiristan was a side-show.

The side-show might have been left to itself for a bit, had not its garrison approached the end of their ammunition.

Communication with them was scrappy and uncertain; occasionally a man could dodge through the Kurdish watchers by night with a message.

To their credit be it said that the Kurdish levy, mercenaries though they were, remained to a man true to their salt, even when their own brothers were fighting for Khudu. Had not the levy and the majority of the Kurdish tribesmen remained on our side, our position must at length have become untenable from lack of supplies.

On the third day of the siege a runner came through by stealth, describing how the Persian infantry had fled in panic when a couple of them had been wounded in a very mild attack by a few of Khudu's adherents; he also gave a few disquieting figures about ammunition.

That night a patrol of about eight levies, under an impetuous young Regular N.C.O., an Awan by nationality, took out a couple of ammunition mules destined for Jiristan. He was a little too rash, tried to bullock his way through, and lost nearly all his men at the closest of ranges in an

ambuscade in a defile a mile or two west of Bardar. A slightly wounded man rode back with the news of this skirmish, which had not improved the situation at all.

Luckily, that afternoon another company of Regular Punjabi infantry marched in, composed of very youthful Khataks, and with them a troop of Regular cavalry and their Hotchkiss gun, to replace the Kurdish levies who were now all involved in the fighting and patrolling.

Lance-Dafadar Alam Khan and his ammunition mules had to be helped out of the hole they were in, his wounded taken back, and the ammunition got through to Jiristan. More important still was a message from the General ordering Jiristan to be evacuated and its garrison withdrawn to Bajgiran.

The insurgents were more cock-a-whoop than ever. Khudu had announced in the bazars that he had pistolled a British officer with his own hand. Save for the points that the British officer was still alive and quite hearty, that there was no pistol in the business, and that it was not Khudu who had pressed the trigger, the statement was quite true.

In a word, Jiristan had to be relieved in a way that would do away with any further commitments. A relieving column was formed. The four platoon commanders of the Khatak company, though they, of course, understood hill warfare, were new to the countryside, the Indian platoon commanders had no experience of fighting in the hills; the British officers were still tied to Bajgiran; and so my own Wurdi-Major (Assistant-Adjutant), a Pathan officer named Amal Baz, of the tribe of the Kuki Khel, led the little force. He had just come back from an

expedition whereby an unexplored portion of the great Hazar Masjid range had been mapped.

The tiny column fell in at twenty minutes' notice in the narrow cobbled main street of the village. Its composition was somewhat unconventional. The mounted troops were a couple of sections of sheepskinned Kurdish levies; next came a squad of Regular bombers, mainly Pathans and Hazaras of the Guides; for artillery the Wurdi-Major disposed of a single Lewis gun with its team of very youthful Khatak gunners under a boy lance-naik; and the main body was a platoon of Hazara foot levies under a wizen-faced Mongol officer.

I well remember the scene when Aslam, the senior N.C.O. of the column, collected the reports, and how the last rays of the setting sun fell on the furrows made by a Bavarian grenade that ploughed his cheek at Loos. He reported "All present and correct" to Amal Baz, who asked my leave to march off. The gendarmerie guard turned out and presented arms to them to the shout of "*Khabardar*," and in a few minutes the little army was filing out to the bleak plateau that forms the watershed between the Aral Sea and the Caspian basin. On for a few miles, down a cliff into the Bardar Valley, the column's procedure was straightforward enough. Files of mounted Kurds galloped out to screen the front and flanks in the established fashion. After Bardar, however, the valley walls closed in, and the column and its mules became exposed to the fire of possible snipers on the flanking hills.

Soon the "point" of the column came upon Lance-Dafadar Alam Khan and his wounded men under cover behind some boulders in the gorge. A

rattle of fire broke out, and in a very few moments the column was engaged with the enemy. Amal Baz lost no time in sending back the wounded of the original patrol. The worst case was an old Kurd who had been hit in seven places. He told everyone about it in lurid phrases, which carried conviction more from their forcefulness of diction than by any comprehension of their meaning. A bullet had gone in at one side of his head and out at the other, but he soon arrived, slung across the straw-stuffed Persian saddle of a mule, to the care of young "Christopher Columbus."

