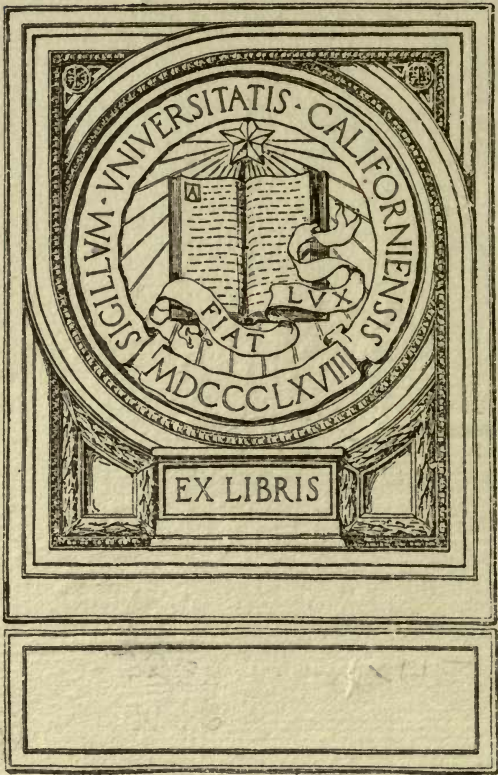


BY
MOUNTAIN
LAKE AND
PLAIN

SPORT IN
EASTERN PERSIA

MAJOR R.L.
KENNION





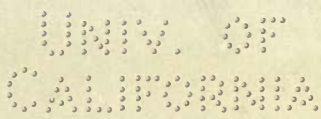
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BAHRAM HUNTING GAZELLE.

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BY MOUNTAIN,
LAKE, AND PLAIN

BY MOUNTAIN, LAKE, AND PLAIN

BEING SKETCHES OF
SPORT IN EASTERN PERSIA

BY

MAJOR R. L. KENNION

AUTHOR OF 'SPORT AND LIFE IN THE FURTHER HIMALAYA'

WITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

William Blackwood and Sons
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1911

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PREFACE.

So many books have recently appeared about Persia that some apology would seem necessary for adding to the number. My excuse is that though most of the "questions" with which this ancient country bristles have been more than adequately dealt with, little or nothing has been said in any of them about sport; what game animals and birds are to be found in the Shah's dominions, and how they may be brought to bag. This book, which takes the form of plain sketches of actual personal experiences during a period of three and a half years while I was in charge of one or other of H.M. Consulates in Eastern Persia, is an attempt to supply the deficiency as regards that part.

If it is thought that an undue proportion of my tales relate to beasts that were lost, I must plead that the fault is at any rate one on the right side.

I am rather inclined to think, moreover, that to most the account of a miss is as interesting as that of a kill. It is certainly more instructive to the few that look for instruction. There is also one's own reputation to be considered, in which connection I am reminded of a story told by one of the reviewers of my previous book: A sportsman was lashing a Highland stream for salmon with indifferent success. "Confound it, Donald," he at last exclaimed to his gillie, "they seem to be catching much bigger fish up the water than we are." "Ah, sir," said Donald dryly, "it's no' the fush, sir, they're only *bigger lears* up the water!"

Eastern Persia affords good sport to those fated to live in the country, but I think it will be clear to any one that has the patience to read these sketches that the amenities of travel, and the numbers and variety of animals to be shot, are hardly such as to attract the sportsman who is lucky enough to be able to range the globe in pursuit of his hobby. An exception might be made in the case of the Caspian province and the country north of Meshed, but here, without some local knowledge and an acquaintance with one or other of the vernaculars, a sportsman would find himself considerably at sea. Apart from difficulties of organisation and "bandobast," the

inability to exchange ideas with one's shikari would, to my mind, enormously detract from the pleasure of a trip.

To the Indian subaltern, or other, who may be inclined to exchange the monotony of a voyage for a shooting tour on his way home, the country may be cordially recommended.

As usual, game in different localities is plentiful or scarce according to the distance from inhabited centres. The effect of the importation of modern rifles has already become apparent in some parts, and unless measures are taken to preserve game, its disappearance is a matter of time. It is not easy to see what can be done to avert this deplorable contingency. To press game preservation on a Government that in some provinces at least is unable to collect its own taxes, would seem futile. Mere laws, moreover, in the present state of Persia, would do no good. In some parts they would be simply inoperative, in others only a fresh weapon for extortion in the hands of officials. It is one of Persia's questions, albeit a minor one, and the solution hangs on that of other and graver problems. Meanwhile, beasts and birds will have to wait—if they can.

My acknowledgments are due to my publishers, Messrs Blackwood & Sons, for the interest and care they have taken in the production of this

book; to Mr R. Lydekker, who has kindly looked through the proofs of the pages relating to the classification of the sheep and gazelles; and, finally, to my wife, who not only has helped in the manual labour involved, but was the "prime instigator" of the book being written at all.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I. BLACK PARTRIDGES	1
II. THE HUNTING OF RAHMAT	22
III. IBEX AND IBEX GROUND	34
IV. IBEX (<i>continued</i>)	49
V. WILDFOWL IN SEISTAN	62
VI. MORE ABOUT WILDFOWL	82
VII. AHU-GARDANI	99
VIII. AHU-GARDANI (<i>continued</i>)	116
IX. WILD SHEEP IN SEISTAN	128
X. BY THE WAY	138
XI. WILD SHEEP IN KHORASSAN	161
XII. THE BUJNURD SHEEP	176
XIII. MORE ABOUT THE BUJNURD SHEEP	194
XIV. THE MARAL STAG	209
XV. THE MARAL STAG (<i>continued</i>)	223
XVI. A HYRCAN TIGER	237
XVII. ON THE ROAD TO THE CASPIAN	252
<hr style="width: 20%; margin: 10px auto;"/>	
APPENDIX I. THE SEISTAN LEOPARD	267
" II. THE PERSIAN IBEX	268
" III. THE BEZOAR STONE	269
" IV. THE GAZELLES OF EASTERN PERSIA	271
" V. CORRESPONDENCE IN 'THE FIELD' ABOUT THE BUJNURD SHEEP	278

ILLUSTRATIONS.

	PAGE
BAHRAM HUNTING GAZELLE	<i>Frontispiece</i>
THE CONSULATE, SEISTAN	3
VIEW FROM ZAHIDAN RUINS	3
MIL-I-KASIMABAD	4
SEISTAN WEAVERS	5
SEISTANI BAND AND DANCER	7
SEISTANI WINDMILLS	7
AFGHAN OFFICIALS	9
PARTRIDGE-SHOOTING—OUR WAY	16
THE SEISTAN WAY	16
A BALUCH TENT	25
SAID KHAN	25
IN THE PALANG KOH	28
RAHMAT SHIKARI	30
PERSIAN IBEX HEADS	34
SASSANIAN SEALS	37
BEZOAR STONE AND SEALS	37
THE TABLE'S EDGE, PALANG KOH	49
IBRAHIM AND THE BIG IBEX	59
SHIKARI AND IBEX	59
RUSSIAN COSSACKS	65

EVENING ON THE HAMUN	67
THE GOVERNOR OF SEISTAN	67
A NET FOR WILDFOWL	68
THE PROCESSION OF TUTINS	68
THE LAKE-DWELLERS IN THEIR REED CRAFT	70
A KULA	82
THE BEATERS	82
GEESE IN FLIGHT	87
A BAG OF GREY LAGS	95
WATER IN A THIRSTY LAND	101
RUSTAM'S FORT	101
ON THE SEISTAN DESERT	104
AHU-GARDANI	111
A SUCCESSFUL DAY	111
LOADED UP	117
SEISTAN GAZELLE	121
THE WILD ASS	121
GAZELLES OF EAST PERSIA	127
URIAL COUNTRY	132
A SALT SPRING	132
VILLAGE IN EASTERN PERSIA	138
THE TAKHT-I-RAWAN ON "SHORA"	138
A BALUCH PRAYER-RUG	145
AN OPPRESSED DONKEY	145
A CAMEL CARAVAN	147
ROADSIDE SCENE IN PERSIA	148
A VILLAGE; TREADING OUT THE CORN	148
A VILLAGE WEDDING	150
BIRJAND	153

Illustrations

xiii

"THE GLORY OF DOMINION"	158
THE KHIABAN, MESHED	164
A MESHED GATEWAY	164
PILGRIMS CROSSING HILLS TO MESHED	166
IN THE KARA-DAGH RANGE	168
KURDISH ENCAMPMENT	178
PALACE OF ILKHANI, BUJNURD	178
THE KURDISH ESCORT	181
KURD SHIKARI AND RAM'S HEAD	181
KURDS WITH THEIR HUMAN TROPHIES	195
THE BUJNURD SHEEP	206
ROYAL, SHOT BY CAPTAIN DANKES	210
THE STAG COUNTRY	210
CALLING STAG WITH THE GAOKAL	230
THE JOINT BAG	236
KURD SHIKARIS	236
THE HYRCAN TIGER	251
REED-BEDS IN GURGAN VALLEY	253
TURKOMAN OBAHS	253
SHEEP-SHEARING	254
INTERIOR OF AILICHIK	254
ON THE STEPPE	258
CARPET DEALING	258
TURKOMAN HORSE	260
GUNBAZ-I-KABUS	264
MOSQUE NEAR ASTRABAD	264

By Mountain, Lake, and Plain

I. Black Partridges.

“And thou hast trod the sands of Seistan,
And seen the river of Helmand, and the lake
Of Zirrah.”

—ARNOLD, “Sohrab and Rustam.”

SEISTAN, land of burning heats and withering cold, of rushing pitiless winds, of pestilence, of biting insects and reptiles, of dreary sands and sun-baked plains, of buried and forgotten cities, of fens and swamps and one great lonely lake,—it is here that the Helmand, after many wanderings in Afghanistan, spreads into a delta, and finally comes to a miserable end amid mud flats and reed beds, sand-dunes and grotesquely carved yellow cliffs.

The Hamun, as the lake is called, varies in size according to the season and the supply of water. In some months, after the melting of the snows in the distant highlands of the Hazara, the river

comes down a brown silt-laden flood, and the lake expands its margins by hundreds of square miles, till its waters find an exit by a narrow, meandering channel, encrusted with salt, to a marshy depression that was the Hamun of days gone by. For the Seistan of to-day is not the Seistan of yesterday. As the river slowly swings from side to side, the people move with it, sometimes here, sometimes there, the abandoned sites being marked by the bones and graves of bygone cities.

The upper parts of the present delta, through which the streams course in deep beds, are too high to be irrigated by simple gravitation, the only method known in Seistan, and so run wild in tangled masses of tamarisk, thorn, and willow, with the open spaces deep in a long wiry grass called *kirta*. This is the cover beloved of the subject of this sketch, the *Francolinus vulgaris*, otherwise known as the Black Partridge.

He has many enemies; jackals and foxes that swarm in the undergrowth, hawks of many kinds, and worst of all, Seistani shikaris, to whom no time nor season is sacred. But in spite of all, "birds" are sufficiently numerous for their market price in the bazars of the country to be no more than about sixpence a brace.

The Afghan frontier lies through the upper part

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The Consulate, Seistan.



View from Zahidan ruins.

of the delta, and business calling me there, we left the Consulate on a bright winter's morning and headed away north-east. The party consisted of three English gentlemen, an English lady (my wife), an escort of Indian cavalry sowars and some mounted Seistani levies such as would be called "catch-em-alive-o's" on India's North-West frontier.

The track is over hard-baked mud, with occasional areas of tillage. Villages, with willow-trees looking dark in the distance, rise up one by one on the straight horizon, and as we draw closer, are seen to be clusters of low mud domes. Through the narrow evil-smelling alleys we pull up to a walk to avoid riding over swarms of naked children. They are all surprisingly alike, these Seistani hamlets; the same groups of men sitting in front of the local mosque; the same scowling, green-turbaned Syeds; the women veiled in hideous black; the weavers sitting at their looms under sheltered walls; the pond of awful looking water with its floating corpse of dog or goat. Through packs of savage pariahs, retriever Don walks with apparent unconcern as a good dog should, bestowing a glance neither to right nor left. We only know by the extra stiffening of his tail what it costs him. For without our threatening whips and the sowars' lances, the howling village curs would soon make an end of him. Outside the

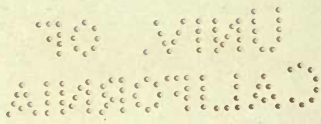
villages, the incidents of the road are mainly connected with canals. Some are spanned by shaking structures of osiers, others have to be forded; both operations being of a kind that horses new to the game view with horror. In Seistan, a horse's life is a burden to him until he has learnt three lessons: to walk with equanimity through a morass; to cross quietly these frail bridges; to let himself gently down the steep and slippery bank of a deep canal and climb the other side without attempting to rush or jump it. A horse that has got so far, without in the meantime succumbing to a disease known as "Seistani sickness," may well be called "salted."

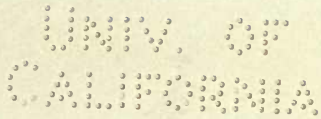
As we go on, the isolated tamarisks become more numerous. A tall thin spire sticks up on the horizon—one of the *mils* or towers, by the construction of which rulers of bygone times hoped to prolong their name and fame. Beyond this we are in a perfect wilderness of ruins. For long after the old legendary days of the heroes, when Zal and Rustam ruled in Seistan and warred against the powers of the north with the aid of demons and genii—long also after those later historic times when there arose that great Archemenian dynasty that gave birth to Cyrus and Darius—this was a populous

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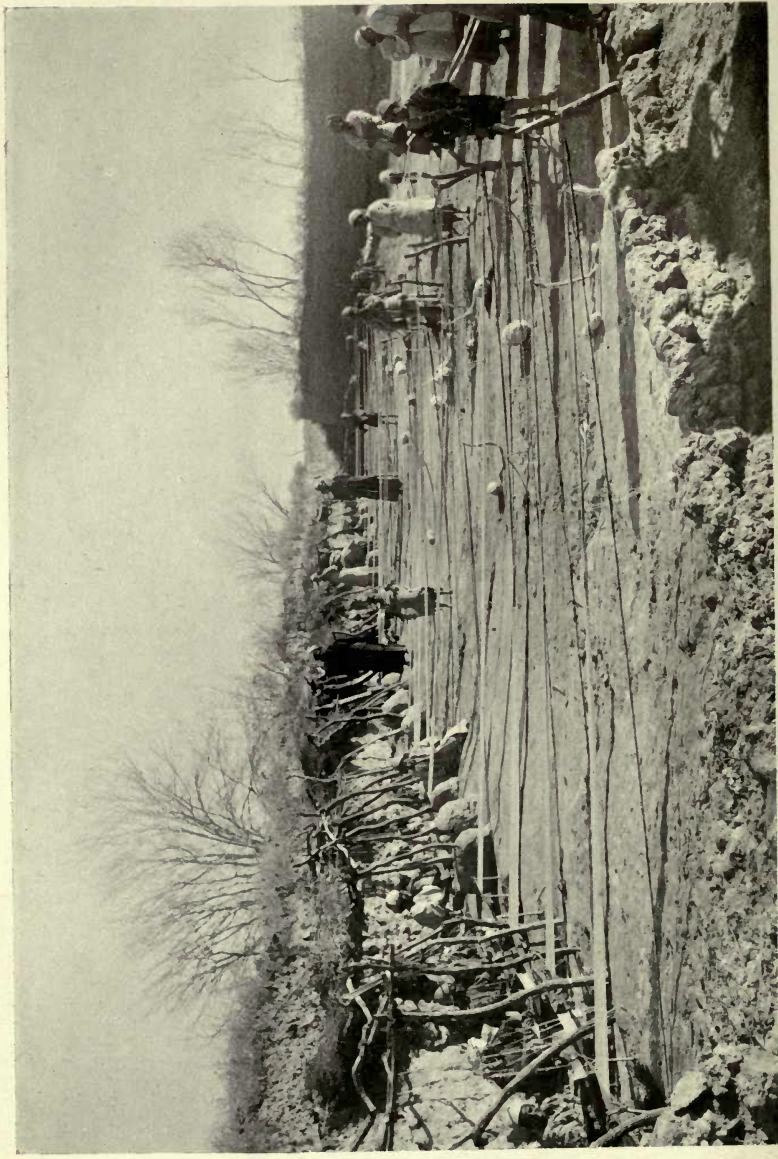


Mil-i-Kasimabad.





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Seistan weavers.

and flourishing country. The ruins of this Zahidan (or Zarang), through which we were passing, extend north and south for many miles. For centuries it remained a flourishing city, till a fatal day when, as legend has it, the great Timur, "lord of Thrace and Samarkand," besieged it and was beaten back, receiving at the same time the wound which made him for ever Timur *lang*, the lame Timur. His revenge was characteristic of the time. Returning, he took and "utterly destroyed the city," and not only it, but the canal system on which its prosperity depended; and so it remains to this day, sown with salt. Farther south lie the ruin-covered tracts of Tarakun and Sarotar, now a still more hideous desert, for the river has turned its back and left them.

Lunch in the shadow of a ruined archway, and then, as the Persians say, we "fall" on our road, which here lies amid wind-driven *burkhans*, those crescent-shaped dunes, which advancing in procession under the pressure of the Seistan wind, in turn lay bare and engulf everything that lies in their path. Year by year the inhabitants of many a village are forced to shift elsewhere. Such a one we passed that morning, making its last stand with barricades of tamarisks against the encroaching foe.

The wind of Seistan! No one that has visited the country can ever again think of it without the consciousness that there the word "wind" acquired for him a new significance. For much as men receive new ideas about water after seeing an ocean storm, so a residence in these parts reveals new and unpleasant possibilities about air. There is the hot *bad-i-sad-o-bist roz*, the "wind of a hundred and twenty days," that howls through the land during summer; the freezing but shorter-lived winds which rage in winter; all from the same point in the compass.¹ Local lore says the latter, sometimes called *shamshir* or sword, last for three, five, or seven days. Everywhere in Seistan are evidences of the wind—the wind and man's struggle against it. Hollows scooped

¹ Some call it the wind of a hundred and thirty days. There is a country north of Herat called Badghis, which may be freely translated "the home of the winds," and local belief makes this district the source of these blasts. The real cause is no doubt the rush of cold air from the highlands of Afghanistan to replace the hot air ascending from Persian deserts. The direction of the wind is from a few points west of north in Seistan, but as you proceed north, the wind shifts round east or north-east. The flow seems curiously shallow, for the series of not very high ridges it meets after pouring across the Tag-i-Namadi, causes it to be diverted southward, so that the plains lying between the ranges of Kain get less and less of the wind as you go westward. A curious phenomenon caused by these winds when very violent is that the telegraph operators on the line that runs through Eastern Persia receive severe shocks when at the instrument, due perhaps to electrically charged matter being blown against the wire.

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Seistani band and dancer.



Seistani windmills.

out of the earth, clay bluffs carved into fantastic shapes, dunes with horns pointing southwards, trees stunted and with a permanent list in the same direction, every building, the ruins even of buildings of the most ancient times, oriented southward. The windmills of Seistan are the oldest form known—a tower four-square, slit vertically to allow the passage of the wind: inside, fans of reeds driven round a vertical spindle.—These tell the same tale. Man himself has not escaped, as a big proportion of the people are afflicted with a peculiarly bad form of eye disease, originated by wind and dust.

My first experience of a winter wind was when in camp with my wife and two children. Close by flowed the blue Rud-i-Seistan, around waved the green and yellow grass, while clumps of tamarisks stood out a darker green against a blue sky. The sun was bright, the air cool. Next morning a little wind, which by midday had increased, and I spent a profitable evening shooting duck coming down the river. Our men, recognising the weather, took in canvas or its camp equivalent. Stones were piled on the tent pegs, ropes tautened, and everything made “snug” for the night. By sunrise it *was* blowing. I shot a few more ducks that came labouring against the wind, but they were coming too slow and low

to be interesting, and when they fell into the water, neither man nor dog could be sent to recover them, on account of the cold. During the day, tamarisk branches were staked the windward side of the bellying tents, while the poles were strengthened by lashing them with branches. The night I seem to have spent with my head outside our tent to see if the nursery tent was still standing, for no shriek would have been heard in the tumult. About 1 A.M. it did come down.¹ The children were rescued from the flapping canvas, but the gale seemed unappeased by its success; and so the night passed, to me an anxious one, as if our tent failed, it was certain that no other in camp would stand—most of them indeed were by that time down—and the plight of women and children in the intense cold would have been serious. Next morning the wind dropped. That was only a three days' gale. The height of misery is reached when, as is often the case in Seistan, the wind is full of sand, driven at any velocity up to 120 miles an hour.²

¹ There is a historic instance of a Persian king who was killed by the flattening of his tent by a gale. As half the broken pole generally remains upright, serious damage is not usual.

² This velocity was actually recorded by the McMahon Commission.

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Afghan officials.

To resume our trip. We reached the goal of our journey next day. The Helmand ran close by, between banks thickly fringed with willow and tamarisk, but having been tapped by many canals, the river is here dwindled to a stream twenty or thirty yards broad and easily fordable. This is the frontier line, and the governor of the neighbouring Afghan province had brought his camp a few miles from ours within his own limits.

Of the following few days, which were mainly devoted to official matters, I shall only mention a single incident, one that had the effect of placing on a pinnacle of fame a member of our party, the Consulate doctor.—The Afghan governor was old and toothless, and among his nationality, in fact among all Mahommedans, an appearance of age is a cause of much sorrow—is not the love of wives thereby turned into contumely? Anyhow, a year previously he had confided to me that he had heard that “in London” such things as artificial teeth were made. The matter being placed in our doctor’s hands, there arrived in due course an apparatus for taking casts of jaws. It apparently took the form of saucer-like receptacles filled with plaster of Paris. Now rumour in Seistan had it that to obtain the lower jaw’s impression, without

spilling the plaster, the patient had to stand on his head! Whether this be so or not, any one that knows the proud and dignified Afghan will understand that our doctor had a task requiring some tact—not to say courage. This was the more the case, as Afghan officials on this frontier have to be so careful of their political reputations that private interviews with Britishers are avoided, and the operation had to be carried out *coram populi*. This was all a thing of the past. On the present occasion the teeth were ready in the doctor's pocket. The moment arrived; the set was produced in the crowded durbar tent and fitted into the old gentleman's mouth. Alone he walked out to another tent where my wife's mirror had been set on a table, and all awaited the result in suspense. He returned amid dead silence, smiling. Never had been seen such a smile, even among the ladies who display their incisors in our illustrated papers, and it never left his face. If the theory is well founded that continuous and persistent smiling itself produces a happy mind, that Afghan's future was assured!¹

¹ It is curious to notice that in these out-of-the-way corners of the earth, the fame of British medical work is often more advanced by some *coup* of this sort than by work of a really more meritorious kind. Seistan, for instance, was ravaged by small-pox. The whole

It is time, however, we arrived at our partridges. Breakfast is eaten in the exhilarating morning cold, which a December's sun has so far done nothing to spoil, so that the warmth which streams through the tent-door from the log-fire outside is pleasing.

Though much may be said in disparagement of the Seistan climate in general, there are samples of weather experienced here in winter—cold, bright, and still—that would be hard to beat anywhere. Such is our luck to-day. A start is made at no dismal early hour; in fact, in that respect we might almost be in Christian England. I once read, and noted with satisfaction, a pronouncement about early rising by a brain specialist. The free and easy savage, he pointed out, never got up before he felt inclined, and never became insane. Pulling oneself out of bed, on the other hand, with sleep still unfinished, “grinds the soul, curdles the

country side, as an Indian doctor once remarked to me, was “deserving of vaccination”; but our medical officer's efforts in this direction were less appreciated than other quite minor benefactions. Thus the story was popularly believed that H. had raised the dead to life by prayer. The foundation for this somewhat embarrassing reputation was merely this, that a boy who had stopped breathing under an anæsthetic, had been restored by artificial respiration, *i.e.*, raising the hands above the head. The incident curiously recalls the Bible story of the prophet who prayed and “stretched himself” upon the Shunamite child, so that his life came again!

blood, and destroys all good intentions." We need run none of these terrible risks when after black partridges. Apart from the "grinding of the soul," &c., too early a start defeats one's object, as in the cold the birds will not enter into the game.

The beaters consist of a round half dozen selected from the crowd of loafers that have assembled from the neighbouring village; men in blue or drab raiment of the Eastern type, with "loins girded," their heads surmounted by felt hats, the colour of mud and shaped like a truncated egg. They are in charge of one Ibrahim (who will frequently figure in these pages), a lad enlisted some years before by the McMahan Boundary Commission as guide and boatman, now risen to the proud position of *mir shikar* or head *jäger*. Last, but not least, there is my wife, who as usual makes an additional keen and most competent beater.

We soon get to work, the birds rising with the regular partridge whirr. "Blacks" get quickly into their flight, and are strong on the wing; but when they are lying well, the shooting is not more difficult than "walked up" birds usually are. Our ground is on the fringe of cultivation, tamarisk cover alternating with strips of sown fields already showing the faint green

of young wheat. Omar, however, puts it more picturesquely :—

“But come with old Khayam and leave the Lot
Of Kai Kobad and Kai Khosrau forgot,

With me along some strip of Herbage strown
That just divides the desert from the sown.”

With the tamarisk trees and the long waving yellow grass, this part of the delta presents an extraordinary contrast both to the monotonous *kharki*-coloured plains of the populated parts and to the surrounding sandy desert. The birds rise in singles, twos, and threes from grass and tamarisk. When the ground is suitable, small drives are tried, and these afford a better test of the straightness of our powder. The beaters are full of zeal. “Purr”¹ they shout as each bird gets up. The difficulty is to keep them in any sort of line.

As the cultivation is left behind, the cover gets thicker, and the open spaces fewer and smaller. Birds here are very plentiful, and annoy us by getting up in scores out of shot to fly into dense bush, whence there is no possibility of moving them. So we have to turn about. Winged birds are nearly always

¹ *Purr* is the Seistani for partridge, an onomatopoeic word imitating the sound that we express by the word “whirr.”

lost, as francolin are terrible runners, and it is hopeless to find them when once they get among the tamarisk roots. A really good retriever was what we wanted ; and in saying this no disparagement is intended to Don, for none but a quite recently imported dog would have done any better. The fact is only too well known to the Indian M.F.H. that in a hot climate a dog loses his nose very quickly, added to which the ground is generally too dry to hold scent. So Don is sent off directly a bird falls winged, when, using eyes rather than nose, he is often too quick for them.

The sun grows hot, and about noon the sight of a willow which casts its reflection on a still pool arouses thoughts of another kind. The very place for lunch—

“ Here with a Loaf of Bread beneath the Bough,
A Flask of Wine (a Book of Verse), and Thou,
And Wilderness is Paradise enow.”

We look back with remarkable unanimity for a mule which has been appearing and disappearing at intervals behind us. Here he comes, with a servant perched on the top of a pair of bloated *khurzins*.¹ As we are looking lunchwards, a snipe

¹ The overgrown saddle-bags used in Persia.

seizes the opportunity to spring up with a *squawk* from the water's edge. If he had waited till our cartridges had been extracted, his derision would have been justified. As it is, he falls a corpse on the farther margin. The "flask of wine," or whisky diluted with "sparklets," fizzes down hot throats. Don meanwhile, thoroughly pleased with himself, having caught two runners and retrieved the snipe, lies blinking in the water, the eddies above him revealing the gentle oscillations of a pleased tail.

It was just before this pleasant interlude that the bag had received a notable addition. A bustard got up some way in front, and flapped a devious course for some hundreds of yards, when he went down behind the grass-covered embankment of an ancient canal. "My Christmas dinner,—run!" cried some one. One of us ran, and a lively sense of the awful result of failure lent wings to his shooting-boots.

It is a pusillanimous bird the bustard. He refuses to "join in the sport." You hurry up to where he has pitched and look wildly about for a bird, conspicuous as an ostrich; while all the time, with his long neck stretched out along the ground, he is running with the most indecent speed in the direction you least expect. On this occasion the gun was favoured by the embank-

ment. The Christmas dinner slowly rose in the agitated manner usually affected by bustards. But he had made the mistake of his life, and was added to the slain. These bustards,¹ of which we never shot more than five or six in the season, fall very short in some of the most prized attributes of "birds." They cannot jump up and perform lightning zigzags, be driven rocketing over trees, or, in fact, offer any sort of sporting mark; but after they have been hung and carefully roasted, and served with bread sauce and crumbs, all such deficiencies are forgotten and forgiven.

In the course of a day's shooting in these parts, a mysterious dark object is sometimes seen gliding ghost-like about the bushes. Coming closer, one finds a native shikari armed with his murderous appliances. He will want, no doubt, to sell you his day's bag, and so spare you further trouble and cartridges. His killing apparatus consists of a folding screen of dark cloth, in the middle of which is a hole for the gun. When the shikari sees partridges, he puts up the screen and sidles along. The silly birds, intent on the strange object, collect in a bunch, and the gunner "browns" them on the ground. As to the explanation of the bird's behaviour, it may be

¹ The Houbara.

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Partridge-shooting—our way.



