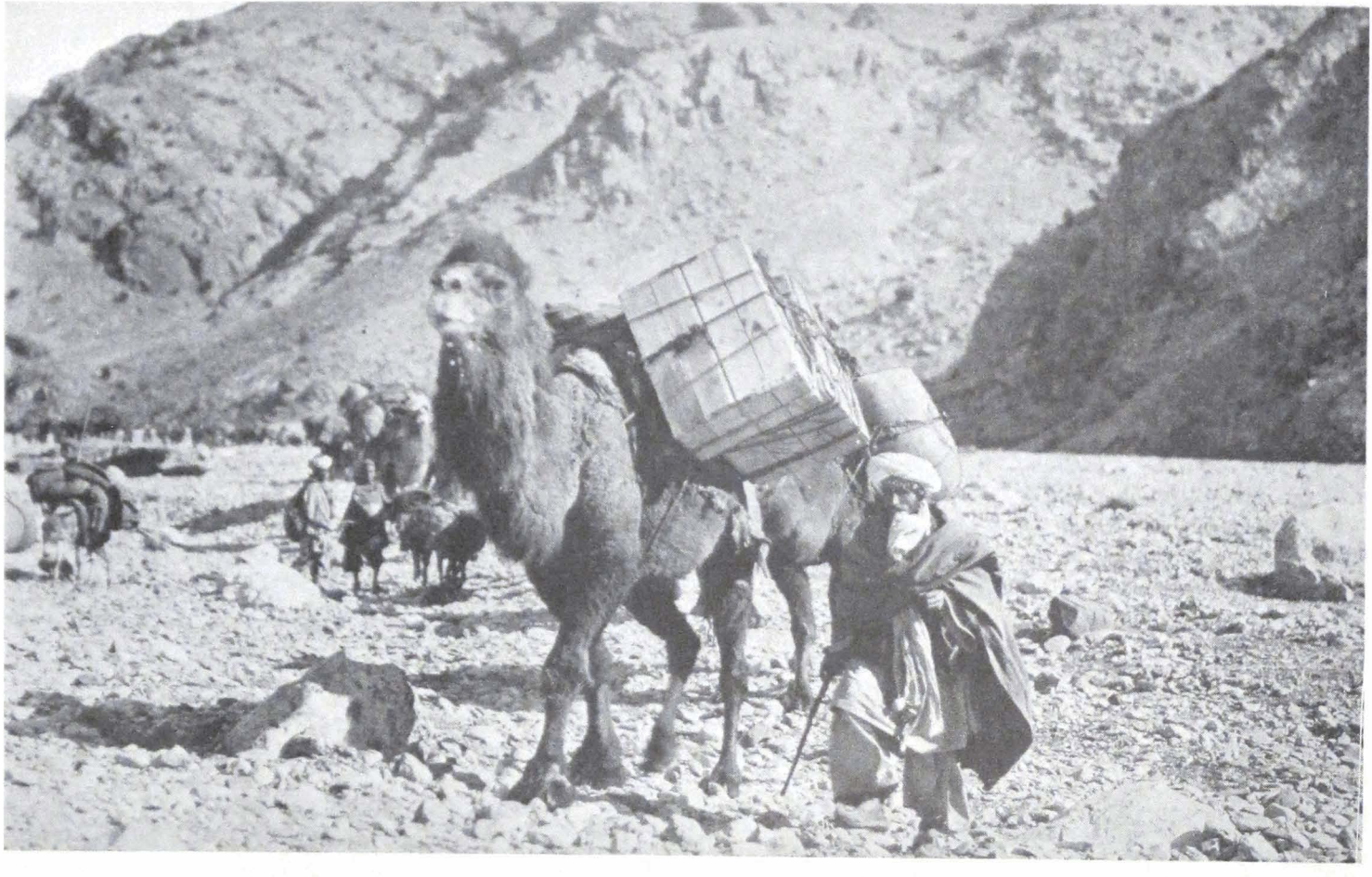

A Khyber Caravan

RETRACING GENGHIS KHAN

By

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LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD COMPANY
Boston — New York — 1937

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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FOREWORD

IT is several years—how many, reckoning from the autumn of 1928?—since the events recounted in the following pages took place, but in writing the story (which we started to do purely for our own entertainment), the time element was curiously bridged, and it all came back as vividly as though it had happened week before last.

We make no claim to fame as explorers, nor do we set ourselves up as authorities. We have merely tried to put down our impressions and experiences—the story of a hazardous journey through what is considered one of the wildest and most dangerous states in Asia; a country which was on the verge of revolution as we traversed it. Three weeks after we crossed the frontier, its inhabitants, armed almost to a man, overthrew a government which showed too marked a leaning toward things European, slaughtered thousands, and forced the Emir himself to flee ignominiously into permanent exile. Had we not been blissfully unaware of the brewing discontent and hatred of modern innovations, we might never have ventured into the deserts and mountains and trackless distances that are Afghanistan—and thereby missed something that will live with us always.

FOREWORD

Afghanistan is still a land untouched by time; untamed, threatening, and mysterious as always. It will be explored someday, of course, but probably by well-appointed, carefully organized expeditions with ample comfort and protection. Meanwhile, we hope that in recapturing for ourselves the zest and excitement of the journey, we have succeeded in transmitting some of the flavor of our adventure to the reader.

JOHN A. HERRMANN
CECIL ROBERT BORG

CALCUTTA

"If you've 'eard the East a-callin',
You won't never 'eed naught else."

CHAPTER ONE

CALCUTTA

AFGHANISTAN?" The Englishman looked at us keenly. "I wouldn't, you know. It's not healthy to go beyond the Khyber."

It was in the big cool-floored rooms of the Bengal Club in Calcutta where we were dining with him. Through with college and looking for adventure, the two of us felt as though we had the world at our feet.

We had come from New York and we'd have to go back to New York. Our lives ahead were all mapped out. Once back and we'd be caught for good—jobs, settling down, marrying— It would take more than this Englishman to discourage us—but we listened politely across the broad white cloth.

We hadn't just happened on Calcutta—Bob and I. We'd met there with mechanical precision. Nothing we do is casual. Everything is planned and plotted. It may be unfortunate, but that's our make-up. In a way, it's what's made our trip so unusual. We had met because five months before, in a New York City apartment, we had said we'd

meet. Said we'd meet in the Great Eastern Hotel, Calcutta, India, on September 5th, at 10 A.M.

Then we parted. Bob went to Europe and I westward.

The date was made with a laugh. And when I took the train north from Ceylon toward Calcutta—the last lap—I would have been willing to bet that Bob was cool and comfortable in Westchester, laughing at the picture of me bustling to keep an appointment. We hadn't written each other. We'd both been moving and couldn't have got mail anyway. When I struck Calcutta I was convinced we wouldn't meet. Things don't happen that way.

I'd always been a Kipling fan. And that first view certainly went home. Right opposite the station, the first thing I saw was the Bridge—the famous one that carries more human traffic than any other in the world. There was traffic, all right! Bullock carts rumbling along, rickshaw after rickshaw, and a never-ending stream of humans. They were darkskinned and turbanned, a sluggish, weary, time-forgetting stream. A few whites moved more alertly among them, tall and helmeted. It was Modern India. I forgot Bob.

The Great Eastern Hotel didn't help either. When I came to, I rushed there—tried to—as if I were behind a Manhattan taxi-driver. It's the finest hotel in India—a good modern, up-to-date building—but in front of the main entrance a couple of white bulls were lolling at their ease. They're everywhere in India—those sacred white bulls. But it finished me. How could I hope to find Bob in there! This was too far from Times Square.

I followed the boy—one of the thousands that get under your feet like puppies in all those big oriental hotels—and went up to the room we'd engaged five months before. I must have been still in a daze when I registered. When I reached the room, there, to my everlasting surprise, was Bob! Sound asleep on one of the beds! I was two hours late, but he'd been on time!

It wasn't so funny to find him asleep. He always manages to sleep. And I accepted the fact that he was wearing *my* socks and *my* shirt—after five months' separation. But that he should be there at all—!

Once together we felt that the world was ours. We could do anything. Back home, looking out of one apartment house across an asphalt street to another apartment house, India seemed the most romantic place in the world. Once in it, lying flat on our backs, steaming, we wanted more than India could give.

When I was a youngster my father used to read me stories about the "hills"—"a volley from cover—a corpse in the clearing"—that kind of thing. Kim's Afghan horse-trader, Mahbub Ali. The hungry eyes of the Boondi Queen. I'm sure it was his escape. He was dreaming of what he'd like to do and never could. But what he couldn't even dream was that I'd be here on the underside of the world, ready to make the dream come true. But at any rate, Afghanistan became my goal from the moment I struck India; and strangely enough, for we never agree, Bob had the same urge. We couldn't remember that we had ever spoken

of it in New York, but all we wanted now was Afghanistan.

That was why, when the Englishman looked at us hard across the table, we drew back.

"I've lived up 'in the blue,'" he told us. "And I'm jolly well pleased to get away from there alive."

He was a casual sort of chap. One eyebrow had a pleasant way of cocking up higher than the other when he was making a point. He talked for the most part in a dry, unemotional voice, sipping a whisky and soda. But when he said "in the blue" all the nonchalance left him. His eyebrows straightened into a frown.

"You see, I had a friend up there. In the Khyber garrison. It's his experience that finished me." His back was to the north, and he squared his shoulders as if aware of something behind him—unwilling to face it.

He told us that this friend of his went out over the line into Afghanistan against all orders. The memory of thirty thousand British wiped out at one fell swoop some years back was still green in the garrison. And there were just enough raids from the Afridi in the hills right within India to make the soldiers watch their step. But this chap went out on a lark—went out and got sniped off from behind a rock, almost within sight of the outpost. The soldiers heard the shot and after dark two of them went out—at the risk of their lives—to search for him. They found his body. Not only was it thrown aside as carrion, but it had been mutilated obscenely by the women of the tribe. They carried it back

for decent burial. "It's a pleasant little habit of the Afghans," he commented, "that about the women. They always do it —after death."

He was like the Ancient Mariner, bound to tell his tale. "There's probably not a country in the world that is more dangerous for a foreigner. It's much worse than if they were wild savages. These people are shrewd—they have to be to live up there at all. And they're decidedly unfriendly—always have been. But particularly are they so now. Their Emir is for introducing modern life—and they won't have it. Don't want anything to do with modern life or moderns! As a matter of fact, they probably won't let you in. The ban on Westerners is severe. It's not just talk. You probably won't be able to get a visé, and if you do, you'll jolly well be committing suicide!"

His earnestness, and the way he turned his back to the north so deliberately, made the shivers run down our backs in spite of the Indian heat.

"The Afghans consider their country the first of nations," he went on slowly. "Every man looks upon himself as the equal of all others. People as proud as that are bold, you know—and cruel. Moreover, they are inured to bloodshed from infancy. They're Mohammedans, fearless of death. Nowhere in the world is murder committed on such trifling grounds or with such general impunity. Believe me, I know of what I speak!"

We thought of that evening a good many times in the weeks to come. There was an air about that club—a sense

of solidity—that we'd never felt in any club at home. It is the best in India, I believe, and we were duly impressed to be there at all. The few men lounging about were elderly and dignified for the most part. But they had—all of them—a merry eye; and the number of whiskies they got away with was phenomenal. But the only effect was to make their cheeks a little ruddier. They were calm and slightly amused, and very, very sure of themselves. None of the striving you see in Americans; that desire to "get" and be "felt." These men were generations beyond that. They were rulers, if ever we saw rulers. And our host was one of them—assured and a little dry. That was why his warning impressed us.

No one else we talked to was any more enthusiastic than he about our plan. Of all countries to choose for a little trip, Afghanistan, it seemed, was the worst. The natives are armed to a man, unlike India, where firearms are forbidden by the government. What's more, the Afghans are constantly fighting among themselves, murdering and plundering. Their fields can't support them, they have no industry whatever. They'll kill a man for his purse—and why not?

Moreover, so far as we knew no American had yet gone through. We did wonder at that—Americans with all their money and nerve and curiosity. We didn't see how they'd been able to resist. "Like being able to refrain from stepping into a cholera epidemic," some friendly soul explained. But of course that only hurried us. We had to make it

before anyone else got the idea. In fact, the whole of the six weeks following, when we should have been enjoying India, we were hurrying toward Afghanistan to beat someone else to it. In India—to be rushed! It may have been the New York in our systems. Born there you are doomed. You never know leisure. But still—to go as pioneers into the least civilized country in the world might reasonably spur on anyone.

The greatest difficulty with Afghanistan was that we were going to be taken for Englishmen there. Everyone said we would. And the popularity of Englishman among Afghans is notorious. All the Britishers we met seemed to feel like our friend who lived "in the blue." They were glad to move south.

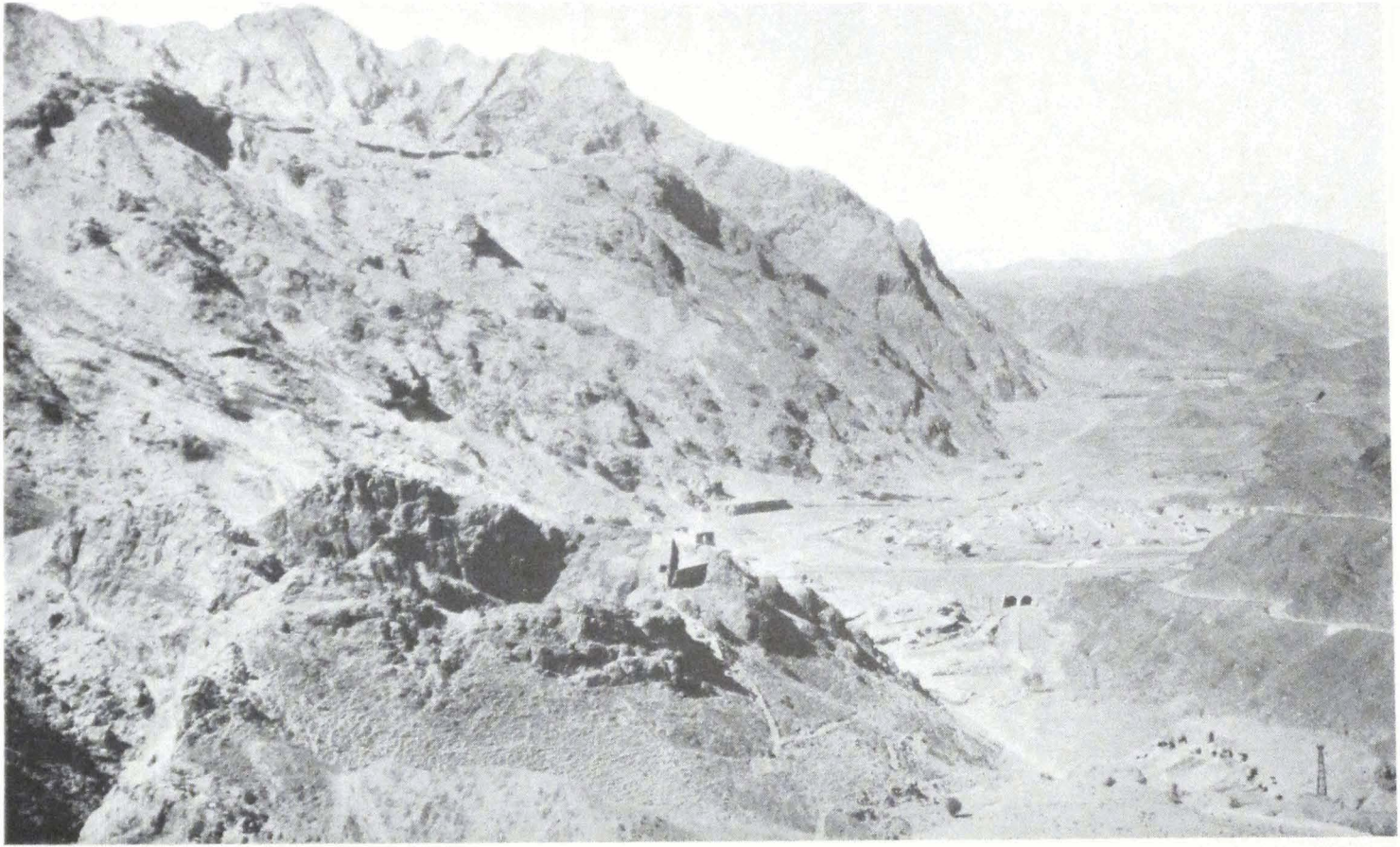
The American consul greeted our idea with perhaps the least enthusiasm of all. We felt not the slightest breath of sympathy emanating from him. He told us that America had no representation in Afghanistan, that we would have no rights, no protection, no appeal; that he could do nothing for us but endorse a letter which we should write, declaring our purposes, to the Afghan minister in Simla, who might or might not give us the necessary visé. Kabul, the capital, was the very farthest we would be permitted to go at best—and that was two hundred and fifteen miles by camel! When we left him we felt chilled.

That letter to the Afghan minister was the first of our great epistles. In fact, letters occupied much of our time from that moment on. But little did we know then. We

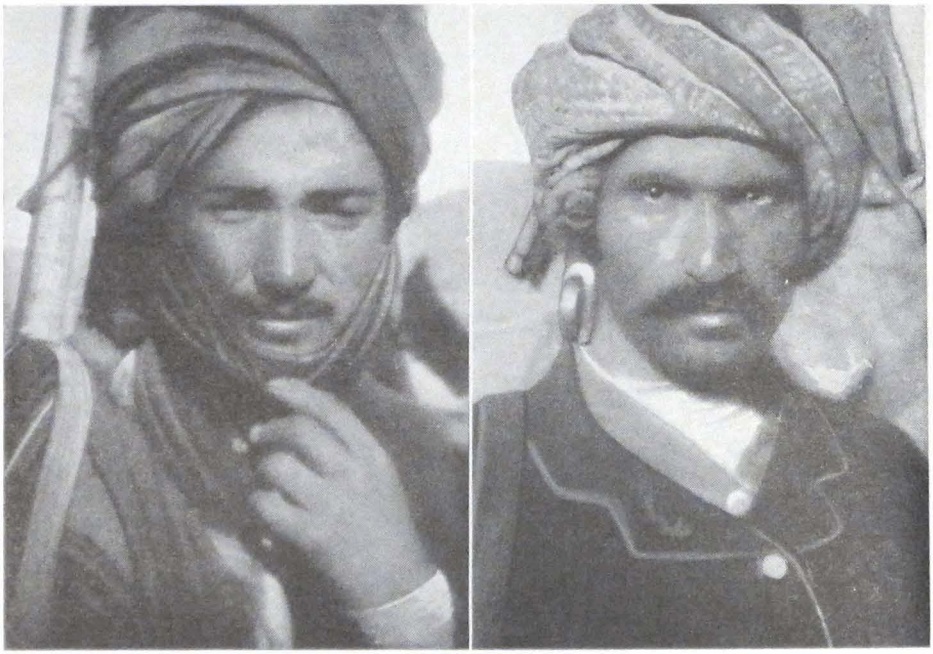
spent two nights writing that letter, when we might have been wandering about the bazaars or snooping into the red-light district. Our whole trip north was planned around the delivery of our letter to the minister. As for girls, we were far too busy to be thinking about them. In fact, we had been highly amused when our Englishman of the Bengal Club told us with great emphasis just where nice girls could be "met." "You may not want to admit you've been there," he told us, "but one town you can't afford to miss is Mussoorie." Mussoorie, a hill town near Delhi, mecca for the ladies. The time came when Mussoorie stood for a mood—when we got so sick of each other's jokes and each other's faces that we would have given anything for a half-hour's kidding with a pretty girl. Even now the name shoots a remembrance of a pang—for we never got to Mussoorie!

But we were still in Calcutta, and in vigorous pursuit of an idea. This trip was not to be just a "stunt." We were in dead earnest. As I said before, this was our one chance to do something on our own. We hadn't breathed Afghanistan to our families. What their stand would be we knew without asking. Anyway, how could we—with them 15,000 miles away and the thought only twenty-four hours old? Families were not entering our schemes for once. We did plan to cable them as we stepped off into the Khyber, but not before.

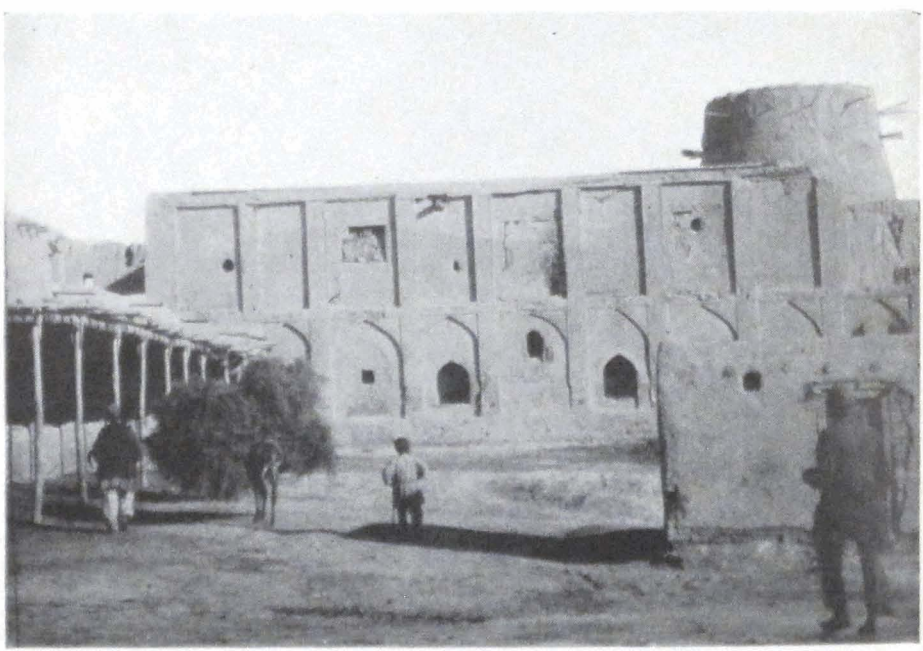
Moreover, we'd both had too much done for us. We were "tired of soft living," we said. And many a cold night in



The Last British Outpost—Afghanistan Ahead



Some of Our Afghan Acquaintances



Caravanserai at Islam Kala

Afghanistan did we eat those words! Bedbugs in Kashmir, mud in Turkey—we never got that hard! But we were seeking something more or less significant. It would be in the way of justification. We didn't talk much about this, but I think we both felt it rather keenly.

What we wanted to do most with this fleeting freedom was to taste danger. That may sound foolish; but when you've never been up against the real thing you wonder just how well you'll stand up under it. We wanted to find out. We are introspective, both of us, always searching for a motive. Unquestionably, it cramps your style. You can't forget yourself when you are continually looking yourself over to see how you're taking things. That was our trouble: we were always outsiders looking in—on an unbelievable world. Observers, and what we were observing—far more than Afghanistan, Persia or Turkey—was ourselves. We selected Afghanistan with its hostility and its lawlessness, its poverty, lack of telephones, telegraphs, railroads, even highways—simply to measure our courage, if any. So the worse the tales we heard, the more anxious we were to be off.

Not that we came to this decision directly. Far from it. As it took us two nights to pen a note to the Afghan minister, so it took us six weeks of concentrated talk to get to the Khyber. Never a move was made without a complete and thorough thrashing out. At college and at home it had always been the same. Temperamentally, we are at the poles. I'm for pushing on, Bob for thinking it over. Which was all right in America, but here, stepping clear of civilization and

back a thousand years, it might not be easy. And it wasn't. I was for bearding Afghanistan blindly, trusting to a lucky break; Bob was for looking things over. But together we made for safe progress. It was the getting together that took time.

We had formulated a philosophy, and bit by bit we were deciding on details. But it took a long time to get under way. The most ordinary moves in India can be counted on to take approximately ten times as long as they'd take at home. Baths, for instance!—

We were in Calcutta and we had to stay there four days —the four hottest days we'd ever spent anywhere, up to that time, with the temperature at 104 and the humidity at 95. We had first to get trunks out of the Customs and the very thought of more clothes was sickening. I was already in shorts and found them too much, though Bob then and always remained faithful to long trousers. (It only goes to classify us farther.) But I did get some justification for my stand, because all the Englishmen, however dignified, felt as I did. We'd go to see a banker—stout party—solemn in navy blue coat and grey mustachios above the desk. But when he'd step out to greet us, there would be the shorts!

As I had to get my trunks out of the Customs, we decided to tackle that first. We approached the Indian Customs as blithely as we would Grand Central. It was four hours before we left—withered.

First there was a fat, stubby man with a large turban on his head and a box of beads before him. He was playing

with them, I guess. I showed him my trunk checks. They were six large sheets of paper and they had to be stamped. But he had nothing to say. He passed them on over his shoulder to the next desk and the next desk did the same. Some of the shoulders shrugged and some didn't. But it was our error. As soon as we thought of *baksheesh* (Indian for "tip"), the air was clearer. I can't say that we got action, but we did eventually get our sheets of paper stamped.

That was only the beginning. After the stamping came the identifying of the baggage in a loft across the street. Down four flights and up two. I didn't think our legs could make it.

"I sure am glad I met you," Bob murmured as we started the second flight.

It was *my* luggage and it had to be pursued because the next day was Bank holiday and Sunday followed. It was always that way. When it wasn't Bank holiday it was Sunday.

Of course, that too, was our ignorance. No Englishman, we realized after two days in India, would have gone near the place. A servant would have been there doing the job with twice the expedition. Ours, at the moment, was pleasantly bargaining in some bazaar. We had a lot to learn—especially about servants.

After we had identified the trunks—hair plastered to our heads and shirts sticking—we had to go down the stairs and toil up again to the man of the beads. The whole performance had to be repeated in order to get the new sheets

stamped. We started with six documents and we ended with nine. It was that way everywhere. Sheets of paper were the "Open Sesame." What any of them contained we never had the slightest idea. Nor, we decided, did it matter at all. It was quantity, not quality, that counted. "Is this *enough* to get us through?" was what we used to ask as we approached a border.

We were furiously busy. And that is scandalous in India. That was what got the little lapis lazuli dealer, I guess. He watched us with glinting eye. When everyone else had succumbed to inertia, the two young Americans would still be stepping out briskly. I don't see why we didn't have apoplexy; and I guess he figured the same. He'd get us before it was too late.

I suppose every American imagines himself a sucker in the Orient—as he usually is. So we steeled ourselves accordingly. In fact, by the time we got well under way I believe we thought more about money than almost anything else. We weren't going to be "done"—that's all there was to it. No man squatting flat-footed in a bazaar, waving his arms and whining at the rareness of his wares, was going to get us. But the lapis lazuli necklaces were enticing; it was hard to pass them by.

Each of the four days the fat little merchant gazed at us brightly. He was jolly and we rather liked him. On the first day he told us the price of one of his necklaces was 120 rupees. We laughed loudly and walked past.

Each day his respect for us increased obviously. The

season was past in Calcutta and we were his only possible customers. Then, too, we showed enough fight to be interesting.

In off moments, between Customs and passports, we gambled with him for coins, odd and even. He loved it, and so did we. "Master make toss," he'd call to us as we hurried in or out.

Finally, on that last day, he offered to "make toss" for his whole stock in trade—some fifteen necklaces. He had already set their price before he knew us so well, at 3000 rupees. Now he would match us 600 to 300 for the lot. He won. But we weren't downhearted. The first trade venture was not so bad. Some that followed were even more to our credit. Even at this distance, I believe that certain good bargains stick in our memories as vividly as our most hazardous experiences.

We couldn't wait to get on. Ahead of us were burning ghats, the Taj Mahal, the Seven Cities of Delhi, the Vale of Kashmir. We knew our guide-books and our maps. What we weren't primed on was the mere matter of living. We went forward, to make all kinds of mistakes—feel very foolish. Our whole sense of values was about to undergo an upheaval.

BENARES, AGRA, JAIPUR

"Oh, there's Injian temples to admire when you see.
There's a peacock round the corner an' the monkey up the tree.
An' there's that running silver grass awavin' in the wind,
An' the old Grand Trunk atrailin' like a rifle sling be'ind."

CHAPTER TWO

BENARES, AGRA, JAIPUR

INDIA was an interlude—fifteen hundred miles that had to be covered between us and the Khyber. In our single-mindedness, we thought only of selling our idea to the Afghan minister, and of outfitting ourselves for the real journey.

But you can't be flung into a boiling cauldron without feeling the heat. We were in India out of season, when there were no tourists about, and the English were tucked up in the hills, playing their golf and polo. The life of India's millions spread out before us in its natural state, and it was the season when their slight energy is at its lowest ebb. They couldn't make an effort if they would —in suffocating September. Yet we were wandering about like two creatures from another planet, suddenly dropped into a new world.

Benares was our first stop on the way north. Benares, the holy city, built on a big bend of the Ganges—where Vishnu "dug a well and filled it with his sweat." We could

have done the same—if we could have dug a well. The place swarms with pilgrims—thousands of them come daily from all over India. Rapt faces, emaciated bodies, holy beggars with beards long and scraggly over naked chests, diseased creatures with open sores, withered arms, contorted bodies; Brahmin priests under big umbrellas reading from holy books. To die at Benares is an achievement. Burning ghats smoulder all along the waterfront, surrounded by families, weeping, yet triumphant that one of theirs is among the blessed. Sweepers hunt for gems among the ashes.

We went daily to see the ghats. But we didn't speak of them. "Funny there's no smell," was our only comment. We talked about everything else and did everything else, but we felt somehow that we'd seen the "soul" of India. Which sounds like Veloo.

Veloo was our servant. We'd been told we ought to have a "bearer"—one who could show us all the points of interest, interpret for us, buy tickets, pay porters, bargain, and guard our valuables lest a long arm reach in at a wayside station. What we got was one R. H. Veloo, who did his duty so thoroughly that he wore us out. In the first place, he was elegant. Wing-tipped shoes, a natty Persian velvet hat, double-breasted blue jacket, and white ducks, stepping along beside my shorts and Bob's lugubrious black. He handed out tips with the air of a prince dispensing largess—four cents a bag to a porter. And he was insulted if we passed up a ruin—anything of the slightest interest.

In the Calcutta Hotel, the night before leaving, we started

to pack our bags in our accustomed way. But not at all. "Veloo pack," he said, pained. And we felt as if we ought to apologize. Every time we boarded a train, Veloo was ahead of us, making our beds (you carry your own bedding on Indian trains), laying out our pajamas, mixing us a whisky and soda. Pretty soft, maybe, but not such a good start for Afghanistan. And when he discussed philosophy and the future of India, we were helpless.

Sometimes we'd escape for a little shopping. After the ghats we'd step into a silk merchant's to look at saris. They were saris meant for Ranis—diaphanous things woven with gold and silver threads that tempted us beyond all reason.

Bob was the one who planned to buy, but I was getting the same amount of kick. For days Bob agonized over an eighty-dollar shawl which we both knew he couldn't afford, the poor proprietor waxing warmer at each visit. The ordeal ended with my buying a mere twelve dollars' worth of silk for pajamas, which, when I got home, I found wasn't enough for a single pair. It is lying right now in the bottom of my trunk.

Our only real purchase was the beautiful Benares tray, a treasure which later proved its worth in a little mud house in Kandahar.

"I suppose we ought to see everything now that we're here," Bob grumbled one afternoon as we lay sweating on our cots. An old woman in the corridor outside was fanning us, the cord of our punkah attached to her big toe. When she went to sleep, the fan stopped and we woke up.

"We're seeing plenty!" I resented being awakened.

And then from out of space Veloo spoke up. In spite of the heat, we both jumped. Our eyes had been closed and we didn't know he was there. He was omnipresent.

"If Sahibs desire, I take them to see dancing girls . . ."

We felt like telling him to get the hell out. But I only grunted, and Bob turned over.

"Might as well take a look," he conceded, after Veloo had left to make arrangements.

"Evidently what Veloo says, goes," I agreed. And we waited with some interest for the evening.

In a shambling victoria, long after the sun was down, but while it was still unbearably hot, we started out. Big wheels in back, small ones in front, and four of us—we two, Veloo and a young Englishman—facing one another on the seats. We drove past the bazaars, into streets so narrow that the hubs scraped the sides—through the mazes of the Benares slums. Veloo was there because he was always everywhere. The young Englishman was an engineer whom we'd picked up at the hotel. When we told him we were going through the Khyber, he looked at us disapprovingly. And when we asked him to join us that evening, he was scandalized. However—"It must be after dark," he whispered, "it would never do to be seen." He'd been five years in Benares, and had never done anything so fantastic as this. But like ourselves, I suppose, he thought the opportunity not one to be missed.