It was still light enough for Amal Baz to fight his way up towards the pass. He was confronted with a novel tactical problem.

According to that chapter of Field Service Regulations which deals with frontier mountain warfare, he should have placed infantry picquets on the hills to either hand, to cover the advance of his main body up the rough valley floor.

Not only were the cliffs far too steep for an armed man to climb, but his force was so tiny that the placing of three or four picquets would have brought him to the end of it. Again, hill picquetting is so slow that he might well have taken four or five days to reach Jiristan in this fashion.

With that instinct for minor tactics that is inbred in the Pathan, he thought out a fresh plan in a moment.

The lower slopes on each side were steep, rough with tumbled boulders, and hampered by cedar and birch scrub, and it was along these that for fourteen miles the insurgents had placed their sangars full of riflemen.

These sangars commanded the track from both sides, and their unchecked fire—for they had a vast amount of ammunition—would render movement up it almost impossible.

Amal Baz explained his plans in a few moments to the N.C.O.'s. The youthful Khatak and his gunners were to take their weapon up to the crest of a spur that dominated the opposite slopes, across the valley, and the sangars that dotted them.

The infantry and bombers would advance up to these same defences, and when the enemy's fire began to tell, bursts of fire from the Lewis gun would sweep the sangars, making the Kurds keep their heads down. This succeeded admirably. A line of bayonets and bombers, led by the dogged and unswerving Aslam, clambered and sweated up the rugged slopes. Aslam had been thrice severely wounded in France, Belgium, and Africa, once indeed desperately, yet nothing could exceed his ardour for any new fray, even after seven years of fighting. The Kurd had no stomach for the cold steel nor for the hateful stammer and crack of the fire that came from over their heads; the bombers got no chance to close.

Soon enough the insurgents again made a stand higher up by some old ruins; this time the gun came into action obliquely from the south side of the valley, enfilading them in a manner very disturbing to their peace of mind.

The process was repeated till night fell, and the sweat-drenched, panting men slept where they lay behind boulders or in crannies of the rocks, covered by a few sentries, whilst an occasional Kurdish



bullet splashed on to a boulder or ricocheted humming into the night.

A rough goat-track led from just behind the point that the column had reached, to the towered valley of Ogaz, the very hotbed of the insurgents, dotted with the towers and strongholds of their chiefs. From here, an enemy with a Pathan's enterprise and dash would have come in on the Wurdi-Major's rear, so we sent out from Bajgiran a small picquet to watch this for him. Away on his right several rough tracks led, as he was well aware, to Firuza, but a dozen miles away, where the very much greater "Adalat" force lay. This constituted a grave menace; had it intervened, he would have had to fight his way out as best he might.

Before the first spears of dawn had glinted up from the Caspian, fighting commenced anew. Everywhere and every time the Kurd attempted to make a stand, he was turned out by the nicely judged combination of fire, bomb, and bayonet. By midday Amal Baz had made good the crest of the pass, and sent me a very reassuring message to say he had done so. The last twenty-four hours had been an anxious time, for we had no real means of knowing the fighting value of the Kurd, or to what heights he could be brought. It was a grave responsibility to send out a column to tackle seven times its strength of the enemy, but risks have to be taken. Had the enemy been Mahsuds or Mohmands, or even the more easy-going Bunerwal, a brigade with artillery would scarcely have been enough for the job, and it might well have lasted a week.

The column spent all that evening and well into

the night hunting their enemy down westwards turning out small knots from rock clefts with the bayonet, taking snap-shots at retreating figures in the birch thickets, or sweeping defences with the Lewis gun.

Very early next morning the advance was checked a little by a more stubborn defence of Namanlu, the little thatched hamlet, bowered in poplars and circled with tiny stone-walled fields.

Here the fine chestnut waler horse that I had lent Amal Baz was hit. The column closed up to the defensive nest: the Khatak lance-naik enfiladed the walls from a high spur. He judged a range of fully 800 yards to a hair, and a good burst from his weapon killed seven Kurds, who were leaders and the backbone of the resistance. Namanlu was indeed Khudu's own "battle headquarters" for the siege, but this so disheartened them that they refused to face the rush of our bayoneteers and bombers that cleared the village. The thatched roofs caught fire, and soon the mounted men were galloping over Kurdish fugitives into the outworks of Jiristan to join hands with their besieged friends.