The Seistan way.

they think the screen some new and fearful kind of eagle, but more probably it is mere curiosity.¹

As the afternoon wore on, and a chill came into the air, birds got fewer, or rather fewer birds rose; for they seem to have the same hesitation about taking wing at this time as they do in the early morning, so that for the last hour scarcely a shot was fired. As to our bags, they were nothing great, but the beautiful black and white plumage of the cock birds and the gamey reds and browns of the hens make them exceedingly good to look at. My diary shows we got that day 17 brace, a bustard, a snipe, and a hare: the previous afternoon's shoot had yielded 10½ brace and a hare, while next morning's was 14 brace—87 head for a day and two half days, for two guns.

Bigger bags than these were often got in the "gardens" that surrounded most of the villages in Seistan. These were mostly high-walled enclosures, adjoining one another like squares on a chess-board, and usually devoted to the culti-

¹ In the Gilgit Himalaya, I have seen a shikari exploit the inquisitiveness of snow-cock in a somewhat similar way. He put on a black mask with long ears, and then getting behind a rock, nodded and shook his head like an inquisitive goat. His appearance reminded one of the "old gentleman" as commonly pictured, and simply paralysed the birds.

vation of vines¹ and pomegranates. The walking is one long struggle over deep ditches and alternate ridges, all covered by a tangle of dry vine trailers — anything but the going one would choose with a loaded gun in one's hand! There are also clumps of willows and patches of thorns, the latter of a peculiarly penetrating viciousness. Arrived at the end of each garden, we are confronted by a wall, anything from five to ten feet high, and often surmounted by a fringe of thorn. This we have to negotiate somehow or other, and as a score or more of these formidable obstacles have to be crossed in a day's shooting, we all—lady included—learnt to nip over them with a facility that surprised ourselves. Doors between the gardens certainly exist, but rarely, it seemed, in the walls we wanted to cross. They are, as a matter of fact, only adapted for private use, as each one has a cunningly made bolt actuated by inserting a hand in a hole in the wall, the secret of which the owner keeps to himself.

The cover being thick, a lot of beaters were necessary, but more always came than were wanted; the chief difficulty in fact was to avoid drawing to ourselves the entire population of

¹ There are, it is said, forty different kinds of grapes grown in Seistan, but they only vary in degrees of sourness or insipidity.

the village. All seemed to have an insatiable thirst for empty cases and an absolute disregard for their own safety. One often saw a head bob over a wall in a line with a partridge and one's levelled gun; and on the whole I think we were lucky never to have had a casualty, which, in the inflammable air of Seistan, would have been awkward.

As to the shooting, it was a disputed point whether walking across or down the ridges gave the best results. The latter had the advantage of easier walking, but the birds were apt to run along to the walls at the end, where they would all get up in a bunch. The cunning old cocks, too, had a way of popping over the walls without giving away any chances. It was, however, excellent fun, and the shooting was of a more sporting and difficult kind than the same birds walked up in the open.

The better class Seistani¹ is not a very lovable character as a rule, but it is only justice to the owners of these gardens to say that they rarely made difficulties about our shooting in them, and frequently did their best to show us sport. The only times, in fact, that we were not welcomed,

¹ In the East it is not uncommon to find the labouring classes on the whole more estimable characters than those who are higher in the social scale.

were when there were ripe pomegranates on the trees and when their zenana folk were turned loose in them. As regards the former, perhaps it is as well to explain that it was not us they mistrusted when placed under the temptation of ripe pomegranates, but the beaters from their own village. A petticoat was, of course, a red flag which had to be studiously avoided. I once only remember an owner, one whose individual permission had perhaps been taken too much for granted, regard us in the light of trespassers. He was a fiery-bearded old Syed, who should have known better. Walking along first with the beaters, he gradually worked himself up, and then for a space of half a mile let loose a torrent of shrill Persian abuse, an art that is thoroughly understood in that country. This reminds me of a memorable occasion when one of a party that was walking in line in a garden, put his foot in a trap primarily intended to catch jackals. This time it was plain, homely English that echoed through the morning air in accents loud and forcible. In easy flow and variety I must admit that it compared badly with the Syed's, but what it lacked in that respect was more than made up for by its vigour, which must have filled the Seistani beaters with admiration.

The time for shooting partridges in these gardens was after the wind had been blowing strongly for some days, which caused the birds to come in for shelter from the open country. The best bag recorded in the Consulate game book is 25 brace to two guns, but 10 to 15 brace was more usual.

II. The Hunting of Rahmat.

غزال ما مرال ما غو وحش ما شكار ما

“Thou art my gazelle, my deer, my wild ox, my shikar.”

—KAANI.

FROM inhabited Seistan the Palang Koh range is on clear days visible as a distant jagged purple line, with in winter occasional gleams of white. Betwixt lies the Hamun, with its lagoons and reed beds, and farther on a stony waterless plain, from which the mountains rise somewhat sharply. The range actually consists of a series of detached ridges, for the most part parallel to one another, with a general direction of north and south. Habitations there are none, but in springtime, when the hillsides are clothed with short-lived verdure, Baluch nomads bring their flocks and plant their black tents near the scanty springs. The ridges being mostly limestone, are generally abrupt, often razor-edged; and though the average height is less than 5000 or 6000 feet,

the range is full of gloomy gorges and precipices that are the retreat of ibex, while the lower hills and rounder slopes are frequented by wild sheep.

When I first visited the Palang Koh, it had the merit—too rare in these days—of never having been shot over by any sportsmen other than dark-skinned shikaris with antiquated weapons from among the nomadic shepherds of the country, and by few of them. But since for big game generally, and especially for hill game, local knowledge is indispensable, I had sent a levy in advance to enlist as a guide a certain Rahmat, who lived somewhere in the range, and was known by reputation to be a mighty hunter.

My setting-off point was Koh-i-Malik-Siah, a desolate customs post, the very “back of beyond,” near the tri-junction of British Baluchistan, Persia, and Afghanistan. For transport and riding animals we had camels only, as the absence of supplies or grazing makes the country an impossible one for horses. The “ship of the desert,” of course, thrives where other beasts might starve, and for them there was camel-thorn (I prefer the beautiful scientific name, *Alhagi camelorum*), and other shrubs suited to their peculiar internal arrangements.

The caravan was soon winding along a faint track amongst low, barren, red hills, the main

axis of the range frowning down on us from the left hand. But for the soft shuffling pad of our prehistoric steeds over the dry ground, the silence was unbroken. I think it was the great Tartarin who discovered that the best means of accomplishing a journey *au chameau* was to sell the camel and take a *diligence*. Here we had no choice, but in any case a good dromedary is not to my mind a bad way of getting over long desert marches—preferable perhaps to a horse; the latter gets so very sick of the job.

Camel-riding is not a fine nor a difficult art. The main points are to forget all you ever knew about equitation, and make yourself as like a sack of potatoes as you can; maintain, as a riding-master would say, a “gentle feeling” on your mount’s nose, and for the rest, somehow or other keep him at a trot. The latter is not as easy as it sounds. If you are fortunate enough to sit astride a well bred beast, it may be left to his own good feeling, kept alive by an occasional flourish of the stick; but with any inferior kind of camel, the question is resolved into a struggle between your watchfulness and an unswerving determination on the part of your *mahri* to break into his back - dislocating walk whenever excuse or opportunity offers. Now and again one comes across camels of the head-



A Baluch tent.



Said Khan.

strong order, and they can make themselves disagreeable after their own manner. One such I remember who broke his nose-rope and took the road to the desert at a swinging pace. The feeling that attacks the unfortunate rider, who finds himself being helplessly carried by his inscrutable-visaged mount towards the dim horizon of uninhabited desert, may be imagined! All that you can do is to trust to luck and to throw yourself off; and if before doing so you have the presence of mind and dexterity to loosen the girths of the saddle, so as to let it eventually slip round under the beast's belly, you will have done the best in your power to stop him and earn the gratitude of whichever of your men will have the joy of tracking and recapturing the runaway.

Riding ahead of our caravan was one Said Khan, leader of the Seistan levies, who on this and similar journeys filled the rôle of "caravan-bashi." He was a typical Baluch, very tall and handsome, with aquiline features which did not belie his character. For if human beings must be ranked either as hawks or pigeons, it was certainly to the *Accipitres* that he belonged. Originally he was a robber chief in the no-man's-land about the marches of Afghan and Baluch territory, and he could recount many a story of *chapaos* across the Persian border, camels

lifted and villages looted, in the telling of which the look of regret for those "good old days" was hardly veiled. When the *pax Britannica* extended over Baluchistan, he thought it best to come under the protection of the Power that was evidently destined to bring these wild tracts under her sway; and after many ups and downs he found himself in his present position. To us he was useful. His influence among the Baluch of Seistan was great, for no people are so loyal to their hereditary nobility. A "bandobast" for a caravan journey, the purchase or hire of camels, were duties he delighted in. No one knew like him the points or blemishes of a camel, or how to diagnose and treat his astonishing ailments—which hind leg, for example, should be branded for an ailment of the chest; no one was his equal in tracking an individual camel over a plain imprinted by a thousand others. So, when an Afghan came in with a story of camels looted by professional Persian camel thieves—or *vice versa*—for camel raiding still remains a fine art in Eastern Persia, he was the man to put on the track. Did he not moreover know, even as he was known by, every border thief?

Once Said Khan was sent with some levies to meet and escort Captain Hunter, the Consulate doctor, who was riding post-haste from Seistan

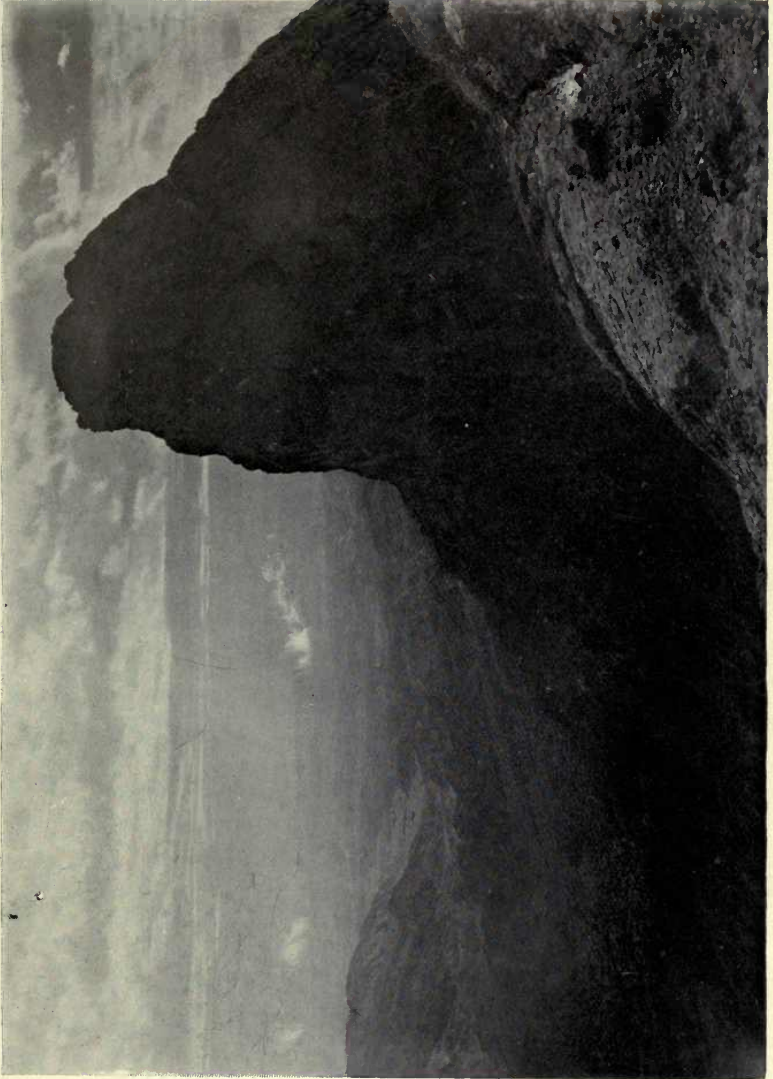
to Shusp. The short road by which Hunter came lay by a spring called Anjira, among the hills bordering the Afghan frontier, a place that had an evil reputation for murders and robberies; in fact it was known at that very time to be the haunt of an Afghan gang of "bad men." Up galloped Said Khan ahead of the party, and as Hunter arrived he found the Baluch *Sardar* patrolling up and down the gorge, the cliffs of which echoed to roars of "I am Said Khan, I am Said Khan," a notice, chiefly perhaps for Hunter's edification, but ostensibly to warn all and sundry who might be lurking among the rocks that they might as well leave! Whether lolling on a riding-camel or bestriding his wiry little Baluch mare, he was tireless—but walk he would not. For Persians he had a supreme contempt. One day we had been riding for many hours under a hot sun, when we met a Persian with a donkey, on the top of whose load was a pitcher of water. "Behold these *Iranis!*" said Said Khan; "they cannot go to gather an ass-load of sticks without taking their bread and water." As we passed, the Persian offered Said Khan a drink. "Ho ho," he roared, "*Irani*, I drank yesterday; what is water to me? I, the brother of a camel!" and he rode on with his head in the air. For the rest—Said Khan's magnificent presence and

swagger were allied to a nature no more advanced than that of the simple savage of Asiatic wilds, who looks on falsehood and truth as purely matters of expediency.

We had hardly got into the swing of the march when a herd of wild sheep were spotted on the hillside slowly moving off. It seemed they were scarcely alarmed by the caravan—to them perhaps not usually associated with danger,—for by running hard up a side ravine that offered concealment, I overtook them, and from a ridge got a shot at the ram and knocked him over. It was held to be a good augury for the success of the trip.

Arrived at the bitter wells of Lowari-Ab, I found no Rahmat as I had hoped, but only a little Baluch encampment of two tents, to which I was immediately called. An old man, very emaciated and evidently moribund, was lying on a mat in a low tent half open to the weather, his head on his wife's lap. He was far beyond the aid of my small medicine case, and before I left next morning he was dead. One could not help being struck by the simplicity of this deathbed, if the term may be used for a ragged mat on the hard earth. No doctors, no "diet," no medicines, no scientific appliances for keeping life in the poor body a few more moments. But for the old weep-

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In the Palang Koh.

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ing woman, it might almost have been some animal breathing out his life: yet not the less solemn or touching. When I passed through the spot a year later, there was a lonely grave on the hillside, white with pieces of translucent travertine.

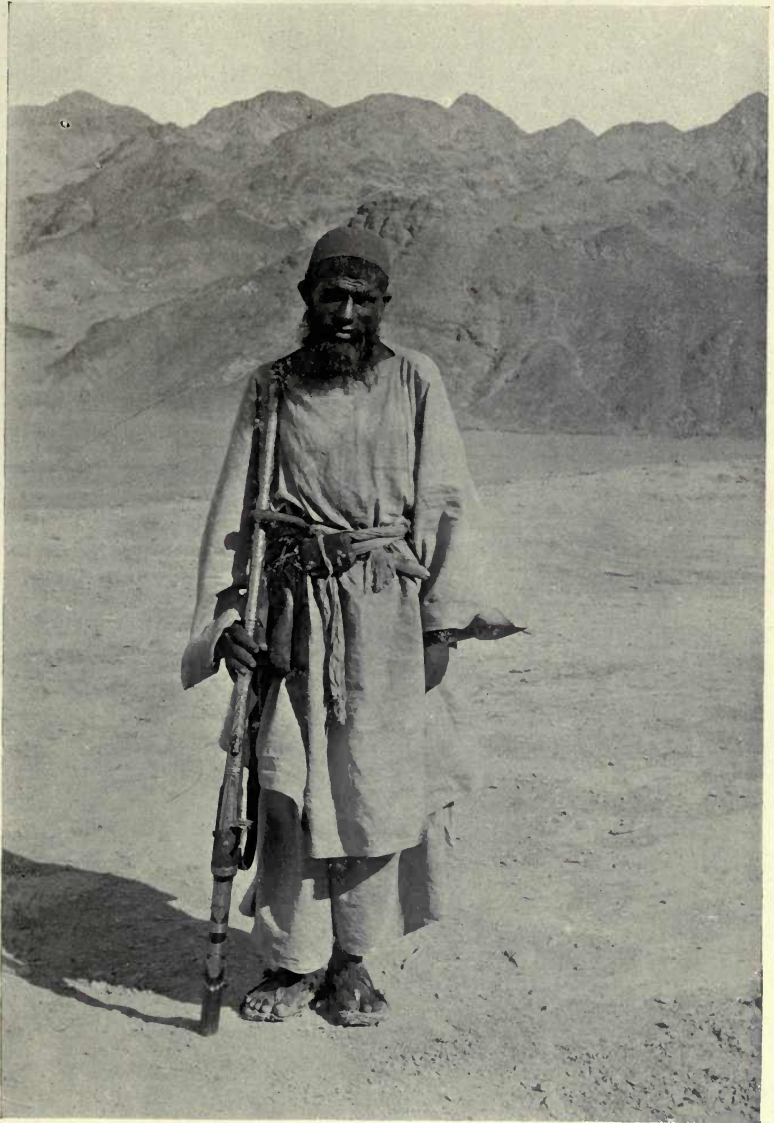
My levy turned up in the evening without having found Rahmat, but he had heard from a shepherd that he was living at a spring under the high Nagat ridge to the east. If, however, Rahmat got wind of the fact that his presence was wanted by any one so formidable as a foreign Consul, there was no doubt, my informant said, that he would lose himself amongst the hills; from all which it was clear that the hunting of the shikari was likely to be at least as difficult as that of ibex or urial.

Next morning the levy and I, together with the indispensable Ibrahim, leaving our camels at the foot of the steep ground, began an ascent up a long ridge, examining the valleys on both sides for our human quarry. We soon could look right out over the yellow foot-hills through which we had come, and see the desert stretching away like an unruffled sea. It was not till late in the afternoon, when we had turned our faces campwards, that a tethered donkey far below gave us the clue we sought. Arrived at the donkey, we were in

time to see the veteran leaders of a herd of goats emerge from a gorge. Throwing ourselves behind a rock we lay in ambush, and surprised a diminutive boy behind the herd, when too near to fly. He was Rahmat's own offspring, and the tactful Ibrahim wormed from him the secret of his father's abode. We were now hot on the trail. In half an hour we were interrogating two bright-eyed, rosy-faced young women—I fear Rahmat was a polygamist—in his own encampment. The lord of the harem had gone a-hunting "east," they had heard a shot in that direction when the sun was "so high." So off we set again, and this time luck was on our side, for crossing a ridge we suddenly came face to face with Rahmat himself.

His colour was very swarthy, his build slight, hair long, black and matted, eyes dark and rather bloodshot. His clothes were skins and rags. Altogether he looked a low type of humanity. If you asked Rahmat his tribe, he would tell you he was a Baluch. Now there is a story that the Baluch are the descendants of Cush, the father of Nimrod. The truth is probably otherwise. I am sure, moreover, that an ethnologist would have placed Rahmat, not amongst the Baluch with whom he claimed kinship, but amongst low aboriginal peoples, such as the Seistan lake-

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Rahmat shikari.

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dwellers. Still, it was a pleasant fancy to imagine this wild child of the hills a descendant of that "mighty hunter before the Lord," for in a long acquaintance with shikaris in the East, I never met one who so nearly approximated to the hunting animal. It was by no means an easy matter on this occasion to induce him to accompany us to camp, and it would have been impossible to have persuaded him to stop there, had I not adopted the quite inexcusable measure of impounding his old rifle. When, however, like a wild animal, his confidence had been won, he was delighted to accompany me hunting, provided he was not asked to leave his hills. This he would not do. During the course of his existence he had never travelled so far even as Nasratabad, the chief town of Seistan, though, as he once confided to me, he had on one occasion visited "a city called Warmal"—the nearest inhabited village to the Palang Koh range.

Rahmat's weapon was an old Seistan-built matchlock which he told me was a "very good one," and in saying that he was unconsciously paying himself as a shikari the highest compliment possible: for if the ordinary person finds a Mannlicher or suchlike arm none *too* good to shoot his beasts with, the skill required to accomplish the same result with the splutter and bang

of that iron pipe, bound up to a stock with wire, must have been something phenomenal. I heard that Rahmat's rifle once failed him five times running. I imagine, if he had taken it to his gunmaker at Warmal, the local Purdey or Cogswell and Harrison, he would have been told—"The rifle seems to have had a good deal of rough usage, and I think, sir, you had better let us make you a new weapon—" or words to that effect. The shikari, however, had a better plan. Someone had cast a spell over the rifle, that was clear. He therefore baked him a flat cake of bread, made a hole in the centre and passed his weapon through it. An evil spirit will not go through bread. To make sure, he passed it through a second time. Thus did Rahmat restore the shooting of his rifle.

On questioning Rahmat about ibex and urial, he waved his arms in a comprehensive fashion, indicating that the hills were full of them—indeed he saw beasts now. The glasses turned in the direction he pointed out, discovered some females that to Rahmat's surprise interested me not at all.

"When Nimrod bold,
That mighty hunter, first made war on beasts,
And stained the woodland green with purple dye,
New and unpolished was the huntsman's art,
No stated rule, his wanton will his guide."

It was even so here, and it took Ibrahim some minutes to convey to the hunter's intelligence a view to him so novel, that females, young and small rams, were outside the range of my desires. Rahmat's recollection then fled back to some mighty beasts that he had seen.

III. Ibex and Ibex Ground.¹

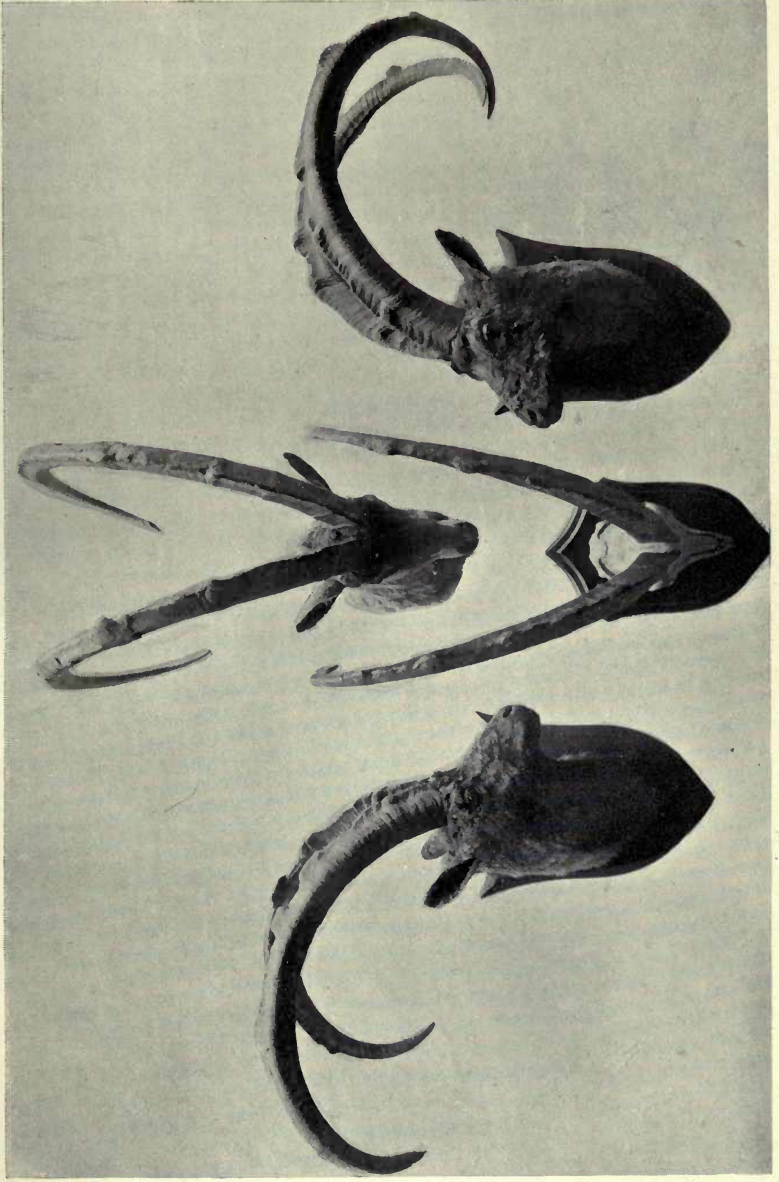
“ . . . those towers sublime,
 That seemed above the grasp of time,
 Were severed from the haunts of men
 By a wide, deep, and wizard glen,
 So fathomless, so full of gloom,
 No eye could pierce the void between ;
 It seemed a place where Gholes might come,
 With their foul banquets from the tomb,
 And in its caverns feed unseen.”

—MOORE.

A LONG arm of mountainous country stretches southward down the eastern flank of Persia, till it merges in the ranges of Baluchistan. North of Seistan it is sometimes attenuated to a single limestone ridge ; more often it is broken up into several such ridges ; while in other parts it spreads out in confused masses of hills with transverse ranges. Here and there isolated knots stand apart from the range like islands in a misty sea of desert. Drainage - system there may be said to

¹ The Persian ibex is of course *Capra ægragus*. Some naturalists have objected to its being called an ibex at all, on what grounds I do not quite know.

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Persian Ibex heads.

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be none, in the usual sense of the term, for the few scanty streams that exist in this part of Asia reach no sea, but are sooner or later swallowed up by thirsty sands or evaporated into the dry air. Desolate though the appearance of the country is, with its great sweeping plains and ranges of arid hills, it exhibits the curiously delicate colouring and transparent, unsubstantial effects only found in the earth's most waterless regions.

The picture I should like to present to my readers of the haunts of ibex is one of wild rugged rocks, precipitous cliffs, and gloomy gorges. The air bears the scent of no flowers, the sound of no falling water,—all is weird and forbidding as the mountains of the moon. And the names of these desolate crags only known to the nomad shepherds who pasture their flocks in the valleys, are they not descriptive? Asperan,¹ “the fairies’ mill tower”; Baran, “the hill of rains”; Ahangaran, “the hill of ironsmiths”; Atash khana, “the mount of fires”; Hazar Masjid, “the range of a thousand mosques.” Each one has its legend or story. Many of them recall the days when Persia was a country of fire-worshippers, till the Arabs came

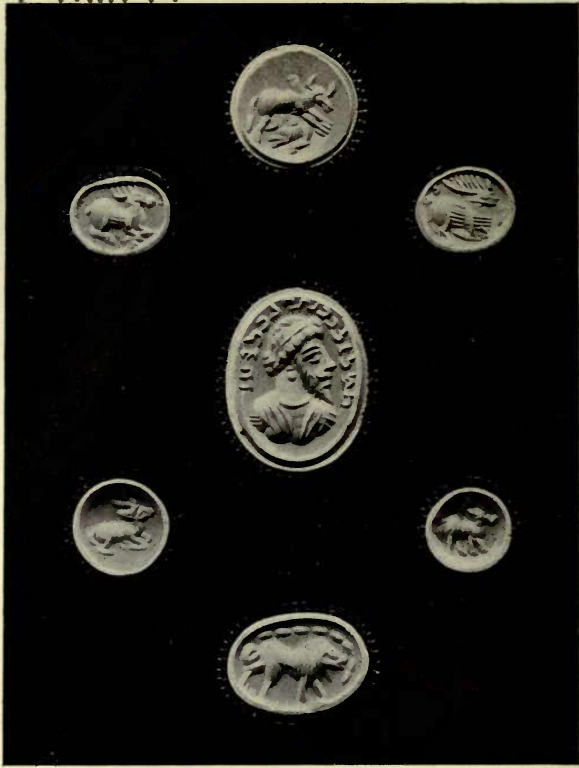
¹ Asperan is now a mere name clinging to some scattered stones, a few springs of water, and the surrounding barren hills, but tradition says that the site is one of an ancient populous city on the main road to Herat, and this is corroborated by the Arab geographers who wrote some eight centuries ago.

and converted the inhabitants with fire and sword, driving those who remained faithful to the ancient beliefs to the remoter recesses of the hills. It was again the tops of these crags that formed the refuge places of the Ismailis,¹ the queer society of "Assassins" that was formed by Hassan-i-Sabah, called the Sheikh-ul-Jabal or "old man of the mountains." On the highest summits one finds the ruins of forts solidly built of burnt bricks, cement-lined tanks in which to catch and store rain-water,² and underground storehouses. Many of these forts are so inaccessibly situated that it is said locally that to bring up the building material the very ibex of the hills were harnessed! In pre-artillery days, places such as some of these must have been impregnable, and I imagine that starvation was the weapon employed by Halaku, grandson of the great Mongol Chinghiz, when he reduced, as he is said to have done, no less than seventy of these strongholds in this Kohistan of Eastern Persia.

Some of the ranges frequented by ibex are absolutely devoid of water during the hot weather, and it seems to be a fact that they exist, like

¹ Remnants of these persecuted peoples still exist on sufferance in different parts of Persia.

² The presumption is that when these tanks were made, the rainfall was heavier than it is now.



Sassanian seals.