When the roadway was too narrow for the carriage, we

got out and walked—into black alleyways with only dim lights blinking in the upper stories of the houses, foul smells, occasional shrill laughter from behind closed shutters.

"I'd just as soon be at the ghats," I grunted.

And to my surprise he agreed.

At one of the houses Veloo stopped us.

We followed him up an unlighted narrow stairway into a sort of hall, past one closed door through which we heard the muffled sounds of bodies moving, but no talking, and then on through a curtain into a dimly lighted room. Just one candle burned on a stool, and it took us some time to make out the scene. It was a small room, so low that our heads almost touched the ceiling. Dirty rugs covered the walls, and others were scattered on the floor. There was no furniture except the stool. Flies buzzed, and ants ran all over.

Veloo had been talking with some one we couldn't see as we came up the stairs. But now, quite suddenly, he was gone, and the three of us were alone. "Absurd situation," the Englishman muttered and slid out his pocket knife, holding it open in his hand.

It seemed a long time that we stood there, wondering. Finally, there was shuffling in the corridor and, one by one, seven Hindus slunk into the room. They were heavy-jowled and dirty, the tallest of them with only one eye, which gave him a peculiarly sinister look.

"Gunmen," was my glance to Bob.

This was something we would have done well to miss.

The seven squatted about the room, but said nothing to us nor to each other. We didn't know whether to squat, too, or remain standing. Finally, I sat down and the others followed suit.

As soon as we were on our heels, the orchestra entered. It consisted of three poor old things, ragged and dirty, one with a queer small drum which he played with his hands, another with a reed instrument evidently ancient, and the third with a thin emaciated kind of guitar. They sat cross-legged in a corner and began what sounded like a dirge. There were sudden shrieks from the reeds, entirely unrelated to the rest of the music, and a background of steady beating on the drum. Veloo slunk in behind them.

It may or may not have been the effect of the tom-tom, but by that time the three of us were on edge. One quick move on anyone's part and our knives would have been in action.

It was then that the curtain lifted for the last time, and two dancers came writhing in. I don't know what we were expecting in a hole like that, but one was forty-five if she was a day, and the other, though a young thing, was half-sick and extremely greasy. They smirked and twisted and wriggled.

The dance was interminable; we began to wonder if we were paying by the hour. The Indians stared profoundly at every contortion. But Bob and I finally wearied. We exchanged glances, and began muttering something about, "How the devil can we stop this," when, suddenly, on a

sharp discordant note, as if they got our reaction and resented it, the musicians stopped.

And to our complete consternation, the "girls" flung themselves upon us.

We'd long since passed from fear of the gunmen to boredom, and then to plain nausea at the vermin and the smells. The climax was more than we could bear. No bargaining this time. Veloo was told to pay them what they wanted and we got out as fast as we could.

Of course, the Taj Mahal, next morning at Agra, was the perfect antithesis—woman glorified to the supreme—the most exquisite tribute to her charm created by man. It may have been the reaction, but the Taj seemed to us to be virginal—utterly pure.

"More Americans ought to see this," we said more than once, "to get over the pity they always feel for Oriental women."

In fact, we found ourselves being sorry for American women. The loveliest parts of all Indian palaces were the women's quarters, the most delicate gems designed for their aristocratic nostrils. The silken saris we nearly bought were finer than anything Paris offers. The very inaccessibility of these ladies suggested a value inestimable, and we'd have given a great deal to see one of them. But outside of monuments centuries old, our glimpses of Indian beauties were few.

Agra and Delhi meant the "riches of India," the lure that

brought Mahmud of Ghazni down from the Afghan highlands and established a line of Afghan kings; the cities that the great Moguls made their own; the inspiration that led to the discovery of the new world. Yet they left us cold.

We went to Fatipur Sikri, outside of Agra, the great fort of Akbar, with rooms for a thousand servants, a circulatory water system, marble toilets and baths, and valves for rose-water, lavender-water, or what-will-you. Akbar was a contemporary of Queen Elizabeth. And it seemed curious to us that in the same town, centuries later, we had to stand in a tin tub, pouring water over ourselves from an earthen pitcher.

But I will say that Baber, 16th-century emperor, first of the great Moguls, and grandfather of Akbar, did strike a spark. He wrote a diary that would put Casanova, Cellini, and Pepys to shame for frankness and detail. There's not a vice that he doesn't admit with a laugh. Yet he was conqueror from Turkestan down through India, and first of a great line. He wallowed in spoils. The Kohinoor diamond was thrust into his hands by a Hindu Rani. But he loved his wines and his foods and his northern mountains far more than anything effete India could offer him. He especially liked being drunk. "To be in a state of semi-intoxication with one's friends beside a running brook," was his idea of a pleasant afternoon. He even got a woman drunk, unheard of in those days, just to see the result. But he admits that they were too much for him. "She got notions," he said, and he left her. Both of his brothers died of excess drinking.

And on his death-bed he solemnly declared, "Let us advise you to adopt a life of abstinence." But he was hearty enough himself to stand it—a giant of a man—big, tall, solid.

"Hindustan is a country that has few pleasures to recommend it," he wrote in a fit of loneliness. "The people are not handsome. They have no idea of the charms of friendly society. They have no comprehension of mind, no politeness of manner, no kindness nor fellow-feeling. . . . Hindustan has no good flesh, no grapes nor musk-melons, no good fruits, no ice, nor cold water, no good food nor bread in the bazaars."

He seems to have had one of those top-notch intelligences that cover all things. A genius of a general, a fond father who wrote letters to his son worthy of our advanced education, and with it all, a man who could control his lusty appetites when he wished to control them.

He didn't get back to his beloved Afghanistan until he died. But he lies near Kabul now, buried beside his mother. She had the measles, and the cure prescribed was a dish of water-melons.—

The Kohinoor diamond, of incalculable value, lies now in a little case in the Tower of London. And we no longer take water-melons for measles. But Baber seems so alive to us that we might have met him last week, standing with his foot on the rail of some bar, telling us tales over his beer.

There is no continuity in our impressions of India, as there is of Afghanistan, and of Persia. Those two coun-

tries are fairly homogeneous. But the Indian cities are like postcards which you slide into a stereopticon, at once getting details and a third dimension. Benares was Holy India. Agra was India of the brilliant past. Jaipur was typical modern India.

We arrived at Jaipur disgruntled.

"Let's cut the sightseeing."

I agreed. I was in no mood for a rubber-neck tour.

But we fell hard. It was the first native city we'd seen. And it was complete in itself, like a toy world, teeming with people who knew nothing of New York, the twentieth century, or safety-razors. Light-hearted people, lolling in crowds around the great palace gates of the Maharajah: women weaving and sewing as casually as if they were at home; itinerant barbers shaving bored customers; sacred cows; beggars; a religious maniac walking on his knees and elbows; a little girl picking lice out of her sister's head. And the Maharajah's elephants tramping out through the great gates jingling their bells joyously, knocking people to right and left. In front of the open stalls of the bazaar old men squatted, smoking long water pipes; and around the wells the women, great earthen jars on their heads, their garments draped—like figures on a frieze.

We stood watching a bridegroom riding through the city square to his bride, white satin turban decorated with jewels—an orchestra on foot, running beside him.

"I think the Maharajah ought to know we're here," sug-

gested Bob. "Two Americans, however insignificant, ought to make a stir in a place like this."

So we sat down to the second of our famous letters. We wrote that we were interested in the mineral developments of a state of such fabulous wealth, and that we were eager to meet its ruler, his honored majesty, and so on. Bob wrote while I batted cockroaches.

We might just as well have had our siesta.

The letter had to go by runner because the Maharajah was out in the country at his rest house. Moreover, it was so hot, the runner declared, that he must have a donkey; which didn't sound quite right to us. But we paid—as we always did. And spent the next day waiting for the answer. Had we stayed till now, we'd still be waiting.

It came to be our policy that when a Maharajah failed us, we tried an Englishman. So the next day we went to the Residency.

It was a fine house up a winding drive with flowers and vines and a long cool verandah. A footman, impressive with dagger and the English coat of arms, met us and held out a silver tray.

"Where's your card?" said I, in my shorts, to Bob.

And Bob began feeling his pockets helplessly.

It took Veloo. "Here, Sahib," and he handed us a sheet of paper from his notebook.

"Got a pencil?"

Bob hunted. And Veloo again came to the rescue. "Here,

Sahib." He was patient with us, but he was very much ashamed.

His Excellency was asleep. And the footman, returning in a suspiciously short time, made no supplementary remarks as to what His Excellency hoped to do when he awoke.

On the way out we met an old beggar carrying a staff with a gourd on the end of it, its dried seeds rattling. He was bare-foot, with only dirty rags thrown around him. Yet he belonged—it was we who were out of place.

Out in the big square, we saw our first caravan. It wasn't so much of a caravan, as we later knew caravans, but swaying rhythmically through the crowd, with bells ringing on the legs of the camels and drivers shouting hoarsely, it shot a thrill right through us.

> *"A savor of camels and carpets and musk,*
> *A murmur of voices, a reek of smoke . . ."*

What were we doing here, anyway?

DELHI AND SIMLA

"Who are the rulers of Ind— to whom shall we bow the knee?"

CHAPTER THREE

DELHI AND SIMLA

IN Delhi we got the idea of going into Afghanistan by car instead of by camel. It was not our own idea; it was Roberts'.

Somehow, the news had got about that the two Americans were dissatisfied with their bearer. Certainly we were not the same two that we had been before we met Veloo. He was so wise that "all the children and the householders on his street" came to ask him for advice. He'd "seen so much" and "done so much." He was teacher, guide, mentor. And under these virtues we chafed—silently. When he told us how lucky we were to have him, we humbly believed it. We went on long dusty rides in suffocating heat—just to see what he thought we ought to see. We stared at Hindu, Mohammedan, Buddhist details and didn't see them. It was not until he had tramped us in and out of the seven old cities of Delhi, doling out the respective merits of Prithiraja, Mohammed of Gore, Ala-ud-din, Ferozabad, that we finally pulled ourselves together.

Simultaneously with our decision to do as we damned well pleased, the influx of job-hunters began. Occult sense on the part of the Indians, we were sure, because we hadn't confided our domestic troubles to a soul. "Bearers" lay in wait for us when we stepped out of our room. They lounged nonchalantly on the hotel stairs. And most conspicuous among them all was Roberts.

You couldn't miss Roberts. If greater elegance than Veloo's were possible, it was his—with waxed mustachios, pink turban, and swagger stick which he brandished with a flourish. He knew fourteen languages. He was brought up in a Sunday school. He never charged a commission. He had friends everywhere who were just waiting for the opportunity to repay him for the Christian services he had already done them. He even mentioned an Archbishop. That was too much. When we actually got down to recommendations the only one he could produce was from a woman in Delhi whom we later met—a hard faced half-breed given to red kimonos and living in a miserable section of the city.

Roberts didn't have the ghost of a chance of a job until, inadvertently, he gave us the idea. He knew that we wanted to go in to Afghanistan and he suggested that we go by car.

He said it just at the psychological moment, when we were gasping with the heat and the thought of Kabul—by camel—was losing favor. Of course, he mentioned it only because of the Prime Minister's interest in cars—his friend, the Prime Minister, who entered into the conversation con-

stantly and who, I must admit, did whet our curiosity. After all, some small native state—who knew? The Prime Minister would help us, give us letters, Roberts persisted.

And when we met him, we found the Prime Minister to be a smooth, round, oily little garage owner who certainly would help us to get into Afghanistan if only we'd buy a car from him. He tried to sell us everything, from a 1916 Nash to an English Wolsey which we nearly bought as a curio—with outside gear and brake levers, high body, low engine, about eleven speeds, and enough brass to start a shop. With that we *would* have made a hit.

The idea of driving a car, instead of a camel, did get us. We lost sight of Roberts' personality behind his suggestion, and fired Veloo.

That was hard when it came right down to it. Especially as he himself had a premonition of his end. After all, Veloo's only fault was his conscientiousness. We both hated to have to tell him. But as I hated it the more, I did it for self-discipline. I fired him; and even went so far as to make him open up his bag before he left—a rickety suitcase which I searched with burning face. Besides the barest necessities, I found one toy pistol—which he was taking home to his little boy.

This left us low. As Sahibs we were pretty poor fish.

But at least we were making a start. We put all ruins out of our minds and gave ourselves up entirely to preparations. We bought a Chevrolet, a closed car, secure against sand-storms and inadvertent shots. The Englishman who sold

it to us gave us a ray of hope about Afghanistan. Why we should select that particular country he didn't see, to be sure. The very name seemed to affect all Englishmen alike. But no doubt, he said, it could be done. (Especially, he probably added mentally, if we bought his Chevvie. For he was still selling us.) He told us about the two cars that had gone from Delhi to Paris. They'd gone through Baluchistan and he urged us strongly to try that route. But his respectful interest did more than anything else to help restore our confidence and enthusiasm.

We invested in blankets, and frying pans; chicken wire and boards to help run the car out of sand and mud; special air valves that would cut down the consumption of gas; and painted "Delhi to Paris" on the doors. We got a huge box of canned goods and some extra petrol tins. Above all, we hired an honest-to-God servant. For Robert lasted only two days.

Our requirements for a bearer had filtered down by now to just plain dumbness. Mildness, subservience, and a fair degree of honesty were all we looked for. And when we spotted Kallon, we grabbed him. He was a little figure in old khaki coat and turban. A funny little coat, single breasted, with turnover collar and a few brass buttons. It was streaked from too much washing and tight over his thin shoulders. His face was open; and when we questioned him he looked back into our eyes gratefully, like a dog.

A sweet content flowed over us. All through India, and

up and down Afghan mountain passes, we swore at Kallon. We nearly killed the poor fellow in Iraq. But we always trusted him—as much a part of our equipment as the khaki shorts and the vulcanizing outfit. We loved him.

It was sunset when we were leaving Delhi. At Jama Masjed, the Great Mosque, the faithful were filing in to prayer. A great crowd, unable to get in, were on their knees outside on the enormous paved enclosure, touching their heads to the ground in front of them, raising them again ecstatically—a sea of motley backs rising and falling in monotonous rhythm.

The mosque stands high on a rocky eminence. Its domes were bold now against a bright sky. It was a place and an hour to worship chosen by connoisseurs.

Suddenly Kallon clutched us. Three tall men had entered the enclosure, and stood there, hands on hips, surveying the scene. They had sharp, proud faces and an air of calm and self-possession. Like conquerors they stood in their faded blue robes, knives in belts, and curly-toed hob-nailed boots.

"Afghans!" Kallon muttered, uneasily.

And we caught our breaths.

Baggage piled high on the back of our car, bedding rolls well past the middle of the window, dust in our eyes, we pushed over the hot sultry plains towards Kim's Lahore, still zigzagging on our way north. Water buffaloes stood knee deep in irrigation ditches, ox-carts rumbled past on the

wrong side of the road. For us the days of Pullman cars and electric fans were past.

We didn't even stop at the Zam-Zammeh gun where Kim sat "in defense of municipal orders." Nor stop to visit the "wonder house."

Instead we bought guns. There's a Sullivan Law of sorts in India, and the business of getting licenses for the guns and then again for the ammunition was on a par with getting trunks out of the Calcutta Customs. Innumerable papers had to be signed, *babus* chased aimlessly around, *baksheesh* broadcast in order to get speed. We bought Mausers, .32 caliber, automatic, six-inch barrel, guaranteed to kill a man at twenty yards. We got our full quota of ammunition—two hundred rounds apiece. And then we felt better.

We bought boxing gloves to get ourselves in condition, practising nightly in our little hotel room.

Whiskies with some English officers, listening to their talk . . . the smell of leather grease, the clicking of spurs, hard blue eyes, and toughened skin. . . . Once the officers had to leave us, called away to quell a Mohammedan-Hindu riot. A sacred cow, it seems, had wandered into a Moslem's shop. Three were killed that night, but the officers got back in time to finish the evening and the whisky . . . They told us unequivocally that we hadn't a chance of getting beyond the Khyber.

But the Afghan Minister at Simla was the climax of the trip north.

Simla is the summer capital, about 7000 feet high, its

houses on stilts, four-man rickshaws scaling its steep sides. Natives in well-cut European clothes and turbans walk with dignity among their fair-haired rulers. English civil service people live in rigid formality, every one numbered from the Viceroy down. (Even at a dinner for six, each guest sits according to his official number, which is as definite as a birth certificate.) Army men's wives play at golf and bridge and love, while their men are on duty far away. Intrigue seems to be everywhere. The air is thin, making you nervous and tense.

We approached Simla in high gear, soon changed to second as we toiled up the mountain side, and finally ground painfully in first up to the hotel.

Our outfit was funny enough, what with the luggage tied on with four kinds of ropes and straps, and "Delhi to Paris" painted in white on the doors of our disreputable car. But none of this could quite account for the crowd that gathered round as we made the last steep grade. We honked in vain, and finally drove through.

"For the love of God and St. Mary!" A tall Irish bobby held up an enormous hand. The mob buzzed. "And who do *you* think you are!" We had no opinions to offer and instinctively reached for our licenses. This savored of Times Square.

"Don't you know no automobiles are allowed here?" he went on. And then told us that the Viceroy of India and the Prince of Wales were the only ones who had ever come this far by car.

The Afghan legation was still higher up in the mountains. We started up in rickshaws, but felt so sorry for the men that we got out and walked. Three times we climbed that terrible hill. First to find no one there, second to leave our passports for the Minister's examination, third to see the gentleman himself.

But we didn't see him. We saw only his assistant, who stuttered painfully. For forty-five seconds the poor man couldn't speak—while Bob disappeared behind some bushes convulsed and I stood there uncomfortably. But once over the first hazard, the assistant Minister was not so bad. In fact, he turned out to be a person of considerable dignity. The consul in Calcutta had already written the American Minister in Simla, the American Minister had communicated with the Afghan office, and the Afghan Minister had already received our letter endorsed by the Calcutta consul. So there was no doubt as to our identity.

We were told that the paper we had signed in Calcutta as good as signed away our lives. We had given up all rights for protection and for appeal. We had sworn that we had no dependents, that we had no political purpose in entering the country, that we would never use any information we might get against the government of Afghanistan.

Solemnly recited as this document now was by the assistant Minister, it seemed far more significant to us than it had in Calcutta. There it had been red tape. Here it was a vow. But we were in for it. Right before us, he stamped our passports with the Afghan seal and signed his final

approval. In ten minutes we were out, with the visés still damp in our pockets. And we weren't sure whether we were glad or sorry.

If it were possible to get into Afghanistan, and we seemed to be finding it so, why didn't others make the trip? Why didn't more Westerners go in? And the implied answer, shouted to us through the hills, almost decided us not to go.

We have pondered long on how it happened that we—of all people—happened to make Afghanistan. World-famed travelers had consistently been kept out. Yet here were we! We decided that it was our very insignificance that got us through. We had no ax to grind, no reputation to build up, we held no great store by our lives. Lack of importance was our only virtue.

Moreover, we happened along at the very moment when Afghanistan was ruled by a western-minded Emir. A month later we probably couldn't have gained admission for love or money. Revolution was brewing even while we were in the country. And since that time no foreigner would want to get in even if he could. In fact, heroic efforts have been made to evacuate by airplane the few who were marooned there. But for a short time, and fortunately while we happened to be seeking admission, Amanullah smiled on the world and beckoned.

SRINAGAR, RAWALPINDI, PESHAWAR

"We packs 'im like an idol an' you ought to 'ear 'im grunt,
An' when we gets 'im loaded up 'is blessed girth-rope breaks."

CHAPTER FOUR

SRINAGAR, RAWALPINDI, PESHAWAR

IN retrospect, it seems only a step from Simla to Peshawar and our final get-away. But actually it was two weeks, weeks of worry with nerves on edge.

First, there was the money worry. Buying the car and equipping it were items we hadn't counted on. Half the world was still ahead of us, and if we continued the way we'd been going, we reckoned we'd be lucky to reach Bagdad. Moreover, the Chevrolet wasn't taking even the foothills of the Himalayas and we knew she couldn't hold out. The only solution seemed to be to capitalize on our liabilities. If Queen Marie and the Duchesse D'Alba in lean days could sell their prestige, why not we our danger? If the Steinway Company gave its pianos to virtuosi, why shouldn't General Motors provide us with a car? We were planning to take one of their machines across a country that, to the best of our knowledge, had never yet been traversed by motor. The machine we were planning to use might fail to make the trip. Wouldn't the company, then, instead of suffering this

possible humiliation, prefer to provide us with a new car? We would give it all publicity. . . . The more we talked it over, the more logical seemed our position. We finally incorporated our ideas in a letter to the General Motors Company in Bombay.

We wrote this letter sitting in our dinner jackets in a cold, draughty room in the hotel at Murree. Murree is the hill town rival of Mussoorie. The officers in Lahore had been as rapturous about its gayeties as the Englishman in the Bengal Club in Calcutta had been about Mussoorie. But already with eyes straight ahead, we had passed the arrow pointing to Mussoorie. And our one night in Murree we were spending thus closeted.

Just as important as our lack of funds was our lack of time. The rains were due any time from late October on, and if the rains caught us, it would be impossible to get through the swollen rivers of Afghanistan—rivers that rise in a day from dry rock beds to raging torrents. Bridges, we knew, were as scarce there as telegraph poles, and railroads and motor cars.

Then at Srinagar, where we planned to await our answer from General Motors, we found mail from America—which should have cheered us. But at each letter our spirits sank lower. Letters from families, telling us the news, little items about the weather and golf and parties, that seemed so important when they were written and already forgotten by the time we read them. An account of this one's tonsillitis and that one's vacation, and between the lines the confident

hope that we were on the way home, and running no risks.

It was our zero hour. The world was going on without us. Pretty soon there wouldn't be a bubble to show where we'd gone under. At lovely Srinagar, in a September week when the great depths of the vale of Kashmir flamed with color, and the Himalayas were cut sharp against a bright blue sky, we thought only about ourselves. Again we asked —what were we doing here?

When the answer came from General Motors, it was a simple "not interested."

It wasn't until we reached Rawalpindi, big railroad center of the northwest, that we came out of our funk. And when the Northern Motors Company gave us a credit of two hundred dollars more on our Chevrolet than we had paid for it toward a new Oakland, our spirits rose like rockets. Unlike rockets, however, they never descended again. There were low moments, of cold and hunger on the Afghan plains, and sentimental droopings in Kandahar, incredulity over our devastating hard luck in Turkey; but never again the utter loss of self-respect that we went through when we were in India, just marking time.

At Rawalpindi, hectic activity restored our energy. To break in the new car we drove a hundred miles a day for five days, regularly as clock work, six to eight, nine-thirty to eleven at night. Daytime was spent in the garage with Hughes, the mechanic, putting the new car in perfect condition—tuning up the motor, timing it, adjusting the steering post (which Bob found to be three eighths of an inch off center), having

new brackets cast for the heavier gas tank, buying coils, fuses, bulbs, three jacks (two of which we later broke), fifty feet of copper tubing (all of which we used), radiator cement. Again we painted the doors. This time "India to Paris" and a skull and crossbones. We'd been told that Afghans feared the death sign—and Kallon watched, fascinated.

In Rawalpindi and in Peshawar, we collected what political safeguards we could. The Englishman, Captain Barr, who sold us the Oakland, gave us letters to two influential natives. They, in turn, gave us letters to an Afghan motor transport company which, as far as we could see, included no motors. And the Afghan Motor Company finally gave us a letter in strange characters and adorned with seals, which became one of our most cherished treasures. What it was all about we didn't know at that time. The only thing that concerned us was the incredible amount of time it was taking to get it all. While one of us was in the garage, the other would be standing in some doorway waiting for a letter. All these kindly people beamed on us, and then proceeded in their own desultory fashion to do what they could. The life and the politics of the Orient aren't nearly so far from our western standards, we decided, as their complete obliviousness of time.

From the Governor General of the Northwest frontier, we were obliged to get the Red Pass which would allow us out of the country by way of the Khyber. It was a holiday of some kind and to get at the Governor General we had to

have him called from a tennis game. But he was as gracious as if we were old friends.

What seemed like the most serious trouble was Kallon's passport. Absentmindedly, he'd left it back in Delhi. Now, passports are treasured like jewels by the Indians because they are so rare. It's harder for Indians to get out of their own country than it is for them to get into ours. Kallon had a passport only because he had been fighting in Mesopotamia. To give him another would be like tossing him over the gates of heaven. Kallon's returning to Delhi and back at this point was out of the question. And breaking in a new bearer was something we didn't even want to think about.

Our faces must have been studies, for the Commissioner did a phenomenal thing for us. He telegraphed the police in Delhi to seek out Kallon's wife, to get from her his passport, burn it, and then telegraph back. All of this was accomplished, and Kallon, grinning broadly, received a new passport. This *was* efficiency! But it was English, not Indian. Now that we had the right to go into Afghanistan, everyone seemed willing to speed us on.

Leaving Rawalpindi was like leaving home. All departments of the town knew us. We'd been running to offices, to garages, to banks, to hotels—in a town where everyone else strolled. Each call we made constituted a problem. There was a crowd at the garage to see us at last get off. The hundred mile drive to Peshawar was yet ahead of us, and then the Khyber.

All we had still to do was to cable, and to get our last fifty-

five gallons of gas. We spent the night at Peshawar, and were just pushing off—when the car gave a sickening slump underneath us. Fifty-five extra gallons were more than it would stand. The springs had given out and we were flat on the axle.

It was a Saturday noon and no one was around to help us. Frantically we searched Peshawar—garage, railroad, junk shop—for powerful coil springs to act as bracers. But to no avail. There remained only one thing to do. We must go back over the hundred miles to Rawalpindi and seek out our friends again.

On Sunday, Captain Barr had to leave his golf, and Hughes, the mechanic, broke a date with his girl. Together the four of us searched. And finally, in the railroad repair shop found locomotive springs that we could use. Everything in the car had to be unloaded and the body taken off. The new springs were installed and a set of strong brackets cast for the heavy gas tank. When the car was finally reconstructed we had eleven men climb in to test it. They didn't make a dent in the springs.

The same crowd had gathered once more. Sweating and dirty from our work on the car, Bob and I fell into the front seats and Kallon climbed up to his perch on top of the load that filled the back, sitting with his legs outstretched before him. He clutched the big bag of Afghan silver coin that we'd entrusted to him, and looked fearfully ahead.

THE KHYBER

"We took our chanst among the Khyber 'ills . . ."

CHAPTER FIVE

THE KHYBER

TAKING OAKLAND CAR THROUGH AFGHANISTAN TO PARIS HAVE TAKEN EVERY PRECAUTION BELIEVE GENERAL MOTORS INTERESTED IN COMPLETION OF TRIP

THAT was the cable we sent our families at three o'clock on the day we started into the Khyber; as practical and unsentimental as we could make it. All the facts that they would care least about. We wanted to make it seem just an ordinary trip—merely giving notification of the start.

I don't know whom we thought we were fooling. For Bob's family, we learned afterward, promptly spent seventy-five dollars in cabling us not to go. And my father, whistling, no doubt, to keep up his courage, sent a laconic: "Good luck. Keep your eyes on the road and off women."

But they might have saved their money. By the time those back home were hashing over their answers, we (who had sent our message "cable deferred") were already pushing along over the Afghan plateau. "Herrmann Borg gone

Afghanistan Tuesday" was all the satisfaction they got as answer to their mad wires, from Dean's Hotel in Peshawar. It was only after we reached America that we knew all this —saw the duplicates and heard of the conferring and the worrying. Perhaps some families can take an impersonal attitude toward their grownup sons. But not ours. They were sick about us.

And well they might have been, if they'd seen us. "Adventurous youth penetrating the unknown!" I'm sure there were people who saw us in a highly romantic light, moving swiftly among black, cowed natives. But the real story was something else again.

The Oakland was an open touring car, light tan, the large skull and cross-bones painted on its doors in white edged with a broad black stripe, the top up, and the body piled high. In the back was the big box of provisions (enough for a week anyway); a duffle, three massive suit cases for ourselves and another for Kallon; moving picture camera; victrola; medicine bag; two blanket rolls and the roll of chicken wire for getting out of the mud; spark plugs, coils, carburetor parts, two extra wheels; picks and shovels, rope, extra springs, two vulcanizing outfits; eight quarts of oil, ten gallons of water (eight for the car and two for ourselves). And in the midst of it all, Kallon, perched high on a box on the back seat, wearing a turban and an old raincoat of Bob's, much too large for him. On the front seat were Bob and I. Bob had on, God knows why, a black business suit and I was still natty in khaki shorts. (It's on record that we shaved only

three times in Afghanistan, and never took a bath.) Above the gasoline tank was an auxiliary tank of fifty-five gallons, and under all were the locomotive coil springs. In a car that was built for five normal passengers, we were carrying 1900 pounds!

It was late in the afternoon with sunset well upon us when finally we left Peshawar and headed for the Pass. Ten miles of plateau lay ahead of us and beyond it the great mountains of the Pass black against the sky. The nearer we got, the higher and more forbidding they grew. Yet, through what seemed an impenetrable wall, Alexander had come with his conquering armies, Mahmud on seventeen raids of plunder from Ghazni, Genghis Khan in the thirteenth century, Timur in the fourteenth, Baber in the sixteenth—thousands of insurgent horsemen, slaying whatever crossed their paths. You wonder what the effect must have been on those hordes, coming down from the desert, through the mountain pass, into the gardens of India. From a life of tents and horses into cities like Agra and Delhi with their temples and palaces and jewels. The tales they must have taken home—far more unbelievable than those of the crusaders, or explorers to the new world!

Step by step we were reversing their route and their experience, riding back into those mountains of history.

Our cable had been matter-of-fact. But we felt far from easy. Up to the end everyone, without exception, had advised against going. Even Captain Barr had shaken his head. "If you must go," he had said, "go early in the morning."

Night—and we heard this on every side—is the terror of the mountains. From three-thirty A.M. on, one may be safe—comparatively. But as the sun goes down, civilization vanishes.

And there *was* something sinister about that road ahead of us, perceptibly darkening. Deep valleys at sunset are always depressing enough, but when you don't know what's ahead and have been led to fear the worst, you don't feel any too cheerful. But we had been on tenterhooks too long to hold back now. We'd been aiming at this start for six weeks, impeded at every step. The rains were coming on, we kept saying over and over to ourselves, and we must get started. Even Bob forgot his customary caution. Excitement had got us. But from then on—from four-thirty of October 15th—I don't believe either of us had one really relaxed moment for three weeks. Our muscles taut from gruelling driving and constant watching, our sleep restless and short, some part of our consciousness every second on the *qui vive,* we felt tied up in knots.

We pushed on up the steep winding road. The mountains were jagged on both sides of us, barren and treeless. Precipices of limestone and shale shot up a thousand feet above us, with loftier mountains behind and beyond. Once, beside the famous Rhotas hill, we were squeezed into a ravine only fifteen feet wide, with sides 2000 feet high!—a narrow enough defile, it seemed to us, for the history of nations to turn on! You can't fool yourself that it's just "atmosphere." Physically, the Khyber *is* impressive—almost terrifying. We tried to

reason about it the way we did about everything. Tried to lay our uneasiness to the stories we'd been told. But there it was all the same—the steep winding roadway creeping higher and higher into—just grey forbidding rock mountains. We were impressed as we never yet had been.

The Pathans didn't help. The Khyber lies entirely in the land of the Afridi tribe, the vindictive hillmen that the English have been fearing and fighting ever since their occupation of India. As far back as Alexander these people had added to the terror of the Khyber. They are brought up from infancy to distrust all mankind—even their own families; as well they might, with only their tiny plots of rocky land between themselves and starvation. Passionate tribesmen they are, satisfying their hatred with cruelty, even at the cost of their own lives. We came unexpectedly on a group of them as we twisted round a curve—tall men, much taller than we'd seen in India, with a few women among them. All were armed, walking upright with heads high, the tail-pieces of their turbans hanging straight and long. I shall never forget the picture of them coming to a stand on the edge of the road to allow us to pass, with a drop in the ground below them where the road had been built up, and the Hindu Kush towering up behind them. They are people with long memories, we'd been told. Our kind had done them many a wrong in the course of time, and we were wondering, as they stood there looking at us, just what they were remembering. They didn't stop us, only looked at us coldly. But we were glad that we, too, were armed. Kallon whispered

from the back seat that Pathans aren't allowed on the highway after sunset, which added in no way to our ease.