By the time the sun was well up nothing remained in that green little valley to tell of the fighting but a row of stiffening Kurdish corpses laid out in front of the Customs post, and the black curls of smoke tinged with orange flame rising straight up in the still morning air from the homesteads of Namanlu.

Amal Baz had dealt the rebellion a blow that sealed its early doom. The enemy had already melted away by midday, though when relievers and relieved marched back together to Bajgiran, the platoon that D—— took out to deny the Ogaz

track and to cover their withdrawal had a brush with a few wandering bands. One of the sepoy's of the Indian platoon was wounded, and D——'s pony took a bullet through his neck.

Khudu's following abandoned him in the next day or two: a small column made a reconnaissance from Kuchan into the Ogaz Valley with hardly a shot fired at it.

The General Staff of the First Red Army were very disgusted with Khudu; they vented their spleen by sending him rude messages to his castle near Gilyan requesting the return of funds advanced and of arms lent to him. The various young Khans of the Topkanlu, the Chapashlu, the Zafaranlu, and the Zeinadillu who had followed or backed Khudu came sheepishly to see us over a cup of tea, ingenuously explaining that Khudu was a plausible and too convincing talker, that had led them astray.

What they really wanted was protection from the Persian authorities, who were far too solicitous of their own hides to tackle Kurds under arms, but were quite willing and ready to torture any whom our jawans might round up. Khudu was soon encircled in his fortalice by a motley assemblage of excessively armed and bandoliered scallywags. I have always noticed in the East that the fewer arms and the less ammunition a man carries, the tougher fighter is he likely to be. Witness the Afridi or the Orakzai of the Peshawar border, who makes twenty rounds last him for a week's fighting. On the other hand, he does not use it for making misses with.

A day or two later the Indian picquet on the Ogaz track was relieved by one of levies, and during

the night it was engaged with some remnants of the insurgents.

I went out next day with a platoon of the Punjabis whose rôle was to clear the valley of any wanderers. During a long summer day we swept the defiles nearly up to the pass, our little Lewis gun always handy. It was dark as the young Khataks marched and clambered down the rough trail through an outlying Kurdish farmstead of Bardar. Suddenly I came upon a tall, long-cloaked Kurdish figure, who eyed me for a moment in the gloom and remarked in Turkish, "Janum, Aghri bashi!" as one who should say, "Good Lord! here's the head brigand himself." This was a cruel blow after our efforts on the side of law and order, but perhaps we were not quite as sleek and tidy as we would have been for a levée at St. James's.

The Adalat force melted away from Firusa back to Poltaratsk, and the Soviet decided to postpone the invasion. By a bad bit of Staff work, the order cancelling the various inroads did not reach a certain bandit who had been detailed to lead a descent upon a place called Rabat-i-Khakistar, a march or so from Kelat-i-Nadiri.

Zero hour arrived and he made his onfall upon the little Persian telegraph office there, not before the Reis-i-Telegraf had sent off a lurid message about what was going to happen to him. A section of our mountain battery, a squadron of Regular cavalry, and a company of infantry were out after the raider from Meshed before you could say "knife," but his friends had already explained to him that he had made a fool of himself, and he fled away back into Turkistan.

A satisfactory feature of these two little wars was the fact that my men had, at the cost of very severe labour, been able to map the ground over which the troops fought, and we were thereby able to print off ferro-prussiate copies enough for all the platoon and troop leaders concerned. It is not always that the ground one maps beforehand is that over which the enemy decides to come.

Meanwhile Khudu, who had taken refuge in his château, that crowned a crag some miles from Gilyan, was himself beleaguered. The Sardar of Bujnurd sent 600 of his retainers in response to the Governor-General's call for aid; they made a cordon round the hold, and grazed their wild, long-tailed ponies in the lucerne and standing corn of the unhappy Persian peasants.