Bezoar stone and seals.

the white rhinoceros, for months at a time without drinking. The explanation perhaps lies in the existence of green-leaved figs and pistachio-trees and succulent roots such as asafetida, which may provide sufficient moisture for their needs. The northern ranges of Persia get a rain monsoon from the Caspian; springs and streams abound and luxuriant grass, and, as might be expected, ibex horns there run heavier than in the dry hills of Eastern Persia.¹

It has been a tradition from the middle ages that the "rock-footed one," as the ibex is called, devours snakes; and it is in virtue of this strange diet that in this beast is found the bezoar stone that was, and in the East still is, so sought after for its curious and occult properties—

"Oh, mickle is the powerful grace that lies
In herbs, plants, stones and their true qualities."

Of this magical and valuable stone there were many counterfeits, but according to the old

¹ It would not have been surprising to find that markhor existed in the hills bordering Afghanistan in the north-east corner of Persia; but though I made frequent and careful inquiries, I never met any shikari of these parts or other person who had so much as heard of the spiral-horned goats. The Himalayan ibex, a frequenter of much higher mountains than any about here, is not found at all in Persia, and I should doubt its existence in the mountains near Herat, though in a recent work on Natural History this is stated to be the case. See also Appendix II.

traveller, Tavernier, there were certain infallible tests by which the genuine thing could be recognised. "One is to place it in the mouth, and if it is genuine it will give a leap and fix itself to the palate; the other consists in placing the stone in a glass of water, and if true bezoar¹ the water will boil"!

As to the virtues of bezoar, it was chiefly valued as an antidote to poisons—a thing that in those days no household was complete without.² In Persia it is still believed to be efficacious, and I have it on the indubitable authority of Rahmat that it also safeguards the wearer from bullets. Was not his own brother the possessor of a bezoar stone? and when under fire in a desperate Baluch raid, did not the bullets stick in his clothes? Naturally, the original shaggy owner is similarly protected, so that a bezoar-bearing buck—one in a thousand—is hard to slay. The notion may be recommended to any sportsman who may miss an easy shot at the "head of heads" and be at a loss for an excuse. Supposing, however, you have bowled over your ibex, and have a mind to ascertain if he be a bearer of bezoar: if a quivering is observed whilst your

¹ See Appendix III.

² One old writer avers very sapiently that the only reason bezoar is not now in demand is "the humour people have of embracing the contrary extreme to that of their ancestors"!

Rahmat is "gralloching" him, cover the carcass with a cloth and quickly extract the precious substance without exposing it to the light.¹

Being anxious to get a bezoar stone, but not having had the fortune to kill an ibex that carried one about in its system, I applied with rather amusing result to an old Persian, who was learned in talismans and charms. He came to our camp in Kain some time later, and after tea and cigarettes had been discussed, told me very impressively that at last, with great difficulty, and naturally at great expense, he had succeeded in obtaining a piece of true bezoar. Having made this announcement, with some mystery, and eyeing me closely to see the effect produced, he abstracted from his bosom, carefully wrapped up—the core of a golf ball! As for the explanation. A strip of turf lay near our camp, and whilst stopping at this place, I daily contested with my wife, fresh from her championship at Burnham, the title of champion of Persia. Some urchin had doubtless picked up a lost "Colonel," and in this guise it came back to its rightful owner. The piece of bezoar shown in the photograph was afterwards given me by the Governor of Kain.

¹ This was Rahmat's plan. One is reminded of the examination of entrails by the Roman augurs.

The subject of charms and amulets reminds me of the seals found by treasure-hunters amidst broken pottery and other indestructible remains on the sites of Persia's ruined cities, mostly of Sassanian times. Some of these, cut in crystal, agate, chalcedony, and carnelian, are engraved in Kufic characters, others have heads of Grecian type cut in intaglio, but the most interesting to me were those representing animals, wild and domestic, which it seems not unlikely were carried by the owners as totems. Some of these display a good deal of "life." Relics of animistic beliefs are indeed common among these primitive peoples. At Shusp is a fissured rock which is known as the shrine of the Shah-i-Mar, the Shah (or spiritual leader) of snakes. At any time in the heat of the day you could go and see a wicked flat head looking at you from a crack in the rock. The snakes were protected, and, I think, fed by the people of Shusp. Every time we passed through Shusp on our annual migrations to Kain we were delayed by the illness of some member of the family, and my Seistanis believed us to be under the ban of this being. It was then necessary to do *khairat*, which meant the sacrifice of sheep—and their consumption by the villagers.

A curious local belief about ibex relates to the colour of their horns. During the rutting season the bucks have a peculiar habit that darkens their horns, and the distance to which the discoloration extends up the horn is believed to indicate less or greater rain or snow-fall during the winter—a very important matter for flock owners.

Let me now, however, pass on to the account of a stalk. And it shall be that of a beast whose horns faithfully vaticinated good winter rains.

My shooting-camp lay below a range called Chahil Dukhtaran, the “forty virgins.” As one remembers from Bible stories and tales such as Ali Baba, the number forty has in the East a peculiar signifi-ance; but what so many young ladies had to do with the rugged razor-edged ridges that towered above me,¹ I was at a loss to imagine, and no one could tell me. There was some wind when I began to climb, but at the top it was blowing in a way that made it im-

¹ There is a ruin on the rocky island in the middle of the Hamun of the same name. The legend about this, as recorded by Tate, is that forty maidens therein resided whose laughter could be heard by their relations at Sekoha (the capital). Perhaps the name given to the pikes above my camp had allusion to the inaccessibility of the forty ladies of the island!

possible to stand. It was like wrestling against something solid. To walk on the ridges was dangerous, to spy out of the question, so we went lower to try for urial. But there also one felt as if battling against an overwhelming torrent. Sometimes in a backwater for a few seconds we were in comparative calm, but could hear and see the power of the blast a few yards away; then next moment a buffet would send us staggering. The sky was the colour of a London fog with driving dust. Ibrahim and I had our motor goggles; Rahmat suffered, and suggested a return to camp. Lunch, in which sand and grit were mingled in undesirable proportions, was eaten in indescribable misery, and shortly after I acknowledged myself beaten. That was not the usual wind of Seistan from the north, but a simoom from the south, hot and stifling. In the night there came a sudden change. The rain came down in torrents. My tent was luckily on a high spot in a valley, that soon was an island with water rushing on both sides, while all around the limestone hills roared and spouted. In Seistan, where the annual rainfall averages about two inches, sounds and sights such as these are rare as they are delightful.

Next morning the air was still, cold, cleared of dust, and stimulating as wine. Instead of bitter

water¹ from a salt-fringed pool, we had fresh water from the streaming hills, such as in that land one thinks of but does not get. We mounted the ridge. All around, "violet peaks uplifted through the crystal air." One is tempted by such wonderful clearness as this to spy ground that is really too distant. We did not, however, lose much time that day. Walking was walking on air, even as in Scotland, and I had such confidence in Rahmat's wonderful sight as to be convinced we should pass nothing by. The morning slipped by and we had not seen a beast worth a stalk. I had indeed picked up one biggish ibex on a far slope with the Zeiss glasses, but the long glass showed him to be a good head only, not the really big one I wanted to finish my trip with. When stalking abroad, where game is so much scarcer than in a Scotch forest, what a grand saver of labour a really *big* glass is! It can hardly be too big. As for Rahmat, he was constantly seeing beasts out of the corner of his eye, but so far nothing out of the common.

¹ The *shor* water of Seistan and Eastern Persia has been well described by Macgregor:—"I think I could give a receipt which would taste something like it. Take the first nasty looking water you can find, mix salt with it till you make it taste as nasty as it looks, then impregnate it with gas from a London street lamp, and add a little bilge-water. Shake vigorously, and it is ready for use."—Curzon's 'Persia.'

Rahmat's hawk-like vision was to me very interesting. Spotting game is a *knack* which to some extent may be acquired by practice. A man with normally good eyesight, who knows exactly *what* to look for—this is important—will pick up distant game on the limited area of hill or plain at which he is looking—that is, on which he has focussed his eyes for the time being. The best shikaris, natives of “the hills,” see beasts that are outside this area. Their eyes seem to be wide-angled like an insect's, looking in all directions at once, and in a flash the presence of game in this angle of vision is telegraphed to the brain. Most big-game sportsmen know how the appearance of animals on a distant sky-line is conveyed to one's intelligence without having consciously looked at the spot. The triumph of eyesight lies in picking up such beasts when they are *not* on the sky-line. In some respects such sight as this is superior to that of animals, as it is backed by superior intelligence. An animal's concept of “man-danger,” for instance, seems only to be stimulated by a moving or an upright figure. It is a common experience among sportsmen for an animal to stare unalarmed at a man lying motionless, even at a range where every detail of his features must be visible. But the human mind-picture of “beasts” is not limited in this way;

for the experienced shikari, it is not necessary for animals to be on the move or even on their feet. Rahmat's powers were, however, quite unique and superior to anything I have seen, even among those hill shikaris in whom the faculty I speak of is born.

When the afternoon became well advanced, and clear purple shadows elongated themselves among the hills, we began to regret the beast we had left; but as we were bound for a fresh camp, we could not well go back. Then came a moment when Rahmat plumped down. This time he had seen a white ibex. He indicated the spot far below, but even with the glasses it took me a little time to find him. He was on a face strewn with white boulders and a long way off, and the way Rahmat had spotted him was a veritable *tour de force*. The stalk was a longish one on account of the wind. Why is it that though fox-hunting people generally know too much of "bad scenting days," one never seems to hit on such a day when one is stalking? The reply that hounds follow scent on the ground, while deer get the scent in the air, shifts, but does not remove, the difficulty.

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I lay on a gentle slope. The big ibex, a solitary beast, was standing on the same level not sixty yards off. I showed no more of my head than

was necessary and pulled the trigger. There came no answering thud, and I was as disgusted as I was surprised to see him going off untouched.

Now, though I use a magazine rifle, I make a practice of putting no more than two or three cartridges in, as I am among those that hold that if you do not get your beast in this number of shots, you should accept your failure and not attempt to mend matters by firing more shots at a running beast that, *ex hypothesi*, are more difficult than those you have already missed. By firing wild shots you run the risk of maiming your beast or of killing or wounding others with him. To my mind the best possible clause in game laws would be the absolute prohibition of magazine rifles.

It will be thought that this sentiment little agrees with what follows. I had for some reason on this occasion filled my magazine. I missed the ibex again as he was galloping over the level towards a steep rocky ridge. He reached it and began going up with springs and halts. It was too steep for him to go fast. He was still not more than 120 yards off, but the sun was setting behind the ridge in a direct line, which made my Lyman sight blaze so that it was quite useless. I put it down and raised the leaf sight. This was little better, as the blinding glitter off the barrel

made it almost impossible to see anything on the black hillside. Using my weapon more like a gun than a rifle, I fired another shot and another. Then came the last shot in the magazine, and he rolled over dead.

As to my miss with the first cartridge, I considered the matter and found a splash of lead on the rock in front of my firing-point that showed that the cause was what I surmised it to be. If you raise your head so as just to see over a rock or bank and then bring the rifle to your eye, you will find that though the line of sight is clear, the same does not follow about the line of fire. My first bullet had grazed the rock two yards in front of the rifle's muzzle, and instead of finding a billet in the heart of the old white ibex, had gone singing away over the hill-top. A silly mistake, and I could not even claim the indulgence due to first offenders!

We went up to the fallen patriarch. He carried fine horns of forty-three inches that crossed one another behind the head, and of peculiar darkness.

I have heard people talk of the disagreeable smell of the wild goats. It is certainly strong, but to me so bound up with the recollection of delightful days after markhor and ibex, that the adjective I should use would be quite a different

one. Is it not, after all, "the smell of a field that the Lord hath blessed"? For I take it that it was a wild goat and no other beast that Esau, with his bow and arrow, was sent out to shoot. All the same, I would not venture to recommend a joint off an ibex for dinner.

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The table's edge, Palang Koh.

IV. Ibex (*continued*).

"See how the mountain goat hangs from the summit of the cliffs. You would expect it to fall. It is merely showing its contempt for the dogs."—MARTIAL.

THE name Palang Koh is commonly applied to the whole range visible from Seistan. Properly, however, it only belongs to one very prominent rock table. This great slab, six miles in length by a few hundred yards in breadth, is tilted gently to the west, and is scarped on all sides by tremendous walls of rock, so that there exist only two or three difficult tracks by which access to it can be gained. Imagine yourself to have climbed up by one of these in the early morning, and to be seated on the table's edge dangling your feet over a gulf of blue air, and I will introduce you to a wonderful view. From the foot-hills far below, which look like the mountain regions of a vast raised map, the desert stretches away, browns and yellows fad-

D

ing into misty purple, to a horizon level as the ocean's. Looking towards Seistan, the blue-green Hamun lies like a little sea on the surface of a sun-baked continent, but it seems to accentuate rather than relieve the desolation of the scene. The dark patches that might be taken for cloud shadows, if they were not stationary, one knows to be reed-beds, and beyond these the cultivated tracts and the tamarisk forest fringing the Helmund. In the lake stands out a tiny table rock, the island of Koh-i-Kwaja, on the edge and down the side of which are the ruins of Kah-Kaha,¹ "the city," as some one has freely rendered it, "of roars of laughter." Many are the tales and legends about this island fort, for during the roll of many centuries it has borne a prominent part in the stormy history of Seistan. In comparatively recent times, when the figure of Nadir Shah loomed gigantic and terrible over territory stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Oxus, from Delhi to Tabriz, it was here

¹ *Kah-kaha* (or *qahqaha*) means laughter. Savage Landor mentions in connection with this place a legend common all over Persia of an animal of so ridiculous an appearance, that when displayed in the ranks of an army it threw the enemy into such convulsions of laughter that they died—or at any rate were defeated. The weapon was eventually turned against the side using it by means of the employment of a mirror. The "animal," on beholding his image, promptly died of laughter himself!

that for seven years his arms were held in check.

From the south end of the lake a thin white tentacle straggles out and meanders southward, then upward towards the horizon, where it is lost in the salt marsh of Zirreh, a faint splash of shivering white in the purple mist. The whole prospect is one of utter and hideous desolation. From the rock bracket overhanging space on which you are sitting, you notice that the edge of the table hill is cracked and fissured and its stone walls carved and potted. In the forefront towers a rounded but-tress, whose holes and hollows are so distributed as to present from a little distance the semblance of a gigantic human skull, whose hollow orbits look out over the desert towards Seistan. On what transformations has that grim figure looked down! Instead of a desert of wind-driven sand, once a sea thundered against the rocks below. As the ages pass the waters dry up, recede, and give place to a fertile plain with habitations of men. Cities rise and crumble into dust. It is the golden age of Persia's heroes. But a strange blight is creeping over the face of the earth. Lakes and rivers shrink and disappear, and grassy plain fades into sandy wilderness. The land is in the grip

of that terrible dessication¹ by which vast regions in Asia are still becoming desert wastes. And on all the grim Sphinx-like shape has looked down, itself but little changed since the days when wetted by the flying spray. In the long cycles of existence, it was but yesterday that the legions of Alexander thundered by, yesterday that on men's tongues were such names as Chinghiz and Halaku, Mahmud and Timur *lang*. And what of to-morrow? Beyond the veil hanging over the desert lie the plains of Bakwa, the scene, according to Eastern saying, of the world's final Armageddon. And after that we can imagine the stone figure yet watching on, after the disappearance of life itself, gazing through the long æons over the whitened bones of a dead world.

The reader will be beginning to wonder what all this has to do with ibex shooting. It has in truth but little, save that the table hill whither I have attempted to carry him in spirit, and especially its rocky walls and buttresses, is the haunt of some

¹ Professor Ellsworth Huntington, in a paper contributed to the Royal Geographical Society's journal, referred to three cycles of dessication—(1) the retirement of Tertiary inland seas because of the warping of the earth's crust; (2) the change from the moisture of glacial days to the aridity of the present time; (3) a dessication "which is the last faint undulation of the great climatic wave of the glacial period." The latter has taken place in historic times, and to it the Professor largely attributes some of the great human migrations, such as that of the Huns.

patriarchal beasts grown cunning with age. Native shikaris leave the hill alone. They are interested in meat, but think little about their quarry's horns. Extreme age, moreover, connotes extreme toughness. And as the peculiar formation of the hill makes hunting a difficult and fluky business, they do not waste their time here when easier hills are near at hand, all, to some extent, the home of the wild goats. The reason why I call the shooting on the "Panther Hill" fluky, will be clear from the record of a day.

I had climbed the hill in the dark of the morning with Ibrahim and two shepherd-shikaris who bore the heroic names of Sohrab and Rustam. On gaining the top, we immediately saw an undeniably big ibex silhouetted against the bright dawn, some six hundred yards away. He had evidently finished his night's grazing on the flat top, for he was looking down into space, and in a few moments was gone. A little later, when I poked my head cautiously over the edge, I saw naught but a narrow ledge some fifty yards down. Beyond this the wall of rock was overhung, so that between it and the *débris*-covered ravines, two thousand feet or so below us, nothing could be seen. Why, by the way, has the adjective "giddy" attached itself to the goat? One could hardly find a less appropriate one!

We moved forward along the edge and then back again, but neither saw nor heard anything of the ibex. We then walked north along the top of the great scarp, but we were always baffled by the same uncompromising formation. "To travel hopefully," said Stephenson, "is a better thing than to arrive." We travelled very hopefully for some time, and nothing could have been pleasanter. At every turn I hoped to look down on the white back of some kingly old ibex basking in the sun with misplaced confidence in the impregnability of his fortress. But it was always the same; either no view at all, or a smooth face of stone, on which an eagle could barely find footing, going sheer down into fearsome depths. It was rather exasperating, when one knew there *must* be big ibex in the recesses of the cliffs.

The morning wore on, then came lunch. The afternoon was wearing on and things looked bad. We had gone north and had returned along the western edge of the table. Once, in a deep *tangi*, we had come on ibex, but ladies only, and that was all we had seen, if I except the yesterday's tracks of a panther. Hope had grown dim, and when this moment comes I do not think that even the optimistic Stephenson would deny that the person that "arrives" has the best of it. So we had come back to our

original skull rock, where we decided to wait on the chance of seeing ibex on the move when the evening got cool.

One other living thing we had seen in the course of the day—a man, mahogany tinted, with a pointed Afghan skull-cap on his head and wild-looking as childhood's pictures of Robinson Crusoe. He was an *angoza* hunter, one of the tribe of Kakars that invade Persia in the spring and spread over the hills in quest of asafœtida. His work was visible on the flat top of our table, in the shape of little pyramidal erections of three stones each. The method of these people, when they find a plant (*Ferula fatida*), is to cut off the stem an inch below the surface of the ground; over it they then build a little three-stone structure to mark the spot and also to protect the plant from sun and wind. Four days later they again make the round to collect the gum that exudes. From this hill country of Eastern Persia come many other gums, most of them more entitled to the adjective "aromatic" than asafœtida, mannas, tragacanth, &c., besides jujube and other *materia medica*, whose presence sometimes lends a mysterious Eastern fragrance to the pot-pourri of East India docks.

The difficulties of the hill, of which I had certainly been forewarned, were now only too

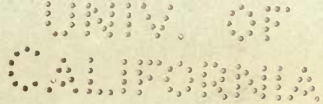
evident. One's only chance seemed in the possibility of getting a shot at an old buck on the top before dawn. As to the ground at the base of the cliffs, while the day was yet young I had certainly seen a herd in which were some good bucks grazing far below us; but it would have been some hours' work to get down, by which time it was odds that they would have moved up into their fastnesses. The local shikaris, too, assured us that the low ground was no good, as one could not get above the ibex owing to the cliffs, while the wind never permitted an approach from below. It seemed, therefore, that the old goats of the Palang Kuh had chosen their residence with a good deal of sagacity.

That Rahmat was not with me was also a fact that I much regretted. Some days before I had sent a man to bring that cunning hunter to my camp, and he had in fact come. Rahmat, however, had an enemy who had his tents at the Jhuli springs not far from my camp. That was one reason for his vanishing the following night. The other, as I afterwards heard, was that Rustam and his brother, who had their flocks at Baba Rahdar, under the Palang Kuh, had frightened him off by hinting that I intended to take him shooting with me to Kain.

As evening came on, and nothing had been

seen, we continued along the top of the cliff, working campwards, till the light began to fail and the monstrous shadow of the hill to creep athwart the level plain below. I had given up all hopes of a shot and was lying spying the low ground with a view to the morning's plans, when Rustam, who had been a little way in advance, came back in great excitement. "Two big ibex, white as snow," was his announcement, "horns thus," and he made a sweep with his arms. It appeared they were some way down, out of shot. A fissure here ran a few yards down the cliff, and this we followed till we reached a gravelly, sloping terrace, on which grew two or three wild fig-trees. From this point Rustam hoped to see the ibex below us. I crawled to the edge but could see nothing,—nothing, that is, but a cold, gloomy, and most repellent gulf. There was another ledge twenty yards lower down. If we could reach that, more ground would be visible. There was a possible road, but it was not a nice one. Go, however, we must, and that without delay, as the light was fast failing. Suppressing qualms, therefore, I followed the barefooted shepherd and we reached the ledge. It was a matter of three yards or so in breadth and had a steepish slope outwards, but at one point a rock as big as a portmanteau

overhung. On this one could lean and see into the depths. This was clearly the Ultima Thule. Below us was a sheer precipice; if the ibex were not in shot from this point we had lost them. Leaning over, I at first saw nothing. Then I saw a beast move out on to a shelf straight below me. I realised with a jump of the heart that he was a really big beast; also that the shot was a very long one, perhaps two hundred and fifty yards, and the light bad. I think I have never had a shot at an animal so plumb below me. A pebble would have fallen close beside him. Leaving the sight at its lowest, I pulled and saw the dust fly. At the shot, which in the stillness of the evening reverberated among the rocks like a cannon, the second ibex, hitherto unseen, dashed out, was over the ledge in a moment, and had disappeared. My beast hesitated and stood long enough to enable me to correct my aim and get in another shot. To my huge satisfaction he collapsed and rolled over. I had desperate fears for his skull, as I heard a great rattle of stones which went on for an interminable time. We all climbed back and went down the hill by the morning's road. Then I went on to camp whilst Ibrahim and Rustam went round to try to find the ibex, about which, as the moon was bright, Rustam felt confident.





Ibrahim and the big ibex.



Shikari and ibex.

“Well,” said the wife, as I finished the story at dinner, “how big do you think he was?”

“I don’t know, but he was big.”

“As big as Rahmat’s last year?”

“Perhaps bigger.”

He was. About eleven o’clock there were voices in the camp, and I caught *khaili burzburg* (exceedingly big), and in marched Ibrahim with the head on his shoulder. The steel tape was in readiness. 47½ inches, a very big head, and a long way the best I had shot.

I tried the lower ground the next two days and found, as Rustam had said, that the wind made stalking very difficult, and I was consequently lucky in getting another good beast.

I must say a word here about our camp at the foot of the hill; it was at the *ziarat* of Baba Rahdar where there is a spring of water, and it proved to be one of the most unpleasant camps it is possible to imagine. It should be told that this Baba Rahdar was a saint, whose shrine, a cairn decorated with flags and horns, lay close to our camp. In these days the Baba appears but rarely, but when he does, it is in the guise of a snake. He is reputed to be of an inhospitable nature, as he allows no traveller to remain at his spring for more than three days. He sends winds which rage and howl up and down the

narrow valley, so that the air inside one's tents and out is full of driving sand and dust, and life becomes intolerable. It was in this way that we were treated, so that we all were glad to leave. But an error had been committed which brought on us the ire of this detestable personage. Said Khan, our *kafila-bashi*, had, as in duty bound, made the sacrifice of a sheep at the Baba's shrine; but instead of the meat being divided equally among high and low, he had, like Ananias, kept back half for himself. Next day three camels were missing, the recovery of which was a matter of weeks and much strife. But even then we were not quit of the malicious being. The caravan, with *takht-i-rawan* and all, proceeded to the next camp at Jhuli by the direct road over the plain. Tents were pitched and the camp settled down. I walked over the hill on the chance of another ibex, and from a high point looked westward over a broad plain amongst the hills. Some distant white specks indicated where our tents had been planted down—my home for the time being. Towards evening a cloud arose in the west the size of a man's hand. More seemed to collect from nowhere, forming an arch across the blue sky. Dust devils raced over the plain and then there came down a howling sand-storm. The plain

was blotted out in swirling curtains of driving sand. Then came some thunder, and forked lightning flashed through the murky yellow. A half minute's burst of rain, and the air suddenly cleared like a precipitate dissolved in a chemist's beaker. The whole thing had taken but a brief quarter of an hour. But the tents—

“I counted them at break of day,
But when the sun set where were they?”

So far as I could see, they had been swept clean away.

When I reached the draggled camp, my wife told me of the hurricane that had burst on them and flattened the tents. The family struggled out of the tent *débris*, and all, including dog and the children's pet tortoise, took refuge in the *takht-i-rawan* (mule litter), which was held from being carried bodily away by escort sowars and levies. From this point of comparative security the housewife (and *ex officio* chief commissariat officer) had to look on helplessly and see her cook-house, with pots and pans, bring driven away before the wind into the desert. Thus were we overtaken by the wrath of Baba Rahdar.

V. Wildfowl in Seistan.

“By observation it is found that wildfowl are the subtlest of birds, and have the greatest regard for their own safety.”

It would require a lifetime to know thoroughly the Hamun in its many moods and aspects. The fan of intricate channels that forms the delta; the periodically submerged area with its typical vegetation; the *naizar* or reed-beds; the great lake itself with its expanses of open water and its reed-fringed lagoons. Then there is its great seasonal dilation and contraction. Sometimes the Koh-i-Kwaja is a rocky island reflected in a mirror of deep water, sometimes it stands high and dry. It is when winter snows on distant highlands are melting in the spring and the Helmund rolls a flood of turgid water that the people of Seistan have to look to the safety of their lands. They see their irrigation *bands* swept away, the river breaking out into new and unexpected channels, and from governor downwards they are hard put to save their fields and villages. Then is the time

also that the lake-dwellers, in their queer-shaped craft, are in requisition as ferrymen across submerged tracts and flooded rivers. In every direction alarms of water and inundations. You ride out and find horizons of water where previously was dry land. Everywhere one comes across black lines of men, half naked, and plying their mattocks as no one but Seistanis can, in the erection of dams and lines of protecting earthworks.

In the summer Seistan is an inferno, where a tropical sun and the blast of the "hundred and twenty days wind" strive for mastery; while Beelzebub and his horde of bloodsucking flies, exhaled from the marshes, hum a chorus louder or fainter according as one or other prevails. We will not dwell on that.

In autumn the water in rivers and lake has become clear; there are breaths of coolness in the north wind, while the dark-green of the reed-beds changes to browns and yellows. It is then, in the silence of moonlit nights, you begin to hear the silken rustle of pinions high up in the air, while by day you mark in the sky those lines and V's and zigzags and ever-changing curves that make the flight of wildfowl one of the most beautiful sights in nature. Then you know that day by day and night by night the lonely meres and marshes are

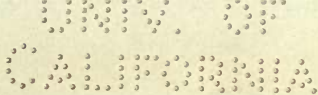
becoming crowded with arrivals from the far-distant lakes of the north.¹

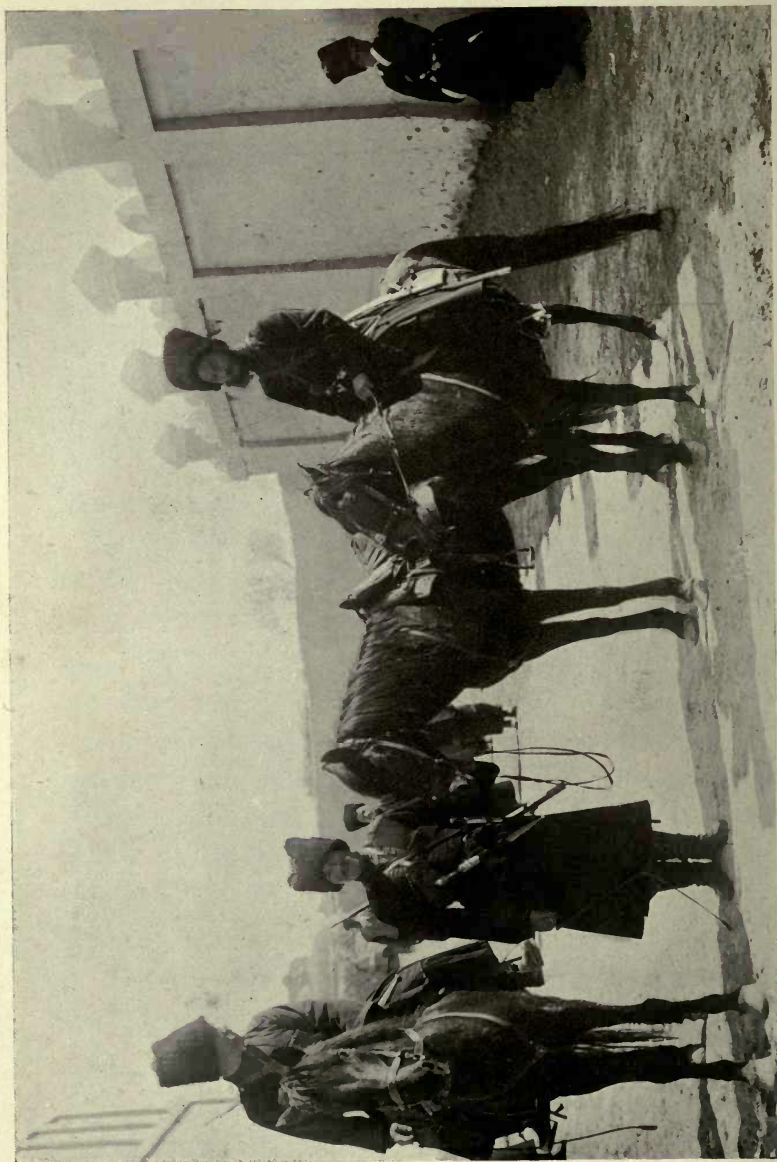
There are few places in the world where wild-fowl collect in greater number or variety than on this lake of Seistan,—and few where the efforts of the gunner to take a reasonable toll of them appear so futile. Of one thing I am determined, and that is, if ever it is my fortune, or misfortune, to visit this country again, I shall risk collision with the Customs officials on the question of the importation of cannon, and bring with me the biggest punt-gun that London can produce.