Of course, we were still on British soil. The first twenty-nine miles out from India is owned by England—the Pass itself—and through it run two roads, the military highway and the caravan route. Our car was boiling now, with the terrific heat and the steady upgrade. When we weren't going in second, we were in first. And we were nervous about our new engine.

That was why we turned down the man who asked us for a lift. It doesn't seem possible now that we could have been so hardboiled. He was a British non-com who'd outstayed his leave and was on his way back through the Pass to the fort. He was sure he couldn't reach the fort by night if we didn't help him out. Certainly no other car would be going through after us. Wouldn't we take him on?

At home it is inconceivable that either of us would have turned the fellow down. But out there the milk of human kindness dried up in us. We were slaves to a purpose. Nothing more was going to hinder us. The car was groaning as it was, and if we took him in, it might be just that last straw. So we refused.

We stayed that night at the very fort he was aiming for. He never showed up.

Landi Kotal is the fort. By the time we reached it, it was so late that we were told we couldn't possibly make the Afghan border that night. But everybody had been saying "you can't," "it's impossible," for six weeks. We'd got this

far and wouldn't stop. The sentry stared at us. The second fort—last English outpost—was five miles on, he told us. And without so much as a glance back we put her in gear again and pushed on to Landi Khana.

Five miles in the Khyber is like twenty-five on the Boston Post Road. By the time we reached Landi Khana, daylight was nearly gone. Even we saw then that we couldn't go on.

Two officers lived alone there—just two of them on the exact edge of civilization. Yet they came out to greet us in evening dress, ready for dinner. A little terrier barked at us and we saw tennis rackets thrown down in the entrance. We looked at each other. The lengths to which these British could stretch their customs! Here were these two, only about thirty-five, certainly with some emotions about it all. Yet they were as ordinarily British—pleasantly so—as if they were in Kensington or Hampstead Heath.

They had no accommodations for us whatever, and we clearly couldn't go on. We must go ignominiously back to that smug sentry. Moreover, to make it at all we had to hustle. The two officers fairly pushed us. We couldn't get inside the fort after four without a password, they told us, and the password was changed every day—what's more, the sentries were instructed to shoot any suspicious character on sight. That we and our Oakland and our Kallon could be regarded as suspicious, we couldn't imagine—but we stepped on the gas, all the same.

The reception we got at the big mud fort we had scorned before was enough to shame us. A new sentry on duty

turned us over to the officer in charge, who had heard all about us and had probably been wondering ever since we drove past what he would do with us when we returned. "Never had any civilians here," he told us. I suppose it was our American gall, but it never occurred to us that we were pretty nervy to upset régime and disregard custom.

The officer was long and lean, with skin like leather. "Never had any civilians." But there we were, with luggage enough to furnish his barracks. And he let them open the big gate for us.

The hospital ward was turned over to us and an orderly gave us clean sheets and blankets. We had fried fish and chips for supper. What we would have done if he hadn't taken us in, we didn't stop to figure out.

All evening the top sergeant devoted himself to us. He sat by while we greased the car (a daily necessity that soon became a hated drudgery), drank whiskies with us in our "ward," and told us stories of his adventures in the army. He was a typical cockney, and we had a swell time with him. He took us to his heart probably because he was lonesome and wanted to talk. And we loved him like a brother—because we weren't out in that ungodly Pass. No doubt, the whiskies helped, too. He did all he could for us—even besides the stories. He showed us his dog that walked on his front paws and answered when spoken to, and took us to see the prisoners, a few mothy looking Afghans, arrested for stealing. Sentinels on the wall above passed at regular intervals all through the night.

We were up at five-thirty—a Khyber dawn. Just the tops of the mountains were bright—a red glow high above the dark sides. The whole force was there to see us off, from the second in command, down. There was the fort surgeon who had shared the hospital with us, a wistful little man who'd always wanted to do just what we were about to do. The supreme adventure lying at his feet, and he never able to nerve himself to risk it! And our sergeant, a little bleary-eyed, and the officer, aloof as ever, but thoughtful and kind. They all, even the fort surgeon, said we were fools to go on. They urged us to call it a day and go back to India. But we were headed west. The military band started playing at six o'clock, just as the gates were opened for us; and we rolled out to the strains of "God Save the King." It was routine probably, but we took it to ourselves. We didn't look it, but we felt like a royal embarkation.

THE BORDER

"The . . . Stranger within my gate
He may be true or kind,
But he does not talk my talk—
I cannot tell his mind."

CHAPTER SIX

THE BORDER

THE sun was blazing hot when we reached the frontier. "It is absolutely forbidden to enter Afghan territory until passport regulations have been complied with." This signpost was as far as even the adventurous Halliburton had gone. It was, in fact, as far as any American had cared to go, with the exception of five. This we didn't find out until later. Everyone who goes through the Pass has to register as to nationality. And we were told in Kabul that we were numbers "six" and "seven" of the Americans. Numbers "four" and "five" we met in Kabul, a writer and a missionary. It was as far into the country as they were going. And even at that they had only preceded us by a day.

We actually were stepping off into the unknown. In Biblical times Afghanistan was more familiar to the world than it is now. Every highroad from Mesopotamia and Persia into India went through Afghanistan. Old Tiglath Pileser of the Second Assyrian empire used to dump his conquered slaves in Afghanistan. Alexander was well supplied with

accurate geographical information when he undertook the trip. Arab caravans, from the seventh to the eleventh century, crossed and recrossed the country establishing flourishing trade-posts there. It was only the western explorers who came by sea—the Portuguese, the English, the Dutch. Then it was that the overland routes were forgotten. The Suez Canal brought the modern world into the East. And only this pocket of Asia—this fenced-in pasture, now grown weedy —has remained a part of the past.

There were 180 miles ahead of us to Kabul, and though it was hot and dusty and the road was terrible, we were all for it. We were out of the Pass. We had crossed the frontier and before us stood our first Afghan.

He was a sentry, wearing a ragged, dirty uniform. Tall and forbidding, he looked at us silently without the ghost of a smile in response to our own. I became immediately conscious of my shorts, and Bob, who had whipped out the camera, swung it around nonchalantly as if he'd never had the slightest idea of using it. The tall one completely deflated us.

After the ceremony of passing him, life became routine. "You may have the honor and pleasure!" At first this was a form of wit. Each of us drove two hours, then handed the wheel to the other. But soon it came to have another sound. "Here's where you get yours," was more the inflection. Driving in that country,—up and up,—changing gears every two or three minutes, sometimes running in reverse to make the steeper grades—was nasty work. You're bound to be on

edge when you're driving that way, watching for nails and bumps and holes, and at the same time always manipulating. But at this point we were still delighted with ourselves. *This* was living!

The Customs is at Dekka, a town ten miles from the frontier. Here we had to hand over the sheaf of papers we'd been collecting in India. It was a little mud village with men squatting in groups and veiled women passing slowly by, earthen pitchers on their heads. The men wore dirty white and the women dingy black, but the children were dabs of bright color. They were running about gaily, stopping now and then to stare at us, their clothes red and bright blue and bright green—like a Turkish carpet—with earrings dangling down their necks. About the adults there was an impassivity that struck us as ominous. It wasn't stolidity, nor was it the lethargy you see in the listless Indians. The effect was that of power under control. Again there was no approaching them.

Kallon took care to eat with these people. He had to pass for a Moslem—or risk a shot in the back. He confessed afterwards that he was thoroughly scared, and we got to know these signs in him. His face seemed to shrink as he held it tight. And his eyes opened and closed quickly. He was always several degrees more nervous even than we were—with his Indian preconception of Afghan cruelty, I suppose, and his unholy fear of Moslems. He may have lots to talk about back in Delhi now but I'll bet he's still nervous.

Whether it was the *baksheesh* we handed out or the letter

we finally gave them from the Motor Transport Company that gave us standing with the Dekka Customs, we never knew. But until we bethought ourselves to hand those over, our many official papers brought no response. As we would indicate our desire to move on with a sweep of our arms toward the automobile and the road, the *Gumrook* (Customs) man would hold up a long-fingered hand. We'd thought we were getting something valuable when we got a visé, but we found we didn't know the half of it. After this last letter was studied, however, the squatting Afghans rose slowly, one by one, and presently they offered us food. It was as if a group of statues in the Park had stepped down from their pedestals and joined us. Actually, we felt honored; there is that air about the Afghans. "High emissaries," we learned later, the letter called us. Not only then but in several far tighter situations, it worked like magic.

Jalalabad was the Concord and Lexington of the Afghan revolution. Three weeks after we passed through it, it was on the front page of every paper. But for us it was a semi-tropical town gracious with tall date palms which the natives climb like monkeys holding bags for the fruit.

There was a toll bridge at Jalalabad, guarded by a crowd of loose-limbed Afghans wearing long, baggy trousers and high stiff leather boots, sabres in belts, and guns in hand. It was bad enough just having to pass them, but to our great consternation, they held us up and demanded 500 rupees as toll! Fifty dollars!

Now, we have a good wholesome respect for armed men,

and no Afghans had as yet made us feel easy. But fifty dollars to cross a bridge! Maybe our weight warranted it, but the Afghans weren't weighing us. They were *doing* us. And I don't believe a man with a gun cocked at our chests could have extracted fifty dollars from either of us at that moment. Extortion was one thing we weren't going to stand for.

"20 Afghani!" we told Kallon to tell them, though he didn't know a word more of their language than we ourselves. (It was poor Kallon who not only had to do the conferring but who also had to carry the bag of silver coins which when we left Peshawar weighed sixty pounds.) "20 Afghani—and not another cent!"

"Throw it at them!"

Because of his very mildness, we yelled.

"Keep it hidden!" we continued to shout when we saw him digging down, with a dozen pairs of black eyes glittering at him. He kept the bag in his lunch-basket.

But whatever Kallon's personal wishes may have been, he had to obey. Good Indian servants do, and he was one of the best.

"Hold it in your hand!" we ordered. "Don't give it to them until we're across!"

And poor Kallon had to stand on the running board holding the 20 "Afghani" in his hand, the Afghans themselves running angrily beside us. I don't suppose they'd ever before had their dignity stepped on to such an extent. They were furious—and funny.

At the end of the bridge we threw them the money, and

raced off. How we had the nerve I don't know. And why they didn't put a shot in our backs instead of the curses of Allah is inexplicable. It would have been strictly legitimate murder according to their code. Yet they let us get by! We decided it must have been shock. It was a new experience to have anyone shout at them, refuse to pay their toll, and rush past, and it probably gave them the surprise of their lives.

But we didn't rush far.

Punctures are bad enough under ordinary circumstances, but on a baked plain, dry and shrunken like a potato left too long in the oven, with the sun beating down on your back and the temperature well over a hundred, they're worse than Afghans. Kallon knew nothing about the car, so it was up to us, and neither of us at that point was any too proficient. By the time we were through we could have matriculated as expert garage mechanics. We'd had more experience than the best of them. That first day, however, we might have been changing the wheels and vulcanizing the tubes with our teeth for the time it took. And every second, half expecting those Afghans to descend upon us. We'd been told they were persistent.

Two miles farther there was a second sickening sizzle.

At that time, we didn't know about the nails. We'd begun to think there was something deliberate about all this—that camel traders were taking a stand about auto traffic, and were scattering destruction along the roads. But it seems that the Afghans wear hobnails in those stiff leather boots of theirs and that all the trails throughout the country are littered

with them. In time our eyes got sharpened to them—shiny, like the spears of little, vindictive devils.

We had three punctures that day. And then the engine trouble began. It was on a 6000 foot climb—one of the two notorious mountain passes we had to go through before reaching Kabul—that one of the honeycombs in the radiator burst, and we had to take a full hour off to cement it. The car had been boiling. We stopped six times on the climb to let it cool off. And all our water was gone. We'd been told that sometimes there were springs on the tops of the passes. Nowhere else. So, at the risk of ruining the car for all time, we forced it to the top. And then found no spring!

A drop of 1580 feet (we'd studied our maps!), a gulley of a valley and then the climb up the pass—and all the time darkness coming on fast.

The top of this second pass, was the scene of the frightful British massacre in the first Anglo-Afghan war in 1842. The English had taken it upon themselves, after the frailest of acquaintanceship with Afghan politics, to put the "right" ruler on the Afghan throne. With the result that the Afghans came to dislike, even more than the imposed ruler, the British themselves. In the middle of the winter in Kabul, when it is well-nigh impossible to escape because of the snows, they slaughtered the British representative and his officers, and at a conference with the rebel leader's son, the envoy himself was killed by the chief's own hand. It was enough to make the British understand. They agreed to withdraw from the country and 16,500 troops and followers

left the garrison in the terrific January cold, only to be completely cut down by the Afghans who made no pretense of observing the terms of the treaty. On January 13th, the survivors of the force mustered at Gandamak only twenty muskets.

It was pitch black night by the time we reached the top. And our imaginations were working at their best.

"Not only must we never be on the road after five-thirty," from Bob, "we can't, under any circumstances, be caught in a Pass!"

But we had to have water or we'd be there forever. So we turned on the dim lights and sent Kallon to search for a spring.

He hadn't been gone a minute before he came back breathless.

"Footstep, Sahib!" He was trembling.

We switched off the lights and listened. Deathly stillness. . . . And then, sure enough, footsteps. They stopped.

By a kind of mutual instinct, I seized my automatic while Bob snapped on the spot-light—

A tall figure stood silhouetted in the glare before us, his turban and baggy trousers white against the black of the night. His gun barrel flashed in the brightness.

This was what we'd been looking for, when we lolled on our beds in Calcutta!

But when you're in a tight place and have to act fast, it's impossible to think about danger.

"Speak to him," Bob whispered to Kallon, and immediately

I let my own gun show in the light. All of this took about a second. Kallon muttered a few almost inaudible phrases.

The figure answered and advanced. He was a king's sentry. He'd seen our car lights and had come forward to warn us. This, he said, was a very dangerous spot.

He spoke in a voice much too small for his stature and we believed him. But we took away his gun, nevertheless. After this he talked more easily, as if relieved of an unpleasant responsibility.

Just the night before, he told Kallon (fortunately for all of us, he spoke Hindustani), three people had been killed there at dusk. The tribes were on the rampage, wild to kill. There was revolution in the air. (It was that restlessness of which we were so ignorant, and which came to a head a fortnight later.) This was such a hot-bed that the king had had a sentry house built in the very midst of it, and to show his faith in his own people, had slept in it one night. That had been only ten days before.

"We should have chosen *this,* of all spots, to search for a spring!" Bob and I looked at each other.

Even while he talked the sentry glanced about nervously into the darkness. Apparently, he was in as tight a situation as we were. "They are everywhere," Kallon translated for us. We could see his face tightening, his hands shaking, on the edge of the circle of light. "Wild Mohammedans—killing means nothing!"

We demanded that the soldier take us to the house, although he said it was only for the Emir. . . . No one but

the Emir had ever stayed there. . . . It was the Emir's sentry house. . . . But we weren't even listening.

All the way down the mountain side, the sentry standing on the running board, we played the searchlight from one side to the other, against jagged boulders. Whether there were eyes peering at us out of the darkness we didn't know. Those rocks could have hidden anything. I held the Mauser ready, while Bob drove down the rocky road into the blackness.

The sentry house was a dreary hole—a mud hut with dirt floor—one room with ten Afghans squatting in it in a loose circle.

After we'd eaten the terrible meal Kallon prepared, so scared himself that one of us had to go with him every time he left the room, Bob crawled into his bedroll near the fire, irritable and cold. All but one of the Afghans had risen slowly and left the room as we ate. But that one, eyeing us coldly, we were obliged to kick out—literally—with the foot! We were as scared of him as Kallon was. But we had to put on face; that much the English had taught us. Moreover, he wasn't armed. And most important of all, we had had three stiff drinks.

And then, when all was quiet, I sat down at the table—at the one table, on the one chair, with the one candle flickering, my automatic in front of me.

"I'm going to write in our diary," I said, looking toward the fire and bedroll scornfully.

"Good boy." Bob's voice was sleepy.

"Well, we decided to keep one, didn't we?"

"We sure did."

"And who's going to do it if I don't?"

"You win." A wide yawn and a heave that nearly landed him into the fire.

I was just conscientious enough to do it, knowing Bob never would. And he knew it too, which annoyed me more than anything. Every entry that was written in the damned book throughout the trip I wrote. And I never failed to get thoroughly grouchy doing it.

"Three punctures. Broken spring shackle. . . ."

I kept my feet on the rung of the chair off the cold ground. I guess my head nodded. . . .

But again, as the night before, it was good not to be outside.

KABUL

"And grimly said the Afghan King, 'I rule
the Afghan race.
My path is mine—see thou to thine.'"

CHAPTER SEVEN

KABUL

WHEN we approached Kabul we felt pretty cocky. To be sure, we'd escaped the Afridis in the Khyber Pass through the hospitality of the British soldiers, and we'd found shelter against the Afghan marauders in the sentry's hut. Yet, we were feeling a little by the way of being heroes. If we had the temerity to take all these chances, possibly people would continue to constitute themselves our guardians. There seemed to be no easier way to attract attention, we began to think, than to become a problem.

But Kabul didn't seem to feel that way.

Kabul is one of the three cities in Afghanistan—three points of a triangle in a turbulent country, connected by only a thin thread of a trail. Elsewhere impenetrable mountains, great desert wastes, and high, bleak plateaus. The cities are so far apart and so difficult of approach that they are like three separate little countries. It is only through long trains of camels plodding patiently over the high mountain passes

that there is any contact at all. Well into the spring the passes are buried deep in snow, and during the hot months there are stretches of desert, sometimes a hundred miles in extent, where there is no water. Spring and autumn rains make swollen torrents of the rivers. Little wonder that the isolated cities scarcely understand each other's language.

What we planned to do was to visit these three cities, which meant covering almost the entire country. We planned to go westward over the old trail by which the armies of ancient invaders had come on their way to India. If Alexander and Genghis Khan could do it on horses and elephants, why not we, in a car? The fact that caravans, trained to it through generations, were having a hard time in the twentieth century, made not a dent in our complacency. Disregarding everything that the seasoned Englishman at the border had told us, the two of us were taking the matter of Afghanistan right into our own hands. We were going to show them!

But again—we didn't know our Kabul.

It is the capital, the biggest city in the country, with 150,000 souls, and considered by the Afghans quite European. But we had to look hard to find anything western. To be sure, it has the only hotel in the country, theoretically built to look like the Taj Mahal Hotel in Bombay and blessed with the name of Café Valli. But its stairway is of mud and its food pure native. The only European item is the baths, and the catch there is that they don't work—not any of them.

Also, Kabul goes in for European dress. (Or it did when we and the Emir Amanullah were there.) But even that is not so hot. There's always something missing—like a necktie. Or something added—like a turban. Occasionally, women pass through the crowds in western clothes, vintage of 1923, but there's always a veil over the face, and only a provocative eye visible.

There are a few automobiles, but most of the streets are too narrow for them to pass, for donkeys and camels block the way—little burros hurrying along, bearing on their backs men whose feet nearly touch the ground, as if, to hurry faster, they need only to stretch a little farther and run six-legged!—and camels bumping their side packs against the encroaching walls indifferently.

The city is huddled, hemmed in by mountains, with no room to spread. It is on a high plateau with the Hindu Kush mountains, snow-capped, frowning down upon it. Indeed, all of Afghanistan is high. It is said that if the sea were raised 4000 feet, the whole country would still be dry. In winter Kabul lies under snow two or three months, so cold that people seldom leave their houses. "At one day's journey from it," wrote Baber proudly, "you may find a place where snow never falls, and at two hours' journey, a place where snow never melts!"

We saw it first from a distance—an Oriental citadel held tightly within its walls, with Moslem domes rising lightly above, like bubbles large and small. Lines of caravans came slowly toward us, almost obscured in clouds of dust. We

were getting excited. We wanted to ride up to the magic city and, with a sweep of our hats, enter its portals!

But that wasn't the way at Kabul.

We reached the gates at ten o'clock, and it was three before we were inside them.

First, as always, there was the Customs—the *Gumrook*—which proved to be our *bête noir* throughout the country. It isn't just when you enter Afghanistan itself, but when you enter each town, that you must have your goods inspected. For which transactions you pay. Moreover, you can't get into any town without a pass, or out of it without another pass. After all, the Afghans have to make money somehow!

From the *Gumrook* you go to police headquarters and from there to another *Gumrook* for final ratification. Then, at last, you may visit the city.

The Customs at Kabul is a group of mud huts arranged untidily about a big courtyard where the caravans await inspection. Camels face in every direction, being loaded and unloaded. Drivers yell. Children dodge about as they do everywhere in the cities. (After all, many an Afghan has twenty-five children. So it isn't to be wondered at that they cover the surface of every city scene like the stones on the mountain sides.)

The Oakland was the only car present, and there was no room for it. We backed and edged and wedged, trying to fit into a space too small. Camels bumped us with fine indifference, denting our fenders as thoroughly as any taxi could. For camels in towns are as insolent as they are shy

on the highroads. The caravan folk stared at us open-mouthed, going round and round the car, touching the skull and cross-bones gingerly. And the *smell!*

It was our introduction to the Afghan odor. People say every nationality has one—the rancid hot oil of Spain, the cold greasy mutton fat smell in London back halls, garlic on Mulberry Street; but in none of the dozen or so countries that we'd been in had we struck anything so terrible as in that *Gumrook*. It was acrid, pungent from some strange spice, but so violent and so foul that even now, the memory of it almost sickens us.

In the main hut we found the "force" smoking their long water-pipes. A big samovar steamed in a corner. The Afghans looked up at us without moving. As a picture of men at work we found it distinctly distasteful.

We sensed right away the trouble we were in for, but we didn't have the nerve this time to do our customary yelling.

We had to keep our guns hidden, for a modern weapon is highly prized in Afghanistan. It is next to impossible for a native to obtain a fine rifle, since the British and the Russians take good care that their warlike neighbors are not too well supplied with modern fighting equipment. An Afghan kills with little compunction, and if the reward is to be a Mauser automatic, even the slightest hesitancy is removed.

This was a Thursday, which explained everything to an Afghan. But not to us. Friday is the Mohammedan Sunday, when naturally no one works, and the good Moslem is busy (for all of two hours) going to the Mosque. It means, there-

fore, no proper holiday for him. Hence Thursday—for his pleasure and our hard luck. It meant that we couldn't get any pass at all, that we had to leave our car in the *Gumrook* until they should see fit to resume work, and that we must, if we wanted to get into town at all, find the high official in his home. The Afghans shrugged their shoulders at our dilemma translated to them through Kallon. Where the official lived and how to find him was apparently our affair.

We finally got a little boy to lead us. The youngster bobbed in and out through winding streets, looking brightly back over his shoulder at us, while we held tight to the sheaf of papers that were to identify us. It was a huge bazaar that we found ourselves in, crowded and noisy. Men were squatting in doorways, selling their wares, others bending double, heads touching in argument over their sales. Almost all wore native costume with here and there a European hat where should have sat a turban.

When we finally reached the official, he did the Afghan equivalent of hemming and hawing until we—most unwillingly—extracted a generous handful of *baksheesh,* as well as the letter from the transport company. Again we didn't know which of the two brought action. He gave us a temporary pass to get out of the car clothes for the night, but no further baggage. We might "sell something," he intimated. We snorted, but we needn't have; because it was in Kabul that we accomplished our best piece of business.

We went to the Café Valli to spend the night, planning on a bath before we saw the Emir. That was before we knew

the Café Valli. Anyway, we were in Kabul! To have gotten there at all was something!

With a few fortifying drinks, we became so worked up over our feat that we decided the time had come to write another letter. It was welling up inside us. As General Motors and the Maharajah of Jaipur had to be informed about our plans, so, indeed, should the Emir of Afghanistan. We'd heard that he had a great love for automobiles—which would give us Something in Common. Two days ago we, too, had loved cars— The connection was close enough.

It was an evening's job. We wrote it painstakingly in French. *"Nous sommes deux Americains. . . . Les premier pour visiter votre pays. . . ."*

"How in hell do you say 'something in common?'"

"Quelques choses entre nous. . . . ."

"Means just the opposite!"

We fought our way through. And then gave the letter to a special messenger (very expensive) who was to deliver it only into the king's hand.

We rather hoped he wouldn't invite us for that evening, since, with our luggage held up in the *Gumrook,* we had no suitable apparel for a royal audience. Yet we didn't dare leave our room lest we miss the answer.

About an hour after we sent our letter, a dignified Afghan arrived—one Ozzi Mulihan, fat, bearded, and serious. We had expected a musical comedy messenger, salaaming before us, and Ozzi was something of a blow. But he *was* holding out a letter for us, engraved with the royal seal.

It was one of our moments.

But the epistle stated that the Emir had been out of the city that day, had just now returned, and was "going to bed early." That's how important he considered our advent into his city. Moreover, the letter was in excellent English.

It did put a damper on us. We'd have to abandon our ideas of a Fiji Island Court, and also reconstruct our own status. We were sure, as the night wore on, that the Emir hadn't even seen our letter. And with that conviction we managed to restore our self-respect.

We would next try the English legation.

Now, Britishers may be exclusive in South Africa and aloof in India but in Kabul they are practically invisible. The Legation is a world in itself, contained within the walls of its compound—pleasant homes, a complete hospital, tennis court, shops. It may be an unsuccessful attempt at transplanting a middle-class English town, but it's the only livable spot for Westerners in the country—a hygienic oasis. Only in cases of absolute necessity do the lives of Afghans and English meet. As everywhere, the Englishman's practice is to ignore the country he is in—forget it if possible. In India that attitude seemed wanton waste of beauty and mystery. But here it was ideal.

We had our car by now and our clothes. We went to the English legation with two ostensible excuses—one a question about passports, the other, Bob's finger which had become infected. But our primary object was to get an invitation to stay there.

We felt ourselves expanding when a correct Indian butler ushered us into the hall. It was a cool hall with rugs scattered on the stone floor and a flowery courtyard showing beyond. A life of adventure is all very fine but how easy we found it to slip back into the comforts!

Our first blow came when we learned that the Ambassador, Sir Francis Humphrey, was not at home. He was "picnicking" with the Emir. For this had the Emir gone to bed early!

Our second was Sir Francis' understudy.

We stood up eagerly when he walked into the hall. We weren't yet completely hard-boiled and the British officials gave us a special kind of kick. But we only saw the end of this one's nose—a long nose—down which he looked at us without so much as a handshake.

. . . More passports! If he had *his* say, we shouldn't go a step farther! He didn't know what the Peshawar people meant by letting us in at all! No American representation in the country and he'd have to be responsible for us! A revolution brewing! The cause—European influence! We'd be taken for spies. There'd be a devil of a mess!

From lions we were reduced to mice. I claimed, back again in the Café Valli, that he was a dyspeptic. Bob was sure he was grumpy because he hadn't been asked to the picnic. But the truth may be, of course, that he was just normally conservative. The actual revolution (which we took no stock in at the time) probably justified him. It was seething through the tribes at that very moment. And, after all, here we were

—two upstarts—thrusting ourselves on him for protection. It was responsibility added to constant fear and homesickness and disgust with everything around him. He had a case.

We went back to the embassy each day that we were in Kabul, in order to have Bob's finger treated. And the doctor was a splendid fellow.—But we went in, ignominiously, by a back gate!

We stayed in Kabul three days and in that time we made not so much as a dent in its surface. Crowds of tall, dark men moving slowly back and forth, veiled women, narrow alleys flanked with white houses that leaned dejectedly toward each other, bazaars shining with brass, brightly colored with rugs, noisy with a thousand sharp discords—it was an Oriental pattern against which the figures of two young Americans, doing their small business were quite lost.

We did meet some other foreigners in the city—you could count them on your hands. And they were kind to us. We remember them now with humble gratitude. There was the German Ambassador who gave us a memorable letter to one Herr Eberhardt in Kandahar—a letter which brought us our most glowing experience in all Afghanistan.

And a French engineer, there to plan a railroad—another of poor Amanullah's dreams which never came true. He it was who gave us our most definite directions for the route ahead.

Then there was the Swede who shared Café Valli with us, and a couple of Italians who were almost as ludicrous as ourselves, against that impersonal pulsating background of

Kabul. One of them was a radio man and the other an automobile mechanic, both imported by the Emir. The radio man was there to set up a government broadcasting station. He'd been in Kabul a year and a half when we arrived and his equipment had not yet arrived from Paris. It had been sent. It was on its way. But there were just too many *Gumrooks!* We knew from our own expensive experience that money might have moved it faster. Meanwhile the little Italian made lament to us. An Afghan girl had been promised to him. But she, too, like the wireless, had not as yet appeared.

The auto mechanic was a representative of the Fiat Company, to make good the Fiat guarantee of a year on the cars the King had bought. His year was nearly up and he was jubilant. He and the radio man hadn't spoken in three months. He was so glad of new faces—white ones—that he offered to fix our car. He completed our own crude job on the radiator that had burst on the way to Kabul and then became so expansive over a drink of our good Scotch whisky that he promised to adjust our carburetor. Our car had lost power. Half the time we'd had to run in second even on a slight grade. The worry of what might happen after we got out on the road again if the motor balked had been keeping us awake nights. It far outweighed our personal humiliations.

The effect of the operation on the carburetor was undoubtedly good—for us. We believed for the rest of our stay in Kabul that the Fiat mechanic had done the trick. But the

car had no test. Once again on the road it was as lame as before. But in the meantime, we were as impressed with the little Italian as if he'd been Mussolini.

It was in the interests of the car that we met the King's chauffeur, who was also a foreigner.

We were in the bazaar seeking nuts and bolts to replace those we'd scattered over the Hindu Kush passes. The bazaar in Kabul—as well as in all the Afghan cities—is the town itself. All the life is there. It's where the men spend their entire day, where everything is made and sold. It is Broadway, Wall Street, Times Square. There is only one store in all of Kabul—a store with a door—and that's an anomaly. Like a house in Madrid without a balcony, or a bungalow on Fifth Avenue.

We spent one entire day in the bazaar, hunting our nuts and bolts. In a purely agricultural community with a language you don't know, nuts and bolts are a bad choice for shopping. Aggressive salesmen waved their arms and cursed and begged and pulled at our sleeves. Bridges covered the bazaar, darkening it; an occasional torch flared here and there, rugs, grey with dust, hung over stalls. Money-changers, sitting cross-legged in conspicuous corners, let coins run through their fingers like grains of sand, spotting worthless rupees with the accuracy of a subway nickel slot, while around them stood circles of ragged ones with watering mouths. The weavers of rugs were using teeth and toes as well as hands. Coppersmiths pounded their metal with the

indifference and persistence of steel riveters. The smell approached that of the *Gumrook*.

"My dear—" A soft voice in our ears nearly sent the two of us headlong into a barrel in which our arms were already buried deep.

Beside us stood an Indian in native costume, wearing a tiny mustache and a faultless turban. *He* was the King's chauffeur—he would find for us nuts and bolts! He spoke to us in English.

We followed him out of the teeming bazaar as if he were a genie and let him lead us to a magnificent pale blue Rolls Royce which completely filled the little open plaza where it stood. He flecked off an imaginary speck of dust and invited us to get in. We did—going as gratefully to the King's garage as, on our first night in Kabul, we would have gone to his dining-room. When we finally left the elegant Indian, we had not only nuts and bolts but a beautiful picture of himself and the King, both in the same car—and autographed by the chauffeur!

We have reason to believe now that this Indian is the same one who only a short time later drove the Emir to temporary safety in Kandahar, when the revolution was well on, and all of Kabul in arms against him.

Our other nearest contact with the Emir was at his summer palace at Paghman. It is the Afghan Versailles, overlooking charming gardens where all the water of the country seems to be concentrated, with the Hindu Kush rising

peak on peak in the distance. A gentle haze rested on the dust-colored landscape, heavier and bluer over the low-lying fields. Fruit-laden donkeys were taking their leisurely way toward the town.

We took tea there on the public terrace and talked with the Emir's children and their rather saucy French governess. Quite unabashed we watched the Queen eating melons. Five had to be opened before she saw one she liked; but that one she liked thoroughly. She was a pleasant darkish lady in her early thirties, wearing a pretty European dress and hat and looking as if she might have come from the better parts of the Bronx.

When we got into our car at the Palace gates we saw her watching us as she got into hers. I can't say that the greeting was cordial, but we were encouraged enough to race her back to Kabul—and might have beaten her—but for two punctures. Two punctures in succession! And those while you're racing a queen!