To them came a sheepskinned horde in long-skirted, many-pleated black frock-coats, with every imaginable sort of weapon—French artillery *mousquetons*, with their three-round magazines, Austrian Wrndls, Australian Martinis from Muscat, Russian three-line, old Berdankas, and excellent new Othmanli Mausers. There were Firuz Kuhis, Jamshedis, Baluchis, Hazaras, Taimanis, Timuris, Kurds, Afshar, and Turks, and a dozen other strange tribes from the Afghan and Russian frontiers.

The Persian contingent consisted of a battery of mountain artillery. The guns had once been the pride of St. Chamond, but a decade of rust and neglect had put them on a level with the gold-laced Persian Colonel who did not know how to open their breeches. In any case, the gallant gunners declined to go within rifle range of Khudu's loopholes, and as the guns, from advanced corrosion, could not now

shoot farther than a Russian "3-line," a sort of stalemate resulted. British intervention was still not allowed, though at last the Persian Colonel was forced to ask for the loan of half a dozen Punjabi gunners to show him how to serve his guns. Before they could arrive, Khudu solved the problem by slipping away at night through the cordon, doubtless with the aid of palm-oil. He fled through the hills to Poltaratsk to take refuge there.

His bubble was pricked, and this was the last the world heard of Khudu.\*

Meanwhile our official evacuation orders had arrived. Very secretly, by night, we brought in our patrols and sentry groups, blew up a bridge or two on the main road and a revetment wall, and marched in the chill early morn towards Kuchan.

Some more riff-raff Persian infantry took over, and we felt very sorry for the Gumruq and our Persian and Kurdish friends, in view of the Soviet's invasion that was now a foregone conclusion, and the massacres that would accompany it.

Hardly had we marched out but the Reds seized a poor old strolling singer, a white-haired Kurd, that used to liven our long evenings with *sitar* and song. They accused him of being a British spy. Then, driving a great stake into the ground where a lonely goat-track crosses the crest of the frontier range, they nailed him to it, driving great iron railway spikes through his ears. A couple of friendly

\* After the operations were over, I received the following signal message:

To Cdg. Bjn. Folg. recd. Begins aaa inform Major Blacker and Capt. D—— that these private wars must now cease. League of Nations. Ends. For necy. action adsd. Cdg. Bjn. From force staff.—M.D.

Kurds found his body by chance a few days later.

On account of the scarcity of water in the desert marches, the force moved southwards towards Baluchistan in four separate columns at ten-day intervals.

The column of which I was second-in-command comprised the Punjabi and the Pathan company of the 1st Battalion, 124th D.C.O. Baluchistan Infantry, besides my own detachment and some cavalry details. We marched off with 600 camels, a number which grew to 1,600 as we collected and took along stores from the supply depôts of the lines of communication. The protection of this huge mass from possible Afghan raiders was hard work for the handful of troops. Every day my men were either advance-guard or rear-guard, whilst the infantry furnished flank guards and escorts for the horde of camels that stretched its weary length for several miles.

After the first few stages on the ridges and plateaus of the northern ranges, we marched at night to avoid the heat of the day.

Eight hundred weary miles, at two miles an hour, to conform with the camels measured tread, dragged out their interminable length. Every few days we would march into a town or village at midnight, and a day's halt relieved the brain-numbing that long night marching causes. One's mind gradually gets inured to the monotony, and in a month or so an eight- or ten-hour march seemed shorter than a three- or four-hour journey had been before. Such is the effect of imagination.

As we got to railhead, raiders from the Afghan

side attacked a station farther up, carrying off a senior European railway official to captivity in Kandahar.

Our column was delayed a few days to deal with any more efforts like this, but at last the dusty, grubby train, which seemed to have oblong wheels, drew into the Quetta station from the west, and our long trail was ended.

This last long march from the Russian frontier was but a very small portion of our three years' Odyssey in Turkistan and Khurasan. My little detachment could not have covered much less than 9,000 miles in these years, excluding railway journeyings. This march over innumerable snow- and ice-bound passes, great glaciers, and illimitable expanses of waterless desert seemed formidable enough to us as we looked back to it, but we reflected how infinitesimal a portion it made of the eighty years' toils and journeyings of men of the Guides all over the heart of Asia. Not only has every city from Moscow to Tiflis and to Lhasa seen a Guide in uniform or in disguise, but there is not a country or a province in all that immensity of the old world whose pioneer mapping is not based on the work of the skilful fingers of one sketching with his life in his hands.