Let me describe one of our trips to the Hamun armed only with our puny “hand guns.” A November morning, cool, bright, and still. It is not ideal weather for wildfowling, but in Seistan one does appreciate a halcyon day.

We have been riding for an hour and a half and have entered the reed tract. Through the Naizar, as it is called, runs a narrow track—it is in fact the highroad to Kain and Khorassan,—but though now dry, and even dusty, it had been churned up by cattle when soft and is rough going. We are surrounded by a forest of high reeds, our only landmark the Koh-i-Kwaja swing-

¹ Many kinds of duck breed in Seistan, notably some of the pochards, and teals, and marbled duck.





Russian Cossacks.

ing about to our left, sometimes in front, sometimes almost behind us.

Wild pig live in this Naizar. Once, during a blizzard, one of these animals tried to force the guard at our Consulate gates, but being repulsed, made away over the plain, pursued by our own levies and some Cossacks from the rival institution over the way. He was eventually killed, brought in, and laid at my wife's feet. These Cossacks seemed capital fellows. It was a daily occurrence to meet them riding their splendid little horses barebacked at full gallop down to water, and as night fell to hear the somewhat mournful cadences of their songs; and we were frequently privileged to see their intricate dances within the hospitable walls of the Russian Consulate.

À propos, I may mention an incident that occurred when we were leaving Meshed *en route* for Seistan. The Russian Consul-General and his staff had accompanied us to our camp a few miles out. Tea was being served, when the attention of all was attracted to three mounted figures approaching over the plain. As they came nearer, we saw that the middle form was that of our Goanese cook, hat awry, and rolling from side to side of his pony, evidently in a very glorious state. Supporting him on either side, with the utmost gravity, and perhaps real sym-

pathy, were two stalwart Cossacks. It seemed that some of our cook's pals had been giving him a cordial send off, and the Russian Consul-General, noticing on the road the insecurity of his seat, had told off two of his own escort to bring him safely into camp. Thus the *entente* was sealed in Meshed!

Though the Russian Consuls and their staffs at Seistan were charming acquaintances, they had little taste for field sports. Once when talk had turned on snipe-shooting, Monsieur — announced to our surprise that he daily killed them with a saloon pistol (with which he was an excellent shot), in the Consulate garden! Later on, it turned out that his *becassines* were a variety known in India as *kuch nahins*.¹

As we ride on, patches of charred reeds and a huge mushroom of smoke on the horizon show the *gaodars* have begun burning. These people, distinct from the agricultural population, own the famous cattle of Seistan that are fattened on reeds and the different Hamun grasses, and they burn the reeds to encourage the next spring's growth.

¹ The Indian story goes that a newly arrived subaltern went shooting snipe. Various water birds got up, and he knocked some over. As each bird fell he asked his shikari what it was, and was told *kuch nahin*—i.e., nothing—not a bird to be shot. On arrival in the mess he announced his bag as one snipe and ten brace of *kuch nahins*!

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Evening on the Hamun.



The Governor of Seistan.

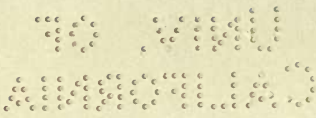
After emerging from the reeds, we find ourselves on a level plain, yellow with a low straggling grass—this also an area subject to inundation. In the distance rows of little square dots might in another country be bathing-machines on sands when the tide is low; here they are the reed huts of the cattle owners, and a very poor time these people must have of it in their frail dwellings, especially when blizzards sweep over the country.¹

As we canter over the level the horizon imperceptibly becomes water, with dotted islands of dark reeds. Wildfowl can be seen flying low down, darkening in the shadow and brightening in the sunshine.

¹ One terrible storm that occurred about eighteen years ago is described in the McMahon Boundary Commission records, and is still talked about in Seistan. A survivor's narrative runs that when the storm arose, it was night. A boy sent from the family hut to report what the water was doing, came running back crying that a great wave was advancing from the Hamun, and telling his people to fly for their lives. They put his words down to boyish fears, however, and stayed with their cattle. The Hamun water was being heaped up on the south side from the force of the wind, and the hut was soon awash. The family huddled together on a heap of reeds collected to make *tings* (shelters) for the cattle. As the cold increased, the water froze, and mingled with the roar of wind and waves was the crash of floating ice. Wild pig, driven from the submerged reed-beds, took refuge with the cattle in the *tings*, but these one by one collapsed, and the animals were carried away and drowned. The narrator's family were eventually rescued in the reed boats of their brother lake-dwellers the *sayads*, but it is said that, during the four days that the wind lasted, over four hundred human beings and fourteen thousand cattle perished.

Our tents are now white dots in the level distance, and in another half-hour we arrive there. Nose-bags for man and beast come next, and shortly after we are collected on the muddy edge of a creek where we find our boats and a chattering crowd of *sayads*. Guns, cartridges, and our distinguished selves are distributed, and like a snake the procession uncoils itself and we glide down the waterway cut through tall bulrushes and feathery-headed flags. The other guns recline in Roman attitudes on the humble reed boats of the country, while my wife and I, in all the pride of seniority and the married state, are in the Berthon boat. The concession, gallantry apart, awakes, if I mistake not, no pang of envy in the breasts of the other sportsmen; for though the Berthon has certain solid advantages of stability and ease, notably the raised seat necessary to the comfort of the European *sejant*, it has the drawback of being difficult to hide in the reeds, and in its nakedness seems to have a more terror-striking effect on the race of wildfowl than the reed boats to which they are more or less accustomed.

These *tutins*, as the cigar-shaped boats are called, being low in the water are inconspicuous, and they have a grandly devised ram for pushing through the reeds. In their construction, which is most



ingenious, absolutely nothing but reeds (in the vernacular *tut*) are used from stem to stern.¹ The life of a *tutin* is not long, as they soon become water-logged; but as they only cost a few hours' labour, this is not of much consequence. A graceful girl propelling a punt is reputed to be one of the most exhilarating sights on the river Thames. A *sayad* in his *tutin* on the Hamun, with his long but crooked pole, is probably somewhat less so; but still his muscular bronze figure, in the strenuous attitudes his art demands, against a background of blue water and sky, is undeniably picturesque.

In Persian, the word *sayad* means simply "hunter"; but in Seistan the term has come to be applied only to this aboriginal tribe of lake-dwellers. They live, like the *gaodars*, in huts made of reeds, but their occupations are netting fish and wildfowl—usually bartered for grain—and making mats. The fish—I think a kind of carp, not the Indian manseer—they catch in a triangular net. For wildfowl, they use a kind of clap net. It is fixed across a channel connect-

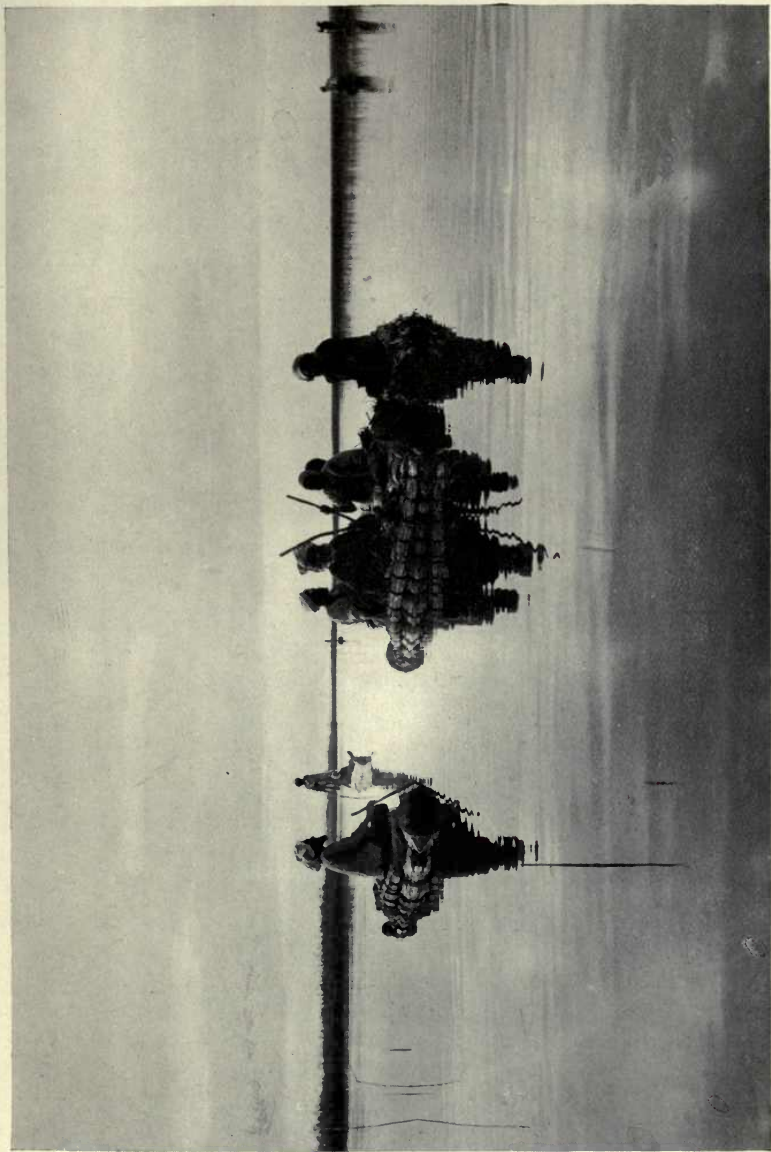
¹ It is interesting to notice how, in like environments, evolution proceeds on like lines. I was recently reading a French account of the Lake Tchad area, and was much struck by the similarity of the physical phenomena and problems of that part to those of the Seistan basin. The boats used on the great African lake seemed from the pictures to be almost identical in construction with the *tutins* of the Hamun.

ing two *chungs*, as the open reaches of water are called. When set, nothing is seen above the surface, but as the fowl are slowly moved along, the net, which is hung on poles that pivot on the bottom, springs up and the birds are enclosed. The trick is done by a man hidden in the reeds pulling a rope. The whole arrangement is most ingenious, especially the way the upright poles are pivoted on the bottom; but it would take a page of letterpress and diagrams to explain it. Coots are enclosed in these nets in extraordinary numbers, duck also in sufficient quantities for the market price in Seistan to be about 2d. apiece. The down and feathers form one of the chief exports of the province.

By an ancient custom, the Hamun is divided among the different sections of the *sayads*, who have thereon exclusive rights, for which they pay revenue to the Governor of Seistan; and for our shooting a special permit from this elevated person had been necessary. Not that the *sayads* were at all loath to show us sport. We interrupted their operations certainly; but a day with the British Consul's party brought them in an easily earned four *krans* or so each, and nothing but keenness was shown.

As our procession moves slowly up the narrow channel, there is an almost continuous patter

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The Lake-dwellers in their reed craft.

on the water from the feet of thousands of coots that rise in front in black clouds. Now and again mallards and other heavy ducks get up with quacks of alarm, and we hear the occasional *squark* of a snipe that had been resting on the roots of the reeds. No shooting at this stage. Presently we arrive at an open reach among the reeds, and places are drawn for. The beaters disappear, to gain by narrow and devious waterways a point far up the *chung* whence the drive will begin. The guns move to their posts. Ours is in a sort of bay on the opposite side. The boat is pushed in among the reeds and the long flags are bent and bound over, serving the double purpose of concealing and keeping her steady. D., on the opposite side and rather higher up, is to fire the first shot.

After half an hour's expectation there comes a whirr of wings, and a lot of teal splash down in the water close by. We can just see them through the reeds swimming about. Then bang! goes D.'s gun, and before we can hear the resounding smack on the water that tells us he has scored, the teal are in the air again and have gone. All is stillness. But in a matter of ten or fifteen seconds there comes a rush. The air is dark with ducks; they come fast and low, so low that it is impossible to get on to

individual birds. There are pintail, to my mind the *élite* of all wildfowl, flying highest as usual; pochards and other ducks below them, with the interstices filled up as it were with teal,—an *embarras de richesse* that is positively bewildering. In a few seconds the great flight is over. There is a rearguard, higher but, thank goodness, more scattered, and these afford a few more sporting chances. The *tutins* come up and the pick up begins. It seems paltry for the number of cartridges that have been fired! Of course, among these dense reeds a duck that is not killed dead is lost. On the Hokra jhil in Kashmir, where the shooting is managed in a similar way, the *manjhis*, who take the part of the *sayads* in Seistan, reserve for themselves a portion of the bag by tethering some of the cripples to reeds below the surface, to be picked up subsequently, and I rather suspected these people had some similar dodge.

We next try a drive in the opposite direction, this time preceded by a long wait, as the *tutin*chis have a long journey round. There is plenty of life to watch in the meantime: a fishing harrier swooping and hovering, moor-hens swimming and diving among the reeds, warblers and other small birds busy in their feathered tops. Though the air is cool, a company of midges prevents us from forgetting we are still in Seistan. Let us

not, however, be ungrateful for present mercies. No one who has only floated on the Hamun on such a perfect day as this, watched the lights on the water, the reeds whispering and nodding to their reflections, been fanned by the cool sedge-scented breeze, could imagine what a hell it becomes in summer. The same beauties, even enhanced perhaps as regards colour, but the steamy air is alive with insects. A time when—

“. . . loud as the drone of bees in the time of a swarming horde, A horror of many insects hung in the air, and roared!”

Swarms of splendid dragon-flies flash among the dark-green reeds. One can hear the clash of their wings; but above all there is the dull hum of myriads of blood-sucking flies. People that care for their horses, when in the neighbourhood of the Hamun, keep them at this time completely clothed (including trousers!); but unprotected beasts—even thick-skinned camels—are tormented by big, grey, flat, evil-looking flies till they stream with blood. For this reason, travellers that have to cross the Hamun in summer generally do so at night, and even then it is no unmixed joy. I look back on one such crossing with my family in the early autumn. The embarkment had been planned to take place at sundown. For an hour previously we had had the company of the flies,

but as the sun set the attacking force suddenly withdrew, and there was a blessed calm. The moon rose, throwing its reflection on the still mere, and we looked forward to a crossing of pure enjoyment. These pleasing anticipations were short-lived. With almost a howl the mosquitoes were on us. My wife was fortunate in having a motor-veil. For the children, who had much looked forward to the crossing by moonlight, it was a lesson in the vanity of human expectations, for they spent the voyage with their heads in pillow-cases. As for myself, I have a recollection of a nightmare battle with insects, that for self-sacrificing fury seemed more like wasps than mere mosquitoes.

To return to our ducks. The second drive there were no complaints about duck coming too low. As is usual on still days, when once thoroughly disturbed, they flew very high—quite unnecessarily so, as far as their safety was concerned,—hundreds of them being mere specks in the sky, circling round till lost to sight.

We had, however, some sporting shots at teal, and of all that tribe there is none that flies faster than that known as the Baikal,¹ or “clucking

¹ I *think* this identification, made from Baker's ‘Indian Ducks,’ is correct. I regret not having sent specimens away for expert opinion.

teal," of which we got several that evening. The Seistani name for them is "bullets," and it describes them well. Fast they came and low, often so skimming the water as to make it difficult to get a shot at them at all. And in this connection an adventure befell one of our party which must be recorded in this narrative. It was after one of these rushes of shrapnel and a bang! bang! from the gun opposite that we heard roars of stentorian laughter echoing over the water. When the sounds had died away, the fact was elicited that "X.," having valorously stood up in his *tutin* to better deal with the "bullets," had taken a backwards header into the Hamun. He had fortunately kept a firm hold of his gun, and, wet but undaunted, climbed back. It seemed, however, that he was not yet convinced that the upright position in a *tutin* is one of unstable equilibrium. A little time later another volley of "bullets" came whistling down the *chung*, and were saluted by a double report from the same quarter. Certain other sounds caused us to take a glance in that direction. "X." had again plunged in (kerblink, kerblunk!) amongst the birds which were floating legs upwards about his *tutin*. How the "clucking teal" must have chuckled!

A wobbling *tutin*, or even, for that matter,

a boat, is not an easy thing to shoot out of. In Kashmir, some of the best and most experienced shots used to lie flat on their backs, and in spite of certain obvious disadvantages, such as the limited arc in which one can swing a gun, one is concealed so much better, and consequently gets so many more birds in easy range, that I am not sure that this position is not the most paying.

The sun is going to bed behind a far bank of reeds, and as he drops out of sight a chill comes into the air. The duck are mostly gone, but as we peacefully glide campwards, we see occasional flights against the fading light.

After dinner the bag is brought up for inspection. To be fully representative of Seistan, besides those kinds already mentioned, we should have gadwals, shovellers, wigeon, spot-bills, stiff-tailed duck, and many kinds of pochards (common, red-crested, white-eyed, tufted), also marbled duck, sheldrakes, and mergansers. These I have myself seen, and the list is certain to be incomplete. Of course we never got all these in one day; generally one sort predominated. Sometimes it was a pochard day, sometimes a marbled duck day, often a teal day. Pintail rarely made up a big proportion of the bag; mallards and wigeon never.

During the night the breeze brought with it the low murmur of geese from the open water to the south, and the expedition we made after them the next morning, before riding back, resulted in a bag of seven fat grey lags. A herd of swan was also seen, but we failed to get a shot at them.

Whooper, and I think Bewick's swans also, are found (and perhaps breed) in the northern, which is the deepest, part of the Hamun. An ancient city called Sabari is supposed to lie submerged here. I never made a trip after the swans while in Seistan, and never had the glory of shooting one of these splendid birds. I did however chance to see one shot, and that in rather a curious way. Riding along one day by the side of a big stretch of flooded land, there came the sound of a distant shot, and almost immediately I saw three swans come swinging along. I slipped off my horse and took my gun from the levy on the chance of a shot, but they went down in the water about eighty yards short of me. I was debating what to do when two of the swans got up and flew back; the third was swimming in circles in the water, evidently in difficulties; then his head dropped and he died. The next thing was the appearance from some hidden *kula* (duck-hole) in the water of a naked shikari, who waded and swam in to retrieve his prize.

Our total bag for the trip was but forty-four head, a poor total for the enormous number of fowl seen; but this is always the case in Seistan, even in wildfowling weather, which this was not.

Talking of bags, reminds me that there was a time when wildfowl in this land of Seistan lay under an odious suspicion, one that lay darkly at the back of one's mind when sitting in a boat in their damp company. Plague had suddenly appeared in Seistan, and it was asked, "Whence?" The nearest point of infection was on the one side India, on the other a remote province in Russia. Now the host of the plague bacillus is a rat flea that can only transmit infection for some three weeks after he has begun to harbour the microbe, and he never leaves his beloved rat till the latter's death. But rats do not travel to Seistan from either Russia or India. This, I should remark in parenthesis, is not, as one might perhaps think, due to their superior intelligence, but to the simple fact that though rats are travellers by rail and ship, they do not journey by mule or camel caravan. The problem was therefore to find a means whereby a plaguey flea could be transported some five hundred miles to Seistan in the limited time it remains dangerous; and the solution, according to one authority at least, was found in the wild-duck. "Imagine," he

said, "a rat dying of plague on the shore of a lake. His fleas attach themselves to a duck that is making a meal off the unsavoury object. The duck migrates to Seistan, covering the distance in a very few days, and the rest follows." The first cases of plague did actually occur among the fowl-snaring lake-dwellers. The theory seems rather fantastic,¹ but considering the extraordinary concatenations of possible events that do happen in nature—the life-cycle of the liver-fluke for instance—he would be a bold man who would reject it offhand. Let me, however, quit this digression into the regions of plague etiology and say a word about flight shooting.

An old rhyme says—

"When the wild geese gang out to sea,
Fair weather there will surely be."

And in Seistan, the same holds good about the Hamun. When, on the other hand, the sky takes on a steely blue and the north wind howls and goes on howling, wildfowl come inland and take refuge on rivers, canals, sheltered pools. There was often flood water close to the Consulate, and when the wind was blowing, we used to go out,

¹ It does not at any rate seem more fantastic than the recently evolved theory of the spread of plague over high passes and mountain ranges by the agency of marmots.

muffled in garments that were only limited by the necessity of getting gun to shoulder, and wait for duck in a *kula*. Cold but exciting hours were some of those spent by my wife, self, and Don, watching for dim flying forms against the fading rose and orange of the evening sky. That one might see almost anywhere: what made the picture essentially one of Seistan was the black outline, low and long, of a crenelated fort wall, and a single tall palm-tree, bowed with age and a lifelong struggle with the wind, that swayed above it. As for the sport, flight shooting is much the same all the world over. The worst of it was that during a Seistan gale the sky was almost always clear, while one wants clouds for a background after dark.

Seistani shikaris do a lot of shooting from *kulas* at night, but having nothing better than locally made muzzle-loaders, only loose off at fowl on the water. I call to mind an old Baluch *sardar* in Seistan, of whom I should like to give a picture. A drab domed cap, round which a turban is loosely tied; under it a yellow face deeply pitted, one eye, a parrot nose. A big heavy form, minus an arm, clothed in loose garments about which the stuff falls in superfluous folds and wrinkles. Among his accomplishments was the art of divination by means of the

burnt shoulder-bones of sheep.¹ He once exhibited to me the identical bone by which he had been able to foretell the overthrow of Mahommed Ali Shah! Then the assistance he gave Lord Roberts in the Afghan war, his account of it at least, was worthy of Bill Adams himself. He had been a shikari himself when younger, and liked talking about it. I asked him one day why Persians did not shoot at birds in the air. The best shikaris, he replied, had a plan superior to that. And he gravely went on to explain how they aim the gun at the moon or a bright star, and fire when duck fly across! According to Mahommedan beliefs, the heavenly bodies were expressly designed for three purposes,—as ornaments to the sky, aids to travellers, and to stone the devil with. The *sardar* was congratulated on having discovered a fourth!

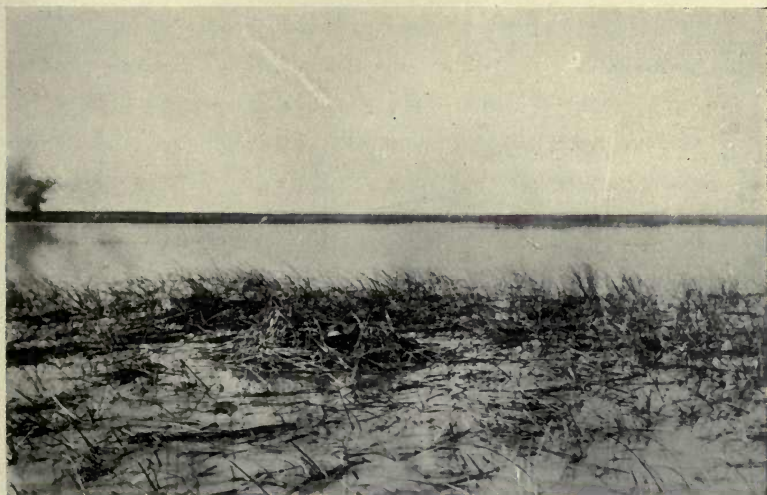
¹ A method employed by "red Indians" too, I believe.

VI. More about Wildfowl.

'Up they rose with cry and clamour,
 Rose up from the reedy islands,
 With a whirr and beat of pinions,
 From the water flags and lilies.'

—LONGFELLOW.

DURING the course of our first winter in Seistan, I discovered a way of circumventing the wily grey-lag that was much superior, as regards results, to the plan described in the previous sketch. Round the Hamun are large areas that are under water for a few months only each year. On these there grows a species of coarse grass, called in the vernacular, *ashk*, the roots of which are much appreciated by geese; and when just submerged, so that the surface becomes soft and the roots can be pulled up, the lags congregate there in enormous numbers. The native shikari's plan is to dig holes in the ground under the water, heap the earth round, and then bale the water out. Thus you have a pit, the presence of which is only marked by a little ring of earth, over



A kula.



The beaters.

which the dry reedy grass floating on the surface is scattered, to make the hole less conspicuous. The shikari takes up his position at dark, after having picketed in the water near his *kula* either a domestic goose or a captured grey-lag that is intended to act as a decoy,¹ and gets a shot or two during the course of the night.

My plan was to have two or three of these "duck-holes" made in line, and have the geese driven over by mounted levies. The ponies' feet did not sink deep enough in the freshly flooded ground to prevent their moving about fairly quickly,—they could at any rate move much more quickly than a man on foot. Seistanis, moreover, like Persians generally, are not at all fond of hard walking, though they do not mind being in the saddle all day, and are firm believers in their animals earning their keep.

Let me try to describe one of our goose drives. The sun, as the Persians say, is the "height of a spear" by the time we leave the Consulate and clatter down the bazar,—my wife, whom no weather dismays, D., myself, and five levies. The night before, the wind had got up with ominous blasts and howls, and was now blowing

¹ It is curious that though one would have expected to find the domestic goose of Seistan bearing distinct traces of descent from the grey-lag, he appears to be a different bird altogether.

half a gale. We have not gone far over the hard baked plain before it is clear we are in haunts of geese. Their distant music, that has been compared, not inaptly, to that of a pack in full cry, first strikes the ear and draws our eyes to a distant skein, and from that moment till dusk we are, practically, never without geese in sight. Blended with this sound is the faint cawing of thousands upon thousands of crows high in the air. A great river of them, one might call it an inky way, extends right across the sky's blue dome. These birds arrive in Seistan after the summer's heat has gone, and through the winter may be seen in the inhabited parts in big flocks of characteristic shape. In the evenings they have the curious habit of collecting, to fly in a huge stream to the Hamun, where they roost on the above-water roots of the reeds. In the morning the stream flows back. The causes which led to the adoption of this strange custom would be an interesting subject for inquiry.¹

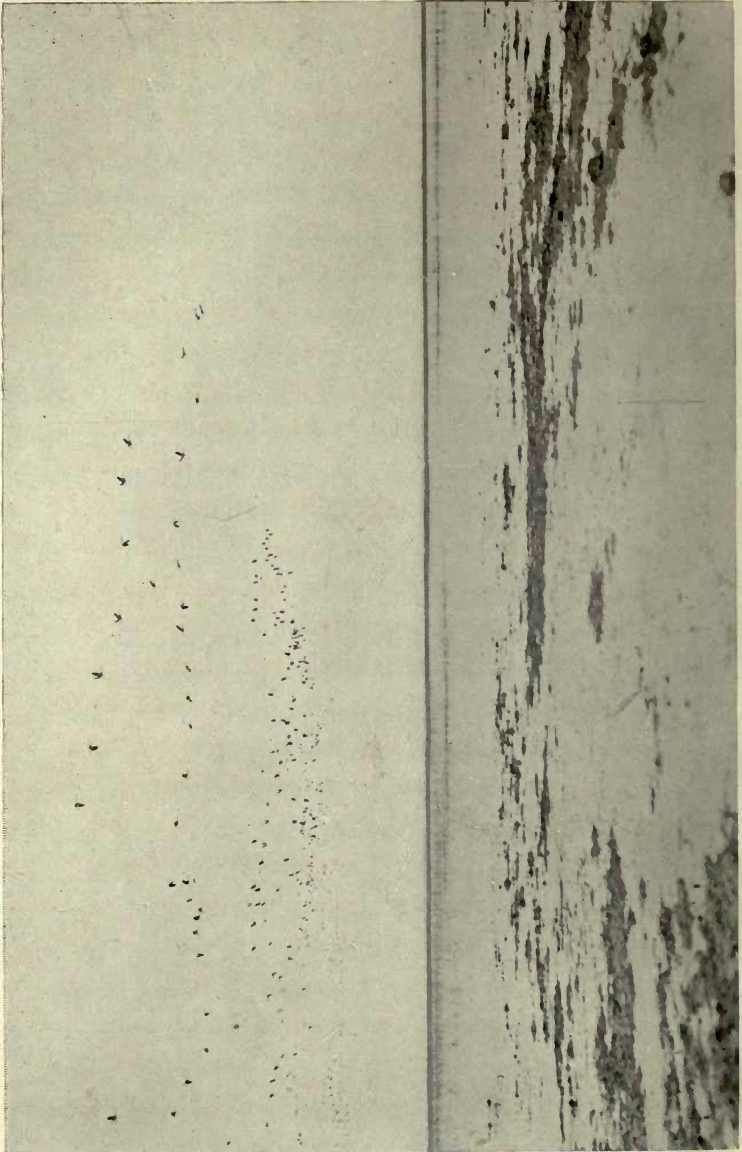
An hour's riding brings us to the edge of the water, where a long low *band* or earthwork has been thrown up to prevent the further advance of the flood. Beyond, there is nothing to be seen

¹ There are no tall trees in Seistan, but most villages have a few fruit or willow trees of no great size, while there is an extensive belt of tamarisk country in the upper part of the delta.

but water, but not "Hamun" as one might suppose, only a flooded tract. Scrambling over the *band*, we go splashing in. The water, which is curiously constant in depth, just reaches to below our horses' knees, or a little less. The man in front—we ride in single file—has to look out for abandoned water-filled *kulas*, holes four feet or so in depth. There were few of us, I think, that did not at one time or another take an involuntary bath in one of them. As we go along, fowl of many kinds get up all round us, and the air seems a whirl of terns and other water and shore birds. There are geese too, standing or swimming in the water, that let us up to perhaps 150 yards before they take wing. But these are not *the* geese. What interests us is a dark line on the water a mile or more away. From it comes now and again a dull roar, and we see a cloud, looking almost black, rise up and then again subside. This is the mighty anserine host we have come to deal with. Some way out a mounted figure is visible, near him two black heads and shoulders, and the splash of baling water. This is Ibrahim, who had gone on early to dig the pits. Arrived at the first, we perceive it to be a damp, unpleasant-looking spot, with two or three inches of water at the bottom. This, we are told, will be found a very nice, dry *kula*,

altogether suitable for a lady! The wife and I let ourselves down and set to work to get things snug, while D. goes on to the next. Our horses are taken to land, and Ibrahim and the levies move off to begin the drive. We can see them canter along the shore for a quarter of a mile, and then at long intervals enter the water to get behind the geese. By this time we are prepared. Our seats, two small boxes, face the right way, cartridge bags have been hung on tent pegs pushed into the muddy walls, and the grass and twigs arranged to give as much cover as possible. Our heads are about the level of the water, but a high goose could certainly see into the hole to some extent, so we huddle under the front wall.