When we got back we were so disgusted with the damned car that we took the two wheels off and carried them up to our room. Thus, vulcanizing in a Café Valli bedroom, we spent our last night in the Afghan capital!

We were going to start out before dawn the next morning for Kandahar, so we had to get everything ready. Our load, we had discovered in that first day's travel, was far too heavy, and we had to lighten it. How to do that and still keep peace, was the difficulty.

We both agreed that we shouldn't buy more petrol. It

was $1.50 a gallon, and there were feathers and sand in it. Oil was $2.50. We had only $750 between us and so, although there was no more gas to be had in all Afghanistan, we passed it up. And many the bitter hours later on that we regretted it!

But what we couldn't agree on was the ketchup! Violently, we fought over three bottles of ketchup and finally compromised by keeping one. That was Bob's. He insisted. And I don't believe we ever opened it.

Then there were the English mushrooms. We'd felt we must have a delicacy now and then. But never had any time yet seemed important enough. Neither of us could bear to part with the mushrooms. So they stayed. And when we finally decided the occasion warranted opening them—in Turkey—they were wormy!

We kept one can of spaghetti, one of baked beans, and one of peas, the juice of which we finally had to drink in lieu of water. Cheese, which was our chief food for several of the meals to follow, and crackers.

In Kabul's only store we had bought more food, not to carry with us but to augment the Café Valli menu of greasy soup and native pailu. Two Afghan women who were in the shop when we entered fled at our approach, and watched us through a tear in the curtain at the back. We bought one can of peaches for $2.00! And a bar of grey chocolate, hard as granite.

All our dishes we threw away gladly, Kallon saving some few things to cook with. These he kept in the lunch-basket

with the money, his own little water bottle, and a few other treasures.

Then came clothes. We had forty-eight pounds of them. But we never gave up our illusion. We threw away all the old and useful ones, but held on hopefully to our dinner jackets!

One of the heaviest single items we were carrying was our Victrola. Next to the beautiful tray we bought in Benares, our one souvenir which Bob insisted on keeping in spite of size and weight, the Victrola was what we loved most. No one can ever know what that machine meant to us. In Srinagar, Simla, Rawalpindi, Peshawar, Lhandi Kotal, the sentry house—the first of us out of bed every morning put on "The Stars and Stripes Forever!" Over and over again we played the four others—"Room with a View," "Mary Make Believe," "Double-Eagle March" (only because it was cheerful, it had no other attribute), and a tiny Hawaiian guitar record. We always began and ended with "The Stars and Stripes Forever."

I think we had bought that one with a laugh. But out in that God-forsaken land we treasured it like an ikon.

On that last night in Kabul we were playing it disconsolately. As we packed to the tune of it, we heard a party going on in another room of the hotel. There was laughter. Not only men's laughter, but girls'. And then, presently, a servant came and asked Kallon if his masters would be so kind as to loan him their phonograph. His master was a German, Kallon found out, and the girls were Russian.

It opened up vistas to us. Sure, he could take our Victrola! We stopped packing at once. We handed over the Victrola and the records. And then we stood on one foot waiting for the invitation for us to follow—but that was just another disappointment.

We were depressed. Particularly the next morning, after listening half the night through to our own records and somebody else's laughter. At dawn, after carrying on in sober dignity, we were still without our Victrola. We dispatched Kallon to get it and he returned announcing that the German's servant said his master would like to buy the Americans' playing machine. We felt like parents selling their child—but the Victrola was heavy, and besides the German was offering 120 rupees for it. (In Delhi we had bought it for a hundred.) We sold it. But we never saw the German nor the Russian girls.

All in all, we reduced our load by about one hundred and fifty pounds.

ON THE ROAD TO KANDAHAR

"With home-bred hordes the hillsides teem."

CHAPTER EIGHT

ON THE ROAD TO KANDAHAR

WE left Kabul at four A.M. in a cold dawn, with a 350 mile drive to Kandahar ahead of us. We were worrying about the car and worrying about the rains. But if we had known then that for nearly a thousand miles we'd be driving mostly in low and second gear, crawling painfully day after day at an average speed of eight miles an hour, I'm sure we'd have been more than worried. The trip to Kandahar seemed like a pleasant interlude as we looked back on the hundred odd hours we'd spent cramped in the front seat forcing the Oakland over the mountains and across the desert wastes of the strangest kingdom in Asia. By eight o'clock, we were parched with the heat. A fifty degree rise in temperature in four hours! Yet even in that state of constant discomfort, the strange country about us made a profound impression. There was a steady upgrade for miles after Kabul, so steep that we rarely could go in high. Mountains unfolded. Rolling, billowy

mountains, with many crevices, like mountains on the moon. They seemed to go on and on indefinitely, soft green in color, amazingly high and still and undulating. They belonged in another world. They weren't cold and threatening like those around the Khyber, but weird and unreal.

Up and up. The day getting hotter. Shifting gears, afraid every minute that the clutch would go. "You may have the honor and the pleasure . . ."

And then a snarl from Bob.

I had been driving along in a sort of day-dream when one of the rear tires hissed—that long vicious hiss so much worse than any snake's.

"Didn't you *see* it?"

Bob sat beside me as I drove, with eyes like an Indian's, looking for nails. He claimed I never saw them. And I guess I didn't. That morning I was seeing only mountains—and food.

The tire had to be changed then and there, the dust rising in a blinding cloud when the wheel dropped to the ground.

But the minute we started again I relapsed once more into my thoughts. It was the oyster season in New York.

"How would you like some baked *right* now, Sauce Marinière?"

I was in a state of exquisite misery, and I dragged Bob with me into the depths. Bumping along we thought up all the dishes that we liked best. We worked out ideal menus for our first meal after we got into civilization. Our mouths watered.

OYSTERS ON THE HALF SHELL

FRIED SCALLOPS

STEAK—POTATO SOUFFLÉ—ARTICHOKE

FRESH TOMATO SALAD

BAKED ALASKA

It took miles to arrive at this perfection!

And then it was time for an Afghan lunch.

Those lunches!

First Kallon would unwrap the bread which he kept done up in wet towels. It was native bread made of mulberry flour. Mulberries are packed in skins, dried all winter, and then pounded into flour in the spring, the result tasting like whole wheat, and not so bad. They bake the bread on hot pebbles making an imprint all over one side like a bad case of small-pox. Then big sheets of it are hung out on a rack and the Afghans buy it by the yard. With this we had native goat cheese. It was our *Afghan ordinaire,* our Afghan Blue Plate.

But it was the ceremony that got us. I generally chose that time to oil the car and was consequently covered with rich black grease. Bob was forever busy looking for something clean to do, holding up his infected finger to prevent an argument. (He managed to keep it in a convalescent state right through the country.) Kallon would hunt through his kit bag, through the back seat, through the entire outfit—hunt and hunt, frowningly—to find spoons. On one occasion he found them in a bag of shoes. He never knew where anything was. Cans half full of food, left over from God

knows when, were constantly turning up and ranged on the running board to await our pleasure. The running board was our table, with food continually falling into the dirt. We were forever hungry, gulping down whatever Kallon chose to give us. But what and when he ate, we never knew. Only his water we saw, in an old Évian bottle, with a rag in the top. This he cherished like a baby.

Nomads had been passing us during the morning—tribes on the move before the rains set in. And now as we ate lunch, a group of them gathered to watch us. There was one old chap with a bag of leaves on his back, who watched us profoundly. He sat on a mound of earth where he could get an uninterrupted view, and he gazed upon us with rising astonishment. I don't know what could have astounded him so completely. But not till we were through did he relax. Then he blew his nose on his turban and looked vacantly into space.—The world was eternal. . . . There was no hurry. . . . No purpose. . . .

We were on a high plateau. Below us was another plateau. And on ahead, the rise and fall of mountain upon mountain.

The only town we passed that day was Ghazni. It is on a high plateau, higher even than Kabul. Throughout the winter months the tableland lies two or three feet deep in snow. Once the whole population of the town is said to have been destroyed by a snowstorm. We, however, were parched with the heat. The skin on our faces cracked. Our lips bled. And our noses were dried out and sore.

In the Middle Ages, Ghazni was the seat of a great empire—a renowned city of the Mohammedan world. Next to Turkey, Afghanistan is even now the strongest Mohammedan kingdom in existence, and pilgrims still come to the ruins of old Ghazni, even from distant Constantinople. The story goes that only nine years after Mahomet's announcement, the tribes in the Afghan mountains heard of the new prophet and sent a deputation to Medina, headed by Kais, a wise and holy man. They became zealous converts and on their return converted their countrymen. They were perfect material for Islam—hardy, strong, fearless. Ghazni became the great stronghold of Mohammedanism, the most inaccessible and the hardest to live in. In the tenth century came a Turkish slave, high in the dynasty of Samarkand. Swooping down over the mountains, he descended upon Ghazni and wrested it from its chief, spreading his rule over all of Afghanistan and the Punjah. In turn, his lands fell to the son of another slave—the great Mahmud, next to Baber the most fiery name in the history of the country. Year after year, Mahmud, the Robber, issued from his citadel on expeditions of devastation. From the borders of Kurdistan to Samarkand, from the Caspian to the Ganges, he brought back enormous wealth to Ghazni. It reads like an opera plot. One can see his hordes streaming over the plains on their swift horses, scimitars aloft, scourging in the name of Islam and of Ghazni!

But all that's left now is a dirty little town. There is no fuel but prickly shrubs against the terrible winter cold. It

is barren, treeless—a walled town with irregular narrow streets, and houses many stories high, toppling and leaning with age. Only the vast heaps of mounds stretching over the plateau show the extent of old Ghazni. And only two slender minarets, a hundred and fifty feet high, tell the glory of its golden age.

The important fact about Ghazni in the present was what our parents were reading about in the New York papers at exactly the time when they figured we would be there. It was the scene of the bloodiest rebellion of the war. And they were poring over maps and encyclopedias, sure that we were caught in the thick of it.

All we were interested in, however, was punctures. Robbers and rebellions would have been a relief. Instead, we had seven punctures that day. We even got to the point where we had to vulcanize on the front seat as we went along, to save time! We had two Shaler vulcanizing outfits with us, "five-minute" outfits, like the "one man" tops. They were tins filled with powder which we clamped on the tire and ignited, the heat fusing the patch to the tube. We mended forty-five punctures that way.

Our most noteworthy puncture came when we were just about half way. It was already three o'clock and we had still 175 miles ahead of us. How we cursed that stop! And how the dust rose as we got laboriously out and to work!

I had just finished tightening the last nut, when I heard Bob exclaim, "Look who's here!"

I looked. Coming toward us were six men on horseback.

In spite of their fame as horse-traders, these were the first mounted Afghans we had seen. They had come from behind one of the many high mounds that surrounded us, and were almost upon us before we saw them.

"Let's beat it," I said, jumping into the car.

"No—they're too close—we'd better see it through," answered Bob under his breath, and more slowly he slid into the driver's seat. "Get out your gun."

I slipped my automatic out from the flap overhead. But when they came closer still we saw that it would be useless, for the Afghans were armed to the teeth—with guns, and knives, and cartridge belts. Kallon began muttering in Hindustani.

With a shout from the one who seemed to be the leader, the six surrounded us. They definitely were not friendly. Scared as I was, I couldn't help admiring those tall horsemen, erect in their saddles, dark of face, with mustachios and turbans, and the bearing of princes. People don't come that way in real life. They were like figures out of a heroic legend—Mahmud's ruthless warriors bent on conquest.

All this happened in less than a second. Bob apparently had been thinking fast and started the engine, racing it so loudly that the horse in front jumped to one side, frightening the others into a frenzy of rearing and bucking. And Kallon, to his everlasting credit, came unbelievably out of his funk. With a dramatic gesture, he stuck his funny little head out of the back seat and pointed to the skull and crossbones painted on the door of the car. It was an

inspiration: the car giving such a lurch forward that the dust flew about us in a cloud, and then Kallon, threatening the supernatural! We roared out from among them like a raging beast, and tore down the bumpy trail.

What those horsemen planned to do to us we never figured out. They were pure Durani Afghans, we knew. We'd seen the Durani in Kabul and knew the type from our various informants. But Durani in a city and Durani in their own haunts are about as different as gunmen from drug store loafers. The Durani are the most powerful tribe in Afghanistan. They are distinctly Semitic in type and claim descent from King Saul, no less. Saul had a son called Jeremiah, it seems, who had a son called Afghana, and it was the numerous stock of Afghana that were removed from Palestine to Media by Nebuchadnezzar and thence found their way to the mountains of the present Afghanistan. Their looks certainly corroborated the theory. And their laws, an unwritten code called Puktunwale, are said to be similar to the old Hebraic laws. It gives one pause. Here were men living much the same as the Jews of Biblical times had lived, and looking much the same, the only difference being that the Durani are soldiers and farmers exclusively. To a man, they are unwilling to pursue a trade or keep any sort of a shop.

These Durani in the mountains are religious fanatics. Many of them call themselves *Ghazi*—men who devote their lives to the extinction of other creeds. What they thought us, God knows. Every stranger is their enemy.

Undoubtedly, they were among the rebels; perhaps the forerunners of that orgy in Ghazni which the people at home were taking with their breakfast coffee—and of which we were still so sublimely ignorant!

Or they may just have been in search of red-heads. Red-heads, we were told before we ventured into Afghanistan, are supposed to be particularly virile. They're held without ransom for purposes of propagation! I wet my hair well whenever possible to avoid any doubt. And Bob has the good fortune to be unequivocably black-haired.

Whatever the business of the horsemen, it only goes to prove how foolhardy we were—wandering blithely into hotbeds of fanaticism and strange hatreds. And doing it as matter-of-factly as if we were taking a back road to Quebec! It would seem that God protects fools.

Of course, these tribesmen had probably never seen an automobile. It was an ancient caravan trail we were traveling, where letters are carried by human runners—a week from Kabul to Kandahar. Undoubtedly, it was they who were brave to beard us—ready, like good Moslems, to fight and to defend! But the strangeness and the sudden deafening thunder of the engine in those deathly quiet mountains might quite reasonably have stopped them in their tracks.

Although we were left limp by the experience, it was exciting. After we were far enough away, the memory became highly exhilarating.

And then came trouble. It wasn't long after we'd sailed through the tribesmen that we began to smell something

suspicious. Like a flash the two of us were out of the car and at the back.

Sure enough! We had our reserve gas tank attached to the standard tank by a copper tubing. When the standard one was low we opened up the connection and let the gas run in. It trickled so slowly that in order to save time we had on this day opened up the reserve during lunch. Then we'd driven on and forgotten it! At the instant that we smelled gasoline we saw that the gauge had not risen. The tube had got loose, and instead of draining into our tank it had been dripping a trail in the dust behind us. We couldn't estimate just how much we'd lost. But we knew we couldn't get any more in the whole country.

That gas business left us pretty low. We didn't talk for an hour—a rare situation with us, who prided ourselves on our conversation. Women, the tariff, the status of Early American Comedy, we tackled anything, crossing Afghanistan. But now we were dumb. We were still in the mountains of the moon. The "road" was fairly well defined going up the hills, but on the level it spread and dissipated itself, as the caravans that made it had done. It was growing dark, and we were far from Kandahar. At the speed we'd been making—if our snail's pace could be called "speed"—we couldn't hope to make it that day. I muttered as much to Bob.

But there was no answer.

"We'll get lost, sure as hell."

Again no answer.

"Even if we should make Kandahar, we couldn't get in at this hour!"

I could have kicked Bob gladly at that point. Not only would he not consider staying out on the plain at night, he wouldn't ever bother to discuss it.

I stopped driving and ordered Kallon to fix us up for the night.

Whereupon Bob got in the driver's seat and started the engine.

He had me, of course. "Why take the chance," he at last condescended to reason, "when everybody's told us it's suicide to stay out at night?" He listed our advisers in India, the Afghan sentry himself, the English legation, everyone in Kabul. "To say nothing of the boys back there!" nodding in the direction of the six horsemen.

But the lonely spot where we had stopped seemed to me as good a place to spend the night as some equally lonely spot elsewhere. We were on a plain where the caravan tracks were scattered and widespread. The chances of reaching Kandahar on this seemed no more likely than ending up in a camp of the Durani.

Yet, over bumps and mounds and deep hoof-holes, Bob continued to drive as fast as the poor, abused Oakland would go. I am sure he would have been driving still and he and I enemies for life, if the lights from a distant watch tower hadn't ended the battle.

"Anyway, I hope to God we get robbed," was my last remark. And in half an hour we were in Kandahar.

KANDAHAR

"Two things greater than all things are,
The first is Love, and the second War.
And since we know not how War may prove,
Heart of my heart, let us talk of Love."

CHAPTER NINE

KANDAHAR

IT'S strange how sometimes you can feel impersonal toward an experience over a long period of time, and then, suddenly, find yourself overwhelmed by it. You lose one personality and take on another. Certainly,—in Kandahar,—from feeling like a disgruntled onlooker pushing through an unfriendly country, I became overnight a part of the scene which I had been viewing objectively. From the audience, I jumped over the footlights onto the stage.

"Germani! Germani!" we went crying through the streets and alleyways of the dark town when at last we got into it. Probably it was a more heartrending cry than we realized at the time. For we were wrought up—what with worry, and hunger, and overwhelming tiredness. We had a letter from the German official in Kabul to a Herr Eberhardt, representative of the *Deutsch-Afghanische Compagnie,* stationed at Kandahar, and it was on him that we were pinning our hopes.

A little old man at the gate of the town had swung his

lantern insolently into our faces when we took form before him out of the darkness of the plain. He'd sputtered at us vociferously. And Kallon, after these volumes of Pushtu, had merely told us that we couldn't go in.

The great gate arched forbiddingly above us, and through thick double walls we could see the dim city.

"We stay in *Gumrook*," he reported, firing us to fury with his mildness.

We'd seen the filthy hole outside the walls, and we knew the smell of all *Gumrooks*. "The hell we will!" We were too desperate now to be intimidated.

We started the car, but unlike the mountaineers, a crowd of idlers now gathered around us, held their ground. We tried gesticulating, shouting, "Americani," "Germani," flourishing our papers before them. But we got no response. They peered, squinting at the papers in the dim lantern light, but remained firm. Finally we gave *baksheesh*.

"Germani! Germani!"

Through unpaved alleyways, around sharp corners, an occasional torch lighting up dingy houses that leaned toward each other like tired tipplers, we pushed our way slowly through the dark town. Our shouts pierced the deadly quiet.

Once a figure stepped out from a curved doorway, right into the glare of our spot-light—a tall man in long straight robe, forehead shaved far back and curly hair hanging over his shoulders. Another of Nebuchadnezzar's henchmen looking ahead two thousand years, defiantly bearding a honking machine and two shouting Americans! We must

have been creatures out of a nightmare in that ancient sleeping city!

A little fruiterer, nodding by his stall just inside the great wall, rose as we lumbered around a corner toward him. At once he was wide awake—a sharp, bright-eyed little merchant.

"Germani! Germani!"

He nodded vigorously, repeating in strange guttural, "Germani." He knew. He understood. But business was business. One hand, palm upturned level with the shoulder, pointed toward his unprotected wares shining under the flickering torchlight. The other hand, toward us, palm also up, but level with his hip, indicated *baksheesh.* His long shadow wavered grotesquely against the wall.

We rattled our bag of silver half-heartedly. It was a promise. And he stepped onto the running board, pointing a devious route ahead.

You wonder how such a city lives in the midst of that wild country. It seemed vast to us that night, houses huddled, tumbled all together, miles and miles of dirt streets so narrow that our wheels scraped the walls. Bob and I were silent, like the ghosts we felt ourselves to be,—except for our spasmodic warning calls whenever we turned new corners.

It was at the far end of the city, near another wall, that the fruiterer put a commanding hand on my shoulder, then hopped off the running board as we slowed to a stop. He pointed to a house, somewhat straighter and sturdier than

the others, and beckoned Kallon to follow him. Bob and I remained grimly silent in the car.

There was the murmur of low voices speaking in Pushtu, a speck of light fluttering within, growing gradually brighter until it flooded the entrance, and then the figure of a pretty woman framed the low arched doorway! She was not native, but a European, fair and young, with wavy hair that caught at the candlelight like a halo. It was we, now, who were dreaming.

"Wass ist es?" the voice was low and a bit frightened.

All the German I'd had in college forsook me. I sputtered meaningless sounds, and Bob, unable to contain himself at my incoherence, exploded in peals of laughter. Just nerves, I suppose—but I wished to God I'd lost him in the desert.

The girl in the doorway looked startled, staring out into the blackness. *"Wass ist's?"*

Her bewilderment brought Bob to his senses; and in what seemed to me polished German, he undertook an explanation. He was dignified in his black suit, the grime of the trip obliterated in the candlelight, enhancing, if anything, his natural darkness, and accentuating a kind of gravity, while I stood miserably outside the illumined circle, conscious of my shorts with deep streaks of grease across them.

"Ich bin Frau Rümmel," she said simply, after Bob had told her who we were and whom we wanted. At mention of Herr Eberhardt her face momentarily clouded, I thought, —an expression coming over it which I attributed later to dread, Bob pooh-poohing me as a sentimental idiot.

The fruiterer, she said, had made a mistake. There were two German households, not just one, in Kandahar. And she smiled a little as she said this.

It seemed fantastic, somehow, to come upon an attractive young European woman in this wild, out-of-the-way place in the dead of night. The unexpectedness of it was what threw us off so completely. I let Bob do all the talking and stood by grinning foolishly, while Kallon and the fruit seller moved like vague shadows outside the circle of light. She was no longer startled, but excited, and apparently not a little pleased at this apparition out of the night.

She said she was sure that Herr Eberhardt had no place for us to sleep. But she would send her houseboy with us to him, and the boy could guide us back. It would give her great pleasure if we would use her extra room for the night. . . . If we would accept her hospitality. . . . She spoke now in English, with considerable difficulty, and flushed as she spoke.

Had we just emerged from a good sleep and a cold shower, we couldn't have been more set up. *Would* we accept her hospitality? We must have shouted our acceptance! At which enthusiastic response she giggled delightedly. She was pretty much of a kid, and probably hadn't had a laugh since she'd struck this God-forsaken country. Nobody could laugh in Afghanistan. Who she was or why she was there we hadn't the slightest idea. But it was clear that we were a welcome sight.

We went to call on Herr Eberhardt. More mazes of alley-

ways and turns, a tunnel-like entrance into a strange house. Then a pretty courtyard with balcony on four sides, and off it a living-room where we found the gentleman himself. Probably if we hadn't by mistake found Frau Rümmel, we'd have been all set up over this finale to a long hard day. The Herr was pompous, but affable, and seemed to get quite a kick out of having two Americans drop in on him at eleven-thirty in the night, six hundred miles from the last Indian city!

He read the letter from Kabul with great interest, exclaimed over our trip, and then broke off quickly.

This boy—this Afghan—where did we find him?

It was Frau Rümmel's houseboy. And when Herr Eberhardt learned that we had already seen that lady, I observed a noticeable drop in his enthusiasm.

Anyway, the man looked like a good eater. We were at peace with the world now, no longer nervous, and ripe for a good German meal. We'd forego speculation.

But he looked at us uneasily. It was no longer Frau Rümmel, but his duties as host that were bothering him now. His native cook had gone for the night and all he could do was to boil us an egg!

On the road since four in the morning, harassed by punctures and heat and dust, ravenously hungry, we now sat down to—not an egg, for we wouldn't let him go to the trouble—but to cold sausage! His native food, brought all the way from Germany at great trouble and expense, but still—cold sausage!

Herr Eberhardt did, however, serve a purpose. He offered to introduce us to the governor, and to try to get letters to the governors of the provinces beyond from him. And he satisfied our curiosity to a certain extent about Frau Rümmel.

Herr Rümmel, he told us, represented a German match concern, which was trying to start a small factory in Afghanistan—matches apparently being one of the few necessities of life not made in the bazaars. He was obliged to be away a good deal; in fact, he was away at present.

"Some nerve leaving a young wife alone in a place like this," Bob remarked.

Herr Eberhardt's reaction was interesting to watch. Pomp dropped from him like a garment suddenly and mysteriously unloosed, leaving him as if naked before us, and ill at ease.

The Herr recovered his composure in a moment and we were given no opportunity to return to the subject of Frau Rümmel.

The only other mention was made much later when he was telling us about a proposed road from Kandahar into India. "Herr Hausmann—the engineer from Germany—figured it would take seven years and cost two million rupees. Amanullah might have considered it. But Herr Hausmann—he lived at the Rümmel's—left suddenly. He left—with his work unfinished, his surveying only a third done—"

"And the road hasn't been started?"

He shook his head. "Nothing, nothing."

"Why did he leave?" I regretted the question the moment I asked it. "Country hard for him? Government no help?" I was trying to mend matters and only succeeding in making them worse. Once again the German flushed.

"I don't know why Herr Hausmann left," he finally said drily, as if reproving me for undue curiosity. It was obvious, too, from the edge on his voice, that he didn't fancy Herr Hausmann, and was no doubt damned glad he was gone. I found myself feeling sorry for the young engineer.

Herr Eberhardt insisted on playing for us all his Victrola records, all German, and all stale. It was middle-class Hamburg, and we were anxious to get back into our German fairy tale. As soon as decency allowed—a little sooner—we bowed ourselves out.

Frau Rümmel was up waiting for us, her wavy hair caught down demurely this time, and her dress changed—from the white one of the candle-light to a kind of pongee, the color of her tawny hair. Maybe she, too, felt the fairy tale.

Her English was halting, but she went at it like a sport. You could see what the effort cost her, from the way the color came and went in her cheeks. I'm sure she had looked up many words in the dictionary during our absence.

I don't remember much of what we talked about that night—but I can still hear the sound of rustling poplar leaves as she told us of her life in that strange land. Her accent was delectable, and her mere presence a soothing contrast to the rough and tumble, catch-as-catch-can life

we'd been leading ever since we started on our trek.

"I haf one bed only to offer you!" she finally told us. She had hospitably offered us lodging, and only now faced the fact that she actually hadn't room enough for both of us. I was glad she wasn't practical.

We tossed a rupee for the bed, much to her amusement, and I was relegated to the floor with my blankets. I felt something of a hero.

We could hardly wait for breakfast-time to come. Not for the food, but for the company. "At seven? Sure!" We'd be on the dot! We didn't want to sleep at all!

But when we slipped into her living-room next morning, it was half-past eight. I had slept like a log, Bob claiming I was damned lucky not to have drawn his rattan cradle. But I begrudged the time I had wasted.

The blue sky was bright, the roof of the house next to ours red against it. The three big poplars patterned the courtyard with their shadows, and a humped cow was quietly ruminating. Frau Rümmel greeted us from the low doorway and told us breakfast was ready.

And what a breakfast! Eggs and jam and canned butter, a European armchair, and a pretty girl to laugh at our bum jokes!

Never have I had an experience more charming than that day! We were thrown together for a period of hardly more than twenty-four hours; yet in that short span of time we became friends and confidants. There was nothing superficial about our relations, no conventions to work down

through, no foolishness. A season's slow-growing friendship was crystallized here in one long rich day.

She had come into Afghanistan a bride. You could see her, in a small Bavarian city, lured by the picture of it all—the swaying rhythm of Oriental crowds, mosques and minarets, the Himalayas reaching to the skies, cutting off this strange country from the rest of the world! Certainly Ludwig Rümmel must have told her glowing tales.

He signed up for five years, and she—for life. It was true, she had a courtyard with poplar trees, rare in that barren country, but there was an outhouse in the yard, and a cookhouse close to it, and the duck pond was not mere ornament. She had communication with the outside world, but by caravan only, days and days to Kabul. News became history, and cholera could wipe out a city before her mother would hear that she was "well and happy." What satisfaction pouring out your heart on a lonesome Christmas, when the cry wouldn't reach Germany until Easter!

Hers was quite different from the Anglo-Indian life we had seen, broadcast as that was through army circles and smart short stories. The women there knew what they were getting into, and they had each other. But this girl was plunged into a world generations behind India in civilized living, and left there alone. No young person to laugh with, no companionship but an elderly husband, absorbed in his own interests. The Afghans living in dense masses about her were as aloof as the mountains; she could waste away with loneliness, cry aloud in frenzy, but she'd still be alone.

She didn't say any of these things, but you couldn't watch her and not know. During those first few minutes of meeting she'd been startled, then bewildered, then embarrassed. But that was all momentary. Now she laughed and chattered gaily—asked us about our homes, our trip, and the work we were going to do. She didn't want to talk about Kandahar, or about herself. Her eyes lost their brightness when she did. But probably unconsciously we forced her into it. I remember her, in her precise German manner, giving us statistics about the country, and analysing the Afghan character with a profound understanding. It was she, for instance, who told us about the Duranis and differentiated them from the Ghilzai—so much better than any of the so-called diplomats we'd met in Kabul had been able to do. She'd read and studied in her prison. And she had obviously determined not to let the Orient "get" her, as it does most Westerners. She had spirit. Two years must have taken considerable toll —a Scheherazade city faded into a dirty slum, a husband becoming more jailer than companion. But instead of giving up—instead of becoming lethargic, fat and indifferent—she'd ridden, and hunted, and kept herself slender and fresh.

Kandahar is the southern point of the triangle of cities, joined together so precariously by their thin thread of trail. It is the focal point of all caravan routes from the Indian border to Herat and Persia, but not the faintest touch of modernism colors it as it did Kabul. A city of 32,000 souls—the size of Plainfield, New Jersey—without a bathroom.

Around the town spreads a fertile plain—the garden of Afghanistan. It is a plain made fertile by painstaking artificial irrigation. There are fields of pomegranates, row upon row of "sirdah" melons, grapes that are unequalled in the Orient. A Kandahar farmer treats his little plot of ground the way a woman does her work-basket, taking out this, putting in that, always to good purpose. In November, for instance, he sows barley, which in March and April he cuts twice for fodder; in June he reaps the grain, ploughs and manures the ground once more, and sows tobacco, which in its turn, yields two cuttings. Next, the ground is prepared for carrots and turnips which he gathers in November and completes one year's work. It made me dizzy just to hear about it. But not a turnip did I see.

Bob and I had tossed again. This time we tossed for the *opportunity* of greasing the car, though usually the one idea was to get out of it. I won. It meant that all day I could stay in the shadow of the Rümmel house, while Bob went to Herr Eberhardt's, to the governor, and to the bazaar. In sheer gratitude, I gave the car an overhauling such as it never had before. All wheels off, the carburetor and distributor thoroughly cleaned, the radiator drained, every joint greased, every puncture of the day before well vulcanized! I shooed off camels that lumbered indifferently into the street, bumping my fenders with their bulky side-packs. I waded among children, gathered by the dozen, staring, touching the car, stumbling over wheels and tools. I tried to teach Kallon to vulcanize. But he was too jittery—lighting the

fuse fearfully and holding it at arm's length. It's a wonder he didn't burn new holes, instead of mending old ones! In white shoes for the occasion—dirty canvas ones, which constituted my only "change"—I stepped through oil and grease, and on, enthusiastically, into Frau Rümmel's clean house. But not a bit did I care for the shoes, nor she apparently for the house. She had years ahead to get that cleaned. Her spirits were high, and she dropped all duties for the day. She watched the car come apart like a slow movie. She laughed at Kallon's awkwardness. She asked all the questions, relevant or otherwise, she could think up English words for.

In the afternoon I was obliged to tear myself away from my work to go to the bazaar with Bob. Besides, Frau Rümmel was taking her siesta.

The bazaar was something you dream about—long, narrow alleyways, packed with a slowly swaying crowd, the bars of sunlight and shadow marching the length of them in an even rhythm of black and white. Women in long shawls from head to ground; men in dirty white and a queer, faded blue; every once in a while a dead dog to be avoided. The sides of the street were a continuous display of wares—fruits, clothing, silver and hardware made while you wait.

We stood spellbound in front of a man winding on his turban. We knew this must be a delicate operation, but just when and how it was done had always been a mystery to us. Even Kallon never appeared bareheaded even though it were the middle of the night. The man in the bazaar

sat cross-legged, working deftly with a narrow strip of white cloth that was yards long. He started it in the middle of his forehead, pulled it neatly over his head, backwards, forwards, back again, leaving the streamers down behind. Then he wound it around in a dozen or more convolutions till the result was as compact as a woven basket.

We were in the bazaar for *poshtins*—the sheepskin coats that the natives wear. We'd been cold just one too many nights. New, the *poshtins* were too expensive. We considered second hand ones, but the memory of the bugs in Kashmir was too vivid. A few bugs we had with us always; but deliberately to introduce a new batch was too much! We went without the coats.