What results and achievements that I was fortunate enough to compass were due above all to the stout hearts, coolness, and devoted loyalty of my N.C.O.'s and men, whether veterans of the bloody fields of Artois and Flanders or recruits straight from their depôts.

No one ever forgot what was due from a Guide, no man ever uttered a breath of complaint at any



hardship, nor, as the never-to-be-forgotten father of the Corps phrased it, no one "was ever taken aback in any emergency." On the contrary, were some hazardous venture toward, it became my task to restrain the eagerness of men, already sorely battered in many campaigns, to thrust themselves into fresh perils.

KHLAS SHEWE DE.

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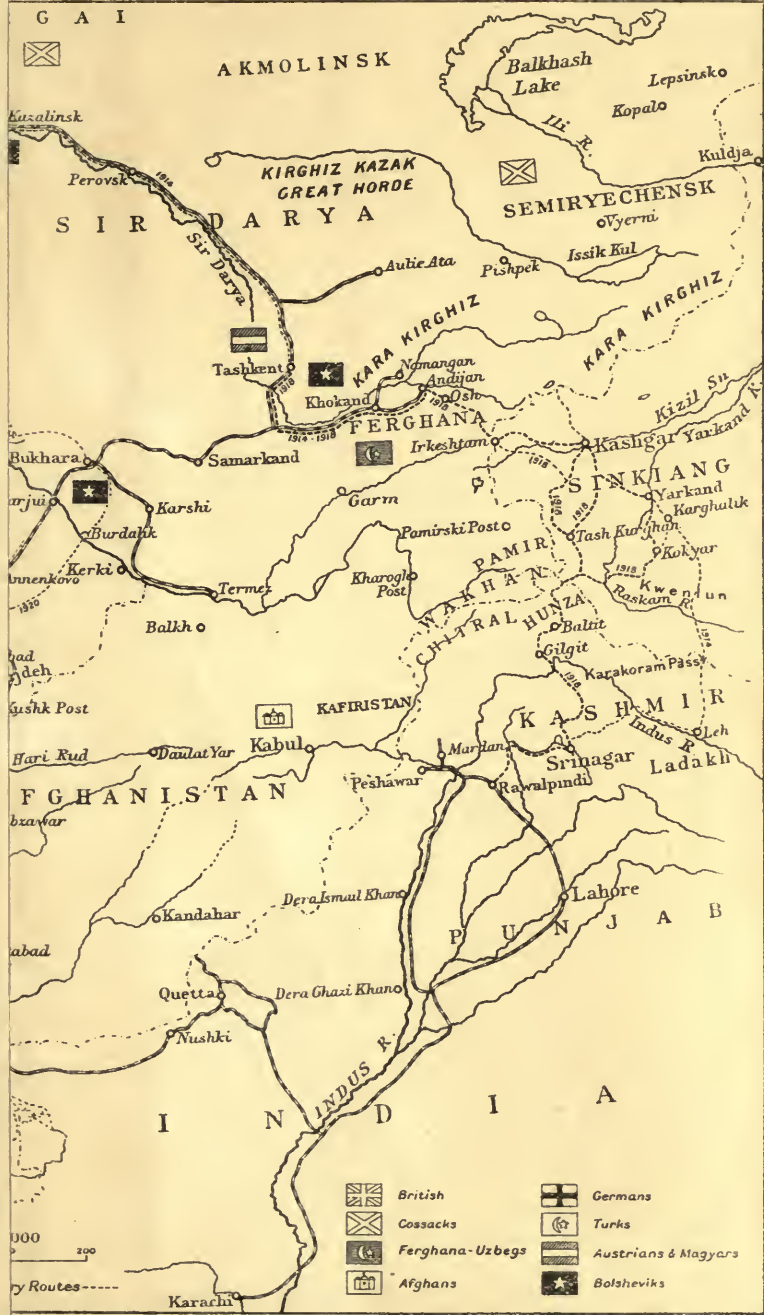
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