Looking cautiously through the low fringe of grass, we can see the horsemen, mere dots in the distance, riding backwards and forwards in the water. Presently a muffled roar comes to our ears,—water lashed into foam by thousands of pinions. A dark cloud hangs in the air. The geese are up! No—they are down again, but nearer. We can now see them, a long line silhouetted against the sky—a truly mighty course. We can even distinguish the general agitation pervading the mass, and the craning and preening going on amongst the nearest birds. The air is full of the prolonged diapason of their



Geese in flight.

voices. Duck and teal begin to hurtle over our heads, but we heed them not, while other flights of wildfowl, disturbed by the beaters, show dark and silver as they wheel about like the flash of shoals of fish. The clamour grows louder, and still louder. They must surely be up soon. Again there comes that low thunderous roar, like a mighty wave breaking on the sands,—a sound that as we listen changes into a new note, the voices of thousands and tens of thousands of geese merged into one tremendous, indescribable scream. Above all, we can distinctly hear a great hum, or boom, the sound of the air being struck by their wings. With hearts going a hundred and fifty to the minute, we huddle down, and, peering through the grass, can just see the dark cloud moving steadily down on us. It is a general advance in line!

Now no more peering till they are in shot. Keeping head and gun as low as possible, we just wait and listen, with what feelings it is difficult to describe, for in the whole realm of sport I know no more thrilling moment.

The clangour grows deafening. Now it seems to be right over our heads, and I become aware of a line of geese straight above us. Concealment is now at an end. Bang! bang! is followed by *phrrrt, phrrrt*, as the shot strikes two stalwart

leaders. The first goes on as if he had not felt it; the second gives a lurch, and comes down with a hurtle and resounding splash. But another line is almost past, another is behind that. To load! to load! Fingers seem all thumbs. Reader, have you ever tried loading with barrels pointing upwards, and in a hurry? It is not easy. These *kulas* are too small for a second gun, or for a single gun to be held in any position but muzzle up. You want three hands. Cartridges slip out of the barrels and fall into the water at the bottom of the *kula*, now a foot deep; you nip your fingers; the muzzle of your gun digs into the mud wall in front, leaving the horrible impression that there must be a fid of mud an inch thick in the barrels. All this while the geese are passing overhead—the geese are passing overhead. At such moments, to have a wife to insert calmly, coolly, and neatly the cartridges into the chambers, is of inexpressible value.

Bang, bang, splash, and what a glorious splash it is with which a dead goose meets the water! It is even glorious when the splash, a few feet away, drenches us with water! I have often wondered why a goose never took his revenge by falling, 8 lb. of dead meat, *into a kula!* I have never seen it happen, but it would be a most unpleasant experience.

From the other *kula* also comes the sound of shots as fast as a single gun can be loaded and fired,—“a crowded minute of glorious life.” At the sound of the shots the geese sheer off or rise straight up in the air. But others follow—those in rear cry “forward,” those in front cry “back.” But by the time eight or ten shots have been fired from each *kula* the great host has divided and passed, the clamour recedes. The ranks have been broken and the scattered squadrons fly wildly about, stricken and disorganised: but not yet routed. For as we watch, in a few minutes it seems, somewhere far to our rear, the “assembly” has sounded. Regiment after regiment wheels round and flying low over the water rejoins the main column, the different detachments going down into the water with a succession of minor roars. By this time heads have been raised to see what has been done. Four geese dead, two more cripples are sailing away to rejoin their comrades, if they can. These will be picked up during the next drive we hope. There are still duck and teal between guns and beaters, so we go down and get a few shots before the latter arrive.

The toll we have taken of the many thousands of geese in the drive will seem to the reader absurdly small. Geese, however, nearly always

fly too high to make killing a certainty, with twelve-bores at least, which was what we were armed with; for, as every one knows, they have a pad of feathers over their breasts against which BB. shot may rattle like hail without doing damage. I had a "magnum" twelve that took a charge of an ounce and a half of shot, an excellent weapon with an effective range perhaps ten yards longer than the ordinary gun,¹ but doubtless only a subject for mirth in the ranks of the great host of lags.

The next quarter of an hour, while the levies are cripple hunting, is spent in baling out one's *kula*, for by this time the water has come well above one's ankles, or if such is not the case one may congratulate oneself on having a particularly dry hole. One *kula* I remember in very deep

¹ I should have been glad to give the maker a free advertisement if he had at the same time employed ordinary care in supplying me with cartridges. The story is that the last year I was in Seistan I found I was not doing so well with the gun as the previous season, and after having for two months attributed it to my own bad shooting, I had the curiosity to open a cartridge and weigh the charge, when the matter became clear. The maker had put in the full load of shot for the 3-inch case but had only put in a powder charge for an ordinary short case, and the whole batch was the same. Gunmakers ought to employ *special* care in the execution of orders for remote places abroad. A mistake of this sort could at home be remedied in a few days, but in a place like Seistan, where goods from England take six months to arrive, there is no remedy, and one has vainly to grind one's teeth, and, I may add, revile one's gunmaker.

water that kept extremely dry, but instead of water oozing in from sides and bottom, there was a continual buzz and bubble of escaping air or gas. This condition, curiously enough, remained for some weeks. What gas it was that bubbled forth I do not know, and I think none of us had the hardihood to test its qualities with a match. The chance of being oneself shot into the air in the middle of a goose drive was probably too painful to contemplate.

Our levies having deposited the dead geese and duck in an old water-filled *kula*, are soon off for a drive in the opposite direction. The geese would now be coming against the wind, and should come both lower and slower. May I here venture on a theory about that very interesting thing—the flight of wild geese? Every one knows their V formation—a leader, and behind him each bird in echelon. When flying in the huge multitudes I have described—and 10,000 is a moderate estimate of the numbers of some of these gatherings—the same formation between individual birds is generally maintained, though of course the V is altogether lost. Now what is the explanation of that echelon flight? Must it not be that each bird obtains some advantage from the flight of his leader perhaps similar in effect to the assistance a bicyclist gets from a pacemaker? Might not

the wave of air set in motion by the left wing of one goose be of some help to the right wing of the bird behind him? No doubt the subject has been dealt with in works on birds' flight, but I have not seen it.

In Seistan we had often the opportunity of watching big flights of pelicans—one of the most beautiful things in the world, but in a way the antithesis of the flight of geese. Instead of the latter's strong, regular wing-beats, the pelican gives a half-dozen or so of laboured flaps to raise himself and then "vol-planes" downwards. I know no more remarkable sight than a great flock of these birds, with their heads thrown back on their shoulders, uttering hollow and sonorous croaks, and rhythmically rising and falling switch-back fashion, or shall I say more picturesquely, like a line of foam on waves.¹

In the second drive the geese come rising and falling in the teeth of the wind both slower and

¹ It is not surprising that, often seen far from water, "pelicans of the wilderness" should have attracted to themselves a glamour of romance. There is the Persian story that makes them construct a tank of mud in the desert which they fill with water and live fish, transported thither in their skin pouches,—a myth that has earned for them the name of *saka*, the water-carrier. Another legend, derived from their vivid scarlet bills and the beautiful pink flush on their feathers (quickly fading after death to snowy white), makes them nourish their young with blood extracted from their own breasts.

lower. Many thousands pass to right and left, but each gun gets a few over him and the drive results in a pick up of nine more grey geese. Here I must offer further excuses for the smallness of the bag. Geese are nearly always much further away than they appear to be. One sees a line of geese that seems certain to afford a good chance; but a movement of a head or gun is made a fraction of a second too soon, and without seeming to alter their course they let themselves slip away in the wind and one finds oneself blazing vainly at birds eighty yards away or more. We always expended a great many cartridges in proportion to the numbers of geese killed. We fired at many without hitting them, and we hit many without bringing them down. Those bagged were nearly always either shot in the head or neck, or with broken pinions, rarely in the breast. It might be supposed that a goose within shot ought never to be missed, but those that harbour such ideas can have had but little experience of wild geese, or at any rate of wild geese in a Seistan gale. Often, no doubt, these misses were owing to our cramped position, but often also to absolute misjudgment of the pace. I have observed on a still day geese and duck flying together, the latter having the better pace. Against the wind there is not much in it; but

coming down the wind, I think the geese were the faster. I should not like to hazard a guess at the rate geese can fly with a Seistan gale behind them!

About midday we give the army of geese time to rally and collect, eat our sandwiches and drink our whisky and Helmund. Of one of these luncheon hours I have a vivid recollection. Imagine wind and rain driving over a "wide and melancholy waste" of waters. Somewhere in the midst of the expanse the top of an umbrella makes a black dot. Lift it up and three muddy people are revealed sitting in a mud-hole with muddy water up to their knees; about the lunch itself there is more than a suspicion of the same elemental substance. Down the neck of one of them at any rate trickles a stream of water from a point of the umbrella. As to the conversation, it is not of geese nor duck nor swamps nor cold feet nor rheumatism, but of a restaurant in Piccadilly, and whether the music of a band contributes or not to one's gustatory (horrible word!) enjoyment. No matter how the argument concluded. Of this much however I am sure, that if any one present had made the assertion that the geese music that reached us in our mud-hole did not render that lunch enjoyable, he would have found himself in a minority.



A bag of grey Lags.

To proceed with an account of the day would be tedious. If the geese were behaving well we would go on till sunset, but on a fine still day one drive was usually sufficient to send them straight off to the Hamun. Sometimes we had a second, or even a third line of *kulas* to which we could change according to circumstances. We often tried the effect of a tame decoy picketed near the *kulas*. They would strain at their strings, lift up their heads and call loud enough when they saw their brethren high up in the air, but the latter rarely paid them more attention than to drop their long necks and sound one note—perhaps it meant “Traitor!” Only a single goose, flying deviatingly about with disconsolate croaks for the vanished army, would sometimes be deceived.

As evening draws on and the last lot of geese have disappeared from the horizon, the water seems strangely silent. Even the teal and wading birds seem to have gone. Only a few harriers are left wheeling round a cripple or busy over a floating corpse.

So the dead are totted up and hung about the levies' ponies and we splash back to land. Perhaps before we get there a cripple is espied in the distance and a levy is despatched in pursuit. He urges his tired steed into a feeble gallop in the

water, and after a run, causing roars of laughter, we see him bend down and effect a capture.

Dry land at last! The sun has departed leaving the western sky glowing with red and saffron, against which, as we turn to take a last look over the water, we see in the distance a skein of geese, the van of the legions which are about to retake possession of their own.

We lose no time over the road to "town," as my native assistant used to call our headquarters, and the ride home in the dark is not the pleasantest part of the day. Those return processions of the British Consul's party, cold, wet, plastered with mud, and hung about with geese, used to attract a lot of attention in the Seistan bazar. The Persian crowd knew better than to make remarks, but we could guess the thought at the back of their minds: "For Allah has made the English mad, the maddest of all mankind"—nothing less!

The grey-lag is the only goose that commonly occurs in Seistan, and all our bags were made up of these noble birds. I once only saw on the water some dark-winged geese of what I think was another kind, but did not get a shot at them. As to bags, I see in my diary that among our best was one of 22 geese and 1 duck, and another 52 duck and 6 geese, both to two guns.

About woodcock and snipe I shall say little. The former are very rare in Seistan, but in Kain and the northern part of Khorassan they are not uncommonly found in gardens in winter. In a swampy little hollow below a hill pass in Kain, I once shot a woodcock, a solitary snipe, and a jack-snipe within thirty yards of each other. Common and jack snipe are found everywhere in Eastern Persia where there are bits of marshy ground. Between Seistan and the northern parts of Khorassan, however, such spots are very uncommon. In Seistan there are quantities of snipe, but scattered, and as elsewhere it is a case of here to-day, gone to-morrow. During the winter, by working hard, one can pick up a few on almost every bit of likely bog where short reeds and grass grow, and even among the heavy reed beds of the "Naizar," but big bags are rare. The most likely bits are those from which the water has lately retreated. My best bag was made on a wild windy day along the bed of a winding natural overflow channel. Clumps of reeds and sedge and alternate expanses of ooze beds and open water made it an ideal ground to look at, and we found it as good as it looked. The other gun and I each took a side. Snipe got up at every step, not too wild but just wild enough, single birds and whisps. It was too good to last.

After shooting forty couple, we ran out of cartridges, and half the ground had not been shot! I have often groaned to think what the bag might have been if we had had another 100 cartridges apiece. What we ought to have done,—however, there is no use going into that. The next day was hot and still, and we were not going to waste the bit of snipe ground for which I had been looking all my life, by going out on a morning like that. The next was hotter and stiller, and the spell lasted. After waiting a week we went out with I think every snipe cartridge in Seistan. The sequel recalls an Indian story. I had gone to a *jhil* that I knew and had proved to be a first-class snipe bog, but that day found on it not one solitary snipe. An English-speaking babu, whose acquaintance I had made previously, came out from his village which lay near to see the sport. “Well, Babu,” I said, “where are the snipe to-day?” “Sar,” he replied, with an ingratiating smile, “I think the snipe all gone away to pick up crumbs.”

It was thus with that ideal snipe ground in Seistan, not one solitary bird was left. Perhaps they too had gone to search for “crumbs.” Who can say?

VII. Ahu-Gardani.

“Figurez-vous,” disait-il, “en plein sahare.”

—ALPHONSE DAUDET : *Tartarin*.

IN the Persian Book of Kings we read how the hunting monarch Bahram, accompanied by his wife Azadeh, went a-hunting. Four gazelle were spotted, and Bahram asked his lady which of them he should shoot. Azadeh seems to have been a very feminine person, for in reply she set him a very stiff task, promising that if it was successfully accomplished she would call him “Light of the world.” This was nothing less than to make a female of the male gazelle and a male of the doe. The first part of the task was managed by the skilful Bahram shooting off the horns of the buck; the second by shooting an arrow at a doe so as to make it lay its ear on its shoulder and lift a hind leg to scratch it. Another arrow was then launched, which pinned ear and hind leg together, giving the doe the appearance of having a horn. Azadeh thereupon burst into tears of pity, which

so irritated the monarch that he ordered her to be trampled under the feet of his dromedary, and so, "made an end of her." Poor Azadeh! She was in her humanity much in advance of her time. One can hardly help the reflection, however, that the status of husband is not what it used to be. Compare the position of the twentieth century benedick, hard put to it to squash his wife with dialectics and arguments, with that of one who could employ his dromedary to the same end! Still, Bahram's action was certainly hasty.

Gazelle are still found in Persia, wild as the proverbial hawk, on plains flat as the sea and almost like the sea in extent: not in numerous or big herds, but in little isolated parties with many a weary mile between each. So that let alone turning bucks into does and does into bucks, it is not easy to get a shot at one at all.

The Persians have three methods of shooting gazelle—by night over water, a way that has nothing to recommend it to the sportsman; the almost equally unsporting way adopted by the nobility of the country of rounding them up with half a regiment of horsemen and blazing into them with scatter guns; and *ahu-gardani*.

Putting it at its simplest, the word (literally gazelle-turning) means lying behind cover while

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Water in a thirsty land.



Rustam's fort.

an assistant moves the quarry up within rifle-shot; but it is not quite so easy as this bare description might lead one to suppose. Indeed, far more often than not, gazelle on the plains of Eastern Persia leave but a bare remembrance of a flicker of white in the hazy distance; then they are gone.

Let me say something to start with about the terrain. If you travel south from Seistan along the camel track that eventually leads to India, after all cultivation has been left behind, there rises on the straight line of desert something that looks like a city. A city it is, but of the dead. Scattered over the plain are crumbling remnants of citadels, towers, tanks, and gateways, while other buildings are but amorphous excrescences on the ground. Amongst the best preserved is a square fort, called Kila-i-Rustam, full of buildings that under the blast of the sand-laden winds have now their outlines rounded in a way that reminds one of a child's fort on the sand, when washed by the incoming tide. In the desert a few miles distant, Seistanis point out the *akhori-Rustam*, Rustam's stable, and you will be shown two ruins a hundred yards or so apart, which mark the site of the head and heel-ropes of his magic and gigantic horse Raksh.

I once had a camp near this spot, and at night

it was eerie to see that corpse of a city shining white in the light of the moon. The silence of the desert was almost oppressive. Suddenly it was broken by a horrible cry, which at intervals was repeated. One could well believe that amid those dreary arches and caverns, the *gul-i-biaban*, these ghouls of the desert, dreaded by travellers, had their tenements. It was but a *kaftar*, a solitary hyena, that disturbed the night with his evil voice,—a gruesome enough beast too, according to Persian beliefs.¹ The place in fact was such as the prophet described—“wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and thy houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there.”

Round about these ruins gazelle wander, and the whole plain from this point to the range to the west has a right, if any place has, to the

¹ General Schindler thus quotes a Persian author in his 'Eastern Irak': "The hyena is a deceitful beast, for it affects to be weak and feeble; but when other beasts come within its reach it pounces upon them and devours them. At night-time it is very strong; in daytime it is weaker. It is a hermaphrodite in this way that it is a female one year and male the other. It loves the wolf, but hates the dog. Its influence on the dog is such that if a dog be going along the top of a hill when the moon shines, and its shadow, by any chance, fall upon a hyena at the foot of the hill, it either immediately dies or throws itself into the jaws of the hyena. It breeds with the wolf, and the progeny of a male hyena and a she-wolf is a *sim*. It is excessively cowardly and a most greedy beast, being afraid even of locusts."

Persian figure, a "mine of *ahu*." The only water in the district is the Shela, the deep tortuous channel by which the Hamun water sometimes finds an outlet. This happens rarely, but there are always deep blue pools in the sandy bed, their edges incrustated with salts, and so bitter to taste that even camels will have nothing to say to them. Gazelle, it seems, are less particular, and during the hot weather they come down to water here, and I have heard of a Baluch shepherd bagging as many as seven in as many nights, by concealing himself near the Shela. Captain Daukes once found a live gazelle bogged in a quicksand in this channel. Its thirst, I suppose, must have been such as to cause it to forget for once its instincts of caution.

The habits of desert animals as regards water are interesting, from the very difficulty of obtaining reliable data. As for these gazelle, Baluch nomads say they drink once in fifteen days in winter and every three or four days in summer. Other accounts go to show that the same animals come to the Shela from long distances every night; but the salt-saturated condition of that water may have necessitated more drinking than when fresher water is obtainable. A pretty little gourd is found on many of the dry plains of this part of Persia; and it is said that, in spite of

the exceedingly bitter taste, gazelle quench their thirst with these.

Another typical locality for these beasts is the wide stretch of desert that lies east of the hill country of Kain. It is called the Tag-i-Namadi—a name given on account of its fancied resemblance to a *namad* or felt carpet. But this is only in spring-time, when the low heather-like *bhuta* with which the plain is clothed is green. Its winter reputation has gained for it another more sinister title—the Dasht-i-Naomed, or “Desert of Despair,” from the blizzards that rage across it. Woe betide the unfortunate caravan that is caught on its shelterless expanse!

There is something strangely fascinating about these vast open spaces. The first whitening of early dawn over the dark horizon, the red flush that follows and turns to fire. The sun springs up a glowing ball and floods the plain with yellow light; bushes and stones are thrown into relief, and the far withdrawn line of hills is brought suddenly so near you could seemingly stretch out a hand and touch them. As the day advances, the air begins to quiver and swim, and, as if a magician had touched the earth, one is surrounded by lakes and lagoons of water with reflected islands, needles, and causeways. Everything seems fantastic and unreal. At such a

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On the Seistan desert.

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time I have seen a herd of gazelle scouring over the plain towards the margin of a phantom lake: now they have reached the water and are plunging in, their forms reflected from its still surface. Deeper and still deeper they go, till their heads only can be seen. Then they are gone. And the whole phantasm bore such verisimilitude that, had knowledge and experience not been there, I could have confidently affirmed that I had seen a herd of gazelle drown themselves in the water of a lake, even as did the Gadarene swine.

Once, when gazelle were being moved up to me, I lay behind a solitary tuft of some aromatic shrub alone in a misty set of haze. Then two blurred dots arose, jumped up and down, waxed larger, and passed by to one side. Quite suddenly they stood out sharp and clear as gazelle. I fired a shot that threw up a spurt of sand about half way, and realised that they were far out of range. Once again I saw pass before me in the mirage a procession of strange giraffe-like creatures, with elongated necks and legs, but on their heads the curved horns of gazelle. Of such kind are the illusions conjured up by the magicians of the desert.

There are days when columns of yellow sand or red dust dance and race across the plain,

the vehicles of those mysterious beings created "a little lower than the angels" from smokeless fire, the genii that have access only to the lower heaven. Following them comes the wind that tears up sand and soil, and sends it flying. The landscape is blotted out, and the sun himself becomes a lurid shield of copper amid swirling wreaths and clouds, or is altogether obscured, while over the country hangs a dreadful twilight.

Let me now try to describe the "gardaning" of a herd of *ahu* as it actually happened. The time is just after sunrise. I am riding on the left of the line, my wife to my right, some five hundred yards away—a similar distance separating her and Ibrahim. This is the best time for spying, for there is neither haze nor mirage. Sunshine is essential. A shikari will tell you that you might as well stay at home as go out on a dull day. Even when cloud shadows drift across the plain, spying becomes difficult; gazelle appear and disappear in the most disconcerting way. One moment they stand out bright and clear, the next they are gone. Spotting gazelle is, indeed, an art, even in the best of lights, that requires long practice as well as keen eyesight. A faint flicker in the misty distance, as imperceptible to the ordinary being as a distant light to the landsman on a

thick night at sea—that is all. I recollect a shikari telling me he saw gazelle under a hill so far away that I thought he was lying. Even with glasses I could see nothing. On taxing him with a too vivid imagination, he admitted he could not see them *now*, though he persisted that he *had* seen them. After going a long way, I found he had spoken the truth. The flash of the sun on a white stern had sent my wild shepherd a helio message that he could not misread. Against the sun, gazelle are almost impossible to see unless quite close.

As we ride on, eyes are fixed on the horizon, and occasional halts are made for more careful examination with the glasses. Suddenly, with a noisy flapping, a bustard springs into the air, nearly scaring my horse out of his wits. Then another gets up, then more from far and near, till seven or eight of the big birds, their long necks stretched out, are going off with heavy, wandering flight across the plain. One wonders how they escaped notice on the ground. A golden cloud of dust is visible low down in the distance; farther on a darkness appears below it, which later on turns out to be a flock of sheep and goats, the property of Baluch nomads.

We will ask the astonished shepherd boy if his plain holds *ahu*. Not improbably he will tell us

it is a "*madan-i-ahu*," a "mine of gazelle," in which case it is likely that we shall see something in the course of the next *farsakh* or two. What by the way is a *farsakh*? An Englishman in Persia will tell you it is four miles, a Russian that it is three versts; but really it is the distance one can hear a drum's beat, or can distinguish between a white camel and a black, that a laden mule can traverse in an hour, or in which a wayfarer's puttie comes untied. It varies with the age and activity of the speaker, according to the province, the nature of the ground, and many other things.

It may be our shepherd will say, "*Be ahu nist*." The plain is "not without *ahu*," not "gazelle-less," so to speak—a safe and non-committal reply. It may be he will hold forth with some enthusiasm about a plain where gazelle are never out of sight; but cross-examination will elicit the additional information that it is three or four days' march in the opposite direction to the one you happen to be travelling. So the shepherd is left to his solitudes once more.

Though the plain does indeed seem "*ahu-less*," it is not without life of other kinds: desert larks, an occasional hare, jerboa bounding into their holes like miniature kangaroos, a flock of courser birds running daintily along uttering their high

minor pipe. We rarely pass half an hour without hearing the metallic *krr krr* of sand-grouse high in the air, or are startled by a flock getting up close under our feet. Sand-coloured lizards of many kinds abound. Snakes are fortunately less numerous, but sufficiently so to render circumspection advisable before taking a seat on the ground. All, however, whether beasts, birds, or reptiles, have the sad neutral hues of their surroundings that tell of an age-long struggle with the desert.

Suddenly, I become aware that Ibrahim is circling his horse, and now he is looking through his glasses. We ride up at a walk—no trotting on any account. He has seen some bobbing sterns but they are now vanished. We proceed, and some way farther on they come into view again. In half an hour more, though still on the move, they are near enough to warrant a moment's halt to take a look through the glasses. It is a buck and three does.

Now the art of *ahu-gardani* is to shape your course to one side, so as to avoid scaring your quarry; so that by degrees, instead of flying as if pursued by ten thousand devils as they did at first, they lose their panic sufficiently to allow you to ride on one flank within four or five hundred yards. It is often an hour's ride to effect

this much. Any attempt to get nearer than this would cause a renewal of their headlong flight; they would again be swallowed up by the desert and all would have to begin again. So we maintain parallel courses.

On the horizon there is a white streak that almost looks like water. In the vernacular it is called a *dakk*, a salt lake either in process of being dried up or completely so. If the former, an apparently firm white surface may turn out to be a peculiarly treacherous quagmire; if the latter, you may find the surface light and powdery with blisters and leprous patches of white, or hard and smooth like plaster of Paris. It may even be solid salt; but in all cases it is flat, a place a rat could not pass unseen, and affording to gazelle as sure a refuge as perpendicular cliffs to wild goats. It is tolerably certain the herd will either make for the *dakk* or for the broken ground at the foot of the distant hills. Now they are going quietly, but leading the herd by some fifty yards is a doe of the "straight-necked" kind I seem to recognise, that with tail cocked—the danger signal¹—goes on and on

¹ A very unmistakable signal too. The tail when down forms a vertical black stripe down the white "caudal disc." When the tail is raised, the white circle is complete. It is comparable to the old signal for a "bull" and a "magpie."

Microfilm identification marks



Ahu-Gardani.



A successful day.

for endless miles and fills the heart with hatred and despair. Presently the gazelle bunch and look towards the hills. They are tired of seeing three ugly humans riding alongside of them. They take the new line, and we swing round and do likewise. We might have taken cover directly they were turned, but it is safest in the long run to make the manœuvre twice or even three times to make sure of their true line. It is now evident their line is the *dakk*, for we have not gone a quarter of a mile in the new direction before they are round again. We follow, and this time we are near to losing them, as we do not get on terms with them again till they have gone two or three miles. The next time they turn, my wife and I slip off our horses the far side, without stopping, and, giving the reins to Ibrahim, walk concealed to the next big tuft of the low heather-like shrub with which the plain is sprinkled. Here we drop like stones and let Ibrahim and his led horses get a hundred yards away before we stir a limb, for our tuft is no real concealment. Then we get our glasses out, elbows in the sand, and keep a sharp look-out.

From our lowly position, flat as nature will allow, we find that the plain has undulations that were imperceptible when we were riding. Thus, though we can observe the ground for miles to-

wards the *dakk*, on the other side, to our front, the view is bounded by a dark line of *bhuta* only a furlong away.

Ibrahim and the horses soon get "hull down," and then disappear. There must be no slackness in the look-out now! Think of your plight if you suddenly discovered gazelle within shot in an unexpected direction! Before you could move your body or even your rifle, sharp eyes would have spotted you, and the work of hours would be undone.