Again that evening I had to leave the hospitable Rümmel household, this time to help retrieve our passports that Bob had been compelled to leave with the police. Visiting the governor for three hours, just before leaving that city for good, irritated me beyond words. I had looked forward to a long evening before the fire in that little living-room. But there was nothing for me to do but go. Bob insisted. And I followed him and Herr Eberhardt, resentful and grumbling.

It was a beautiful night, and the governor's palace loomed up white against a deep blue dome of sky sparkling with stars. The buildings were enclosed in great stockades, well within the city walls. In spite of my preoccupation, I was impressed.

There are five provinces in Afghanistan, each ruled by a

governor—a *Naib*—who, up to Amanullah's time, was supreme in his territory. Very like the Indian Rajahs, only of course, much, much poorer. But now these governors were responsible to the Emir and to a perfunctory code of laws —a gesture toward centralized government. And they were quite content with the change, we judged from the three we talked with, because the remuneration was larger and more regular than the uneven taxes they had hitherto had to depend on, Afghans considering all taxes as tyranny. Moreover, the aura of a court still surrounded them—the Afghan idea of a court.

We passed sentinels who demanded papers, and more sentinels, who demanded more papers. Then through a shadowy courtyard where dark trees grouped themselves in the corners like ladies in hoop skirts at a garden party. Bob had seen these trees in the daytime, and said that they were heavy with round red fruits. In the center a fountain trickled.

We stepped from there directly into the salon of the potentate.

Outside, the visit had seemed an Oriental fantasy. Inside it was pure Gilbert and Sullivan. There was a long room carpeted with a huge red rug and lighted by oil lamps, a few soldiers standing about and leaning against the walls. They were unshaven and slovenly—like bazaar loafers picked up at random and dressed for the act in obsolete European khaki. At our appearance they became self-conscious. No one had told them what to do with the likes of us. A big

mustachioed captain of the guards came in to greet us, and then the governor was announced. We almost expected the soldiers to break out into a raucous chorus.

The governor was in pyjamas. Striped silk pyjamas. As were also his two sons, one a grown man, the other a small boy. The same pyjamas, Bob whispered, that they'd had on that morning at ten. But I was more interested in the spectacle of the two children. Monogamy was only two years old here in Afghanistan (also thanks to Amanullah), and I couldn't help wondering all the time what had happened to the discarded wives and the offspring in between.

Greetings were profuse, even through the sifting process which they had to undergo.

"We come to bring to Afghanistan the good wishes of America."

We had decided on that phrase way back, and perfected it as time went on. Our remark was made in English to Herr Eberhardt who translated it into German to an Afghan officer. This one put it into Pushtu (the native tongue), from which a more educated Afghan finally lifted it into Persian. Persian is the court language, and no governor, however able in Pushtu, is going to admit that he understands a word of it!

"We take back happy memories of your gracious cities"—

"Sounds like Western Union," Bob whispered. "'Greetings to distant countries!'"

Herr Eberhardt eyed him coldly.

The governor had been unable to talk to Bob in the morn-

ing, so now he asked many questions. We had asked on arrival for our passports. But he waved that aside as unimportant. He was a pleasant looking Afghan provincial. Two years before, as a lesser official, he had planned to go to America, he said. But Amanullah had offered him this governorship, and he could not pass up the opportunity. He had never been outside of Afghanistan, and probably never would be—so he might as well dream of America as of India or Baluchistan. This was our mental comment, not his spoken one. He listened with great interest to Bob's tale of skyscrapers, and of automobile traffic, and of subways. He might one day see an airplane, but the chances were slim that he'd ever see a Bronx Express.

He gave us letters already prepared to the governors of Farah and of Herat. He introduced his children, and pointed proudly to their books.

"What are they studying?" we asked politely. But confronted with it, he didn't know.

He had served to us melons and pomegranates and pears, large and luscious. Fruit and *chai,* a kind of tea which we saw in no other place in the East. It has a queer spice in it, and is thick and sweet. You have to smack your lips to get the full flavor. We did it like any good Afghan.

But the governor did *not* produce our passports. Bob had been told that they would be sent to us at Frau Rümmel's at eight o'clock that evening. It was now nearly ten, and the whole thing seemed to be just a party. Plainly the governor couldn't understand. Why should we be in a

hurry? Had we not just arrived in Kandahar? Why then should we wish to leave? I suppose if you haven't left a place in forty years, it's hard to get the idea of one-night stops.

We all squatted on the floor, with European chairs ranged round the walls empty. They were the only concession to Amanullah's western policy.

By eleven o'clock, when we were entirely out of messages and smiles, and had finished the fruit and *chai,* an aide, who, it seems, had gone home for the night, came ambling in. (They had been searching for him since eight!) It was he who had had the passports; and they had been given a thorough going over, being stamped within an inch of their available space. The smaller the province, the more officious, we found, and hence the more stamps. By the time we got to Persia we had to go to no end of trouble to get additional visa pages from the U. S. Consulate, for all our blank pages had been covered at Afghan customs posts.

The same big stars were hanging low as the gates clanged to behind us. The moon was rising, a little lopsided. Rooftops, a sea of them, stretched out from the small hill of the palace. And over all hung a great enveloping silence.

Wasn't this as satisfying as the roar of New York, and honking taxis, and red and green lights, and garish display signs? Life is short. You find a place that hits you right—just right. Why not have the guts to stay in it? I suppose I must have spoken my thoughts half aloud.

"So Herr Hausmann once thought!" Herr Eberhardt said

in German. It was as if he too were speaking thoughts aloud in German. It was as if he were speaking thoughts aloud in spite of himself. "But he could not see it through. . . ."

I didn't like it—this pulling up stakes so soon and leaving this oasis for heaven-knew-what. The moon was bright as we came to Frau Rümmel's little street, and she opened her door when we came near, letting out the warm yellow light. An oasis, indeed.

Bob and I went into our room at once, for the Herr very obviously wanted to talk to her privately. I'd been amused at his maneuvering before. Now I was annoyed.

"What are we going to pay her for all this?" Bob asked the minute we were alone, yanking me out of my reverie. He had brought up the matter of paying before, but I'd always managed to avoid the issue. Now I was outraged.

Pay! Pay a lady like her! It would be an insult!

I was in such a state that I actually convinced him. What a load I was lifting from his shoulders by doing so, I didn't realize. He had been stewing over this, it seems, for twenty-four hours and through three good meals. So long as we had coins jingling in Kallon's bag I was quite content. But Bob had been doing some mental bookkeeping.

"Come on, Johnny, we have to do something about this. It's embarrassing as hell."

It was then that I thought of the beautiful Benares tray. Silver, delicately chased, and encrusted with exquisite black and white mosaic. It was our treasure. Every day we had packed it carefully, always telling Kallon exactly where to

put it. Often we got it out and polished it. It was the one object we wouldn't be separated from during the general upheaval in Kabul. Our only souvenir.

It was a perfect compensation, the most fitting expression we could hope to find for our deep gratefulness.

Herr Eberhardt left, and Bob went sheepishly into the living room bearing the gift. She appreciated its beauty and its rarity, as I knew she would, but she wouldn't take it.

"Wonderschön!" she exclaimed, stepping back, putting up both hands. She couldn't. She couldn't accept it. . . .

So Bob finally ended the matter by putting it up on the rough mantle over her fireplace.

There was nothing more to say. We were going to leave at three A.M., and would get two hours' sleep before starting on our three hundred mile drive to Farah. There was shaking of hands. Stilted, formal goodbyes. She started to speak as we were leaving; then flushed, as she did so often.

"The tray will remain longer than anything else in this house," she said, choosing her English carefully, "—except my memories!"

At three the moon was already waning. A deep ditch ran along one side of the narrow street, and the wheels of the car were within six inches of the edge. I had to point the spotlight at the front wheel, and Kallon a flashlight at the rear one, so that Bob in backing shouldn't slip in. Not more than a foot at a time could he move. Kallon brought out a basket packed with food which Frau Rümmel had left for us—a

dozen eggs, some canned butter, native bread, jam, and a chicken, prepared for us the night before.

"Madam gets up at six o'clock," he told us as we moved slowly through the shadowy streets. We'd always encouraged him to gossip. "She is going riding with Herr Eberhardt!"

I turned up my collar to keep out the cold. But still I shivered. The three of us rode in silence out of Kandahar and on to the desolate plain. I felt that we were leaving life behind us—inside that arched gate, and within those double walls.

KANDAHAR TO FARAH

"The eagles is screamin' around us, the river's a-moanin' below,
We're clear o' the pines and the oakscrub, we're out on the rocks
an' the snow."

CHAPTER TEN

KANDAHAR TO FARAH

AFTER you leave Girishk there is a turn in the trail—vairee important!" The French engineer in Kabul had stopped at this point in his directions, and opened his eyes wide at us. "The worst part of all Afghanistan, it is there!"

We couldn't get excited about a place called Girishk when the mountains were still between us and Kandahar. But we did have the sense to ask the engineer to commit his directions to writing. This was a gesture of mutual distrust. If Bob at any time said, "Turn to the right," invariably I thought, "Turn to the left"; and vice versa. Each of us knew the other too well. So we were very glad to take the Frenchman's piece of paper and put it away in a pocket.

"Keep mulberry trees on ze left! *C'est très important!*"

Over rocks, over hummocks, over inexplicable little mounds, we rolled on in the dark early morning—away from Kandahar and toward Girishk. I imagined us riding roughshod over an ancient cemetery—miles and miles and miles of dead ones. A herd of humped cows stood huddled to-

gether, faintly silhouetted in the night light. It was very cold, and we were for the most part silent.

Only one big star was left of all those that had been hanging low over Kandahar. Alone in the sky it shed a brave pale light—quite close to the horizon. In my dejected state I took it for a symbol of my own personality, especially as the light grew fainter.

"What time is it?" I asked, bitterly.

"Sunrise," answered Kallon.

A pale streak in the east grew green—the sky was an opal of mist, as we rode on, shivering. Suddenly, a little cloud peeking over the horizon caught some gold, and held it brightly aloft. It was a trumpet call to which the whole heaven gradually responded—banners of salmon-pink, followed by rose, deepening and brightening as the procession welled into deeper yellow, orange, red—in never-ending, unbelievable brightness! Finally, the sun.

"Thank God, we aren't driving into it!" said Bob.

Over mounds, over bumps, over rocks, toward some distant hills rising jaggedly out of the plain—an irregular line of scarred precipices crowned with fantastic pinnacles. It looked like the New York skyline. For seven hours we saw no sign of life, not an animal nor a person nor a flower, while the morning slowly ripened.

Crossing the Argandab river was what brought me back to my senses. We saw it from its hilly bank, far below us—a river bed of huge rocks, winding between steep banks as far as the eye could follow.

The three of us got out to search for the best crossing—a spot solid enough to hold the car, yet with rocks sufficiently small to keep the wheels from being squeezed down between them. We waded in water to our waists.

Bob and I each found what we considered a perfect spot. As I happened to be doing the driving, it was my spot that won.

"Go full speed anyway!" Bob advised. We were in the car again, dripping and disagreeable after our prospecting. We tied a blanket over the radiator to keep out as much of the Argandab as possible and then I went my own way, which was about fifteen miles an hour. I was afraid to go top speed over small-sized boulders—fearful that they would wreck us. I held the wheel with a death-like grip as we went up and down, sliding, slipping, jerking—everything in the car rattling. And then, when we were more than half way across, on some small rocks which I had picked out as particularly steady, we stuck. And then sank profoundly.

I tried to back, but the wheels wouldn't turn. We got out and pushed. Tried to raise the wheels. But nothing worked. As a last resort we did what Bob, from the beginning, warned us we'd have to do. We unpacked the entire outfit!

Nobody who hasn't started on a three thousand mile drive with complete supplies for the journey knows what such an unpacking means! Baskets, frying pans, camera, mattresses, suitcases, blankets, even the reserve gas tank—everything had to be taken out and spread on the rocks of the Argandab river!

When it was over, it was funny. But for an hour while we were at it, unpacking, carrying everything over the wide river by hand, working the car out, and then repacking on the other side, we were like a pair of snarling dogs.

Breakfast restored us. It's remarkable how little it took then, and always, to restore our spirits. But this was *the* breakfast! All of Frau Rümmel's food in one fell swoop! The dozen eggs scrambled, the chicken broiled, the butter, the jam, and bread!—Only Kallon was uneasy. He never could understand our appetites. Part of an egg did him. And now he found himself with nothing left to put back into the basket!

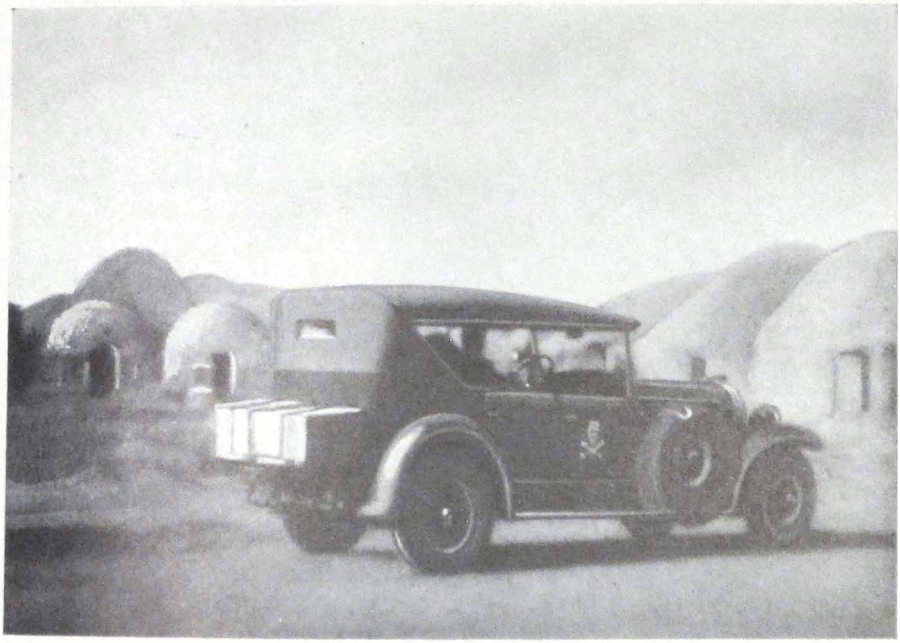
But how *we* profited! Lying in the shadow of the car—because it was now insufferably hot—we smoked and chatted. Soon we felt thoroughly rested and relaxed. By the time we reached the Helmund, which is the largest river in southern Afghanistan, we were so fit we could have swum it.

We found we didn't need to, however.

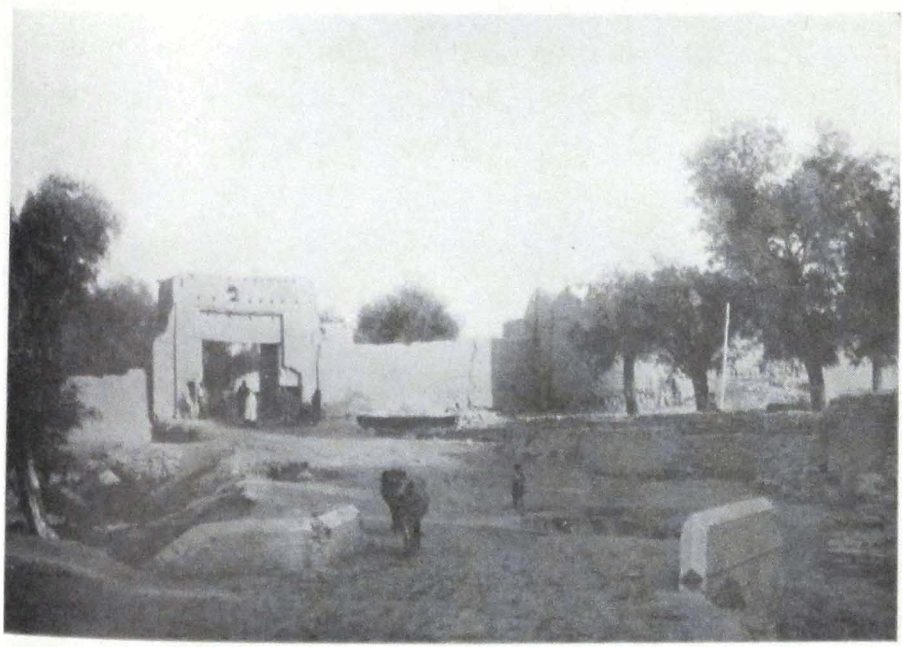
It seems that Amanullah had once planned to cross his country by automobile. And for his coming a bridge had been built across the Helmund on the general line of the trail between Kandahar and Farah. But whether or not he had ever crossed it, we didn't know.

It was a pontoon bridge made of flat row-boats with planks on them, well covered now by dirt from passing caravans.

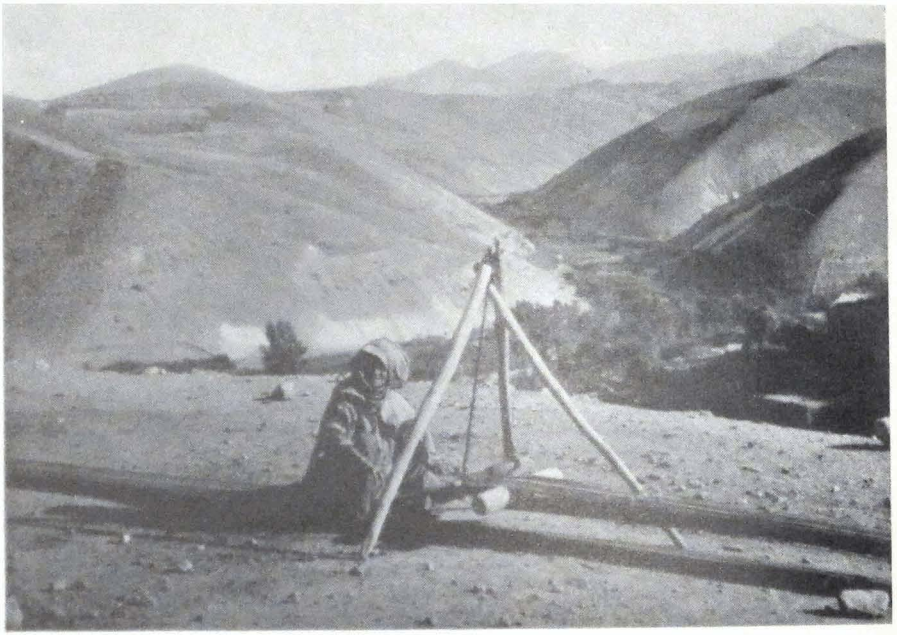
"Wait a minute," said Bob, as I made for the bridge.



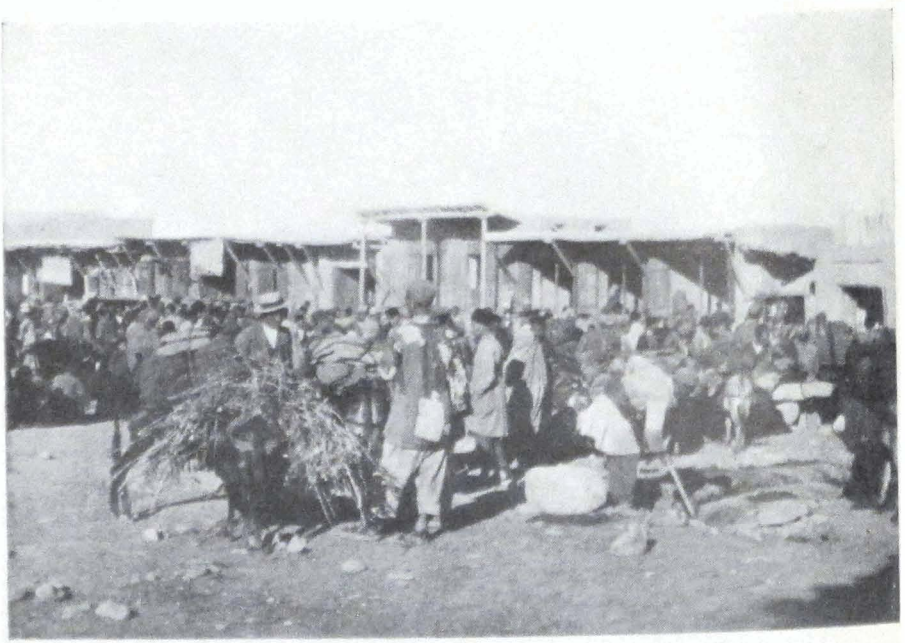
A Beehive Village in Northern Afghanistan



Village Gateway



"Mountains of the Moon"



A Persian Bazaar

I stopped reluctantly.

"Let's find the ford the Frenchman told us about," he went on, pulling out the paper.

"Six miles!"

"But it'll cost us nothing—and we won't risk drowning."

"Yeah, but the Frenchman said the water might be high. We'd lose twelve miles, and waste the time besides!"

I had the advantage, with the wheel in my hands, and decided to save breath. I started her up again, and approached the bridge.

"Baksheesh! Afghans want *baksheesh!"* Kallon cried out, his eyes wide with excitement.

The dirtiest lot of ruffians we'd yet seen were blocking our way. They were shouting and waving their arms.

"Other side!" we shouted back, nodding our meaning toward the opposite bank. We'd give them their pay there.

They clutched at the car as I drove it through them.

"Other side!" Kallon told them shrilly. But they continued to protest, waving threateningly and clinging to the car.

I stepped on the gas.

The widest river in Afghanistan was before us and under us. Ours was probably the first automobile ever to cross it, yet our entire attention was being devoted to escaping toll!

Seven of the Afghans ran after us and jumped onto the running board.

"Push them off!" Bob cried to Kallon, and Kallon, too gentle to kill a flea, and thoroughly frightened, was obliged

to obey. He did it the way he'd done the vulcanizing; it was Bob who did most of the pushing. Before they knew it, all seven were on the ground, two of them sprawling on their backs. Then he threw after them what money he considered the passage worth.

They deserved what they got. They were loafers, not tax collectors, as we learned later in Girishk, hanging around the bridge to graft on caravans.

While they were picking themselves up behind us, and sprawling again for the coins flung to them, we sent the Oakland plunging over the loose planks, bucking like a steer as the pontoons bounded from under the wheels.

"Step on it, *step* on it!" Bob was muttering, and I was stepping, holding the wheel with a grip that hurt, trying to keep the car steady. The farther shore looked good to me, too. We had almost reached it when—crash-bang!—a wheel slid down between the loosened planks, and for the second time that morning we were stuck!

Instead of giving them the laugh, we were now beckoning the Afghans to come and help us. All seven, followed by an inquiring fringe of hangers-on, came cautiously forward. The few coins already thrown were enough to undermine their pride, with the result that both sides were considerably subdued. Personally, I felt like a dog with its tail in the door.

Working together over the car, we finally got it loose. It wasn't as serious a sinking as our earlier one. *Baksheesh* was handed around once more, far more generous than had been originally demanded. And once more upright, we picked

our way carefully over the rest of the planks. Only Kallon looked back.

Girishk was a mile farther along, a small square town surrounded by walls, with one narrow street cutting through it. From a distance it looked futuristic, its cubes of houses rising one above the other, in even planes of light and shadow —white and grey. It was a toy town with all its rag-doll inhabitants out in front of their houses to watch the apparition of our car, with its skull and crossbones, going through their midst. We spoke to the town simpleton, who understood a little Hindustani but who could tell us nothing.

Girishk rather restored our pride. We went through it with a flourish.

It wasn't until it was about six miles behind us that we began to take note of what we were doing. Frau Rümmel and Herr Eberhardt and the governor of Kandahar had all said that we should attempt to go no farther in one day than Girishk. We should spend the night there. But that advice we weren't considering at all.

"After you leave Girishk there is a turn in the trail to Farah. . . ." According to the Frenchman we should see a river bed with a caravanserai beside it at this point.

There was no road to speak of, only goat and camel tracks, such as we always saw scattered about the plains near a town. There was a river bed, but no caravanserai.

"Keep mulberry trees on your left."

But there were no mulberry trees.

Considerably farther on we came to another river bed,

much smaller, and also without a caravanserai or mulberry trees. So we returned to the first. We decided he must have meant the one behind us, as a caravanserai would have been nearer the town.

"Keep mulberry trees. . . ."

Bob grumbled, and I pushed the Frenchman's written directions under his nose.

"If you turn wrong, you get into mountains—'the most terrible part of Afghanistan, it is there!' "

Not even a root of a mulberry tree. We got out and searched.

There was, however, what appeared to be a fork.

"Farah?" we asked of an old man, leading a shaggy goat. We pointed to the right path which looked somewhat more worn than the other.

He nodded his head vigorously.

"I thought so," I said, jumping back into the car.

"Farah?" asked Bob again, pointing this time to the left path.

And once more the man nodded with the same vigor.

We might just as well have tossed a coin. The debate began all over again, and we finally turned right.

We felt at peace with the world that afternoon. The sun was beating down on the roof of the car, but a breeze coming down from the mountains scattered the heat. We hadn't had a puncture so far that day, and our two river experiences seemed already historic and rather amusing. We rattled along the trail in high spirits.

The trail was pushing up a rocky valley between huge hills that were fast becoming mountains. Cliffs were rising beside us—sometimes a thousand feet high. But we only held on tighter as the loose shale slid out from under, and continued to talk.

Throughout our trip we were never silent except when we were angry, and that was rare except around five in the afternoon. That hour we set aside as a period for silence—a kind of wrathful meditation. Usually we ended it by having a drink.

But on this afternoon it was long before five that we were forced into silence. Lovely golden valleys were growing into mountain ravines. Peaks that had been frowning down upon us were now beginning to resist us—defiantly.

"I know a family with seven children," Bob was saying. "The father and the mother are both artists. They can't afford a maid to do the work, and yet . . ."

The trail was so steep that the engine was knocking in first. We seemed to be climbing a wall! With great difficulty, at that angle, Bob turned the car around, and backed us up the rest of the way in reverse. It was the only way we could have reached the summit. But it was a complete damper to conversation.

Once on top, an amazing spectacle stretched out before us! Geologists claim that the land elevation was so rapid in this section that the erosive action of the rivers could not keep pace—which accounted for the formation of these immensely deep *daras,* as they are called. Making a cross cut of the

Siah Koh range, as we discovered later we'd been doing, was giving us a perfect illustration. We were among mountains that rose at their best to 15,000 feet and more! A complete world of jagged peaks, waste and desolate! They were not majestic like the Khyber, nor weird like the Hindu Kush, but wild mountains of rock, with boulders, precipices, of solid, dark grey granite, hurled madly by raging Titans. It was as if all the loose rock of the world had been gathered together and dumped there, the pile spreading far and wide.

That was only one of the mountains we had to climb in reverse. From two to six o'clock the trail toiled up impossible slants, then shot down steep rocky sides. The one who was not driving had to scout ahead to find a place wide enough to turn in, and walk to the top each time to look over the edge. Several times we had to level the summit of a climb with pick and shovel to keep the bottom of the car from catching and leaving the four wheels suspended in air. Going down in first with the shale slipping was terrifying. But once down, we had to "let 'er go" to get impetus for the next climb! Mountain followed mountain, with cavernous defiles carved out between them by rushing streams sometimes thousands of feet in depth. I only wish we had kept count of the river beds we crossed that afternoon! Once we struck a defile not more than thirty yards wide, cut out of limestone cliffs 1500 feet high. No country in the world, our same geologist says, has so many clear-cut waterways in proportion to its size. And I guess we didn't miss many of them that day.

Four hours in those mountains!

In one of the wildest of the valleys, but still so deep that the sun could scarcely reach it, we came upon a village. It was a queer, dome-shaped settlement, with houses of grey mud the color of the mountain sides, and roofs round like beehives. We could see the inhabitants scamper as we approached them, leaving the town quite empty as we rumbled in.

We stopped the engine and got out to look around.

As the quiet continued, faces began to appear at the doorways—doorways not more than four feet high. They were utterly unlike any Afghan faces we'd seen, round, with small grey eyes, high cheek bones, and no beards. They were distinctly Mongolian. We imagined them to be of the Hazara tribe, who are direct descendants of the military colonists of Genghis Khan. Frau Rümmel had told us about these people, pure Mongol, intermixed with no other race, who have preserved their Mongol character and much of their language down through the ages. I suppose once in, they couldn't get out of those fastnesses.

The Hazaras are not a fighting tribe and their women are constantly stolen by the fierce Firozkohis, who are professional robbers ejected from the Han-Rud Plains because of their misdeeds. The Hazara girls are traded to the Azheks for guns, ammunition and knives. Nearly every well-to-do establishment of Afghan Turkestan has two or three Hazara slaves. They are said to be very hardy. Frau Rümmel said seriously, "Very hardy, never idle."

"Chau pilau Farah?" we asked. These were our two Afghan words—

"Chau," how many—"pilau," seven miles.

But they only looked at us, dumb. The carcass of a sheep hanging in one of the doorways sent out a sickish odor.

We stared mutually, and then gave it up. The little town had seemed a ray of hope, but now it left us desolate.

"My guess is we took the wrong turn!" Bob said, and I agreed.

No caravan would have worked out such a circuitous route, which was beginning now to look more like an animal trail. Undoubtedly, these particular Hazaras had never moved since Genghis Khan dropped them there.

As the sun was setting we found ourselves emerging from the mountains. After climbing, climbing, all afternoon, we thought we must have reached the top of the world. And it looked as if it might be—this vast plateau that stretched out for miles before us. It was shaggy with rocks that stood out sharp against the bright western sky, but empty of a human soul.

Both of us hated this hour of driving, with the deadly level rays of the sun straight in our eyes. We even connived in the morning to plan out shifts so as to avoid it. But this time, we were obsessed with other worries. In the mountains we had had some sense of anticipation. Over each top we might see Farah. But here we saw all there was to see, and it didn't include Farah. There was nothing. Only the faint traces of a meandering trail.

From Girishk to Farah by the caravan route was about one hundred miles. We had calculated that we should be there by six. When it grew to be eight, and darkness had settled down, we knew definitely that we were lost. Farah should have been twenty miles behind us.

Undoubtedly these were the Zamindawar hills—the region that the Frenchman had warned us about. "Vairee dangerous." It is the wildest province in Afghanistan, not only as to mountains, but as to people—the Achakzais, who are the most aggressive and truculent of all the Durani tribes. They were the ones who descended upon Kandahar and besieged it in a campaign of the war with England in 1870. It was they who nearly defeated Sir Donald Stewart. They are fanatical Moslems to whom life means fighting and for whom death, already fated for them, means release.

We had marked certain regions on our map with footnotes of the tales we had heard about them. We read these now by flashlight.

Aside from inimical tribes, the seriousness of our being lost was even greater than the Frenchman knew. As ever, there was the car. We had planned our gasoline back in India according to the mileage across Afghanistan, making what we thought to be due allowances. But if we went back now over seven hours of hard traveling, mostly in first, back to Girishk, there to start out afresh on the *left* turn for Farah, we wouldn't have enough gas to get us out of the country, not enough even to get us to Herat. It would do us no good to return to Kandahar, for there was no petrol there—not any-

where in the country, as far as we knew, except Kabul. If we followed this path we might be going still farther out of our way. We had been going northwest most of the time, and might easily be pushing up the range, instead of across it.

There was clearly nothing to do but spend the night where we were. Even Bob agreed. It was ten o'clock when we finally made up our minds, and we'd been going since four A.M. with hardly a stop. The last food we'd had was Frau Rümmel's treat which we had eaten at eight in the morning.

It was our zero hour. A half cup of water apiece, a can of cold baked beans, and a melon.

The cold was terrific, and we didn't dare build a fire. When we dressed our fingers—for besides everything else, each of us now had an infected finger!—it had to be done by flashlight, under cover of a blanket.

We rolled up on the ground in our blankets, fully dressed, with pistols close at hand. It was hard to find a spot the length of one's body that was not jagged with rocks. Bob had drunk his share of water in one great gulp. But I was keeping mine beside me, sipping only once in a long while.

The moon came up while we lay there, twisting and shivering.

"People pass," muttered Kallon once, from his distance.

And we raised our heads.

Probably two miles away, a long line moved slowly in single file, silhouetted against the east, a string of camels patiently plodding their slow way westward. The plop-plop

of the animals' footsteps came distinctly to us along the ground, and I thought as I lay there, "That is the heart-beat of Afghanistan."

Came the dawn.

But we weren't impressed. We both had indigestion.