Hullo! two little sticks on the dark horizon that surely were not there before! Horns? Yes, they move, a head bobs up and down, then disappears. Elation gives place to depression.

Nothing more happens for a long time, and the sun begins to beat down on our backs in a way that makes us squirm. At length I raise my head with a bunch of thorn held in front and take a survey. Ibrahim is far away. More careful spying shows that the gazelle are also there, travelling along parallel and seemingly close to him. The hunter and hunted double backwards and forwards. Now they are heading straight for us, Ibrahim describing zigzags behind them with the skill and patience learnt of many bitter experiences. They come steadily on—500 yards, 400, 300. Glasses are laid down and the rifle cautiously

poked forward. But what's the matter? They are bounding away—they are off! What on earth has put them away? A glint from the rifle? a puff of wind? It is possible, though like all antelope these gazelle are not very keen-scented animals. They are gone now and no mistake. Ibrahim has halted and is looking with his glasses, but apparently has yet hopes, for he presently moves off again. We shall have a long wait now, so take the opportunity of crawling to a tuft a little farther on, whence we shall get a better view of the country. You cannot of course move far, for your assistant cannot see you and will try to bring the gazelle past the original spot. Indeed, on a wide plain, with no clear landmarks, the recognition of the exact place where the rifle lies hid is in itself sufficiently difficult. Ibrahim, after going miles, and even after taking the gazelle round a whole circle, rarely made a mistake, and the fact speaks of a wonderful bump of locality.

Well, the good lad has got on terms with his *ahu* again, and with inexhaustible and admirable patience brings them along till we can distinguish the buck's horns with the naked eye. Now is the time you can hear your heart beating, and the symptoms, even with the old and hardened, may develop into an attack of buck fever. Your

H

assistant has displayed such an infinity of care and patience, you have yourself spent, it may be, days in search, ridden many long miles, lain baking for hours under a hot sun. A miss is unthinkable, and yet a moving gazelle is neither a big nor an easy target.

They come steadily on, and will pass to our right¹—a lucky omen! the buck second in the string. Now they have changed their line a shade. Will they pass out of range after all? No, it is all right, but it will be a long shot. Now the buck's eye is almost visible. How does the verse go?—

“I never nursed a dear gazelle,
To glad me with its soft black eye,
But when it came to know me well,
And love me, it was sure to die.”

Well, not sure, perhaps; but we'll do our best. Now the gazelle are at the nearest point; every yard farther will make the shot longer. The sight covers the buck—covers him almost completely up! As I am about to shoot he moves behind a bush; now he is out. Bang! he is down. That's all right. Ibrahim has seen him drop, and is galloping up to *hallal* him. So over the gazelle we meet, and tell Ibrahim we have never seen such

¹ It is a favourable omen when an animal presents its right side, and *vice versa*.

a clever *gardan*, and *shabash* him and pat him on the back. Ibrahim, I find, is of my opinion, that the gazelle suspected our bush. They were, he tells us, coming up "by first intention," but had been scared by something; from which it is clear that, careful as we had been, we had not been careful enough.

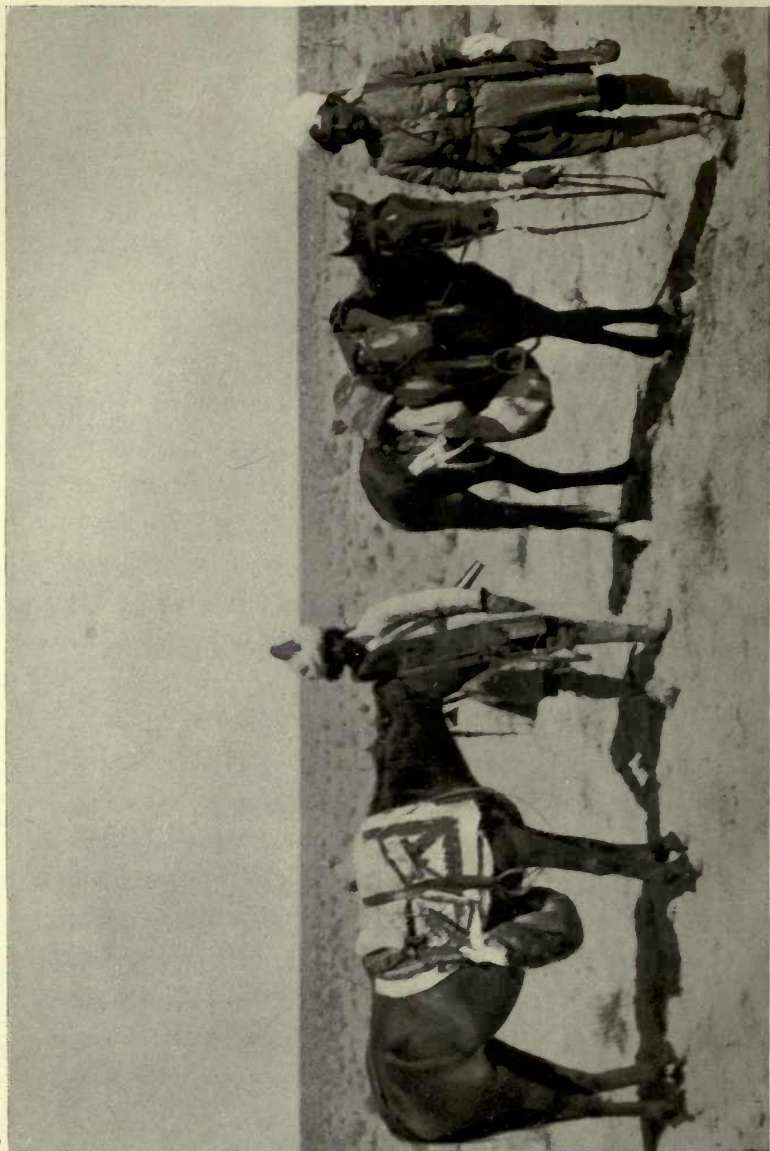
VIII.—Ahu-Gardani (*continued*).

“The wild gazelle on Judah’s hills
 Exulting yet may bound,
 And drink from all the living rills
 That gush on holy ground.
 Its airy step, its glorious eye,
 May glance in tameless transports by.”

ACCURACY, I fear, has had to give way to exigencies of rhyme. If, as I imagine, the *Dorcas* inhabits the same kind of ground as our gazelles of Persia, the words “rills” and “hills” might both be deleted, though I am at a loss to suggest substitutes. Something has already been said about the watering habits of gazelle. As to the “hills,” these animals generally affect plains of the type that Persians call “palm-of-the-hand,”—so flat that, according to native hunters, the right thing for the shikari to do is to take off his shoes, and, propping them up, take cover behind them. A better plan for the “Faranghi,” whose shoes do not come off so easily, is to carry a bunch of camel-thorn, which can be anchored

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to the ground by stones. I was once watching the approach of a buck, of course a very big one, behind improvised cover of this sort, when a gust of wind came and tore my bush from its moorings, and the gazelle and I were left staring at one another in mutual disgust; and it was not a very prolonged stare on the buck's part either.

In this sport, the unexpected is continually happening, and it is not always the gazelle that is favoured by fortune. More than once beasts turned by Ibrahim have come galloping up to me from a very long way off, without giving me a moment's anxiety—except, of course, that connected with the shot itself! Once, after going down, I had not time to get my rifle out of its cover before the herd came back on its tracks close by. Eleven bucks, clattering over a surface that was hard and smooth enough under the intense light actually to reflect them, as from polished marble. They were in single file with regular intervals, each animal so exactly the counterpart of the one in front, that they might have been simulacra of a single gazelle; and I should hardly have been surprised if, when I had managed to pivot round and get off a shot at the rearmost, they had vanished with the report like mirage-conjured phantoms.

If there is a time of year when gazelle are less unapproachable than at others, it is, according to shikaris, the winter, when a very cold spell has set in. They say that gazelle then wander the whole night to avoid freezing, and in the day are so anxious to sleep that "turning" them is easy. As to the truth of this, all I can say is that I personally have never noticed gazelle finding any difficulty in "propping their eyes open"; in fact, to find a weasel asleep would generally be an easier matter. In spite of difficulties, there are native shikaris that claim to have shot a thousand and more gazelle, mostly I fear by poaching methods. But these are only old men from among the primitive, pastoral peoples that spend their lives migrating from one grazing-ground to another, men who have grown grey in—

"ranging trackless fields,
Beneath the concourse of unclouded skies,
Spread like the sea in boundless solitude."

There is a quaint belief among such people that one who can count his slain up to a thousand must bury his rifle, or as some say—perhaps the more economically minded—the knife with which he performs the *hallal*. Otherwise sickness, or some other evil, will befall him. One on whose head rested the guilt of much blood, related to me how a warning had been given him. He knew he

was near his thousand but had not kept accurate count. One day he had shot a beast and was running up to it when in its place he saw a black animal. "No, it was not a wolf, nor leopard, nor hyena, all these he knew—it was no animal known to man—perhaps it was a *sim*." Another shikari told me that when the thousandth animal had been killed, it turned into a gibbering human form. That must, I think, be very disagreeable, perhaps worse than one's wife bursting into tears!

Besides gazelle, the plains of which I have been speaking, and in fact most of the remoter deserts of Eastern Persia, are roamed over by wild asses. Unfortunately, since the days of Bahram *ghori*, celebrated through the East as the hunter of wild asses (*ghor*), these animals have always been remorselessly persecuted for the sake of their meat and hides, usually by the ignoble plan of sitting up over water, with the consequence that they are now scarce. The royal sportsman of old, I imagine, resorted to no "low down" devices of this sort, but chased his quarry over the plain with javelin or bow and arrow.¹ But—

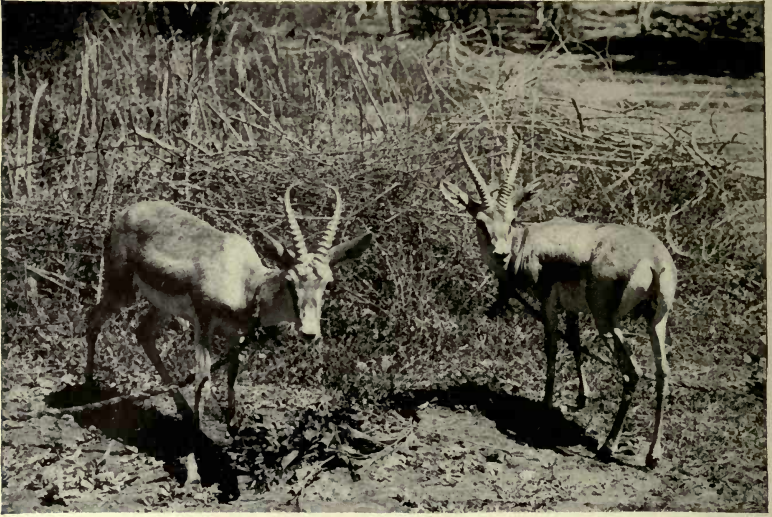
"Bahram, that great hunter—the wild ass
Stamps o'er his head, and he lies fast asleep."

¹ There is a story that one day Bahram, in the presence of a favourite mistress, transfixing two wild asses with one arrow. Instead of praising the shot, her only remark was, "Practice

It may be, however, that his spirit still roams over his old hunting-grounds, the sweeping plains and jagged hills of Persia; and if so, with what feelings, I wonder, does he look down on the modern sportsman, armed with Ross and Mannlicher? I hope, notwithstanding all, he will forgive us. We may well alter the old apothegm and say, "Sport is long, life short." Conditions change, but the spirit of the game remains the same. The sportsmen we know now existed even in those ancient times. There are historic instances of the jealous shot. We read how the nephew of Odnathus of Palmyra presumed to dart his javelin in front of his uncle—and met with trouble of an orientally unpleasant kind. The Emperor Jehangir was a "big bag man." According to his own memoirs, he killed 17,188

makes perfect." The king, incensed at being thus damned with faint praise (the *babus* improved version is "praised with faint damns"!), banished the lady to a distant part. Not to be beaten, she there evolved a plan. Selecting a young calf, she practised carrying it about. As the calf grew in size, the lady's strength increased, so that some years later, when the king on one of his expeditions saw a woman carrying about a full-sized cow with apparent ease, he stopped to ask what made her "so awfully clever." Then her toil was rewarded, and she archly replied, "Practice makes perfect." The modern novelist, with brutal realism, would probably have made the monarch pass on with some such remark as "Bless me, how very droll!" and leave the heroine to her exercises. The Persian story, however, ends in the obvious and orthodox manner.

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Seistan gazelle.



The wild ass.

animals and birds with his own hand,—a huge bag in those days. The “crack shot” is exemplified in the Roman emperor who used to cut off the heads of “driven ostriches” with sickle-headed arrows. History of course only tells us about the great ones of the earth, but the types must have existed among “the people” too. In Persia, naturally, the crack shots were “cracker” than anywhere else, hence such stories as that given at the beginning of the previous sketch. Nor was the best type of all wanting. Can one imagine the writer (the Emperor Baber) of an account such as this to have been other than a first-class sportsman:—“I pursued a wild ass, and on coming near, discharged first one arrow at it, and then another, but the wounds were not such as to bring it down. Yet it ran slower than before. Spurring on my horse, I hit it such a blow with my sword on the back part of its head behind its two ears, that its windpipe was cut, and it fell tumbling over, its hind legs striking my stirrups. My sword cut excessively well, and it was a *wonderfully* fat wild ass!”¹

I personally never went after the wild ass, a Tibetan *kyang* that I once shot for meat having satisfied any ambition I may have had as re-

¹ Talbot's 'Memoirs of Baber,' a truly delightful book.

gards the equine family. We owned for some time a wild ass that had been given us by Captain Keyes, then Consul in Tarbut. We were on the march from Meshed to Seistan, and after doing several days' journey, when one of our mules had got galled, I determined to make the big, handsome, curly-coated donkey earn his feed by carrying a load. But like the workman, though he "ate well and drank well and slept well," the idea of doing any work put him "all of a tremble." I once asked a native hospital assistant, after a rough journey in Chitral, how it was so many of his medicine bottles had got broken. "Sir," he replied, "mule transport is inauspicious for medicine bottles." It was thus with our onager, very inauspicious for anything put on his back! Then I told off a long-legged native groom, who hungered for a mount, to ride him. He tried very hard, but the wild ass, without biting or kicking or the display of vice of any sort, firmly but humorously declined to carry anybody. So he resumed the roll in the caravan he had chosen for himself, a mere hanger-on, running free to stop and pick a thistle or do anything he listed. In Seistan he joined our little herd of gazelle in an enclosure, whence he made it his special mission to break out and clear a gap into the garden for his comrades: I

think I can hear his melodious bray of triumph now.

Like all the antelope tribe, gazelle are exceedingly swift beasts. I do not believe any greyhound single-handed could kill a gazelle in fair chase, though, of course, they may be caught by using two or more dogs in relays, or, as is done in some parts, with the help of falcons. I have seen a gazelle that was only half-grown, by dint of doubling, get away from a very good greyhound. Our Indian sowars in Seistan were very keen on coursing, and kept a lot of greyhounds, but none of them could come up with gazelle. Of course, if slipped close, a greyhound might kill by running into his game before the gazelle could get into his stride, or as they say, "before he could swallow the food in his mouth"—the way a hunting cheetah in India kills a black buck. He might also kill if favoured by soft ground. Once in Seistan, a greyhound owned by Daukes did actually catch a gazelle single-handed—a full-grown buck—and as such an occurrence must be rare, I give the story as it was told me. They were on the long dreary march between Bandan and Seistan. D. had shot at a buck and missed—there is a "lot of room" round a gazelle!—and the sowar that was with him immediately slipped his dog. They

lost sight of dog and gazelle at once behind a ridge, but soon after came on them again, and the dog had killed. Whether the buck had been dazed by the shot and did not run, or whether for some reason he ran straight into the dog's jaws, I do not know. Anyhow, there it was, and the sowars with D. went into transports of admiration, declared he was a "dog of gold," and should not walk another yard of the march. Nor did he, as they carried him on their saddles all the way into Seistan!

If when riding across a plain you see a doe that hovers close about the flank of your caravan instead of scudding over the plain, you may be sure she has a fawn hid somewhere close by, for the safety of which she is displaying this touching solicitude. My wife once came on a little baby *ahu* in this way. He was lying in a hollow, his big black eyes wide open, his long ears pressed back, and he did not stir a limb till he was actually picked up.

The gazelle in our Seistan garden made charming pets, and were all so tame that they would eat out of our children's hands. It was a sight to see them tear about like mad things in the cool of the evenings, larking and buck-jumping, the "play" that fits young things for the stern realities of life. The bucks, as soon as they had

lost their fear, developed truculency, especially towards anything strange in the way of clothing, as one of our red-coated servants found. He got his hands badly gored in warding off the furious charges of an angry buck.

The gazelles of Eastern Persia are of two species,—one identified by Mr Lydekker with *G. fuscifrons* (or Kennions' gazelle), and the other named *seistanica*. The difference in the heads is shown in the illustration, added to which there is the fact that the females of "Kennions'" have horns, while those of *seistanica* are hornless. The latter is also a rather bigger gazelle than the other, and has also a bigger "goitre." As for the nomenclature, far be it from me to venture on that thorny ground. Mr Lydekker's letters (Appendix IV.) must speak for themselves.

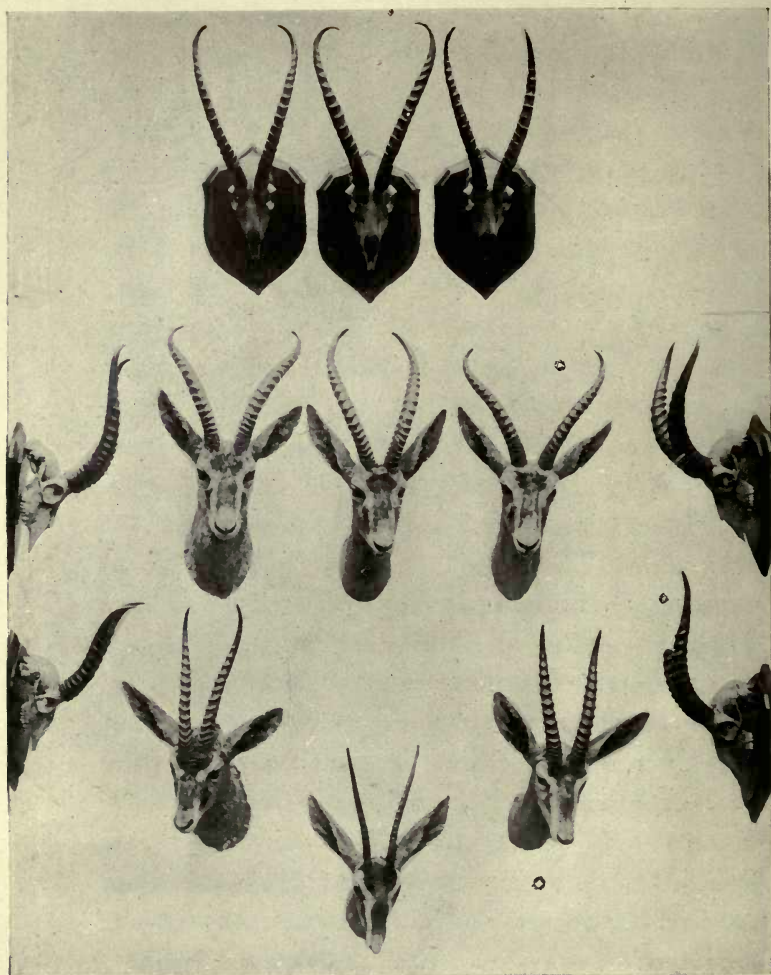
The range of Kennions' gazelle seems to extend from Persian Baluchistan as far north as Shusp in Kain. Its discovery, which came about by my shooting a horned doe in mistake for a buck, was a surprise, as no gazelle with horned female was known to exist in this part of Persia. Inquiries I then made from local shikaris elicited the fact that they recognised two kinds of *ahu*,—called respectively *buz ahu* (goat gazelle, the kind with horned female), and *mish ahu* (sheep gazelle, with hornless female). There is little difference in the

habits of the two species. Both are often found in the same plain, and they afford an example of closely allied species inhabiting the same ground, and yet, so far as one knows, not interbreeding. The only difference I have remarked in their habits is that Kennions' seem to prefer the higher and more broken parts of the plains, while *seistanica* keep more to the flatter and lower parts and *dakks*. The range of the latter, which Mr Lydekker considers distinct from the Persian gazelle, extends north, at any rate as far as Bujnurd, where I have shot specimens that were indistinguishable from those found in Seistan. According to this view, the true Persian gazelle (*G. subgutturosa*) does not exist in Eastern Persia at all.

It has occurred to me that an apology is perhaps due to any reader who may have accompanied me through so long a dissertation about a mere gazelle, a beast of no size or importance; but if the charm of shooting depends on its difficulty, whether caused by the nature of the beast itself or by terrain—dangerous game is in a category apart—then *ahu-gardani* must rank high. There is a proverb often cited by Persian shikaris that is specially applicable—

“*Yak roz shikar :*
Sad roz bigar.”

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Gazelles of East Persia.

(Top eight are "Seistanica"; bottom five "fuscifrons" (Kennion's);
the lowest head is a female.)

“One day shikar: a hundred days’ toil” (or more accurately “unpaid labour”). Indeed I know of no form of sport in which the odds against the rifle are heavier. After all, as some one has said, “the game is to pursue the fox, not to kill him.” What sort of sportsman would he be whose ideal “happy hunting-grounds” afforded a minimum of toil with a maximum of killing? What true angler really desires a “multitude of fishes”? *Ahu-gardani* has, moreover, the merits of a foursome, the co-ordination of endeavour by two. The responsibility is the senior partner’s till he goes down; after that it is for his “Ibrahim” to exhibit the virtues of observation and patience, for himself to keep his eyes “skinned,” and to put the finale on their mutual toil.

IX.—Wild Sheep in Seistan.

صیاد با هر بار شکاری ببرد
باشاد کَ یکی روز پلنگاش ببرد

“The hunter does not bag shikar every day.

Some day it may happen that a panther will bag him !”

—SAAADI.

My shooting-camp was at a place called Baluch-ab, in the range locally known as the “Panther hills.”¹ How the range obtained this name I do not know. Panthers do exist there certainly, as they exist practically in all Persian hills, but they are very scarce. I, personally, have never done more than see their fresh tracks, and those who take their flocks there, who should know if any one does, tell me that they perhaps see two in the year. I deem this amount of explanation necessary, lest the reader should anticipate from the couplet that heads this chapter some exciting episode in which a panther is chief performer. As a matter of

¹ See Appendix I.

fact, the account that follows has nothing to do with panthers, and the only moral to be drawn is that pointed by Persia's greatest poet—the uncertainty of things, sport included; especially when the quarry is anything so elusive as wild sheep.

The chief, and indeed one may say the only, amenity of the place lay in a streamlet of bitter water that oozed from the ground in several places, and after running an exiguous course marked by white incrustations of salts, was again absorbed in the earth, not far from where it had seen the light. A few tamarisk bushes and a patch of *kirta* grass only served to make the surrounding barrenness appear the more barren. Near by was a small ruined fort called Kala-i-Nadiri, four-square, with towers at the angles, one of the numerous relics of the great conqueror's march through this country on his road to India. Baluch-ab, in fact, must always have been a point of some strategic importance, as it lies on the ancient caravan road running eastward from Kermania; and during centuries of little known history, when Seistan, an independent or semi-independent state, lay in a chronic condition of war and turmoil, the desolate hills and rocks around must often have resounded with shouts of battle.

Nowadays, the Indo-European telegraph wire

passes through the hills at this point, and its many smashed insulators, not to mention a '303 cartridge picked up near the water, told us of the recent passage of a caravan of very up-to-date goods. For in Seistan we stand on the brink of one of the rivulets—and I do not know that the use of the diminutive is justified—by which modern weapons are pouring into the East. The talk of universal peace is after all confined to very few, though doubtless very advanced people. As soon as one travels even a little eastward, it is quite inaudible, while instead, one becomes aware of a hum not loud but insistent, and in many different languages, that sounds like a cry for more and more arms. As is well known, the Afghan gun-runners, of whom we had just seen the traces, are in the habit of dribbling by twos and threes to a given rendezvous at some remote landing-place on the Persian Gulf, where they receive consignments of arms brought from the Arabian coast in dhows that have succeeded in eluding our gun-boats. After passing through Persian Baluchistan, the arms caravans often make for the "Panther hills," where they rest for a few days before making their last march across the long stretch of waterless desert to the Helmand. Not very like the stealthy movements

of smugglers is the progress through the country of these bands of white-robed braves—with their advance-guards, rear-guards, and flankers singing and firing their rifles as they go. Here, in Persian territory, law-breakers though they be, who can say them nay? Persian “regulars” as well as Seistani Baluch sowars and *jambazes*—the latter a class that have in them military possibilities—are sent out from Seistan to stop the traffic, but—! Once a Seistani force took up a position on a narrow gorge by which the Afghans were expected to pass out of the hills, and when the head of the gun-runners’ caravan entered the defile, it seemed as if fighting were inevitable. The Seistanis, however, were content—or rather we will hope disgusted—to see the Afghans turn about; and whilst they were crouching behind their rocks, the smugglers found an exit by another gorge a few miles distant. The remarkable part of the occurrence did not lie in the Seistanis being out-manceuvred or in their pusillanimity,¹ but in the extraordinary difficulty of the route by which the Afghan caravan—all camels—actually passed a few miles

¹ “Persia can be conquered with a single company without firing a shot; with a battalion it would be more difficult; with a whole regiment it would be impossible, for the entire force would perish of hunger!”—From Curzon’s ‘Persia.’

to the north of Baluch-ab. The debouchment from the hills was by a winding staircase of stone between sheer walls of rock. The steps were smooth, round, and water-worn, some six or eight feet in height, to all appearance an impassable place for any baggage animals, let alone camels that are ludicrously helpless on rock. The passage was accomplished by the moon's light, the plan adopted being to make a sort of ramp of the camels' loads, down which the animals were led. I shortly afterwards visited the place and saw the gorge by moonlight, the white cliffs and black shadows standing out in intense and eerie contrast, while around reigned the utter silence of uninhabited wastes. It struck me what a subject for a painter the passage of those Afghans would have made! Indeed, I should doubt whether in these prosaic days any more romantic and picturesque circumstances could be found in the wide world than those surrounding this sinister traffic.

The morning after our arrival at Baluch-ab, Rahmat led the way down a ravine glistening white with soda efflorescence, and we started climbing the yellow hill on the far side, on which he expected to find his big ram.

Let me here say a word about a most excellent foot-gear in which to climb these dry rocky hills

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Urial country.



A salt spring.

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of Persia. It is a sort of shoe called *giva*, made in the country, the uppers woven of cotton in the shape of the foot, the soles of cotton cloth, somehow pressed, while in a wet state, into a board-like consistency, hard and polished. After a little wear, the sole gets a rough surface that clings to rock better than anything I know. I was told that a party of Japanese—a people that seem to have the faculty of extracting the best from the whole world,—in the course of a tour in Persia, found the *giva* the only thing worthy of commendation to their countrymen. Poor Persia! That it should be the epitaph of a great and historic people, that they made good shoes! However, the *givas* are really excellent.

To our dismay we had hardly done half the climb when there came a rattle of stones from above us, and a herd of the sheep topped the hill and were gone. Among them was an undoubtedly big beast. They must have got our wind, for as I had carefully spied the hill before climbing, I do not think they could have seen us. We followed the herd to the top, then down, tracked them south along the far base of the hill, and half an hour later spotted them moving slowly along, their alarm apparently all evaporated. Here we nearly got level with them among some ravines, but they again began to climb, and we had to

wait. When they again disappeared on the top of the ridge, we climbed up, and eventually saw them far below us on a flat plain cut up by narrow ravines. They were standing in a bunch, and evidently undecided on their next movements. I therefore gave them time, and had lunch. It was their siesta hour by now, and I expected them to compose themselves to sleep on some commanding hillside. Whilst waiting here, Rahmat showed me how he imitated the low noise made by the male in the rutting season. He asserted that by this means he could get a ram to come quite close up to him to meet a supposed rival—a thing I had never heard of before with wild sheep.

As the herd remained standing, we determined to try our luck, dropped down a ravine that concealed us, and soon found ourselves on the same level as the herd, and some four hundred yards from where they stood. No means of getting nearer; the intervening ground could not give cover to a hare. Another long pause. The herd at last moved, and one by one disappeared into a small dry *nullah* with steep banks. When the last was gone I ran, ran for all I was worth, over the hard clay. I had reduced the distance by about half, when with a horrid shock I became aware of the herd to my right. They had

evidently moved up a branch ravine, and now all stood 150 yards away, staring at the strange, long-legged biped that was hurrying over the level. Of the few seconds during which a startled beast is sometimes stricken with temporary paralysis and rooted to the ground, I knew that a second or two had already elapsed. I sat down to miss that ram as he stood, to miss him again as he fled. Then he got mixed up with the racing herd, they all vanished into the ravine, and I only caught a glimpse of them again far, far away. A day's toil, all hopelessly wasted in a *dénoûment* that lasted a brief half-minute.