"Suffering from undernourishment," I wrote in the diary, and it was at least a month before we could regard that night as an amusing adventure.

But, strangely enough, we were in good spirits. Even the night before we had gone through the ceremony of the pillow—the one pillow which I always wanted, but which I always offered Bob.

"So you could boast about it!" he claims now. But he always returned it to me with protestations and thanks. Even in the cold we'd done this, and now in the morning we were still good-natured.

For five hours, as we proceeded, we didn't see a soul.

Of course, there was nothing to do but go on. We hadn't gas enough now to get even as far back as Kandahar. We just had to keep going until we should find someone to direct us. It seemed our only chance.

And then, suddenly—around ten o'clock—on that vast and endless plain, we came upon a solitary figure.

It was an Indian priest coming back from a pilgrimage to Persia. He was a Parsee walking back from holy Meshed to Bombay—a distance of 2500 miles!

It made us feel religious just to see him. And Kallon was

re-born. We hadn't realized how that little man had shrivelled—with fright and excitement and probably hunger. At sight of his countryman all the little tight lines in his face were suddenly ironed out, and he relaxed into a great all-enveloping smile.

Farah could be reached by this camel path, the priest told us. It was not the route from Kandahar, which was miles south. It was a nomad's trail up into the mountains, and he himself was cutting across those wild mountains on an ancient track from Herat to India. We were now only two *pilau* away from Farah.

The tension we'd been under seemed to snap.

But the plain stretched on in solitary wilderness after the priest had left us—naked rock and stone. After a time we began to wonder if perhaps he hadn't been a vision—if perhaps we were not going mad!

It was a full hour of fast going, rumbling and rattling and bumping—before we saw anyone else. We caught up this time with a small group of nomads.

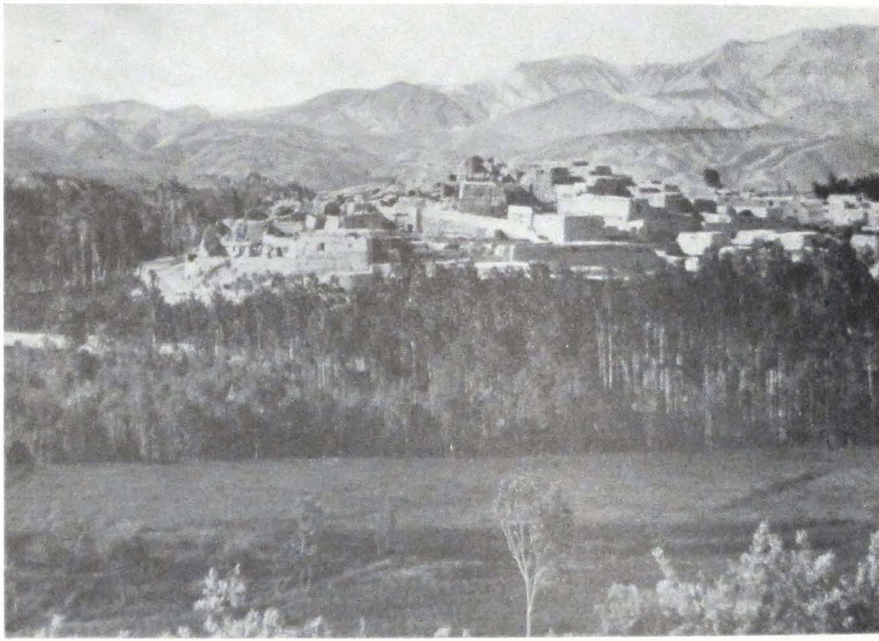
"Chau pilau Farah?" we asked, frightened lest we get blank looks.

But these knew. Six *pilau,* they told us on their hands.

The next ones we saw said ten. The nearer we got, the higher they raised us. But it was enough for us that they recognized the name. Mileage we knew meant nothing to caravan travelers, who reckon in time instead of distance. Moreover, we were beginning to find out that the Afghans deliberately misrepresented—trusting no one. They con-

Our So-called Guard—Baghdad to Damascus

Mired Near Baghdad



The Mountains of Lebanon

"First Car Through Afghanistan" Is Through

cealed the time and the direction of their journey, as well as the nature of their cargoes.

About one o'clock we arrived.

Farah was a small town with mud walls and fortified towers, built around a pool in which dead things floated. A miserable looking town, caked white with dust, and scorching in the fearful noon-day sun. In the shadow of the open *maidan* was a line of some fifteen boys, sitting cross-legged on the ground, backed up against the wall of a house. Their heads were swaying in unison as they sang something in a slow, rhythmic monotone—probably the Koran. Before them stood an ancient man, head shaved, with long, scraggly, grey beard. He was the village *mullah,* and this was his school. Head after head stopped swaying as we drew up, in spite of the raps of the *mullah's* long stick. Finally, as a body, they dropped their books and approached us. All the natives began gathering, all more timid and more friendly than any we had yet seen, running up to us, touching the car, then backing off frightened.

The governor received us beneath a yellow silk panoply. It was in the courtyard outside his house, a raised platform, carpeted with many fine cushions strewn over it, and spiked holes upholding the gorgeous fringed silk. One servant, bearing a heavy encrusted silver pitcher, poured water over our hands, while another dried them on a hand-spun linen towel. With much ceremony, tea was made as we sat there cross-legged, and poured from beautiful hand-wrought silver.

An entrancing scene.—But a very funny one.

"We bring you tidings of good will from America, and we hope that the relations between Afghanistan and America will be more firmly cemented by this visit. . . ."

Our greeting was translated from English, through Hindustani, through Pushtu, through Persian, to the governor, sitting cross-legged, in picturesque costume, and sipping his *chai.*

The two of us—representing America! We hadn't shaved for days (and scarcely eaten), we were covered with white dust that stuck in the grease, and Bob in his streaky black suit was now nearly as bad as I in my khaki. To his children and his children's children, that is the picture which the governor is going to hand down as *genus Americanus.* He told us we were the first Americans ever to reach Farah.

And how the genus Americanus drank tea! We were fiendishly thirsty. The first thing we'd done on entering the town was to order Kallon to get water and boil it. We'd had nothing to drink but one half-cupful of water since eight o'clock the day before! But Kallon was gone so long that in the meantime we'd found the governor, presented our letter to him from the governor of Kandahar, and begun to drink his tea. We'd drunk quarts of it, and so frantically that we burned our mouths, the servants and the governor looking at us silently and with great interest.

"Englishi word 'hot,'" we explained as the membrane shriveled on our palates.

But the Afghans only stared the more profoundly. By this time Kallon returned and the real conversation commenced.

So it was not until after the tea and after the speeches that he managed to get my ear: the only water in the town, he whispered, came from the pool with the dead things. He had boiled some but even boiled he had found it unfit. Kallon, with his Indian standards of purity in water, had found it unfit!

Bob said I looked haggard after the whispered words. And I felt it. I was sure that those quarts of *chai* would be our end.

The conversation was funnier than in Kandahar, and far more difficult. The man who claimed to understand Hindustani, a lean, hungry fellow who bowed continuously for no reason at all that we could see, did not understand it very well. The governor may have understood, but he couldn't admit it, of course. Whenever Kallon left us, as he had to every few minutes to look after the car, a stony silence followed, the governor, his henchman, Bob and I, all sitting there on our cushions, staring at each other and saying nothing! Bob and I foolishly smiling till our faces ached!

The governor asked us to spend the night with him. He offered us the yellow silk panoplied room, beds, servants, and rich foods which he enumerated.

But we didn't accept. In every way Farah was the most extraordinary town we'd visited—queer, primitive, friendly, yet we went on. We were "in a hurry"—with all the rest of our lives ahead of us! We'd had neither sleep nor food, and both were offered us here in plenty, but the winter rains were coming. We continued our mad rush through the strangest country in the world.

FARAH TO HERAT

"They have ridden the low moon out of the sky, their hoofs drum up the dawn."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

FARAH TO HERAT

"WHAT is the greatest happiness in life?" Genghis Khan once asked his generals. It was blistering summer, and the Mongols were taking their ease on a wood-clad slope of the Hindu Kush.

"To go a-hunting on a spring morning, mounted on a beautiful horse, carrying on your hand a good falcon, and watching it seize its foes," one of the generals answered.

"No," said Genghis, "the greatest is to vanquish your enemies, to chase them before you, to rob them in tears, to ride their hares, to clasp to your bosom their wives and daughters."

We had found Baber a man after our own hearts. But Genghis Khan, antithesis of all we'd been taught, became the One Big Figure of Asia. Neither of us was long on history; we had proved that in India. But in Afghanistan, if we did nothing else, we got a sense of the terrible magnificence of Genghis Khan that will stay with us forever. It takes a limitless plateau to set such a man off. And I doubt if anyone can appreciate him who has not been into Central Asia,

where the world is untouched since his hordes swept over it. The roadway we were on, from Farah to Herat, is just the same now as it was a thousand years ago, the ford at the Harud was the same that the Mongols rode their horses across. The hardiest, strongest race ever to inhabit the earth came down through the very mountains that were frowning upon us from the north.

This hot afternoon, bumping over the dusty plain, it was Genghis Khan who was the subject of our conversation. Everything we'd ever read came surging back, colored now by Kallon's strange bits of Oriental lore. His inherent horror of the Mongols was so real and so hair-raising that even we began to suspect every cloud of dust on the edge of the desert—yellow hordes flying over the plain, stirrupless, with curved sabres—tearing on toward Farah and us.

"Voice like thunder in the mountains, hands strong like bears' paws that could break a man in two as easily as an arrow." That was Kutulakh, the Mongol hero. "One who could lie naked near a brazier in winter, never heeding the cinders and sparks on his body—believing them to be insect bites. . . ." Such perfection was the aim of all the tribesmen that wandered the Gobi desert—men who could ride ten days on end without lighting a fire or taking a meal; merely opening a horse's vein for nourishment, letting blood jet into their mouths, drinking till they had enough, and then staunching the flow.

Until Genghis Khan brought them together, the Mongols were tending camels on the shores of Lake Baikal—a frugal,

temperate people, with indomitable courage, and contempt for all that was weak and frivolous. Under him they conquered the world.

But it was their utter ruthlessness that got us.

At Merv—just to put one's finger on any spot on the map of Asia—the tribal leaders were beheaded while Genghis's son sat on a throne of gold.

Nessa they bombarded with catapults for fifteen days, carried its walls by assault, and then murdered 70,000 of its inhabitants as they lay bound.

At Nishaphoor separate piles were made of the heads of men, women, and children, the site of the town was sown with barley, and lest any inhabitants be left, muezzin was sounded, and each surviving Mussulman, as he emerged to pray, was slain.

By his own special methods, Genghis Khan made a nation that stretched from the China Sea to the Dnieper—the greatest area of the world's surface ever subdued by one man. Nomads conquered shepherds, shepherds conquered farmers, farmers conquered cities—the whole cycle of human progress telescoped into one generation and one personality. He "purged the east of the diseased and the decaying, the weak and the false, the worn out and the blasé." He organized a postal service over all this vast territory, and a commissariat that even now people can't figure out. Roads through Central Asia were made safe for the first time in history—if you can call it safe.

And the best of it, it seemed to us, was that there was

no bluff about it all. Genghis was no "champion of freedom." Roads, commissariat, postal service, were for speedy communication between forces three thousand miles apart. Cities were razed, not as haunts of slaves and luxury, but that his herds might "freely feed upon grass whose green was free from dusty feet." From 1211 to 1223, 18,047,000 people perished at his hands. By 1219, the 862d city had fallen before him.

And here were we, bumping along in a little Oakland, in Genghis Khan's very footsteps!

"Seven *pilau* Herat," two horsemen had told us when we were still back in the little square at Farah.

"Twelve *pilau,*" a camel-driver said outside the gates.

Yet here we were eighty-four miles out, without seeing a soul. New York to New Haven—empty. Nothing to dispel our illusion of Mongol hordes. Only here and there a skeleton to assure us that others had gone before.

Once we did pass a herd of camels grazing—a thousand at least—awkward, prehistoric-looking beasts standing nose to tail, hip to hip—like a carpet of bumped, dust-brown backs.

And there were the mirages.

"See that?" I asked Bob, feeling a little dizzy. It's a funny sensation to see something pulsating on the horizon that you happen to know is not there at all. Bob saw it too. And Kallon. A wavering sea far ahead that made us all feel lightheaded.

Or maybe it was the pomegranates. All afternoon we were

eating them, scattering seeds over the front seat, getting our hands sticky with juice. We hadn't had anything but *chai* all day—and the pomegranates were taking the place of food and water. We have since learned that the mortality among Afghans in the fall from "immoderate use of fruits" is something unbelievable. And if the Afghans—! I guess we were lucky to see no more than mirages.

Late in the afternoon we left the desert and began zigzagging up the mountains that had been getting gradually bigger and more ominous. Hard climbs, sharp descents, hairpin turns. In one of the hollows of the mountains we came suddenly around a curve on to an encampment. It was a big camp of black tents, at least a hundred of them, pitched close together as the camels had been, in the shadow of a mighty cliff. They were huddled in the dark shadow, with the world far down below, and the heights above still bathed in yellow sunlight. It was weird enough to come upon anything in those mountains—and particularly so, to see black where you'd always looked for white. As we came near, dogs rushed out at us snarling and leaping at the car—huge dogs like mastiffs, gaunt and hungry looking. Bob grabbed his automatic, and I stepped on the gas. The dogs raced close behind and Bob was poised to fire. He didn't have to, as it happened. But the whole effect—coming suddenly upon us when we'd been in a strange retrospective mood all the day—gave us a start.

First, nomads on the march with their flocks of fat-tailed sheep trailing behind, as many black as white. And then

caravans heavily laden. As we sped on they increased in numbers. The trail that had been so empty before was crowded, until we began to think that Herat was being evacuated.

The tribes of that section are Ghilzais, said to be highly intelligent. But they didn't look it to us. They were filthy, their faces crusted with dirt, and their clothes in shreds. They'd been wandering these mountains for three centuries. We'd been on the road less than two weeks. And, I guess, at that the proportion of cleanliness was all on their side. They are of Turkish origin, and next to the Duranis in importance. They are the only Afghans that will trade. Hence the thousands of their caravans.

From sunset on and through the night, the caravans went filing past, plodding slowly over the steep sides of the mountains, the white clothes of the drivers standing out against the black of the night.

They were on their way to Kandahar, the great trading center, trying to make the trip over and back before the rains. Probably they carried wool, fruit, madder, *poshtins;* but from the smell we thought they had asafetida exclusively. Asafetida, the spice the Indians love—Afghanistan's chief export—and the *Gumrook* smell. We'd finally tracked it down.

Often there were as many as three or four hundred camels in an outfit—a cavalcade winding over the mountain side toward us, one driver to about sixteen beasts, walking ahead with his long staff, or sitting asleep on one of the big loads.

The camels were tied together, tail of one to peg in nose of the one behind, lurching along, squashing their big flat feet in the loose shale, chewing their cud and swaying their load all in one slow rhythm. Time was nothing. Distance was nothing.

Until the Oakland came dashing along!

Then things flew. Camels shied, pulled themselves loose, or dragged the others with them. Women and children screamed. Drivers cursed. Poultry, cows, sheep—the whole caravan disintegrated!

I will never forget the picture of one camel in the glare of our searchlight, hind feet high, front ones in a ditch, with a child on his back holding tight. (The children usually ride on camels and the women on donkeys.) This youngster was dozing on its enormous rocking horse—until we came along and shattered the animal's nerves. With one great jump the camel bolted for the desert, the child clinging like a jockey. They'd have been going still if it hadn't been for the ditch.

There were caravans and caravans. Not far from Herat we met one that was distinctly aristocratic. A huge one made up of shaggy Mongolian camels with bells around their knees, and packs bulging with fine rugs.

Most of these people travel at night in order to avoid the terrible heat of the day. But how they stand the terrible cold of the night is what we wanted to know! Once a whole army, retreating from Persia, was lost in these very mountains—18,000 men frozen to death in a single night. Even the rapids in the Harud (which we were fast approaching) freeze.

And the people use it for a road. Of course, this wasn't quite the season for such extremes. But it *was* October. And in no January or February at home could either of us remember being so cold. The Afghans might be hardened to it, but it was not so easy for two steam-heated Americans.

True to form, Herat was getting farther and farther away from us as we went on—seven *pilau,* twelve *pilau.* At midnight we were still in the mountains. We'd expected to eat a good dinner at Herat, but instead we ate spaghetti in the mountains, and ate it cold. Kallon's hands were shaking so that he could hardly open the can, and the raincoat rippled its entire length with his shivers. We drank a little whisky and kept the engine going to warm our hands. But it was all pretty cheerless.

For one second, out there in the mountains, I recalled the last meal we had sat down to. It was the little supper at Frau Rümmel's—only two nights before. It seemed like looking back on one's youth.

We reached Herat at three A.M., having started the day's drive at four the morning before.

"We don't sleep in the hills *again!*" Bob had stated several times decisively.

And we didn't. But we curled up like dogs, against the outside walls of Herat!

HERAT

"Better is Speech when the belly is fed."

CHAPTER TWELVE

HERAT

EARLY morning sunshine, hot water for shaving, and a breakfast of grapes and eggs and toast. A funny little round man in knickers hopping about us, toilet articles in a row. Gasoline.

Herat was pure joy. "Ring-fenced with mountains, fruitful in cattle and crops, and inhabited by infidels." That's what Al Idrisi said about it in 1162. Al Idrisi was an Arab who wrote a book called "The Delight of Those Who Seek to Wander through the Regions of the World."

The city looks like a feudal castle. It is the oldest town in Afghanistan, and has seen many a good fight. Forty people were left after Genghis Khan got through with it in 1232. After slaughtering some 600,000, the Mongols retired, only to come playfully back when least expected, to see what might have escaped. Sure enough, 2,000 Herati were just creeping out of hiding. And it was after this second killing that the forty assembled for prayers. Timur, the Lame, annihilated

the city in the next century. The Afghans and Persians have always fought over it, so that in the course of time, Herat has had to build enormous battlements. Mud walls twenty-five feet high stand on earthwork foundations twice that height, punctuated by huge semicircular towers, and surrounded by a wide ditch. It is a feudal castle on Gargantuan lines, far more stupendous than the little old city within would seem to warrant.

Yet even the little old city we liked. The people seemed mild and friendly, after the austere and aloof mountaineers. Out on the plateaus and in the mountains, every man we'd met had been a potential enemy. They hadn't proved so necessarily, but the approach had always been far from friendly. Here the faces, the manners, and the language, all were warmer. It may have been that gradual melting of one national type into another which we saw as we were approaching every border. Herat is half Persian, and we were immediately conscious of the difference. We didn't realize how tense we had been until we reached Herat, where we were no longer regarded as intruders.

Certainly the town was no more European than the others we had passed through. There seemed to be no drainage, no sewerage, and plenty of garbage. The main bazaar, from the gate where we entered, was covered throughout its entire length by a vaulted roof, ending in the center of the city in a small domed quadrangle—City Hall Park, so to speak. And the mixture of costumes moving through it—Russian, Usbek, Persian—made it most picturesque, and much livelier

than the monotonous Afghan towns of the interior with their white clothes, white dust. Herat was much farther removed from European influence than Amanullah's Kabul. But at the same time, much farther from the English of the Khyber, and the myth of European conquest. We were accepted here without suspicion.

We were accepted—but not until daylight.

At three A.M., when we arrived, all the gates were closed. No sentry was to be found, everything was dark. A city within of 20,000 souls, but not a sound! It was like knocking on a mausoleum. We honked like howling wolves. But in vain. Then we circled the walls, until the road turned sharply right and landed us, after three quarters of a mile, within a circle of light. We had come to the Russian legation. The Sickle and Hammer of the Soviet Seal glared down at us as we shot our spotlight through the darkness—glared, but gave no welcome. A guard, stepping out of the darkness, was no more sociable. After all, even in Afghanistan people don't drop around before dawn. The soldier held his gun firmly, and wouldn't be budged.

I don't remember what dreams we had before we embarked, of the Oriental salaaming that would greet us. I'm sure we felt that no demonstration would have been too extravagant. Yet here we were once more, ignominiously pulling out our blankets, and rolling up on the ground. We were empty with hunger, our teeth were chattering, and the Russian guard was eyeing us suspiciously.

But the next day's sunshine, with Kallon waking us to the

breakfast he got from God-knows-where, dispelled our troubles like morning mists.

Given the slightest material to work on, Kallon could always be counted on to produce something in the way of a meal. This time he had slept with the guards outside the legation walls, and no doubt joined them in their prayers. Which was probably as good a pathway to the pantry as any other.

The funny little man in khaki knickers was a Russian. We found him staring at the skull and crossbones. He sputtered eloquently when he saw us—in Persian, Russian, French, and German.

"Grosses paquebot!" he exclaimed, pointing to our car. And everything else he said was correct in about the same proportion. He couldn't walk and he couldn't stand still. He hopped—with his feet well apart, knees slightly bent, elbows out. With his big round belly and his little close-shaven round head, he looked like a Dickens caricature. Was this the Russian ambassador?

His linguistic handicaps didn't embarrass him. The car—or maybe it was the skull and crossbones—apparently rang a bell in his consciousness. He tried to tell us about what seemed to be a "tank." In the war he had operated the thing —*"grosses, grosses,"* his arms getting wider and wider apart to show us how big! In spite of his round tummy and his thin legs, he'd been a power in his tank. He'd driven over hordes—crushing—annihilating. French, German, Italian, English, *"Ich hab schisse alle,"* he told us proudly. First he'd

killed Germans, and then he'd been on the German side and killed French. . . . We couldn't follow it all, but his eyes shone avidly. He'd even (we understood him to say) shot his mother!

Bob and I eyed each other. What the Soviet idea of a representative was, we hadn't the least idea. This one was obviously a worker and a man of action. Russians had an important part to play in this buffer state. Maybe in such a country our friend would be as effective a diplomat as any. We didn't know.

The little fellow was most cordial. Nothing was too much for him. After so thoroughly introducing himself, he rushed us into the courtyard of the legation, which was open now with the sun. It was a friendly place planted with flowers and vegetables, and built around on three sides. He took us into a room within the gate and there displayed the toilet articles, all in their proper places, and a little stove, with water heating. He couldn't know that those were the two most beautiful sights we'd seen so far.—Everywhere was the Russian Sickle and Hammer, side by side with pictures of movie stars.

He told us that there were two other cars in Herat—his own and the governor's. But neither of them had ever been driven east—which was the direction from which we'd come. He shook his head violently. The desert . . . no water . . . fifty *pilau*. . . . (Caravans had apparently given the long arid stretch a reputation.) It was the terrible path of Alexander's march, he told us, and shook his head still more vigorously.

But he *had* driven into Persia, as we intended to, and into Russia (which though only sixty miles away, was practically inaccessible because of the mighty mountains).

We weren't surprised when we finally learned that our host was the Russian ambassador's chauffeur.

The Persian consulate loosed a little cloud on our sunny horizon, but not enough to spoil the day. We had to go there to see if there were enough stamps on our passports to get us into Persia. We'd gotten Persian visés back in Calcutta, but we knew by now how little that meant. And we were right. For an hour we were delayed, waiting for—well, we never knew what. But we got it, and left with many new stamps. Moreover, there was a lovely garden to look at while we were waiting, with two old Persian gentlemen in European clothes walking back and forth in it—back and forth—quietly talking. We were approaching another kind of living. And we weren't sorry. We smiled at the Persians, and the Persians smiled back.

The whole town was interested in us. When we went into the consulate we left Kallon outside to grease the car and pump up the tires, and when we returned we found at least two hundred people collected around. The street was a dense mass. We had felt rather apologetic about the job we'd given Kallon, but now we found him strutting. Beaming natives were doing the greasing and the pumping, while others, less fortunate, were fighting for the chance. And Kallon was walking up and down, giving orders.

Everywhere we saw rounder faces, and those broadened

by smiles. Most of the men wore the little round velvet hats trimmed with lamb's wool that we usually associate with Russian Jews. And if not these, the Persian military caps, stiff and with a visor, like those of Italian officers. The Persian government is also trying to modernize, and measures its success by the European clothes it sees around. But the effect is not all it might be. It makes Morris Street immigrants out of mellow Asiatics. In the garb that centuries of living has taught them to use, they are easy and graceful; in western clothes, they look greasy and awkward.

But the high spot of the day was noon—at the governor's palace.

The guards were suspicious at first—as guards are apparently taught to be—until we presented the letter from the governor of Kandahar. Then we were conducted into the palace like princes.

It was a big place, about a city block in size—a two-story building built around three sides of a huge courtyard where three or four fountains played. It had none of the glamour of the Kandahar palace out under the stars, with its torches, and its great walls, and its squatting governor and staff. Nor was it as Oriental (to our way of thinking) as the Farah panoply of yellow silk. But it was probably the most typical of what Afghanistan under Amanullah wanted to be.

We were shown into the dining-room where the governor and his staff were lunching. It was a big room with wooden floor and wooden shutters—the modern gesture—but nearly empty of furniture—and dirty. Paint was peeling off, and

what furniture there was, was rickety. Pushed up in one corner of the room was the table where the men were eating —any one of them might have stepped out of a Pearl Street coffee-house. They sat in chairs, but the chairs were cheap things, falling apart. And they wore European clothes—at least some of them wore parts of the European costume, though none was complete. There were business coats with baggy Afghan trousers, or the typical Afghan leather vest with a pair of old striped pants. The governor was the most nearly perfect; he had everything but a necktie. Neckties didn't seem to have taken in Afghanistan.

They didn't see us as we stood for a minute in the doorway, and continued to eat silently, absorbed. The center of the table was a mass of dishes—big platters emanating spice. There was mutton with spice, vegetables with spice, nuts and fruits mixed up with spice (like mincemeat), eggs, spinach, pilaff of rice. There was one spoon, one fork, one glass, and one pitcher. At the far end of the table the bread was stacked two feet high, each piece about twelve by eighteen inches. Many of these the guests had already helped themselves to, and were using as plates.

There were twelve men, with the governor at the head. They rose ceremoniously when the guard announced us. I don't know whether it was deliberate or a coincidence that they had just at that moment finished eating. Bowing gravely, they all approached us, their hands and faces sticky with food. And we regretted that we'd started the European custom of shaking hands.

There was no interpreter as yet, though we'd been muttering "Hindustani, Hindustani" from the time we reached the palace. But the governor, a fine looking, middle-aged gentleman, gestured to the table, to the servants, and to ourselves, to make it clear that he wanted to feed us. Would we sit down? And we answered, "Sure!" With bows, nods, and smiles he indicated that he would await us in the next room. And one by one, the whole party filed past us, following him. Two servants stood at the door, one washing each man's hands, the other wiping them—all on the same towel. We two next, we supposed, but we tried to put it out of our minds.

The same food awaited us, somewhat renewed, but not hot —cool mutton and rice with greasy gravy. We took bread for plates, dished out of the center with the one spoon and fork, and did the best we could for the rest with our hands.

But the center of interest was Kallon. He had followed us in as usual, and the servants, not knowing who he was, began immediately to bow and scrape. He still wore Bob's raincoat buttoned tight up under his chin, belt pulled in, form-fitting, a pair of our discarded white trousers, not taken off since Peshawar, and the inevitable turban. He could easily have been a prince. And so the Afghans thought. They pulled out a shaky chair for him, and seated him at the table with us.

"Well, I'll be damned!" It was unheard of—an Indian servant sitting with his sahibs.

But we pulled ourselves together too late. He was already

established. I will say that he sat as far from us as he could. And that he didn't look at us—he didn't dare to. But the Afghans probably took that for just so much more dignity.

When we were through we found fresh servants and fresh towels waiting for us at the door.

In the next room the same coffee-house group was standing up waiting for us. It was something in the way of a Cabinet, we supposed. The governor was seated at another long table, which was also dirty, with yellow paint peeling off disconsolately. He was very cordial and invited us to have *chai* and fruit with him.

"Hindustani, Hindustani," had finally brought results. As we ate, the "lackeys" brought forth a ragged, barefooted old man with full bloomer pants and only a vest over his hairy chest. This one could speak Hindu, they indicated proudly. And Kallon began to chuckle, first looking at us, then turning his head away and giggling some more.

Kallon was having much too good a time, and the two of us stood still in our tracks and regarded him.

"What the hell!"

And everything was suspended while Bob at length, and in excellent English, told him where he got off.

The air thus cleared, we turned our attention once more to the governor. Our conversation with him was much what it had been with the two preceding governors, only each time it seemed to get bigger and better. On this occasion we were especially flowery because we needed his help to get us out of the country. It was Thursday again—the beginning of

a long Afghan week-end, and we wanted to cross the border that night.

However, you find that you don't come to the point with an Afghan governor until you've exhausted every other possible topic. And all this in the same four languages.

"America sends tidings of good will. . . . Relations between America and Afghanistan will be more firmly cemented by this visit. . . ." We went glibly through the formula.

"How did you find the Afghans?" the governor asked. And we believe he really wanted to know.

"Most friendly," we told him, forgetting the hills. "After such good treatment as we received, we are sure that more Americans will visit your country." *Yes,* they will!

He had once seen an American, he went on to tell us, speaking as if it were of a rare kind of beast. (We think it may have been Mr. Jackson Fleming, newspaperman, who flew over a part of the country in 1927.) He had seen an American, but he had never spoken to one. Did we drive all the way from America?

I proceeded to describe the various means by which we had travelled. How the Naib interpreted all this I don't know, but the burst of Persian which followed my remarks certainly sounded as if some idea were getting across!

"In our country, there are cars that ride under the earth," I said solemnly, the Naib looking straight into my eyes as I spoke. "Many of them are tied together like camels in a caravan. And they travel seven *pilau* an hour."

The governor continued to stare profoundly at each speaker until Persian was spoken. Then he nodded his head way up, way down, in great comprehension.

"In our country," Bob took it up, "there are palaces that sail over the seas. Palaces with many floors and hundreds of rooms, and little boxes that shoot up and shoot down with great swiftness. These are built that tired sahibs need not walk up stairs, but stand still and are raised from floor to floor. These palaces pass each other on the ocean and make loud screams of greeting."

We regarded each other admiringly. But there was always the danger that some of our best fancies might be ruined on their way, what with silly Kallon and the wild-eyed barefoot one.

After an hour we murmured something about leaving the country. And immediately, like all the others, the governor sat up alert. Why should we want to be leaving a land that we found so alluring? We told him that we feared the rains and that we had hundreds of *pilau* still to go. But no, he shook his head, it was Thursday. The *Gumrook* was closed. He could give us a political pass to get us out, but not the Customs stamp. That was not in his department.

"But, honored Naib, if the rains come, we will be buried in the mud."

"We will be drowned."

But he firmly asserted that we should stay until the rains were over. He liked our stories.

Matters were at a standstill until Bob had an idea. He

beckoned Kallon to bring him the moving picture camera, and asked the governor if he might take his picture.

That did the trick. The slow academic discussion was abruptly ended and the governor was all attention. There is only one moving picture house in Afghanistan and that is in Kabul. It shows pictures of the Emir's coronation exclusively. But the governor seemed to know about pictures. We thought we'd heard the word "cinema" in his talk, but it was lost before it reached us. Now he dispatched one servant for his hat, another for his cane, and smiling excitedly, he led us out into the courtyard. He still was without a tie.

We took him standing up, his arm on my shoulder, his arm on Bob's shoulder. We took him walking and in close-ups. I don't know how many feet of film we had to use to get him round to giving us the necessary permission to go. But eventually we got it, and he assured us that we could rely upon him to get us across the border.

He was a pleasant old chap, distinctly Semitic in looks like all the pure Afghans, with Roman nose and rather thick sensuous lips. We were sure he had a good harem, bootleg or otherwise. He was that kind. We liked him, and regret now that we didn't accept his pressing invitation to stay.

We were only seventy miles from Islam Kala, which is the last Afghan outpost, and itself only twelve miles from the Persian frontier. We made for it in style. Thanks to the two cars in Herat, there was gasoline to be bought and

we got twenty-four gallons for thirty dollars—even though it hurt. The governor gave us soldier guides to get us through the city, and two of them, one on either running board, accompanied us through the swarming bazaar and beyond the gates, brandishing their guns importantly.

ISLAM KALA

"And the talk slid north and the talk slid south
With the sliding puffs from the hookah-mouth."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

ISLAM KALA

ISLAM KALA was a let-down.

We went toward it beaming. Behind us were the cold mountains and the colder indifference of the people who lived on them. Half-Persian Herat had warmed our hearts. The governor was putting in a good word for us somehow with the customs officials, and we were about to step across the border into a land of mildness and miniatures.