A wedge-shaped series of low round hills at this point runs out into the flatness of the desert, like ripples on a lake when struck by a sudden gust. We followed the herd's tracks for miles into these hills—a long walk made doubly tiring by disappointment—but never saw them again; and so that ram was added to the list of "might-have-beens."

No doubt there were palliating circumstances: must there not be a reason for everything? I was hurried, blown, the ram was half covered by a female, the ground too hard to dig my heels into. But I knew in my heart, and as likely as not the shikari knew also, that I had missed a shot that ought not to have been missed.

In one's long-after thoughts about a big head missed, there is a melancholy that is not altogether displeasing in its bitterness; one even finds a kind of joy in remembering and picturing to oneself its very bigness. Perhaps it is the feeling of one who has loved and lost. Now about the size of that ram. I had noted a more than complete circle of horn, and it was a big circle too. He was by far the biggest ram I ever saw in the Palang Koh, and Rahmat, though he had not learnt to look at horns in a critical spirit, thought it a very big one. This Rahmat, it should be told, once brought into the post at Koh-i-Malik-Siah a pair of horns with which to deck the saint's wayside shrine. These I measured and found 36 inches. He produced for me from the ash-heap near his tent another pair¹ measuring 39½ inches. The latter equals the record head as given in Rowland Ward's book. So that when Rahmat said that lost ram carried a very big head, it may be taken that it was big.

The year following I again visited this ground, but saw nothing of that ram. I was much struck on this occasion by the way in which these sheep seem to congregate in some localities, whilst leaving others apparently just as delectable. Going

¹ Now in the collection of the Bombay Natural History Society.

through a country of low round hills about Lowari-ab, it seemed almost that, point my glass where I would, there was a ram or two looking at me from every hill-top. I shot two of no great size, but did not stay looking about for bigger beasts, as Rahmat assured me that at Battammar, two marches farther on, would be found the real big ones. But this promised land was quite destitute of any sheep, big or small; though as regards water, grazing, and other attractions, it was rather superior to the one I had just left. No doubt, when asking Rahmat to find big heads, one was giving him a task to which he was unaccustomed. This time he made the common error of thinking untried ground must be best—*omne ignotum pro magnifico*. But Rahmat did not make many mistakes.

X. By the Way.

“ . . . the cock had crown, and light
 Began to clothe each Asiatic hill,
 And the mosque crescent struggled into sight
 Of the long caravan, which in the chill
 Of dewy morn wound slowly round each height.”

—ARNOLD.

ROSE-GARDENS do exist in Persia, also bulbuls. A Persian, away from his own country, would probably describe the whole land as a “Garden of Iram,” the rivers as “Kausar,” the springs as “Salsabil”; but the impression left on a traveller’s mind is of another kind. Boundless plains, with horizons gently sloping like tilted seas, ranges of arid hills standing out like islands in an ocean, towns and villages mere oases in a vast waterless and treeless desert. As you journey over one of these plains, the blue line of distant hills rises higher, you notice dark spots of green under the barren slopes. It is a village. As you approach through an enceinte of walled-in fields, a cluster of domed roofs looks like the comb of some formidable insect. A dilapidated mud fort, a

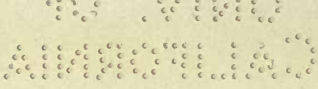
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Village in Eastern Persia.



The Takht-i-Rawan on "shora."



ruined tower or two, stand out against the sky. The stony path, that may be a main trade-route, struggles up the hill, tops the low crest, and on the other side there opens before you a precisely similar prospect, the same level plain, the same far blue ramparts.

During nearly four years in Persia, we saw much of this sort of thing. For more than six months in each year we were occupied, like the Arabs, "in folding our tents," and "silently stealing away." As to the sport obtained on these Persian treks, there is fortunately always something to look out for. Even near the more thickly, I should rather say the less thinly, populated tracts, where villages are only separated by a mile or so, and there is no chance of seeing gazelle, one can hope to see bustard; in fact these fine birds (the large variety) are often found within a few miles of Meshed.¹ In Kain and Seistan, the smaller bustard is found, called Houbara, a name that is supposed to be a corruption of the Persian word *ahu-barra*, the young of an *ahu* or gazelle, to which the bird may be thought—by the fanciful only—to bear

¹ Major Sykes and the other officers of our Consulate-General at Meshed make bags of as many as twelve or fifteen bustards (*otistarda*) in a day, by having them driven up to guns by mounted sowars.

some resemblance. Sand-grouse, of I think all varieties, abound, and fair bags can be made by taking cover in the early morning where they are in the habit of coming to water, the same plan as that adopted in the celebrated shoots in Bikanir. On all low hills, near cultivation, one finds chakor and seese partridges (*Caccabis chukor* and *Ammoperdix bonhami*), and good sport can be had driving the former and walking up the latter. The grey quail is also a resident of East Persia, and I have no doubt if it were possible to use call birds in the crops, as is done in India, good bags could be made.¹ When on the march, however, the real stand-by for the pot is the rock pigeon. They love the cool obscurity of the *karez* wells, found near every village,² and by

¹ Native shikaris, to allure the birds, use a quail pipe, an instrument ingeniously and most delicately made by stretching the skin of a mallard's neck over a little wooden drum. The quail's characteristic little note is exactly imitated by tapping the drum with the finger.

² A *karez* (or *kanat*) is the ingenious arrangement of wells that is used all over Persia for obtaining a supply of water. A likely point is selected on a sloping plain or valley. The slope is essential, though it may be so slight as to be imperceptible to the eye. If water is found, another well is sunk a few yards lower down, and the bottoms of the two wells are connected by an underground channel. Another well is dug, and the bottoms again connected, and so on till the slope of the ground brings the water to the surface. Practically all the water supplying every town and village on the plateau of Persia is obtained in this way.

walking along a line of them and chucking a stone into each, one can generally get a few shots. But *karezes* serve the traveller's pot in another way. A curious thing about these induced streams is that nearly all of them, hundreds of miles it may be from sea or river, and completely isolated from any other water, in course of time obtain a stock of small fish. The only explanation I have heard attempted is that of wind-blown spores. I cannot say that the fish afford sport,—they are usually caught in a sheet!—but their existence is a boon to the traveller, as if at all optimistic, or even hungry, he might be moved to compare them with whitebait.

Our prehistoric mode of travel, with camels and mules, possessed a certain element of the romantic—

“ Like a picture it seemed of the primitive pastoral ages,
Fresh with the youth of the world, and recalling Rebecca and
Isaac ”—

and there were compensations, but both Isaac and Rebecca sometimes felt it a little wasteful of life to spend fifteen days over a distance that would be traversed by an express train in a matter of three hours. Perhaps those were the days a gazelle had been missed, or the chakor had refused to fly the right way.

Persian marches are always very long, twenty to thirty-five miles, or even more, and towards the end of these longer stages there is a mental and physical yearning for the arrival in camp. I remember one such evening we had been travelling over the dreary country that lies between Seistan and the hills; our outlook through the day the horizonless plain, our only landmark, the Koh-i-Kwaja, floating to our right in the air like a monstrous flattened balloon. About the time the sun went down, a red ball of smoky flame in the dust-laden air, we lost the track of our advance party, and found ourselves on soft ground that a little time previously had been under Hamun water. The mules began to labour, and the *takht-i-rawan*,¹ in which the children travelled, had to be taken off their backs. We too had to dismount and lead our riding camels. The guides were at sea, for not even the most experienced can always predict the state of the *shora* area that surrounds the

¹ The *takht-i-rawan*, a kind of mule litter, is a most excellent form of conveyance for those who cannot ride. In these days it has become unfashionable among Persians, the reason for which one appreciates when one sees a whole family with bag and baggage stowed into *kajawas* slung on either side a single mule. The *takht* of course requires two mules. Persians are economical people, and their ideas of what a mule can carry are elastic.

Hamun.¹ So now one advised marching back to the water we had left in the morning, another stopping for the night where we were, while a third counselled trust in Allah and going on. We knew the rising ground where our camp was to be could not be many miles farther on, so the forward policy was adopted, but it was soon repented. The animals struggled and floundered, and as the intervals between the desperate efforts of the sweating, trembling mules became more prolonged, our hopes of seeing camp that night became dim. It was now dark, nothing to help the guides but the stars. We could not stop, we could not get on. By the mercy of Allah, however, as things were at their blackest, we reached more solid ground, and when some time later the ray from a fire shot across the gloom, the mules set to whinny with delight, while our caravan men one after another threw themselves on the ground and rolled. As to why they should have given relief to their feelings by rolling I do not know. To find a reason I fancy one would have to look a long way back

¹ The explanation of this apparently unnecessary ignorance lies in the changes that constantly take place in the level of the lake and the gentle slope of the shore; even small variations in the water-level causing the submersion and emersion of great tracts of land.

in the history of the human race. Children express both joy and grief by rolling, though I am sure they could not say why.

There is something very pitiable about a camel in difficulties, whether on soft ground like this or on the surface-slippery ground one gets on the baked white plains of Seistan after rain. On the latter the danger he is liable to, and the poor beast knows it well, is to come down in the position a skating novice may have horrible visions of when he feels his legs sliding in opposite directions. The Persians call it *shikasta* (broken). A camel was once being ridden across a piece of slippery ground like this just in front of me. It was only a hundred yards in width, and the rider had not thought it worth dismounting for. The camel, however, seemed to have a horrible pre-science of his fate, as he was uttering lamentations that could be heard a mile off. Then down he came, in such a way that there was nothing for it but to destroy him at once.

Worse still was an incident of pathos I witnessed on the Trans-Caspian railway. The train was pursuing its usual unrapid course through a plain dotted over with Turkomans' camels, when I felt a slight shock and saw an unfortunate beast hobble down the embankment on his stumps, with his broken legs trailing. There he





A Baluch prayer-rug.



An oppressed donkey.

lay and looked over his shoulder in a way I shall never forget at the machine that had mangled and thrown him aside, and now steamed remorselessly on. The reader, who is so inclined, may see in this an apologue, the blatant civilisation of the West, the picturesque and uncomplaining East—but there I cannot follow. One has only to see a little of the latter to realise that whatever Asia has lost by contact with the West is as nothing compared with the resulting benefits. It is impossible to be blind to the fact that in the unsophisticated Orient, justice and humanity, whatever, in fact, is connoted by the word “righteousness,” hardly exist.

As for the picturesque camel, there is small danger of his becoming *déclassé* for many a cycle of years. It is almost regrettable that this is so; indeed, one could wish that by some epizootic disease the whole race of baggage-animals could be swept off the face of the earth, for everywhere they are a poor ill-used lot, and nowhere more so than in Persia. There is an oft-quoted line of Firdousi's—

“Oppress not the ant that carrieth her load of grain.”

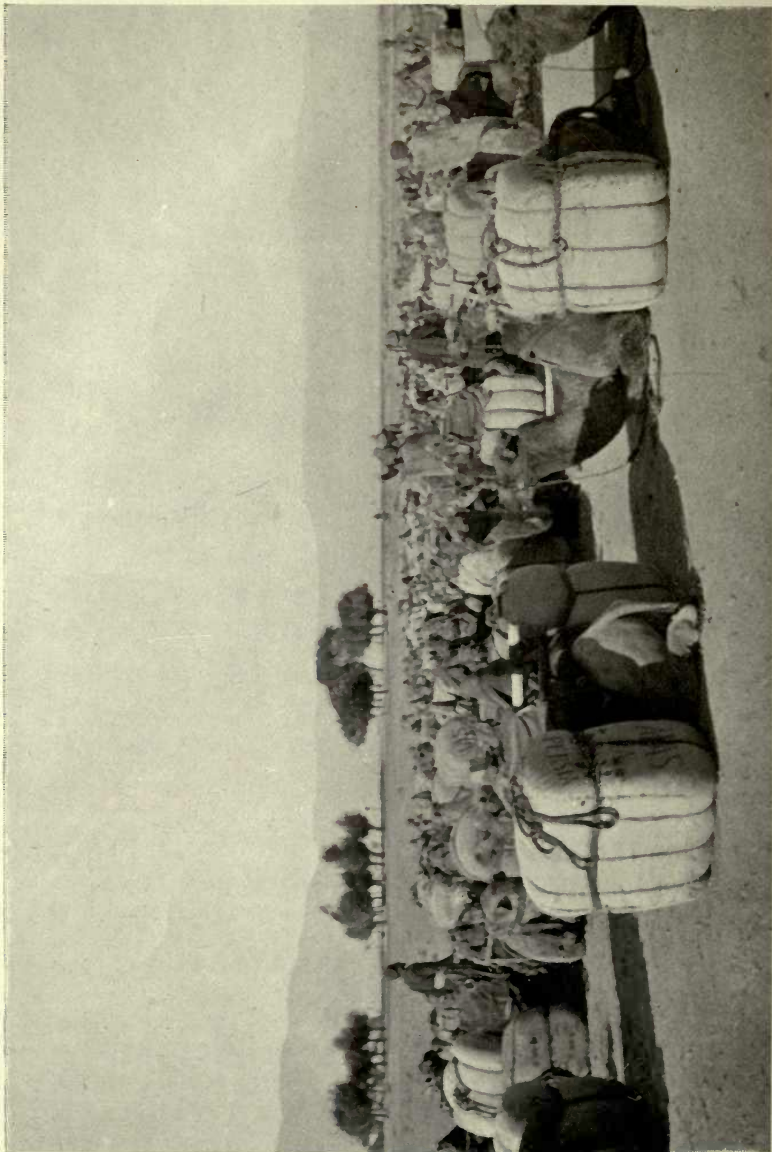
Yet no one is likely to forget the droves of “oppressed” donkeys with their gigantic loads, or the spectacle of the same wretched beast stag-

gering along with hocks knocking against one another from the weight of the portly Persian, who sits open knife in hand.¹

With a mixed caravan of camels and mules, such as ours, the fact has to be reckoned with that the former only march during the day, the latter only at night. Native servants are quite likely to put the tents on one and the tent-poles on the other,—an arrangement that saves them trouble of one sort, though it may provoke trouble of another! Persian mules are good walkers, swinging along over four miles an hour, but the camel's pace is nearer two than two-and-a-half. The camel-driver is rather a wonderful human being when you come to regard him. After marching the greater part of the night, he arrives, as I should imagine, haggard and hollow-eyed for want of sleep. But early in the morning he has to be off with the camels to graze, and during the day his charges are scattered over some square miles of country, often far from

¹ Used as a goad! The Mahommedan religion inculcates kindness to animals: "An adulteress was forgiven who passed by a dog at a well, and the dog was holding out his tongue from thirst, which was near killing him. The woman drew off her boot and tied it to the end of her veil and gave him to drink, and was forgiven on account of that act. It was asked the prophet, 'Verily, are there rewards for doing good to quadrupeds and giving them water?' He said, 'There are rewards for benefiting every animal having a moist liver.'"

Microfilm perforations



camp. Looking after grazing camels in this country is, moreover, no sinecure. Then off again with the caravan in the evening. His sleep, if ever he does sleep, is taken in instalments. As a long string of laden camels passes you at night, tied nose to tail, you see a human figure sprawled across a load or a camel's bare back, head and arms and legs dangling anyhow, adhering by suction like a limpet, by capillary attraction, or some such mysterious method. It is one of the *sarwans* taking his turn of slumber. The camel bells, particularly the deep boom, boom of the big bell on the rearmost camel, tell the caravan leader that all is well.

There is something weird and rather thrilling about the passage of laden camels at night, especially if you are lying under the stars. From a very long way off comes a murmur of bells, rising and falling on the breath of night. Your thoughts fly back to Sussex downs and the music of sheep-bells; but this is fuller-toned. Very, very slowly the volume of the carillon grows, the stream becomes a river, and you can distinguish in arpeggio the ripple of the small, the sonorous boom of the great bells. Then, as the air throbs with sound, the stars on the horizon are obscured, and a succession of tall, dim forms stalk by in ghost-like procession. You catch for

a moment a voice lifted in song; then they are gone, swallowed up in the darkness, and the music recedes. Perhaps you drop asleep, but if you wake again an hour later, the faint sweet murmur of the bells is still stealing over the waste.

The traveller in Persia will do well to stick to his tents. *Caravan-sarais* exist at practically every stage on every main trade-road, but weather conditions would have to be bad indeed for tents not to be preferable. Of course you may be travelling post-haste, without tents, and in such circumstances you cannot help yourself. Most *sarais* have pretentious exteriors, but they afford mere shelter: rows of dens opening into an indescribably dirty courtyard, bare walls blackened by smoke, bare floors littered with relics of previous occupants, an English stable a far sweeter place to sleep in. The best I have seen was one on the Resht-Teheran road, practically the only metalled road in the country. There were rooms with doors, furniture, beds and bedding. The sheets of course were not unsullied, the pillows not without traces of heads of more nationalities than one. But what would you have? The hotel was popular, guests followed one another, and there was no time to get things washed. It was not that the innkeeper was unmindful of those trifles which go so far to make for real comfort.

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Roadside scene in Persia.
(Buildings on right are windmills.)



A village ; treading out the corn.

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In case you had forgotten your tooth-brush, for instance, there was one attached to the wall by a piece of string, which might be used but not taken away! There is, besides, in these *sarais* a form of animal life—there are, of course, many forms: this one, however, has a more than usually infamous reputation. He bears the significant title of *gharib-gaz* or “biter of strangers.”

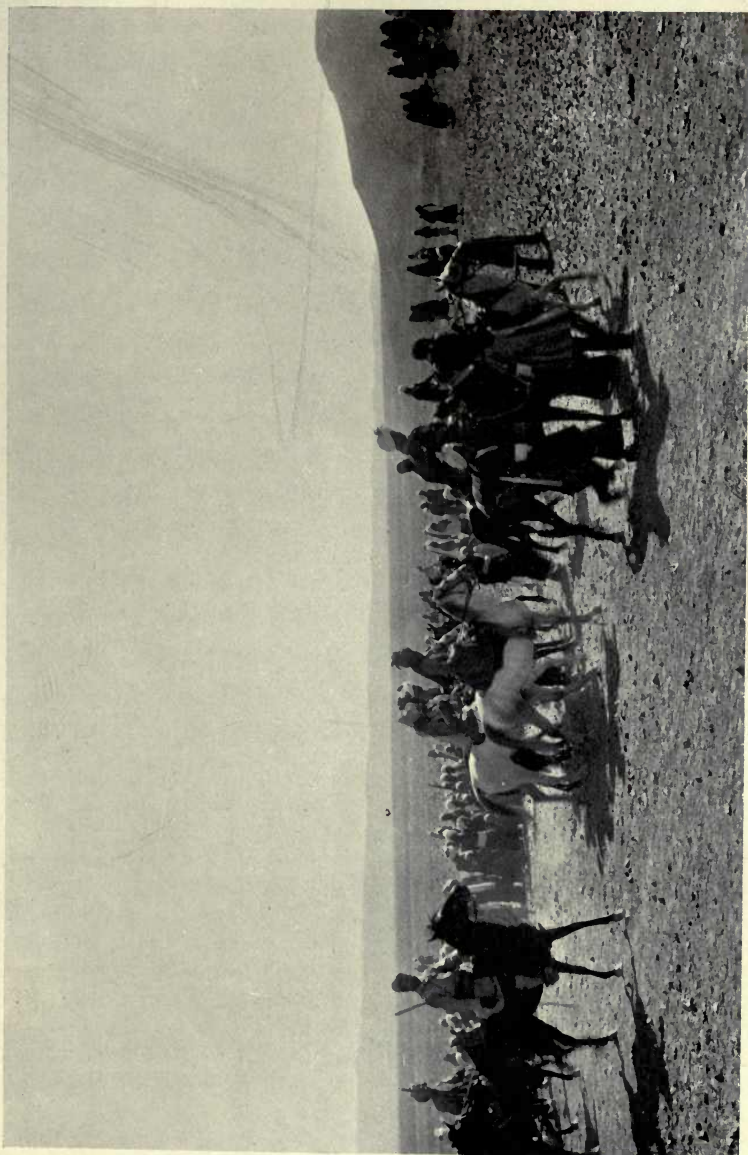
When travelling in Eastern Persia, a common sight is an encampment of black tents belonging to Baluch nomads. These tent-dwellers are more picturesque than attractive looking, their hospitality great, their manners rude. The rugs, woven by their women-folk on rough horizontal looms, are often very beautiful, and the spirit of acquisition frequently led us to make a detour to pass through an encampment visible from the road as distant black specks. The best “carpets” are those called *jaizi*, a word signifying those made by unmarried girls to form part of their dowry. The better rug a girl is capable of turning out, the greater her value in the matrimonial market. It was not, perhaps, surprising to find the women sometimes averse—even to the point of tears—to selling what was at once the result of months of labour, the sole furniture of their home, and the chief currency in the important business of match-making. The men were generally keen enough on

the money—the means of purchasing rifles and cartridges—but could not sell without the agreement of the wives, so I fear we were the innocent cause of some family jars. Between these conflicting views a *modus vivendi* was usually found by charging the *Faranghi* (Persian equivalent for “foreign devil”) a very fancy price.

The villages passed are not as a rule interesting either pictorially or otherwise: but of the inhabitants I will say this much, that my memories of the homely Persian peasantry, in their sober coloured robes and ugly domed felt hats, are not unpleasant. Their griefs and joys are those of husbandmen all the world over, mainly connected with deaths, births, and marriages. Once a wedding procession passed near our camp in the evening, and we turned out to see it. The camp had seemed strangely deserted for a little time before, and the reason was now apparent. The cavalcade was mainly composed of my own escort, whose services had been requisitioned to impart glory to the proceedings and incidentally perhaps to arouse unquenchable envy in the bosoms of less fortunate neighbours.

To the myrmidons of camp the bigger towns offered greater attractions than either desert wilds or villages. Not so to ourselves, for the ceremonial and cocked-hatism that has to be sub-

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A village wedding.

mitted to in Persia is trying to the normal mufti-loving Briton. An arrival in any provincial capital is a specially troublous time. There is to start with the *istagbal* or official welcome. A mile or two outside the town two tents are pitched, in one of which you change into uniform, in the other are met by the reception party who then and there entertain you to tea and sweetmeats. The expressions of politeness decreed by custom are interchanged, and though in the fulfilment of this duty the plain Englishman is unlikely to stray into flights of fancy, it is as well to remember that attempts at originality are not likely to be rewarded in the way they deserve.¹ This over, the whole party proceeds in solemn state into the town, where it is for you to give precisely the same class of entertainment. The "bloods" of the place look on these processions as opportunities of showing

¹ "A chair pushed one inch or two forward or backward so as to transgress the border of a particular carpet marked for its limit, may cause serious offence; a cup of tea or a tobacco-pipe missing from the conventional number offered to a guest, may awake hostile feelings; there may be hidden meaning in a misapplied word of welcome or farewell, in a clumsy gesture, in a new-fashioned article of wearing apparel. Trifles could hardly go further in the way of puerility; but it is a part of common-sense diplomacy to acknowledge with gravity things which to all seeming are most opposed to common-sense."—Morier's 'Second Journey through Persia.'

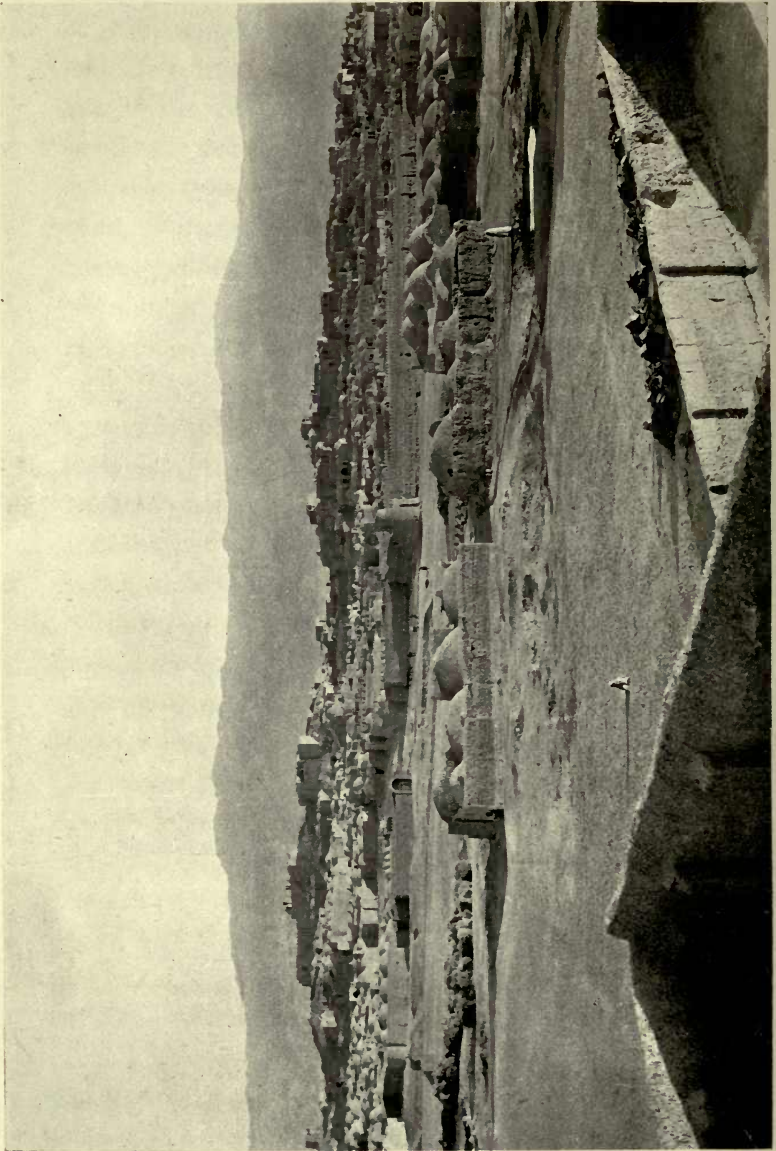
off their equitation, for Persians think a good deal of riding, and firmly believe that skill like theirs can be seen in no other country in the world, an illusion shared with them I believe by at least one other nation. There was a time when Persians really could "ride, shoot, and speak the truth": now—

"Horses they ride without remorse or ruth,
At speaking truth perhaps they are less clever,
But draw the long-bow better now than ever."¹

On these occasions, rider after rider darts out of the throng, and setting his horse at full speed, drops the reins and goes through the motions of unslinging, loading, and firing a rifle. The performance fills one with admiration of their nerve, as they are regardless of the ground they ride over, and their peculiar seat, with long stirrups and body inclined forward, gives one the uncomfortable impression that like the knights in 'Alice in the Looking-glass,' they only want the

¹ A good story is told by Malcolm illustrating the importance attached by Persians to riding. An English ambassador was riding through a bazar, attended as usual by a mounted retinue. Something startled his horse, and being an indifferent rider he fell off. Going on his way, he noticed that his Persian *ghulam-bashi* had stayed behind. The latter, however, shortly afterwards rejoined him, and in a confidential tone intimated that he had made the best of the unfortunate *contretemps*—"Every one in the crowd," he added, "is now convinced that your Honour was drunk"!

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Birjana.

slightest excuse to tumble over their horse's heads. It is not unusual at these reception-parties for the local poet to stand up and deliver himself of a panegyric, of which you are the blushing subject. Etiquette does not fortunately demand that you should reply in similar strains; you will have done all that is necessary if you cause the poet's mouth to be filled with sugar-candy.

Then there are the visits and return visits that have to be made, and these not only with governors, and the superior officials that form the *élite* of Persian society, but with lesser—but still shining—lights, such as post and telegraph masters.

All have the dazzling polish of manners that have caused Persians to be called the "Frenchmen of the East." They are full of exquisite phrases, and the wise *Faranghi* will supply himself with a quiver full of flowery darts, which he can shoot forth at opportune moments. At the commencement of a visit, for instance: "Peace be with you"—"And with you peace"—"You are welcome, you have honoured me exceedingly"—"Your state of health?"—"Praise be to God" (bow, and arm pressed across abdomen)—"Your presence is light to my eyes"—"It is long since you honoured this slave's house"—"I look on your house as my own" (this is very good)—"May Allah prolong your age"—"May your

shadow never be less"—"May your arm never wax feeble," &c., &c. Then at the conclusion of a visit: "It is now time I removed the cause of inconvenience"—"Inconvenience! It is the greatest pleasure! You are removing your gracious presence very quickly"—"Permit me, as far as the door"—"What need of ceremony between friends!"—"God be your protector,"—and so on *ad infinitum*.

Self-depreciation is sometimes carried to extreme lengths. In the course of a conversation, it would be an exhibition of bad manners not to refer to oneself as a "slave," at least once or twice. Once, when visiting a chief, his son, a pretty little boy, walked in and nestled against his knee. "Your son?" I asked. "My dog," was the surprising answer. "Take him, he is your property." Now a dog, a *sag*, is an animal of so mean a status that a plate that has been licked by one cannot be used again till it has been washed seven times, and also purified by earth. The price of a dog is coupled with wages of a very disreputable character, as *haram*—unlawful. Sporting dogs very fortunately and conveniently come under a different category. For them and for pet dogs Persians use a more honorific word, *tuli*. The word, however, which this gentleman employed with reference to his offspring, was *sag*.