Our only mistake was that we weren't yet quite stepping across. Eighty-two miles of Afghanistan still lay ahead of us. And though it seemed like the mere straddling of a brook beside the thousand or so miles behind us, eighty-two miles of that country can offer as many diversions as a steeplechase.

First there was a sandstorm.

We had been rolling gaily past the outskirts of Herat. Wonderful old towers shot up out of the plain. They were remnants of the great Mosalla Mosque built back in the

fifteenth century when Herat was the seat of culture in the East. It had been destroyed by various marauders, but with all their ruthlessness, they hadn't been able to annihilate its godliness. The slender tiled minarets, standing out singly against the bright blue sky, were probably more beautiful than the whole building would have been. They left such vistas to the imagination. We definitely were not sightseeing; we hadn't forgotten India. But those reddish towers, rising so vividly and unexpectedly before us, took us completely off our feet. They were defiantly beautiful—in a raw rough country.

For a few miles around the town we passed farms, vineyards, stretches of sirdar melon beds, and a few orchards. Yet the whole country was dry as a withered leaf, every drop of water that can be found being brought to the surface for artificial irrigation. Next to the Chinese, the Afghans, when they put their minds to it, are the best practical irrigation engineers in the world. We saw squat Herati in their blue shirts and skull caps working on these canals with three cornered spades of Nebuchadnezzar's period. All their implements are of the same type. Near Kandahar we had seen men digging ditches, one holding a long-handled shovel, and the other, opposite, helping him with a stiff wire attached to the same shovel, pulling it up after the other fellow had buried it. Their devices were like children's; yet they produced wheat fields and good stretches of corn without ever having heard of a tractor. We saw them threshing wheat by letting donkeys, five abreast, mill through

it. They husked corn by pounding it, two men to a pile, with thin long poles. More than ever were we back in Bible times.

The desert stretched out ahead of us after we'd left the oasis of Herat, flat to the left, with a line of hills running parallel, on the right. Animals and men littered the road and spread far out into the plain. The day was golden and sizzling. We could hardly breathe with the terrible dry heat. Even Kallon in the back seat gasped.

Then it was that out of a clear sky, literally, without a breath of warning that we could interpret, the sandstorm sprang up. A terrific wind came sweeping across the desert, shaking the car in its tracks, catching the sand and whirling it sky-high. The sun was immediately obliterated and the whole world became dark as night.

Fortunately, we were near the hills, and they protected us. We sat huddled on the running board, goggles on, and eyes tight shut. It was as cold now as it had been hot before. We didn't dare get our blankets out for fear of their blowing away, nor could we put up the curtains. It seemed that the top would be torn loose by the terrific gale. The whole car shivered and shook.

At its greatest velocity, the wind kept up for half an hour. From minute to minute we expected to be lifted off the ground and sent spinning in the air. The thirty minutes seemed like three hours.

When it did finally lessen, and the light of the sun seeped through, we were gritty all over—sand in our ears, in all

the creases of our faces, in the crevices of our clothing—permanently, we were sure—in our hair. We could taste and smell it, and piles of it, like snow in a blizzard, had drifted over the wheels.

When we got an eye fully open, we saw that we weren't alone. Farther out on the plain, the storm had caught a caravan. The camels were in circles, each driver, I suppose, attending to his own group, the animals squatting, heads towards the center of the ring, and the men kneeling, almost lying down, within the circle, with burlap rags, blankets—anything, pulled over their heads. The caravan wasn't getting any shelter from the hills, but it certainly knew how to protect itself!

We drove on while the wind was still whistling, and had our second misfortune in short order. The road went into the hills and the sand had so drifted that at one place we had our choice of ploughing through it up to the hubs, or going over an embankment. For an hour we were held up. The handle of the shovel broke off, the chicken wire that we'd so carefully carried all the way from Peshawar was lost, and there wasn't a board anywhere. We had to jack the wheels up on the covers of our suitcases, which, of course, smashed. But we were beyond luggage. Finally we resorted to blankets to give the wheels a hold—and they worked.

We reached Islam Kala about six—still cold from the storm. It is a caravanserai, fortress-like because it is on the border, and forbidding. We came just at prayer-time, and all the good Moslems inside and outside the walls, were

kneeling, bowing their heads on the ground, raising them, bowing again in vigorous devotion. We peeped through the gate into the big square courtyard. Only after they had finished, were the gates opened for us.

Surprisingly, there is a telephone wire from Islam Kala to Herat. A simple enough affair, as we learned later: The caravanserai turns a little handle and the governor answers. We hadn't heard the word "telephone" through all our interpreters at the luncheon party, and we'd wondered vaguely about the governor's promise to make things right for us in Islam Kala. But now we saw that we were expected.

The soldiers salaamed and let us in.

The caravanserai was built around a courtyard where the camels of traveling caravans were bedded down. Its walls were of mud—very professional mud that gave the effect of sandstone, rather than old and picturesque looking like the walls of the towns we'd been through. At the end was a tower three stories high where the "head man" lived, on the left side was a mosque, and on the right, a line of small chambers. It was an official looking place, completely without sanitation or lights or water, but a palace compared to the one they tried to inter us in at Kandahar. The only point in common with the other *Gumrooks* was the stench. The animal tent of a circus would be a garden beside it.

We were led into one of the little mud chambers. It had a round domed ceiling with a hole in the middle for the smoke to escape. It was swept out and simply furnished

with one rattan bed in the corner, which as the evening wore on, was gradually augmented by another bed, two chairs, a candle and a table. After the walls of Herat and the plateau of the Siah Koh, it was luxury. I hadn't been in a bed since Kabul.

Three men stood by, apparently assigned to us—tall, lean Afghans like those we thought we'd left behind us. One hungry looking one with a hawk nose looked especially bellicose. Cyrano, we called him, though he had all the air of a detective. Kallon was about one-third the size of any of them, but when we reached the room, there he was giving orders.

"Lift this." "Put that there." "Push the bed." Such were his gestures, accompanied by a flow of Hindustani which nobody understood. The governor's luncheon party hadn't worn off.

Bob bristled; and then stepped aggressively into the room.

"Kallon, lift this—put that there—push the bed," he shouted in his best Sahib manner, and pointed to the door for the Afghans.

But he didn't know his men. They backed to the door, it is true. But they took a stand there, and stood silent watching us.

"Serve our dinner," I told Kallon as pompously as I could with all those eyes on me.

Kallon got my idea even if they did not. With true humility he went out to prepare a meal for us, but when later on he served it, the Afghans still stood in the doorway. They

insisted on tasting our melons for us. And as the bad far outnumbered the good, they accommodatingly ate them, spitting out the seeds on the floor, and throwing the rinds under the bed.

We were in a state of helpless rage because neither of us cared to try a second time to put the trio out. There was an air about them that was none too reassuring—especially about Cyrano. Afghans will respect a stranger on their threshold, we'd been told, but consider it quite *comme il faut* to warn neighbors of the prey at hand, or even to overtake the guest after he has quit their roof. This lot was treating us well enough, but they were giving us a thorough looking over.

We ate mounds of greasy rice, bread and tea. There was a Russian samovar, and big square sugar loaves, which are Russian too.

After supper we went to find the "head man" who lived in the tower. Clay roof after clay roof we crossed in pursuit of him. There was a Baghdad air about the place, and the Comptroller of Customs (if that's what he was) was out of the "Arabian Nights" for sure. We found him sitting in the corner of his room on the floor, with many, many rugs piled up over him, trying to write. I was sure it was his will. His eyes were watery, with deep circles under them, and his brown skin looked like crumpled paper. He shivered under his mountain of rugs. He took our papers and passports, looked them over in friendly enough fashion, and then slipped them casually under his rugs. There was

nothing we could do about it. He would probably die there and the passports be buried with him.

It was pitch dark when we left him. Somehow we had escaped our three musketeers and we'd left Kallon to guard the room. So that now we were quite alone.

The night was cold and clear. Guards clanked rhythmically outside the walls, and a rumble of voices seeped out from one of the rooms that led off the courtyard. The camels in the center were asleep, their big hulks spread over the entire space like a vague, billowy sea.

We walked quietly down the line of little chambers towards our own. The door of the one from which the voices came was open so that we could see in. There was a fire in the center of the dirt floor and around it eight or ten Afghans sitting cross-legged, smoking their long water-pipes, with big fleece coats flung over their shoulders. The firelight made their long, lean faces shine like bronze—Semitic faces again, with Roman noses and rather thick lips. The authorities had selected pure Afghans—no mixtures—to guard their border. These were probably taking their pleasure there around the fire, but they weren't relaxed about it. When one spoke the others looked at him sharply, their eyes like pin points in the light. In a corner leaned their guns.

They were talking animatedly. We watched them for a minute or so unobserved. But when Bob said impatiently, "Come on!" somewhat louder than he meant to, their talk froze on their lips. In a second they were on the alert; one

reached for his gun. Two of the others rose swiftly and stepped outside. I suppose they could see our white faces framed against the darkness. An ominous mutter ran through the group.

As quickly as we could we got back to our room. But there was Cyrano with his two henchmen—we couldn't get away from them. Even Kallon was a little uneasy under their watchfulness.

We indicated sleep; pointing to the beds and resting our faces on our hands. Finally we pushed them out and sent poor Kallon along with them.

"That's that," said Bob, and threw his Mauser on his bed roll.

"Reminds me of our first night in Afghanistan," I recalled.

"Can't remember so far back—"

"When the king's sentry rescued us and let us sleep in the guardhouse."

"Oh, yes, three people had been killed close by . . ."

"And we drank some whisky to keep up our nerve . . ."

I pulled out the diary, as I had on that other night, and tried to forget myself. As usual, Bob slept. With my blankets over me and my feet on a chair to keep them off the cold floor, I sat and wrote for two solid hours. My gun and the candle were in front of me on the table.

"Climbed a mountain in first . . . had to turn around and go up in reverse . . ."

A prolonged hacking cough shattered the stillness of the

night. It seemed to come from close beside me. Cough after cough, followed by harsh, uneven panting.

I suppose it was a fellow lodger in the cell next door. But it was fantastic in the night to hear suffering at such close range. Every time he broke into one of those chest-splitting spells, I could see him in my mind's eye as clearly as if he were on the cot beside me—gaunt body, hollow cheeks, sunken chest. It was all I could do to go on with the diary.

"Got the governor to give us a visé. . . . Moving picture. . . . Sandstorm. . . ."

I went at it so determinedly that the sharp recollections finally absorbed me. I lost myself so completely that when a door squeaked behind me, I jumped as if I'd been shot. Suddenly I realized that for some time I hadn't been hearing the coughs. There was a fumbling at the door. And fear sent a sickish, unnatural breeze over my skin.

As I caught up my automatic, uncertain whether to wake Bob or not, I saw the door pushed slowly open. I stood with my back against the wall facing the door, prepared to shoot. . . . And a black cat slid noiselessly in. . . .

When at last I went to bed, I put the table and the chairs and my own bed so securely against the door that the next morning Kallon couldn't get in to wake us up.

When finally we let him in, he brought the news along with breakfast, that we were being held in ransom for 3,000 rupees. We'd broken customs regulations at Herat and couldn't leave the country without paying this sum.

We were speechless with anger. I saw Bob reach under his mattress and I was sure he was going to start something. But there was really nothing we could do. We could only let out by yelling at Kallon.

He had an interpreter with him and at least twelve of the long, lean Afghans—probably the "fireside party"—had come to gloat. They watched us like birds of prey as we ate—fruit, eggs, bread, tea—served in bed. For we had to eat no matter what. Right in the doorway they stood, watching every mouthful. We yelled to Kallon to put them out, but we did it only to let out our ire. We knew he could do nothing.

When finally he did go out for our passports, he was able to find neither them nor the "head man."

"I'm sure he died," I muttered.

"And his crew is in mutiny."

We argued and offered money. They accepted the money but shook their heads over the argument. As we dressed, the crowd continued to stare. We couldn't even slide our pistols into our pockets for fear of their being seen. More than ever were they contraband here.

It was just as he was leaning down over his shoe-string that Bob made the great discovery. There was a telephone on the wall near the floor. (I suppose they squat rather than stand, to do their talking!) It had been hidden by the rattan bed on which he slept.

Before anyone knew what he was doing, he turned the little handle—like the telephones out in the country at

home—and put the receiver to his ear. He thought at the time he'd get the "head man," if any, but what he did get was Herat!

"Hindustani, Hindustani!" he cried, much as we would shout, "Police, police!" if a burglar were in our room. His call must have registered something special at the other end for he said there was a lot of sharp, fast talk and then pauses with periodic monosyllables interjected. He got Kallon to the receiver.

The Afghans in the meantime were all excited. They looked as if they would like to set upon us, but it was their turn to be helpless now. After all, the governor meant a good deal in their lives.

I should like to credit it to Bob's clear voice. But it may be that the governor, our friend after all the talk and all the pictures, had us on his mind in this none too tractable caravanserai of his. Maybe he knew his *Gumrook*. But whatever the "Open Sesame," Kallon before long heard Hindustani at the other end of the telephone, and as satisfactory a conversation as we ever conducted, ensued.

Indignantly we got him to tell about the hold-up. We were sure this time that his translation was good, because he'd had a bad night himself. He said the governor himself would like to speak to one of the men, calling him by name, and when he heard it, who but Cyrano should step up to the instrument.

"Thought as much!" Bob and I nodded to each other. There was much talk, which the other Afghans seemed to

get, because they gradually dwindled away. Cyrano turned to us after he'd hung up, and scolded at large. He scattered the remaining friends, and then nodded for us to follow him.

We ended up in a private room which seemed to be his. It was a filthy place with pictures of naked European women stuck up on the wall. Great wrappings were undone, and out of them came our passports. God knows what he had been planning to do with them!

We'd been held up for 3,000 rupees. The poor old "head man" was far too sick to know what was going on, and this hawk-nosed one was superintending the racket. But we were so devoutly thankful to get our hands around those passports once more that we actually tipped him—instead of pushing his face in.

Half an hour later we were off. Kallon was in his place once more, the effects of Herat completely wiped out. We went out of the mud gates on two wheels, and twelve miles farther on, took pot shots at a vulture. It was symbolic. I claimed I was aiming at Cyrano, and Bob said he was celebrating leaving Afghanistan. We were crossing the Persian border.

We were out of the country we'd tried so hard to get into. Eleven days, more than a thousand miles.

It was a strange, strange country—independent to the point of fanaticism. The English had apparently never felt themselves capable of dominating it, in spite of their two

wars and their Indian subsidy, which lasted up until 1919. Throughout the World War, the Emir Habibullah kept the country obstinately neutral, in spite of the religious sympathy with Turkey and the five months' visit of a German delegate. Yet after the war, Habibullah, who seemed to have his people so completely under control, was stabbed in his bed. Amanullah—our friend—took his turn, and tried westernization. He had his Italian radio man, his Herr Hausmann to build a road to India, his French engineer to plan railroads, his Rolls Royces, his European clothes. But all his attempts were fruitless. Modernism didn't take in Afghanistan. Innovations incensed the mountaineer conservatives. The unveiling of women shocked them into bloody rebellion.

The revolution which the whole world was reading about was well under way while we were still within the confines of the country. We were fussing over passports and punctures, when guns were booming over the mountains. On October 23d, three days after we were in the town, Ghazni was smartly punished for attempted rebellion. It was a flare-up big enough to reach the United States. And from that date on newspapers carried Afghanistan daily on their front pages. Editorials and feature articles and photographs of slow executions reminded the world that savagery was still rampant—while we went blithely on. First it was the army defeating the Shinwari tribes; then Lawrence (of Arabia) said to be leading British border intrigue; Amanullah taking refuge in the fort as his soldiers turned

against him; Jalalabad besieged; and the British rescuing women and children from the Kabul legation by airplane. They were fierce and exciting days. And there we were, unconscious, right on the edge of the volcano. Three days later in Ghazni and we would probably never have left it. As it was, we'd had a series of lucky breaks. . . .

In December, Amanullah moved his court to Kandahar, while the rebels held the Kabul palace and destroyed the hospital. In January he abdicated. He had gone through the humiliation of issuing a public proclamation abandoning his principal reforms. He even returned, himself, to native dress. But the turbulent Afghans would have no more of him. Since then, his brother (and successor) has been killed. His step-brother and three other sympathizers have been strangled to death. Torture has pursued any attempts at reform.

Amanullah is now safe in Europe, and we are safe in New York. But the nomads still wind over the mountain passes with their baggy sheep, and the long strings of caravans are silhouetted against the sunrise on great rocky plateaus. The Naibs have probably given up their chairs and their vests. And the hammering and the swaying continues in the black and white shaded bazaars.

TO TEHERAN AND BEYOND

"They sends us along where the roads are, but mostly we goes where they ain't."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

TO TEHERAN AND BEYOND

I'VE been looking for you young men for three days!" A little, white-haired, apple-cheeked man came rushing into the office where we were sitting. We were dirty and had a three days' growth of beard. And he was spruce in a white linen suit.

"Sit down, sit down," he shouted, as we pulled ourselves together and got up. "I've a cable for you, and I want to know what it's all about!"

Out of his pocket he pulled a worn slip of blue and white paper. It looked as though he'd pulled it out pretty often.

"Heartiest congratulations." About what? The cable was from my father, and the man was the American Consul at Teheran. Americans in Persia were none too common, and Americans being congratulated were worth a three days' search.

That's what Persia meant to us—warmth and friendliness and interest. From the moment we crossed the border we felt the difference. Across a long flat plain we saw the Per-

sian flag, and purple-blue hills beyond. When the customs officer spoke in good easy French, we gave a deep sigh of relief.

But the outlook after leaving the customs officer was scarcely solid comfort. The road straggled ahead over the desert, night was coming on, and Meshed, our next stop, was over two hundred miles away. It was bitter cold, but we put up the car curtains cheerfully, and warmed our hands on the radiator.

As usual, the road scattered itself aimlessly over the plain, and by eleven o'clock it had dwindled into nothing.

"Here's where the camel died," remarked Bob. And he began making wide circles, trying to pick the road out again. But only the faintest of ruts crossed and criss-crossed. There was a river. For all we knew, the road went off at an angle and never reached it. Moreover, the river didn't look fordable.

Suddenly Kallon clutched. When he was excited he always clutched.

"Caravan!" he whispered.

We couldn't hear a thing. But we stood silent, ear to the wind. And, sure enough, there was a distant sound of bells —separate sounds punctuating the stillness. Then a slow melting together until a regular rhythm beat its way towards us, and—after half an hour of constant exciting crescendo—jangling, clanking, as the big beasts came lurching past. It was an enormous caravan moving on toward Herat.

The head driver felt sorry for us. Beside his cavalcade, we

probably looked pretty unimpressive. When he found out what we wanted, he hopped on the running board (throughout Persia we had friends on the running board) and directed us straight into the river. That was the roadway. For a quarter of a mile it ran right down through the stream!—

True to form we reached Meshed at two A.M., just as cold and as helpless as we had been at Kandahar or at Herat, but damned glad to be there at all.

A night straggler was slinking along the walls at a fast, uneven gait.

"Rahe 'hotel'?" we asked. He eyed us suspiciously. We produced an explosion of phoneticized Persian-French and sprinkled "Americani, Americani" liberally through it. It apparently took. For we landed, not in the hotel we'd been asking for, but—to our everlasting joy—in the compound of an American hospital.

That was one of the high spots—coming in out of the desert in the middle of the night, and hearing a Hoosier voice. A tall doctor in a long, white night-shirt opened the door. Fortunately, he was just in from a case. And he greeted us like long lost sons. Never again will we have such an audience. He roused his wife and they both talked to us until daylight. They were as glad to see people from home as we were, stuck out there as they had been for eight years. One of the two American families in Meshed, and three days' hard driving from any others.

We stayed two days with the Lichtwarts. After the moun-

tains and the desert, to get between two clean sheets, and to sit down to table with an American family, was heaven. Food that we understood, two little kids to play with, warm water from a tap, and real bath tubs. A game of tennis.—"Home means all that the songs say it does when you've been away long enough," we told them hourly.

"You fellows will freeze if you don't get something warmer to wear," the doctor told us, looking at our thin sweaters, and led us to the bazaar, in search of sheepskin coats.

We'd been eyeing these all through Afghanistan and now, for six dollars each, we finally got inside them. They were shaggy, white coats lined with lamb's wool, belted, and reaching down below our knees.

"What the devil!" I was trying to get into the long slender sleeves. But they weren't meant for arms, the doctor told us. They just dangle. The coats are made for riders, big enough to wrap completely around one. We felt like Cossacks. But when a good rain came, we smelled like a meat market.

"Rahe Teheran kojast?" was our cry now, instead of *"Chau pilau Farah? Chigat Rahe Kermanshah?"*

We bought seventy-five gallons of gas, had our washing done, and kissed the two little girls goodbye. They were six and eight years old, these two, and had spent practically their whole childhood in Meshed. We couldn't help wondering what Main Street would look like to them when they got back to Indiana—after the shady bazaars.

"Whether at Naishapur or Babylon
Whether the Cup with sweet or bitter run,
The Wine of Life keeps oozing drop by drop,
The leaves of Life keep falling one by one."

We climbed up the hills to Nishapoor in first to where Omar Khayyam lies—under a white slab beside a dirty blue mosque.

"And fear not lest Existence closing your
Account, and mine, should know the like no more;
The Eternal Saki from that Bowl has pour'd
Millions of Bubbles like us, and will pour."

Certainly Omar's pessimism was justified in Nishapoor. The poor old town was levelled by an earthquake in 1208, and rebuilt. Levelled again in 1269. And completely buried by an earthquake in 1280. Omar died in 1123. . . .

Up and down hills we toil and jounce the five hundred and forty miles to Teheran. The roads are lined with people. Nomads on their donkeys—ten or twelve donkeys carrying a unit of three or four families, on toward what they hope is something better. Beside their beasts walk the men, heavily bearded, ragged, with long staffs in their hands. They wear baggy trousers of dirty white, loose jumpers, and little astrakhan caps. Often they are gnawing melons, down to the rinds, spitting seeds out rhythmically as they plod along. On the donkeys are the household goods and on top of them the children and the hens—always hens. Sometimes the women walk, sometimes they ride, swathed in black shawls, proud and calm in their poverty. The procession

moves along slowly, uncomplaining. From one pasture to another pasture. To a warmer slope in winter, to a higher altitude in summer. Life is like that.

Then we come upon carts. Hundreds and hundreds of covered carts, rolling slowly down steep mountain roads, toiling more slowly up—where our car can hardly make the grade. Drivers lash their horses and shout hoarsely. Persian kindness of spirit does not extend to beasts of burden.

There are motors too—unlike Afghanistan. Ancient Fords piled high like the donkeys, nothing of the car visible but the wheels. Often men astride the engine. Chevrolets with boards across the back, and fifteen people crowded on them. There are buses that shake as with some giant ague. Above the rumble of our own car, we can hear them coming. They seem never to have been painted or greased or oiled—just run till they collapse, like the donkeys.

Caravanserais in Persia become garages. They're built like the Afghan ones, around an open courtyard, two stories high, the open space as before for camels and donkeys, the lower floor divided into sheds for cars, the upper story into rooms for travelers. Two nights, between Meshed and Teheran, we stay in these—in Sabsavar and Sharud. They are comfortable, fairly clean, and friendly places.

We pass several with little beehive domed houses in rows, and crowds of people gathering as we pull up.—

Once we came upon a pretty village. We rounded a sharp curve and there it was—a little white town with its bazaar

of open stalls piled high with goods and fruits and copper. A brook ran through it shaded by poplar trees, their yellow leaves bright in the sun as the kettles below them. And beside the brook two men on donkeys. As we stopped, a twittering crowd quickly gathered. It was the background of a miniature, brightly colored, and sharply detailed. But there it ended. For the figure that filled the foreground was a foul beggar with trachoma, running sores covering his face, and flies spreading over him like a garment. He thrust an arm into the car, and Bob jumped as if he'd been shot. The crowd laughed with delight.

It seems unbelievable that in the same town with that beggar, we could think of lamb chops. But we did.

"Got to have meat," I'd been muttering ever since we left the Lichtwarts.

Kallon claimed that he knew all about cuts, so we started him toward the shady side of the bazaar, and then let him feel and smell and pinch to his heart's content. He even had to point out the spot on the carcass where he thought chops grew. All such doings tickled him.

In the meantime, we bought grapes worthy of Omar himself, and set off for a wooded slope. The whole world sang. Kallon pottered around with his fire and pans and kettles. Bob tried to shoot a partridge. And I stretched out on the needle-covered ground. . . . Overhead evergreens patterned the sky with little even lines at sharp angles that looked like the background of a modernistic fabric. Mixed with the fragrance of balsam came the scent of wood fire,

and lamb chops, and onions. It was one of those moments . . .

From our wooded slope we climbed all afternoon. Persia is almost entirely dependent on its roads for communication and commerce which means that they are no longer casual camel tracks, as they had been in Afghanistan and nearer the border, but man-made and fairly well-surfaced. The catch is that they are built on old caravan routes, never winding gradually over a mountain side, but straight up and straight down, direct and time-saving perhaps, but hard on our loaded car. This time it was up. Up and up until toward evening, we found ourselves on the roof of the world. It is a sensation that you probably can get nowhere but in Asia—of vast, illimitable distance, plateaus as far as the eye can reach, empty, desolate, and reddish brown in the slant of the late afternoon sun.

"The earth as it was before life was created." And it was like that! Vast barren space, with nothing living upon it. Incredible stillness. No grass; not a tree for the breeze to whisper through. Every once in a while we'd stop the car, and look, and listen. For once we were speechless ourselves.

But we couldn't stay on such heights forever. After all, ours were western lives—changing, kaleidoscopic. And we found ourselves eventually upon a promontory that looked down over a wide plain far below. A little oasis in the middle, with trees and greenery, gave it size. In the distance rose another ridge of mountains.

To reach the level immediately below us, we went down a long straight road—six miles without a turn or twist, and at an angle to the plain of about sixty degrees. It was probably the most perfect coasting hill in the world. We let 'er go, and sang as we flew down.

The oasis sheltered a small bazaar—nuts, fruit, gasoline, and a group of bearded Persians sitting cross-legged on the ground, pulling at their hookahs.

It was too good to pass. We got out, bought some more grapes, and joined the circle.

"All set for a game," I murmured. And Bob immediately took me up. He pulled out a pair of dice, and quite nonchalantly, not looking at the group, started to roll them. The circle watched gravely, dignified at first, then leaning forward with black eyes bright. Scratch any Oriental, and you find a gambler.

"Here, George,"—I couldn't resist beckoning one of them to join—and before long the dice were passing from one long-fingered brown hand to the next. It was a grand party. Muezzin sounded as we sat there and our companions, loath to leave, drifted away from us to pray.

Between the plain and Teheran lie fifty miles of mountains. As many miles as we'd come down we now had to go up, terrific grades, as bad as any we'd had in Afghanistan, though fortunately on man-made roads. As before, we had to back up some of the steepest. Once we pulled on the emergency brake, and found ourselves within two feet of a precipice. It was as sharp a test of driving as we'd been

through. And Bob had to take all of it, for I was suddenly sick with chills and fever. While I dosed myself with quinine and lay back limp, he put in five gruelling hours behind the wheel.

From a high pass we looked out over green rolling mountains that stretched as far as we could see in all directions. To reach Teheran, we knew, meant going over every one of those mountains to the west.

The last drop was black night. Lights twinkled below us, like determined little fireflies. And we swooped down upon Teheran. There were no outskirts, no straggling line of houses. Huddled all together within its walls was the seething mass of Persia's capital.

Teheran seemed to us a seedy Oriental city gone European. A policeman waves a black and white baton at the main intersection, and headlights blink twice for right turns, and once for left. European articles are on sale, there are windows of glass, and two baths in the Grand Hotel. What we remember best is the ice for our whisky and sodas, and the Russian haircuts. . . .

We were told that if at night you open the door of your car, in pops a Persian lady. They're provocative, those Persian belles, in their black veils so thin that you can see their eyes gleaming. I was all for opening the door, but Bob dissuaded me. Certainly we were busy enough without courting further trouble.

There was the American Consul greeting us with open arms; the French Consul who gave us our Syrian visé. New

pages to be inserted in our passports, overflowing now with Afghan signatures and stamps. And money.

We went to the bank at nine-thirty. We'd been told that cashing checks in Persia took a long time, but we hardly expected to spend half the day at it.

The teller greeted us pleasantly in French. How much did we wish? *Très bien.* Would we kindly stand on that side of the window?

And for an hour and a half we stood on *that* side of the window, leaning and yawning.

Then he came toward us smiling. *Très bien.* Would we come inside? He led us into a private office, apparently to a small reception. A dozen people talked with us of Afghanistan and Persia and India. Everybody was jolly and good-natured.

And then we were told to get in line again.

While we were having our little visit, all the laborers in Teheran had been paid off, and even now were standing in that same line, waiting to deposit their savings. Each carried a little seal with which to make his mark (Teheran is said to be one of the most illiterate cities in the world). Nobody was in a hurry. Everybody was happy. And we got our money at one-thirty—four hours to the dot!

The Badous are a tribe of small black people, who live in caves in the hills. Like animals, they forage for their food, and hide from the rest of the world. No one seems to know

their origin, unless they are the remnants of African slaves driven perhaps out of Assyria and caught forever in the deep ravine of the Persian mountains. They are rarely seen. About three times a year they creep out from their holes and pounce upon any travelers who chance at that moment to be passing. It may be a religious rite, or it may be economic. Their technique is to kill and then strip their prey of all worldly goods. One good haul will maintain a Badou tribe for months.

"Hi! Hi! Hi!" Two large motor trucks were standing outside a tea-house as we raced along one hundred miles or so beyond Teheran. As we came alongside, one of the drivers stepped out into the road and signalled us to stop. "Hi!"

It took some time to find a common language, but we finally hit upon Arabic. They knew a little of it, and Kallon less. But their faces and gestures told much.

We must go no farther, they told us positively. The Badous were on a rampage. Last night they had killed two Persians and an Armenian. They had stripped their bodies of everything and left the three propped up naked in the front seat of their car. The motor trucks were not going on until the next morning, and we must also wait. The Badous are never dangerous after daylight. The lorries would leave at three, and if we wished we could follow them.

There was no doubt as to the seriousness of the situation, so we turned sullenly into the tea house. We had been all set to cover a lot of ground.

Now a tea house may sound like Japan and cherry trees, or even Alice Foote MacDougall. But this one—common enough through Persia—was just a low mud hut. In the front room was the inevitable samovar (samovars, belts and long smocks showed Russian proximity throughout northern Persia), a counter of food with eggs and fruit, and a fat-bellied stove with eight or ten Persians and Armenians smoking around it. In the smaller back room was one large, low wooden table. This was the bed. I measured it with my eye, wondering how many of us could make it. And Bob egged Kallon on to offer *baksheesh* enough to get the whole room to ourselves. There were smiles and bows on the part of the proprietor, but Kallon told us he wasn't quite sure just what we had bought.

It was dusk when the truck drivers had stopped us. We ate fruit and tea, and sat around the fire with our fellow lodgers, until one by one they drifted off to corners and rolled up in their blankets. Things were moving well. Finally only the truck drivers and ourselves remained.

"This is our cue," I muttered. And Bob and I walked nonchalantly into the back room and closed the door.

We were just undressed, bed rolls spread out on the table, when we heard a door creak. It was not the one we had come through, but one leading outdoors. As we stood staring, we saw it open slowly, stealthily, and two native women poked in their heads—the proprietor's interpretation of *baksheesh!* With one spring we landed on the door, banged it shut, and hauled the big, heavy table over against

it.—Presently the truck drivers shambled in, and we welcomed them. The four of us lay on our backs together.

I can't say we slept. At three our companions got up and shook themselves. After their departure, we yelled for Kallon. No matter what or where, we had to have our service. And I never shall forget the picture of Bob, sitting cross-legged like a Turk, in his pyjamas on that queer, wooden frame that passed for a bed, being served his breakfast by Kallon. I always envied him that pose, but my own legs were too short to make it. He ate, to the delight of the assembled company, four eggs fried in mutton fat. All I need even now is the memory of that rancid smell to become completely bilious. All the Persians came in to see, smiled and laughed, and advanced close to find out what it was he ate.

But tragedy was waiting for us outside. Mud huts are apparently sound proof, for we didn't know until we got out into the darkness that it had started to rain.

When we went to bed, the moon had shone brightly. The fear of rains was still as academic as it had been before we left India. I guess very few Americans can appreciate what "the rains" really do mean in Central Asia. We knew only theoretically; and once out of Afghanistan with its absence of roads and bridges, we felt comparatively easy about the weather. The Lichtwarts in Meshed had tried to put us straight.

"Turkey!" they had said. "Roads in Turkey are practically impassable in dry weather, and impossible during the

rains." They had friends who tried to come into Persia from Europe via Turkey, and had had to turn back because of the mud. We might get through Persia, even if it did rain, they told us, because of the better roads. But Turkey! Grimly we kept repeating to ourselves that we couldn't get through to Europe if the rains came early. The significance of it all didn't sink in until we stepped out into the hard, steady downpour at four in the morning. The Persians threw blankets over their heads and came out to see us off.

If this were the beginning of the autumn downfall, it was three weeks ahead of time. From Hungary eastwards, these rains come with the regularity of the seasons, softening up the hard brown earth, swelling the rivers. Life-giving, perhaps, to parched peasants, but hell on travelers. That was why the roads had been so full of nomads and caravans, motor lorries and big covered wagons, we realized afresh. Everyone hurrying his goods to shelter, scurrying to his own little hole to sit through the weeks of rain. Maybe that was why the Badous got in their incursion. . . .

We thought we'd had every kind of road trouble, but now there was something new in store for us! For two hundred and fifty miles we drove through rain—mountain roads, steep grades (another variety now with hairpin turns), wet rock glistening. Slipping and sliding, with no chains on the car.

The rivers had begun to swell. Fording one, our engine stopped dead in the middle. Water was coming through into the body of the car, and Kallon began lifting our duffle

from the floor as best he could. I was sure we were stuck for all time. But Bob, putting her in gear, managed to work us jerkily out with the power from the self-starter. Once across, we took out the carburetor, sucked the gasoline tube dry, and bailed water out of everything—the rain still pelting down.

Kermanshah once meant rugs to us—old ivory, the festoons of precise little flowers and antelopes skipping hither and yon, a deep web, soft and clinging. But when we went through this day, it meant just one more city to pass. Shortly beyond was the British customs and an officious little Arab in swagger English uniform. Ahead of us a paved road shone in the rain. We were in Iraq, and Persia was behind us.

BAGHDAD AND BEIRUT

"But fill me with the old familiar Juice
Methinks I might recover by and by."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

BAGHDAD AND BEIRUT

IRAQ or Persia, the rain still fell. The paved road lasted for six miles and was then washed out. We landed in a town called Khaniquin—one dirty street, coffee shops scattered down its length, open fronts to the streets, Arabs in long flowing robes and black striped hoods. Trachoma everywhere. And a hotel overrun with vermin.

The drinking water swarmed with life.

"Why is one always thirstiest in spots where the water's dirtiest?" I remember Bob saying, wearily. "Put in a drop of iodine!"

To our amazement, even after the iodine, much of the life continued to swim.

"Try bichloride."

And Bob did. We had to give up any hope of a drink, but we were interested biologically.

Everything in that Arab hotel corresponded to the water. (We hired a carriage and drove three miles out into the desert in the rain—to satisfy our sanitary sense.) We had no

choice but to put up for the night— Not daring to go near the beds, we slept fitfully on the dirty floor.

The next day we started out for Baghdad. "Baghdad," the signpost read, and pointed vaguely westward over a trackless waste. The rain had fallen two and a half inches in the night, the river was nearly up to the bridge, the road often disappeared altogether for hundreds of yards at a time. We would spot it far ahead of us, and make for it as straight as we could through the water and mud. To have slid down beside it would have been to be mired completely. Bob was driving, never daring to stop a second lest the car get caught and sink down. Kallon and I ran ahead through ditches, over mounds, and into holes, the car slipping and sliding along close behind us. More than once that morning I felt the hot breath of the engine on my back.

Finally we got so weary that I decided—holes or no holes —we'd have to quit. We got in the car. The rain had stopped for the moment, and optimistically we hung out our feet to dry. We were thoroughly relaxed. And just at the moment when we had no resistance whatsoever, the car gave a terrific jolt. Bob, unwittingly, had driven pellmell into a bad hole. My head hit the top with a bang, and a sickening low moan rose from behind. Bob stopped dead. In back of us, crumpled on the floor of the car, was Kallon—unconscious.

He was a dead weight as we lifted him out and laid him on the wet ground, his eyes glassy, the eyeballs showing white. Only the faintest blur on the mirror we held to his mouth showed that he breathed at all.

"What's happened to him?" we asked each other, fearfully.

I pumped his chest and Bob poured whisky down his throat. There was a frightful gurgle. He came to just for a moment—and then went off again.

People can say what they like about Indians. But there couldn't be a better exhibition of gameness than poor Kallon's. He was all right, he said every time he was able to speak. We shouldn't bother. And then he'd go off again. Only when he was unconscious would he moan. When we hit the hole, he'd rammed his chest full force into a sharp angle of the robe rack fastened to the back of the front seat. We were afraid the poor fellow wouldn't last till we could get him to Baghdad. So we pursued the only other course open to us. We put him back in the car, and turned around to go once more to Khaniquin.

We turned around, went about fifty yards, then slid heavily into a submerged hole, and sank solidly down into the mud.

Bob remembered having seen a native with a team of oxen about a half mile back, and he started for them on the run.

While he was gone, I lifted poor Kallon out of the car and forced more whisky down his throat.

Getting yourself understood by an Asiatic laborer out on a desert plain isn't so easy. Bob showed the man a rupee, made motions of pulling, pointed to the team, and across the

desert to the distant car. But the other, he said later, regarded him blankly. Only after much more vigorous pulling and several more rupees did a great light finally break. The man nodded his head and yelled to the oxen.

They were beautiful beasts, those oxen, but they couldn't pull a car out of such mud. The Oakland had sunk till it rested on its frame, and when the oxen left us it was just where it had been when they arrived. Our shovel had already broken in the sandstorm. We tried sweaters, blankets and raincoats under the wheels, but nothing held. At the end of two hours we gave up trying to be ingenious and got down to real work. With the broken shovel we dug a trench thirty feet long and three feet deep. This was to drain out the water which had filled the hole where the car was sunk. Then, like children on a beach, we collected pebbles with which to line the hole, and finally succeeded in sliding in a spare spring which we were carrying. With that solidity underneath, we were at last able to use a jack.

In the meantime the whisky had completely revived Kallon. He doubled up occasionally with pain but most of the time grinned foolishly—at the oxen, at us, at the trench. He'd never tasted liquor before.

There was a British doctor in Khaniquin, thank heaven, who strapped him up. He found no bones broken, but said that the heart had been considerably affected by the blow.

And then he looked at us. We'd been wallowing in the mud for more than three hours, were covered with it, and

were shivering. He eyed us keenly and then took our temperatures. Sure enough, we both had fever.

"Pop right over to the railroad depot," the doctor commanded. "There's a rest room there that's not so awfully clean, but better than that beastly hole you were in last night." He was outraged when he learned that we stayed at the Arab hotel. "Take a drop of whisky and have a good hot bath!" His attitude was so fatherly that we began to feel sorry for ourselves.

So over at the rest house of the railroad station, we started a cure. News spreads fast in Khaniquin, and we were hardly there before three British engineers from the oil fields sauntered in to see us. They'd heard, they said, about our "bit of hard luck." Which bit they meant, we didn't know. And so in mutual commiseration—for they were sorry for themselves, too, stuck as they were for a year in Khaniquin —the five of us sat down to some whiskies. For seven hours we went at the business of cheering one another up, until in the end we couldn't make up our minds whether to stay on with the British Petroleum Company or take our friends on with us to Baghdad.

The hot bath was merely an interruption. You have a hot bath in Khaniquin when the one-train-a-day pulls in. You use water from the locomotive. Shivering, we stood in three inches of water, and considered ourselves in great luck.

The rains, it seems, had not yet begun in earnest. They were only playing with us. And people said that we might

still get through. The smiling sun had already dried the Iraq desert, allowing us to make Baghdad. It might still get us through the great Syrian desert into Beirut, through Turkey, into Constantinople. . . . Bucharest. . . . Vienna. . . . Munich. . . . Paris.

But after that first sinister warning, we were never sure. Each night we went to bed uneasy. And woke in the darkness listening.

We got to Baghdad. During the *bona fide* rainy season, it is an island. But by the time we reached it, it was again the middle of the desert, the temperature rising to a good 107. A ramshackle city with winding streets hardly wide enough for two donkeys to pass. Dead walls with no windows facing the street. Mean doorways. The big new buildings are made out of the materials of the old city—where Sindbad lived "in the most perfect prosperity and delight and joy and happiness." Even in his day there was neither stone nor wood, and the builders had to depend upon mass and color for their effects. But now the form has changed, and the color is a harsh, yellowish red. A decaying city, which was once the center of Islam, when Islam was to the world what Christianity is today. Gasoline drips over the ancient greatness; English signs flaunt their aggressive modernity; motor boats honk up and down the Tigris.

We were in Baghdad on the first Tuesday after the first Monday of November, and with lagging steps went to hear the American election returns. We thought about Times Square, and remembered Afghanistan. We were coming

out of the Orient and we weren't so sure we wanted to come. The East mingling with the West was leaving us low.

In a moment of energy we painted on the door of our car: "First Car Through Afghanistan."

The General Motors agency ground our valves free of charge and took our pictures!

The *Baghdad Star* printed a story about us.

Two oil-drillers from Kansas hung out over a balcony and offered us drinks.

But we did not like Baghdad.

. . . Besides, this was where we were leaving Kallon. If we'd had money enough, Kallon would be with us yet. He could qualify as office boy, valet, cook, or keeper of the money bags. But a convoy across the desert between Baghdad and Damascus was going to set us back ten pounds, the Turkish government, we'd heard, would demand God-knew-what for our car, and home was far beyond Constantinople.

So we outfitted poor Kallon with clothes, bought him passage on the steamer from Basra to Bombay, and wrote five eloquent letters of recommendation. We tried to make our pens say what we really felt about him now that we were losing him. And as we wrote we saw him out of the corner of our eyes, wheezing there with a pain in his chest, going unwillingly away from us and back to his native India. We dripped sentiment; and when he read the letters, he wept.

But the real problem still remained ahead of us.

"How in hell can you measure a fellow like Kallon in money?" I asked, when Bob presented figures.

"Believe me, Indian bearers expect to be measured in money." Bob was as worried as I was. Only more practical.

But before we made a decision, we thought of something else we could do to put it off.

"Where's the wash?" and instead of sending Kallon, we hunted it out ourselves.

We had the car gone over thoroughly because it would have to pass inspection for the desert journey.

We took considerable time with the hotel bill.

And not until just before we were ready to get off did we get down to figures. Each of us muttered something to the other which neither understood. I was delegated to do the paying. And in my embarrassment, I handed out to Kallon half as much again as I had decided on in my own mind.

It was a bad moment. We had no idea whether we had given him merely enough or set him up for life. It seemed a goodly sum. But as Bob said, Kallon had to be true to his profession. He took the money. He looked down at it lying loosely in his hand—and said nothing. He had served us well. The three of us, masters and servant, had been intimate as only such experiences can make one, yet in parting there were no words, and no explanations.

The time had come for starting out across the desert. We had had our car inspected and we had filled up with gas. The big fifteen passenger bus was tuning up. All was ready. And then, to our great astonishment, along came Kallon, on the run. He was carrying bundles. Some shoes we had left behind, he said breathlessly. Some lunch he had pre-

pared for us. . . . And all the time looking at us with soft brown eyes, so like a dog's. . . .

The group going across consisted of the bus, a Buick mail car driven by a Scotchman with an infected hand, and ourselves in the Oakland. The bus is the biggest in captivity, made in Pennsylvania especially for this desert work, six-wheeled, with tires that cost fortunes each, and are good for only one trip and return. They start with 200 pounds pressure, twice during the trip the driver lets out 100 pounds, and there remains in them still 200! Air expansion under the terrific heat! The bus carries 250 gallons of gas, food for two weeks, a ton and a half of luggage, and is equipped with toilet facilities. It does 607 miles in thirty hours, twice a week. The trip costs £20, but saves a three weeks' sea voyage.

To cross the desert without a convoy is considered the height of folly, for the route goes through the stamping ground of the Wahibis, not only the most notorious bandits in the near east, but the most intelligent.

It was they who attacked the Crane party and killed an American missionary less than two months after we were there. No saints, no tombs, only Allah for them. They represent Mohammedanism in its pristine purity, allowing no smoking, nor wines, nor silk. The only outlet they permit their vitality is a good killing now and then. And plenty of loot for a steady diet. For all our professed boldness we could see no reason for being so foolhardy as to try the Syrian desert alone. The Wahibis rob you, strip you, and leave you nothing but your hat. If you resist, they kill. Desert Robin

Hoods, autocratic as czars. Two mail carriers had been left sitting on their empty pouches about a month before our trip. We were in no mood for such whimsies.

But our mistake was that we pictured a convoy literally. Actually, we were out of sight of any vehicle or any human being most of the time. Each car went about its own business, chose its own ruts, and hoped for the best. The £10 merely saved anticipatory worries.

Ours was the last car to be inspected, but scarcely had we left the Customs Post when our front wheels began to act queerly. They shimmied, they wiggled and twisted as if they had decided to leave us and go out on their own. Sometimes you see that in the city, and it always looks funny. But funny it is not on the desert.

"Now in the garage in Teheran," began Bob. He had been making a study of garages in Asia. And in Teheran's largest, he had watched a steering post operation. He tried the same thing on the Oakland, and performed a cure. The shimmying stopped.

But in the meantime we'd lost our fellow cars. We'd been held up half an hour. And now the desert stretched beyond us, infinite and empty. Reddish brown, dry, trackless, it stretched out in soft uneven undulations like the ground swell on an innocent-looking but dangerous ocean. The sun beat down, and the dust rose to meet it, dimming its brilliance and blurring the horizon. Eyes, ears, hair, noses, clothes—gritty and dusty. All our mucous membranes were parched. We couldn't even bear the thought of smoking.

There was no definite roadway, only ruts that might or might not converge. Occasionally we could go at top speed, over vast areas that were smooth and hard as a billiard table. These were mud flats, we learned later, morasses during the rains. But oftener we were going in second, ploughing through sand. From three in the afternoon until eight at night, we didn't see a soul or an object. Maybe a few tufts of grass grew there—I don't remember—but not a bush, nor a tree, nor a fly. It was the first time we had been entirely alone. Not even Kallon sitting there behind us.

At eight we came upon the rest of the caravan, bus and Buick, all occupants out around a fire, eating sandwiches and drinking tea. No one even asked where we'd been.—This was between the Tigris and the Euphrates.

Then again desolation. Cold now instead of heat. But still dusty. From 8:30 until one, without a light to show where the others were.

"We'll get in the middle this time," I announced. (The cars proceeded in single file.)

"Yes? And get all the dust from the bus?"

We kept in the middle, but far enough back to avoid the dust and to lose the bus.

All our conversation had given out in Afghanistan.

"Think we ought to wait for the Scotchman," I muttered after about three hours' steady running. We were following wheel tracks, but they did not appear to have been made by the bus.

"All right." And we waited half an hour. Silently for the

most part. The stars big, and close enough to drop down on us.

We started off. An hour later I spoke again.

"We've got to wait for that Scotchman."

But Bob continued driving.

"He's got an infected hand."

I was insisting on argument so he gave me some.

"We're paying for a convoy, aren't we?"

"Yes, but we're not getting it."

"What if he has gone on some other path and passed us long ago?"

"Not likely."

"He's an old timer."

"That doesn't help blood-poisoning."

"What could we do if he did catch up?"

"Nothing, maybe, but it's only human."

"Since when are you so public spirited?"

By the time we came upon the bus waiting for us, we weren't even looking at each other.

At two we were at the fort—the black Buick as well as ourselves, and the Scotchman with the rest, whistling. The fort is a small compound in the very middle of the desert. The transport company maintains a restaurant there, and it serves as a base for the Arab motor police who accompany all convoys through the most dangerous area. This is the focal point of the Wahibi onslaughts.

We were told later about Ibn Saud, the Wahibi chief, stepping nonchalantly into the oil company's office in Beirut.

"Gas and oil," he said authoritatively. He had stolen six Buicks in the desert, and run them dry. They were five hundred miles out—like ships stuck on the reefs. And the salesman had to be quick about bringing forth the needed fuel.

Crossing the rest of the desert, Bob and I separated. The Scotchman got into our car with Bob. And I got in the Buick with one of the bus drivers, who drove at forty-five in second, chased an antelope over the desert, and finally shot him with a .22 rifle.

By the time we reached Damascus everybody was happy. Bob and I celebrated our reconciliation with three whiskies which took with a bang, and an hour later started off for Beirut. We didn't like Damascus.

But we did like Beirut.

Beirut was probably the one spot on our entire trip—New York to New York—where we really enjoyed ourselves, ironic as it seems now in the light of later events. Often we'd been interested, often excited, but never yet had we really let down. And the seven days that we stayed there were just one long stretch and yawn. What was ahead of us we did not know, and cared less.

All the way from Damascus, the road climbed steadily. We were in the Lebanon mountains, cool now and fresh after the desert heat, softly green with olive trees, and sprinkled with villages. It was from a peak about five thousand feet above the plain that we looked down upon Beirut. Far below us it lay smiling on the inside curve of a horseshoe bay. The

Mediterranean stretched out to the western horizon, and mountains outlined the curves of the shore in strong jagged lines. The sea has separated it from the busy whirl of the west. The mountains have protected it against desert droughts and marauders, so that it lies in its fertile plain, serene and secure. Dusk came on as we went down the long descent, sprinkling lights one by one over the greying valley, till by nightfall the city was a bowl of jewels held in the long dark arms of the bay. Through the narrow opening that led to the sea, a big ship sailed slowly into the harbor.

The city seemed to be immediately below us, but we had to go downgrade twenty-one miles to reach it. A bright hotel lobby awaited us, elevators, running water, baths, lavish food. . . . In the dining room two young men, burned almost black from the sun but clean shaven and passably well-groomed, stared at each other across the table. The musicians played softly.

"What is that swell tune?" asked one of the young men.

And the other replied, *"Violetera."* I'd been singing it, off and on, from Calcutta through to Beirut!

If the American Consul hadn't told us to wait we would have gone straight on to Aleppo. Something within told us that time was precious—one of those clocks that tick in practical people, pushing the important forward into their consciousness, pulling back the foolish, with regular rhythmic beat. But when the Consul said he might be able to save us $400, we put all argument aside.

We already knew about the difficulties of getting a car

through the various countries ahead of us. Each one, we had heard, demanded a large deposit which would be returned as the car left the borders of the country. Provided one could be assured of the refund, this might be all very well, but Turkey, our same informants told us, was apt to be "difficult." There might be long delays—much red tape. We had telegraphed London to see if we could get international plates, but the reply, which we picked up at Damascus, was to the effect that if we wanted international plates we must come to London to get them. Which helped.

Just what the American Consul expected to do we never quite knew. He said he would telegraph the Embassy at Constantinople. Nor did we see why any rules should be waived for us. But the general interest flattered us, and we waited. Only four cars had gone through Turkey ahead of us that year, we were told. And try as we would, we couldn't get a Syrian in all Beirut who was willing to guide us there. Turkey was looming ahead hostile and wary.

But if ever you want to forget your troubles, stand on a balcony and look out over starry Beirut, or dance in the *Chez Nous* Café. Every nationality is there—washed up by the Mediterranean. Mysterious Egyptians, pretty Russian women, Bedouins in long flowing robes—all temporarily in harmony in the suave French atmosphere. We stayed merrily on.

Until, like Waterloo, news came that the Embassy could do nothing. We had played too long.

At dawn we started out for Aleppo, as we should have done

seven days before, to get Turkish official permission to go through the country. We left a deposit there of $400—which Turkey still owes us. At the border the Customs officers deflated our tires and ripped open the upholstery, looking no doubt for the riches of the East. And as we crossed the frontier, it began to rain.

TURKEY

"Then the lead-cart stuck, though the coolies slaved,
And the cartman flogged and the escort raved."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

TURKEY

JUST how valuable Kallon had been to us we didn't realize until we started through Turkey. We'd always yelled at him when he had trouble making himself understood. Yes, he knew Pushtu, we sneered, when we left India, and watched the Khyber natives listening to him curiously. "He doesn't know what they're saying any more than we do," we muttered outside the gates of Kandahar as the Afghans argued, shouted, and Kallon told us meekly, "They say 'No.' " Yet, with Kallon along, we always seemed somehow to find out what we wanted to know. In Turkey we were completely stumped.

One Armenian, thrust at us in the first town we struck, spoke English.

"I see," was what he spoke.

"How far is it to Topra Kala?" we asked him.

"I see," with a broad grin.

"Is this the main road?" pointing to the road, and again repeating, "Topra Kala."

"I see."

He was the only person we struck before reaching Constantinople who even pretended to know any English. Yet, with utter nonchalance, we carried on conversations of the most technical nature, demanding precise and definite details, with whole crowds of Turks.

In the little town with the "I see" puzzle, were the police headquarters, where our passports were looked over. The police officers would have been doing us a favor if they had refused to let us into the country. And maybe they were trying to save us our humiliating end—in that hour and a half conference which they had over our papers. But more likely they were considering us as a market for oranges. Orange season was on in Turkey, as melon season had been on in Afghanistan, and grapes in Persia. The entire population of the town was eating oranges. Baskets and crates of them were piled high outside bazaar stalls. Seeds covered the ground like pebbles. Even our passports still carry an elusive odor of orange.

The Consul had given us a typewritten list of the towns we must pass, and Topra Kala was the first. As no one at the border could direct us, we thought our best bet would be to follow the railroad. Railroads were new to us now. Though this one was just a single track, with not a car or engine in sight in all the hours of afternoon and night that we followed it, we were certain that it led toward civilization. "Erzine" was the only station we passed—about three in the afternoon.

"Sounds like a girl's name," I remarked cheerfully.

But Bob didn't even look at me. He was beginning to feel sick.

Mud was everywhere, sleazy and slippery. Wagon tracks led hither and yon, but no one of them any more significant than the others. Occasional carts rumbled along, never any two on the same road, and we dashed after them. But the drivers always whipped up their horses, trying to get away from us. When we did catch up, shouting through the rain, blank stares greeted us.

We had no chains, and if we had had, they would have been useless. The ruts were too deep, the bottom of our car scraping on the mound between them. Chains would only have ground us in deeper. We were getting out and pushing. We let out all but ten pounds of air in our tires to get more traction. We cut brush, threw rocks into the mud, tried every engineering trick we could think of—and all the time the rain fell in torrents.

Night came early because of the storm—a dreary, leaden dusk, with the rain beating on the top of the car, and the mud oozing and gurgling as we pushed through it. There were no carts now; the farmers were all back in their homes, we supposed. But curiously enough, we never saw these homes. Moreover, when darkness was complete, we discovered that we'd lost the railroad.

We had seen no one since six, nor had we passed so much as a shanty. We kept on in what we thought was the same general direction we had been going and prayed that the

same fond chance which had stood by us on other dark nights might get us to Topra Kala. The town was only thirty miles from the border.

Suddenly at ten, the road ended in a barnyard.

An oldish man appeared in answer to our honks.

"Topra Kala?" we asked, pointing all along the horizon, and raising shoulders, eyebrows, voices, to indicate our own lack of knowledge.

He looked at us blankly and shook his head.

Then in a different tone, pointing to the man himself, and waving a five-pound Turkish note (worth about $2.50) we repeated it: *"Topra Kala."*

This time he got the idea. He said plenty, and then went in to get an old shawl to cover his shoulders. When he came out he was followed by seven children.

It was well that there were so many. For the barnyard was a morass. We couldn't turn around and it took all seven, plus their father, and myself, to push the car backwards until we were out.

For another hour we sloughed on over the same muddy roads with no lights anywhere, and no life. Every few minutes the Turk got out, looked into the inky blackness, and then pointed.

Finally Bob turned off the gas and stepped out of the car into the deluge.

"I'm through."

That was all he said, but I've never seen anyone so completely finished with a job as he was. And I didn't blame

him. He'd been driving the most of eleven hours, was soaking wet, and dead tired.

He stripped to the skin, got into blankets, and rolled up on the back seat for the rest of the night.

For another hour and a half I drove on into nothing. And then I quit too. I got the car on to a mound that was fairly solid, off which I thought we could roll next morning. And the Turk and I finished the night snoring peacefully together on the front seat. . . .

In the morning I was awakened by a door slamming.

"Where's the Sultan?" asked Bob.

And sure enough, the Turk was gone. *He* was through. He'd had enough. And when we peered out we saw him legging it as fast as he could across the plain away from us. I shouted. But it was useless.

Bob and I shared an orange for breakfast.

"Let's look around," he suggested briskly.

"Oh, God!" Bob had had a sound sleep, but between the wheel and the Turk mine hadn't been so hot.

"Well, I tell you: Whoever's got the wettest shoes, goes. No need of both of us getting soaked."

It seemed reasonable. I was the goat.

When I got out of the well-curtained car, I had all the feeling of stepping out of a suburban house. And well I might. For the car was stuck as fast as if it were on a foundation.

About half a mile away I sighted a railroad station with a wagon drawn up in front of it. And I couldn't have

been more delighted to see Grand Central and a Rolls Royce.

It was still raining and I could make no speed in the mud. I went back two steps for every one forward.

"Hey!" As I approached, the wagon drove off. I shouted again—and again. But on it went.

When I reached the station and looked at the sign, what should I read but "Erzine!" It had taken us just seventeen hours to get back to where we had been at three o'clock the afternoon before.

I was so dumbfounded and so furious, that I just stood still and stared.

Finally the station-master came out to see who I was. It takes something pretty unusual to rouse one of those Turks—Allah's most completely indifferent and self-sufficient people. I began to realize how funny I must have looked to make him forget his inertia.

He, on the other hand, was quite normal—a wiry little fellow, swarthy-skinned and bright-eyed, wearing rubber boots, blue shirt, and a typical railroad cap. This officialness gave me hope. But there still were the difficulties of conversation. Not a word I said registered. So I resorted to more primitive methods. I drew a picture of a car buried in the mud. Then carefully, pointedly, I attached a rope to it, with horses on the other end. As in the ancient Chinese, time was an element in my art.

The station master understood the car. But not the horses; so I got down on all fours, and neighed.

Then he understood. His beady little eyes shone. He pointed by way of answer, to the clock, circled his hand around its face once, and then he whinnied too. The wagon would be back in an hour!

We were delighted with each other. He shared his breakfast with me—a roll filled with some kind of sweetish meat, that Bob described later as candied sausage. And by the aid of a time table, I got considerable information. We were on a branch line that ran between Alexandretta, a little port we had passed near the border, and Topra Kala. Topra Kala itself was only seven miles away.

While I stood there, a train came clanking in, and then sadly returned whence it had come, letting nothing off, taking nothing on.

Only when the wagon came back, did I return to Bob who by this time had begun to think of setting up housekeeping out there. We unhitched the horses, tied them to the car, and managed to get nearly to the station. Our plan was to get the car onto a flat car somehow, and send it on ahead. To drive any farther through that mire was out of the question. But, unfortunately, there was no flat car. The station master indicated in ways he now knew only too well, that if we waited four days, he might get us a flat car from Alexandretta. But he couldn't be sure. Our next plan was to drive down the tracks to Topra Kala. Only seven miles away. But our friend shook his head vehemently. He drew a picture of a bridge. And he pointed to his time tables.

And then *he* got an idea. He left us hurriedly. And we

saw him walking far out across the fields on the opposite side of the track.

When he came back he was excited. The ground was higher and drier out there, he made us understand, and he would lead us through the fields to safety!

He was so enthusiastic that there seemed nothing for us to do but acquiesce. And it seemed like a good bet, as we got started. We ploughed through brush higher than the car itself, over large hillocks, always in first gear. But there *was* traction, and that was all we wanted. Things were going pretty well until we came to what had been a valley (it now was a swamp). Our friend again regarded his time table carefully, and motioned us to the tracks; we had one half-hour before a train would come along and he seemed to think that we might reach Topra Kala in that time. It was only three miles farther on.

The tracks were on a steep embankment. (The engineers who built that road evidently knew what rain could do!) I was driving, and in order to get impetus to make the grade, I decided to back onto a mound which I saw to our left and from which we could get a start. Bob and the station master tried the mound, found it fairly solid, and I made for it.

But instead of going over, the car went hard and tight *into* the mound. The wheels wouldn't even spin. We were buried.

It was getting dark again. Another day had passed. The railroad man had given us all his time. He'd brought some more of those terrible sweet sausage sandwiches. And now,

carrying his switch-handle and red flag—proud insignia of his profession—he sat down with us on the running board and shook his head. Things were bad.

Two wagons on their way home from the fields, passed by on the other side of the tracks.

We ran toward them.

But one of the drivers wouldn't stop at all. The other was more agreeable, but his two horses couldn't budge us. After that, no drivers would stop. And we decided that they must have been tipped off.

Then it was that the station master got another idea. Whenever one of these mental upheavals seized him, his whole body shook. He shot to his feet, and gestured wildly to Bob. The two of them dashed off down the tracks toward Topra Kala, leaving me alone with the Oakland.

They were gone two and a half hours. But I'd long since passed the stage where time meant anything. As inert as the car itself, I just sat. Not a thought passed through my head. Sometimes I raised a leg, or shifted an arm—to be sure that I still had the use of them, and then settled again into my coma. The mud was beginning to harden on my clothes. . . .

What finally came back loomed through the darkness like a torchlight procession. It was Bob, the station master, four members of a road gang, the foreman of the gang, and four horses. In the orange glare of the station master's torch little pools of water made by our footsteps in the afternoon shone black. The strange dark faces were lighted up,

grotesque, like figures in a sinister painting. Long shadows shot out into the plain. There was loud talk, shouts, and the snap of whips on horses' flanks.

How utterly strange was the situation that we'd got ourselves into Bob and I never once stopped to realize. What our friends back home would have thought, if, by some legerdemain, they could have got a glimpse of us out there in the void, was as remote from our thoughts as New York itself. We didn't even remember that we were in the middle of Turkey. Our identities were completely lost in the job ahead. We were in a jam, we were wet and tired, and we had to get out.

Once in action, the group defies description: Bob at the wheel; the frantic horses straining at the ropes; the four workmen brandishing whips; the foreman, the switchman, and myself running ahead trying the ground. The car made its first lurch forward, striking the legs of the hindmost horses. The pair reared at the sudden impact, terrifying the forward team by their violent commotion. There was kicking —squealing. The drivers, jumping to get out of the horses' way, lost the reins. I fell flat in the slime struggling to keep out of the way of the plunging teams, and the switchman hauled me to safety. The headlights of the car blazed, whips hissed savagely, shouts in Turkish rose over the roar of the engine. . . .

"Hey, you!" It was a louder shout, in English. The engine stopped dead. Bob slid from his seat and stood on the running board.

"You can't get anywhere with all this racket!" he yelled at the top of his voice. "Stop that shouting! Don't whip the horses! Johnnie, take the lead!"

The effect was marvelous. The lights seemed to glare more brightly, and the shouts rose louder. The Turks lashed the horses with redoubled vigor, eager to please. Bob no longer tried to avoid the horses' hind legs. The wheels of the car were up on the embankment on one side, down in the muck on the other. The furious vitality of every creature present—dedicated to the sole object of getting that Oakland through to Topra Kala—succeeded.

At eleven P.M. of November 12, the miserable cortège, with its wild-eyed attendants, reached its destination.

The "First Car Through Afghanistan" was through.

I was hanging on to a subway strap. A fat man, pressed close beside me, was running a pudgy finger down the Curb quotations. Two girls with thin eyebrows and red fingernails none too clean, were holding the *Daily Mirror* between them, regarding it solemnly. The smell of stale, fried food mingled with Coty and Guerlain.

I stared at my newspaper.

"Afridi Driven From Gardens Outside Peshawar. . . ."

"Brigands Ambush Afghan Soldiers. . . ."

The train pulled into Times Square, and the mass of people pressing out, elbowing and pushing, caught my paper and carried it along with them.

Route to Calcutta & Points West

Alexandretta
Aleppo
Beirut
Baghdad
Teheran
Meshed
Herat
Farah
Kandahar
Kabul
The Khyber
Peshawar
Rawalpindi
Srinagar
Simla
Delhi
Jaipur
Agra
Benares
Calcutta