Those visits! the cigarettes that have to be smoked, the concoctions that have to be swallowed! The sharbat, "cooled with Persian snow," might be delicious, if it were not for that very doubtful snow; but the tea, two to four cups, still more the coffee, are unmixed evils. The appearance of coffee is the conventional sign for a guest to take his departure,¹ and when during a visit the abominable compound is brought up, you sing an internal *nunc dimittis* and "remove the cause of inconvenience" as quickly as you can. Verily,

"Persicos odi puer apparatus."

I know no more searching test of the digestion than an arrival in a Persian town. The dinners generally begin with the utmost punctilio, the guests seated strictly according to precedence, the host in a lowly seat at the foot of the table. Later on in the evening ceremony is a little relaxed. Wine² is of course forbidden, hence Byron's jingle—

"A Persian's heaven is easily made,
'Tis but black eyes and lemonade."

¹ If, however, you hear of a deceased Persian friend that he was "given coffee," it means that his exit from this transient world was secured by means of poison.

² As a matter of fact, wine is one of the promised delights of the Muslim Paradise, but it is a sort that has no evil after-effects, without a "headache in a hogshead"!

but—"qu'il y a des accomodements avec le ciel!" God is very merciful, and the sin a very small one. The difference in this respect between a Persian of the present day and an Englishman of a generation or two ago, is that the gentleman of Persia prefers his liquor *before* eating. His taste in wines is not very discriminating. He prefers Shiraz and the muddy vintages of his own country to the produce of France and Portugal, champagne excepted; but the toleration extended to the latter is mainly on account of its expense. The potion that meets with the most whole-hearted approval in Persia is brandy, and generally speaking the more degrees above proof a spirit is the more it is liked. Beer is looked askance at, being *ab-i-jo* (lit., barley-water), the drink indulged in by the persecutor of the martyred Hussein.

The Persian taste in music is similarly patriotic. I have often heard gramophone records by Mme. Melba and other European stars interlarded with the latest from the capital, a *ghazal*, we will say, by "Rose of the World," and it was certainly not the singers of the West that gained the most applause. One evening, after a "Persian" dinner, when the gramophone had emitted the last of the Teheran prima donna's nasal shrieks,

and it was about the time when I expected my guests to take their departure, one of them intimated that among his retainers, who, after the usual custom, were guests in my servants' quarters, was a *ghulam* who was without rival in his rendering of the camel-driver's song. If permission were given, he would be summoned. He duly put in an appearance and started his song, loud and resonant but full of a wild melancholy. After it had been going on for a very long time, it occurred to me that this was a *sarwan's* song, one that begins when he starts a march and only ends when he gets to its conclusion. The Persians had closed their eyes and swayed and nodded in rapture—or sleep. Some had removed their hats, and all had the demeanour of men settling themselves down to some hours' solid enjoyment. The singer, too, was evidently a stayer. Heaven only knows, I thought, what the length of this march will be, on which I have embarked so light-heartedly! I suppose my Persian *major-domo*, whilst handing round the relays of liqueurs, divined something of my feelings, for having caught my eye he disappeared, and we could scarcely have traversed another half *farsakh* of that long night march before he reappeared, and with a tray of coffee cups! After all, I said to

myself, these Eastern customs—some of them at least—have their redeeming points!

Notwithstanding anything that has been said to the contrary, all prospects in Persia are not unpleasing, neither are all men vile. Among my pleasantest recollections are those of the capital of Kain. The Governor was one of those individuals, nowadays not uncommon in the East, whose contact with Europeans has led to their acquiring certain Western qualities to which men of their own race are usually strangers, while not “jettisoning” the best of their own national traits. The “Glory of Dominion” was a first-class sportsman in the best sense of the word. Being a governor—in Persia a delicate and hazardous office,—he could never go far from his capital and a telegraph office, so his sports were limited to gazelle shooting on the plains near Birjand, falconry in the season,¹ while rifle-shooting and tennis were his daily relaxations in his own gardens. The inclusion of tennis in the sports of a Persian governor will surprise those who know their Persia, for running about on one’s own feet cannot be indulged in by a native of that ceremonious country without serious loss

¹ Persia is a country eminently adapted for falconry. It is a thousand pities this sport has almost died out amongst the upper classes.

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"The Glory of dominion."

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of dignity.¹ The "Glory," however, was deterred by no such considerations. He even went further, and took off his long pleated Persian coat to play, thereby making himself perilously like a *Faranghi*, whose costume, as every Persian thinks, verges on the indecent.

Tennis-players used to green English lawns would have been amused at the games played in a rough and dusty courtyard, surrounded by an outwardly admiring, but inwardly scandalised, crowd of black-coated retainers. The loud applause that greeted each good stroke of the governor's! the even more eloquent silence that followed each good shot of his opponent! the lies they told about the balls that went out of court! The latter is but natural. A Persian proverb runs—"If by day the king should say, 'It is night,' you should rejoin, 'Behold the moon and Pleiades.'" Should "a king" hit a tennis-ball out of court, I feel sure the correct

¹ The Islamic doctrine is that for a man all amusements are vain except three—the breaking in of his horse, the drawing of his bow, and playing and amusing himself with his wives. This is, however, considered out of date. Persians—the men at least—play no outdoor games, but are fond of chess and cards, the time for playing which is the fast of Ramazan, when they sleep all day and wake all night. It is whispered that at these card-parties the freedom of language and behaviour indulged in by even the highest in the land would surprise those used only to Persian "company manners."

thing to say is, "Behold, it is within!" It is bare justice to the governor to add that he gave his courtiers no encouragement. At short ranges he was a very good rifle shot, and a visit nearly always ended in a contest at a suspended melon or egg. I should like to have spoken of his gardens and his entertainments, but space forbids, and these things, after all, have little to do with sport.

XI. Wild Sheep in Khorassan.

“ In that delightful province of the sun,
The first of Persian lands he shines upon.”

—MOORE.

LOOKING north-east from the city wall of Meshed, there can be seen in the distance a purple mass of mountains that day by day during the torrid heats of summer sends forth an invitation, tempting in promises of coolness. The time came when acceptance could no longer be delayed, and early one morning my wife and I left our temporary home in the British Consulate-General.

That the start was made by stepping into a cab will seem to accord ill with what has gone before, yet such was the prosaic fact. It is in this way that the up-to-date Persian always travels. If he has to journey from the capital to Meshed—some five hundred miles—he hires a “four-wheeler.” To go thence to Seistan, about the same distance, he engages the same useful vehicle. The humorous part of the business is that there are

L

no roads.¹ The Russian-built carriages used in Persia, however, are quite as independent of roads as the arm that bears the motto *ubique*. Once, when I was being driven from Teheran to Meshed, it came on to rain. We happened to be crossing some fields, which soon became a lake. The horses sank up to their hocks and gave up trying, and with good reason, as the wheels were imbedded up to the axle. The "fare" had then to divest himself of nether garments and join his servant and the cabby in similar undress, in the extrication of the vehicle and horses.

There is in Persia something rather appropriate about this impersonal word "fare," for once the agreement is signed to transport you to a given place in a given time, you become so much baggage, and the driver consults your convenience when and where to halt about as much as a camel-man his loads. It happened in the journey referred to that my coachman and owner for the time being, desiring a rest in the middle of a long and rough stage, got off his box, an action that had the unlooked-for result of making his horses, which had till then shown no particular zest for their work, start off at a gallop. So there I and my servant were, shut up in our closed

¹ *I.e.*, made roads, as opposed to mule tracks. Two metalled roads have lately been made to Teheran from the Russian frontier.

carriage, in wild career down hill, and bumping and swaying in a way that caused both passengers the most lively alarm. My Persian servant now came to the fore. Being light and agile, he swung himself on to the box from the step without overbalancing the cab—as my weight certainly would have done,—thence on to the horses' backs, and so he managed to get the reins and stop them—a very difficult feat, for which I was duly and immediately grateful in the way that Persians best understand.

Our wheeled journey this morning was for a short distance only,—some fifteen miles to the foot of the hills; and as we rattled and bumped down the main street, we felt thankful that this was so. Our coachman drove with the recklessness of his breed; for whether it be that living in the shadow of the great shrine of Meshed, where to die is to die blest, makes the drivers of that city more than usually careless of their own and their passengers' necks, I do not know; but the fact remains that one and all display what seems to the latter an unnecessary degree of dash. Passers-by in the streets already beginning to bustle, sleeping figures of men, children, and dogs, these he shaved with impartial abandon; by a hair's-breadth he avoided staircases leading down to *hamams* and subterranean chambers, and

likewise those cavernous pits and hollows that yawn hungrily by the roadside in every Persian town; all to an accompaniment of shouts and objurgations, addressed in turn to his half-broken horses and to the apathetic Persian loafers. So through a labyrinth of narrow streets and gloomy covered bazars, all of wonderful picturesqueness but kaleidoscopic smells, by mosques and *mad-rassehs*, by the great *khiaban* (or boulevard), and the entrance of the shrine itself with the chains beyond which no unbeliever may pass. Then through the city gates, and we emerged into the country and thankfully exchanged the infernal rattle of cobble-stones for the ease of a road whose appalling ruts were softened by a deep layer of fine dust.

One might spend an hour worse than at one of the main gates of Meshed watching the people entering the holy city, for as the scene of the martyrdom of the eighth Imam, this city ranks high as an object of pilgrimage to pious Muslims, —so much so, that when the pilgrimage has been duly accomplished, the “Zawar” is entitled to prefix to his name the honorific style of *Meshedi*. At one of the southern gates, besides Persians from distant parts of the Shah’s dominions, one would see Indians and Afghans, Baluch, Arabs, and Turks, all in their picturesque and distinctive



The Khiaban, Meshed.



A Meshed gateway.

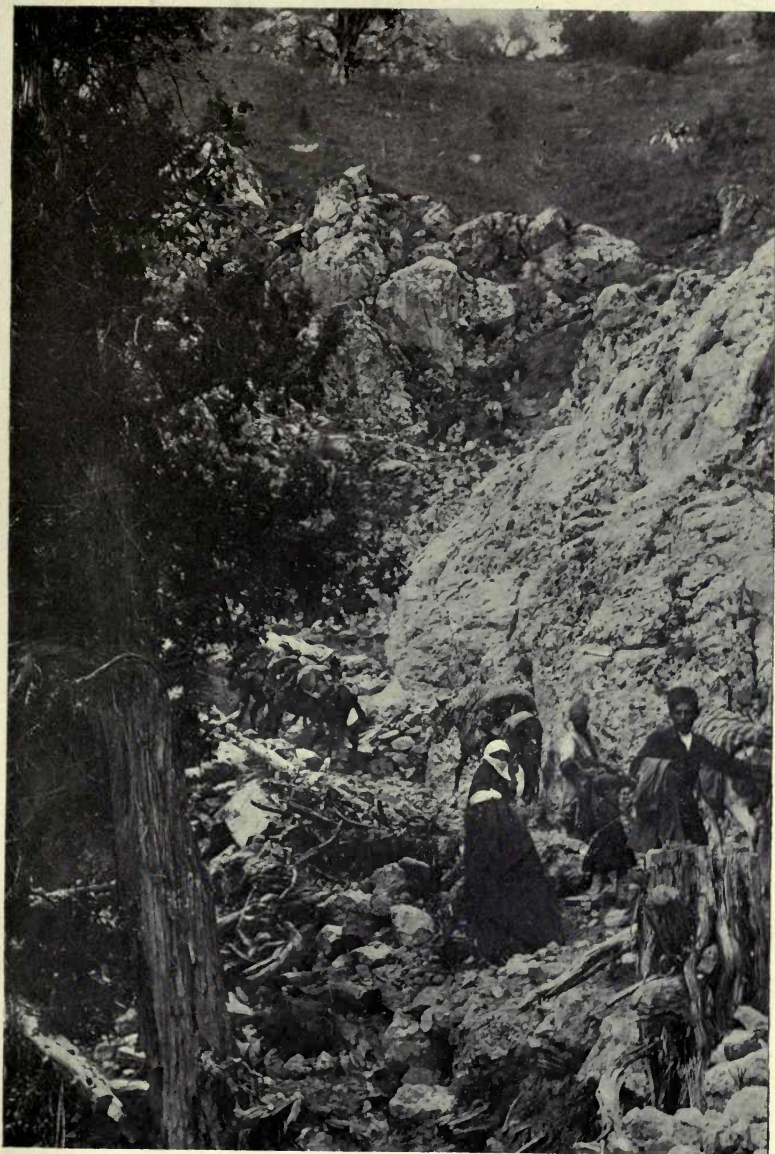
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national costumes. At the main northern gate enter Kurds, Caucasians, Bokhariots, and representatives of the Central Asian tribes and peoples that own Russian and Chinese sway. Within, folk jostle one another who have come from places so far separated as Kashgar and Zanzibar. It is a wonderful crowd; "some in rags, and some in tags, and some in silken gowns," but all have more or less rid themselves of the stains of travel in honour of the shrine. They come on camels, on mules, on asses, on their own ten toes. From the Russian side they arrive in huge four-horse *fourgons*, packed with an indefinite number of passengers. I would roughly estimate the human load of one of these at twice that of a bank holiday charabanc, of which indeed it vaguely reminds one, but it might be more. There are young and old, male and female. Some have barely strength to totter in at the gate, but these never expect to pass out again. They have come to die, happy in the knowledge that their bones will be committed to sacred soil. The ears of many arrivals are already closed to the murmur of camel bells and the sounds of the march. Corpses are brought for burial in Meshed from far and near, so that the holy city has become one vast cemetery. I remember a solitary Kurd horseman on that white stretch of road with an

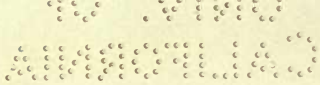
oblong bundle, whose shape it was impossible to mistake, balanced across his saddle-bows. He was performing the last pious duty of son to father. But Meshed is far from being a resting-place for the poor bones. As soon as the grave falls in, or even before that, the site is taken for a new arrival, so that the populations of the cemeteries are hardly less shifting than those of the *sarais*. One could imagine the streets thronged at night with outraged and indignant ghosts! Whether this is so or not I do not know; the sacred city is not a good place for Europeans to wander about in after dark. Curiously enough, however, one hears little of "the pestilence that walketh in darkness"; for Meshed, that flagrantly disobeys every sanitary law that has been laid down since the days of Moses, is rather a healthy place!

So predominant in the minds of the wayfarers on the roads to Meshed is the one great object, that the usual salutation, *Salam Alaikum*, "Peace be with you," is dropped, and instead one hears, "May your pilgrimage have been accepted," and the reply, "Pray for us." But men are not the only pilgrims. A common sight on all the roads converging on Meshed are solitary boulders, large and round, lying in the fairway, and one is told that these also are

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Pilgrims crossing hills to Meshed.



moving forward of their own volition on the same sacred errand. To those burning with religious zeal, miraculous levitation is a far more natural and credible theory than any such prosaic explanation as pushes onward by the zealous hands of numberless wayfarers.

We soon left the main road, and passing by a wonderful blue mosque in a grove of trees, drove across the plain towards the hills. Some twelve miles from Meshed, when the track became too bad for wheels, we mounted our horses that had preceded us there and rode on to a camp pitched by the side of a rushing stream in the shade of a row of poplars. Next morning, after passing through a gorge with limestone walls towering above us, we found ourselves in a real hill country with romantic fort villages and terraced fields.

It is in this region that the long arm stretching southward that forms the eastern abutment of the Persian plateau, takes off from the main range, that huge wrinkle in the earth's surface, of which Hindu Kush and Paropamisus, Elburz and Caucasus, are but parts. As might be expected, the country forming the angle is a confused mass of tumbled, contorted ridges, cloven by winding valleys; here a smiling, almost alpine country with green hillsides and

willow-fringed, forget-me-not bordered streams, there savage and sterile of aspect like the ranges further south.

The path now lay by the side of a river, in a valley that nature had decked with a wonderful profusion of wild-flowers, among them some old English friends,—bugle, campion, foxglove, trefoils, blue-bottle, hyacinth, and many more. At one point we narrowly escaped an accident. My wife's pony dropped his hind legs over the bank, and failing to recover, went over into the river. Thanks to the presence of mind of the rider, nothing worse than a ducking resulted, and this was soon put to rights in a house belonging to the *kat-khuda* of the nearest village. Here, with Eastern hospitality, a room was placed at the disposal of the foreign lady, while garments, the cut and fashion of which afforded the female portion of the household subject for loud and mirthful discussion—and talk, I'll be bound, for the next month,—were dried in the hot sun.

Next day we reached the Kara Dagh range and I settled down to some hard work. I think I saw game every day. At this time of the year it was still very hot in the middle of the day, and it was pleasant as well as good policy to spend the hours from twelve till two or three under the shade of a big

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In the Kara-Dagh range.



juniper tree or a friendly rock. These siestas were, in fact, necessary, as summer nights when out after hill game in the East are most unpleasantly brief. If one takes advantage of the cool of the evening, camp is not reached before half-past eight, so after a tub and dinner "lights out" can hardly be managed before ten; while to make the most of the delicious two hours before sunrise, half-past two or three is the latest one can safely allow for *réveillé*.

It was after a night of this unsatisfying kind that I and a local shikari started in the dark on what proved to be my best day on these hills. We began climbing almost immediately after leaving the camp. I was rather stiff and tired after a long day that had concluded a brief five hours before, and I thought with some resentment of the camp settling down to sleep again after my departure—to them, no doubt, a somewhat unpleasant interlude in their night's rest. From a commanding shoulder we watched the stars pale, and the grey, dim outlines of hills and trees turn to colour, and presently spied beasts below us. There was no good ram, however, and we turned again to breast the hill, our objective being a ridge that loomed high in front. A short way on we found tracks of a big ram, and soon after saw him leisurely

climbing the spur we were on. He had no suspicion of danger. What little wind there was blew in our faces; but when first we saw him he was in full view, and if he had, after the manner of mountain game, kept looking back on his tracks, he must have seen us. Rahmat of the Palang Koh used to say that wild sheep trusted more to their eyes for protection and less to their noses than the wild goats. My own impression is exactly the contrary. In any case, the early morning is a time when all animals seem very much on the alert—in the evening twilight the reverse is the case,—and we were therefore in luck's way. The ram was going slowly, and by keeping to the ravine on our left we gradually overhauled him. As I crawled the last few yards to get my shot he was uneasy. Some vague apprehension of danger had been aroused. He no longer nibbled tufts of grass, but faced this way and that with sudden movements of alarm. But what the danger was and whence it came, he knew not then,—and he never did know, for suddenly and painlessly he died, the way a beast ought to die.

We set our faces to the hill again and reached the ridge as the sun began to beat hot on our backs. Before us opened a magnificent vista

of green hills stretching away to the line of the Turkoman desert, through whose thirsty sands beyond our ken flowed the great Oxus. A historic country indeed was this over which we looked, one that from the dim legendary times of the wars of Afrasiab and the Touranians, the "Gog and Magog" against whom Alexander afterwards built his great wall, has echoed to the tramp and thunder of armed hosts; the shout of battle and the rush and turmoil of nations struggling for supremacy. But not to the noise of arms only. Down the long ages this corner of Asia, with its comparatively low hills and easy valleys, the only break in the great mountain barrier that stretches across Asia, has been, as it were, straits through which have flowed currents of human migration, Aryan, Mongol, Turk, and Tartar, set up by oceanic tides of which one can but guess the origin.¹ It is for this reason that the dwellers in the scattered towns and hamlets of this part of Persia and Afghanistan are so curious a flotsam and jetsam of bygone nationalities.

A flat-topped hill with grey scarped sides,

¹ The chief cause of human migration south and west from Central Asia was probably the dessication of this region, or a succession of periods of dessication or "pulsations of climate."

hardly recognisable in the distance among others, was pointed out as the famous Kalat-i-Nadiri, the extraordinary natural fortress where Nadir Shah, the Napoleon of the East, collected his incalculable riches of gold and jewels, the sack of India. By Persians the fortress is still regarded as impregnable and the key of their country. But what of Nadir himself? His bones moulder under the gateway of the palace of the Kajars in Teheran, where every day they may be trampled under the feet of those that reign in his stead, while his descendant in tail male occupies a menial position in one of the European Consulates in Meshed—

“The elemental surge of time and tide rolls on and bears afar
Our bubbles: as the old burst, new emerge,
Lashed from the foam of ages, while the graves
Of empires heave but like some passing waves.”

As we were looking, the clatter of falling stones drew our attention to matters of more immediate importance.

A little careful searching revealed a big herd of urial some little distance below us, on a steep stony ridge, and it contained two big rams besides smaller ones. Regaining the top, we hurried along out of sight of the sheep and then began to scramble down a steep ravine. After going some way, we made for the interven-

ing ridge, and, as we had expected, could see the herd on theirs, which lay parallel to ours. They were out of shot, but were moving slowly down hill: so we did likewise. Lower down, we took a little branch ravine that seemed to lead in the direction we wanted, but to my horror it turned in such a way as to bring us out quite suddenly in full view of the herd. Retreat was impossible, as the sheep moving downwards would every moment get a fuller view into the ravine we had been descending. Of course we had become stones, and as usually seems to be the case, the position I was petrified in soon became agonising. The sun was by this time intensely hot. After waiting a few moments, the herd began to compose themselves for their noonday rest, some of them taking up a position as if looking straight at us. It seemed almost malicious. "Do these idiots," I fancied them saying, "think they look like stones? Well, we'll just watch them doing it for a while." So we were left to bake.

I had time to observe some twenty yards below us a shallow V-shaped depression in the hard clay, which had been formed by water, and when human nature, as Mr Briggs said with reference to his historic sneeze, could stand it no longer, towards this I slid. Strange to say, the urial were

not alarmed—or pretended not to be. I got concealment for a little way in this, and had hopes it would prove the means of accomplishing a heroic stalk; but it turned in a way that would again bring me in sight of the herd. I might have waited here, but it would have meant spending the heat of the day—four to six hours—on that scorching hillside. Forty yards lower down, however, was a dry juniper tree, the miserable shade of whose naked branches looked at the moment particularly inviting. If I could but reach that I could wait in comparative comfort. Slowly, moving one limb at a time, and making myself as flat as was physically possible, I let myself slide. Vain hope! No further liberties were to be allowed. Up went a ram's head; a female gave a few bounds and stood gazing. Then came her snort of alarm. Every eye in that herd was turned my way. That was, of course, the end of the stalk. They were too far for a shot, and nothing remained but to see them disappear.

They stood stock-still for a moment—the pause before the wild stampede. As they did so, a big ram I had not seen before appeared from below as if to join the herd. He was distinctly nearer than the others, though still a long shot. I had drawn up my knees and given a twist to my Lyman sight, and was ready for the chance. As

he stood to see what the herd was gazing at, I pulled, and he collapsed and rolled down the hill. The rest of them, with the sound of an avalanche of stones, before he had completed his journey to the bottom of the ravine, were gone in a mighty cloud of dust.

صد انداختی تیر، هر صد خطاست
 اگر هوشمندی یک انداز راست

XII. The Bujnurd Sheep.

صد انداخت تیر و هر صد خطاست
 اغار پوشماندی یک انداز راست -

“Thou hast shot a hundred arrows, and each one a miss ;
 Shoot rather one arrow and let that go to the mark.”

—SAADI.

THE range called Elburz stretches across the northern part of Persia, shutting off the Caspian provinces from the main plateau. One can see the mountains from the sea as a purple line, dark from the forests with which they are clothed. The northern slopes form the habitat of a race of deer called *Cervus maral*, which was reputed to range eastward as far as the small chiefship of Bujnurd. The matter, however, being evidently one requiring investigation, it was not long after coming to Meshed before I found myself *en route* for this place.

The first part of the journey was in what is known as a *kaliska*, a sort of “victoria,” over what

Persians like to refer to as the "Askhabad *chausée*," but there is so little of the highroad about it that drivers of wheeled vehicles seem generally to prefer the fields and ditches on either side. Our cabby, who had undertaken to transport us the hundred and eighty odd miles in four days, was a Tartar, both literally and figuratively, and he will live long in my memory. Long-cloaked, loud-voiced, unshaved, dirty, insouciant, a cigarette ever in the moist corner of his mouth, he drove his team of four horses abreast with a skill and nerve that would have done no discredit to a horse-artillery driver.

The ordinary sights of a Persian road have been often described: the filthy and verminous *caravan-sarais*, the tea-shops, the religious plays enacted outside to a frenzied and sobbing audience, the blinding and all-pervading dust, the siestas in the scented shade of a rose-garden, the importunate and impertinent beggars. One truculent individual of the latter genus came up brandishing his axe, and not getting what he wanted, called me *mouzi* and other opprobrious epithets, till he was reduced to silence by the point of an umbrella deftly delivered in the gastric region by my travelling companion, the well-known Indian attaché of the Meshed Consulate-General.

Some places of historic interest are passed on

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the road: the ruins of Tous, the capital of Khorassan in the days of the Caliph Harun-al-Raschid of Arabian Nights fame: the Ulang-i-shahi, or royal pasture, the most celebrated grazing-ground in this part of Asia: the mound that is reputed to be the scene of the murder of Nadir Shah.¹ Then by the ruins of old Kuchan that lie now as they fell when the town was flattened by an earthquake a few years ago, and the new town with its surrounding greenery of orchards and vineyards. Here we are in the country of the Kurds, a race of hill men, and like all hill men good fighters, that were brought from their own Kurdistan in the west by Shah Abbas in the days of our Queen Elizabeth. Wholesale deportations of this sort were common in those days, the object of this one being to establish a fighting people on the border of Khorassan to prevent the inroads of the Turkoman. In the present day the "man-stealing" Turkoman, that were the terror of the countryside in Persia right down to Seistan, are mostly peaceable Russian subjects. Only a remnant, the Yamut and Goklan sections, that live in Persian territory between the Caspian Sea and the Kurdish chiefship of Bujnurd, still carry on the hereditary occupation.

¹ Vividly described in Sir M. Durand's fascinating novel, 'Nadir Shah.'

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Kurdish encampment.



Palace of Ilkhani, Bujurd.
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On these Kurds, therefore, still falls the task of holding the passes by which Turkoman raiders might swoop down on the defenceless villages of Khorassan, or hold up caravans of traders or pilgrims. The existence of such goings-on was brought home to me one evening when our coachman lost his bearings. After some three hours wandering about in the dark, over country that seemed more suitable for the playground of wild goats than the perambulations of a "four-wheeler," we espied a light, and drew up outside a walled and fortified village. There we hoped at least to get the wherewithal to cook a speedy but much desired dinner; but to our horror the villagers flatly refused to open their inhospitable gates. It seemed that a very few days before they had been raided by a party of Turkoman; men had been killed and maidens carried off. Hence their—for us—very ill-timed caution. Fortunately the persuasive eloquence of the attaché, carried on with an unseen interlocutor on the top of a tower, and listened to by myself with painful anxiety, at length allayed their suspicions, and our bivouac was at least free from the spectre of starvation.

It was pleasant to leave behind, as we gradually did, the parched plains and arid hills of Persia, and to enter a goodly land like that of Bujnurd. First patches of green by the roadside, a few

scattered trees on the mountain slopes,—the first indications of the splendid forests of the range further east,—then the whole country became green, and we found villages nestling amongst oriental planes, chestnut, mulberry, and walnut trees, worthy of the vale of Kashmir itself.

On the evening of the fourth day we were met outside the town of Bujnurd by the consular escort of Indian sowars that had been sent on in advance with my camp, and a number of Kurdish horsemen sent out by the chief, so made our entry in becoming state.

After a few days in Bujnurd, where I enjoyed the hospitality of the Ilkhani, a very fine young sportsman, I went on with a light shooting-camp and few impedimenta. My shooting-ground was the no-man's-land that divides Kurd and Turkoman; and at Zard, a little hamlet on the border, I was met by some horsemen sent to protect my camp, in a characteristically theatrical manner. Approaching the village, a cloud of dust arose on the far limits of a wide plain among the hills, and a troop of wild-looking horsemen came charging towards me *ventre à terre*. They looked as if they were going to ride over our small party, but when within a few yards of me, the leader, mounted on a splendid grey Turkoman horse, threw up his arm and halted them. They were

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The Kurdish escort.



Kurd shikari and ram's head.
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certainly a picturesque band, these moss-troopers of the marches, excellently mounted, and sitting their horses like men born in the saddle. They all came on with me to the shooting-ground, but being far from any village, the difficulty of supplies soon induced me to dispense with them.

At Zard I picked up two shikaris, and the first task, and not an easy one, was to make them understand that any one so exalted as a British Consul-General really intended to climb the hills on his own feet, or, indeed, was capable of doing so. The upper class Persian has no idea of any sport that cannot be managed from the saddle. In Bujnurd the chief and his mounted men love a gallop after pig, at which they rain bullets in the manner so well depicted by Yate.¹ The chief told me that he and his brother could gallop up to two pigeons, and as they rose, without drawing rein, he would shoot one and his brother the other. I once saw them essay this very feat—unsuccessfully.

None of the people I had so far met in Bujnurd and on the road had been able to tell me anything about the deer, and, most important of all, when the roaring season began or ended. I had assumed that, like Kashmir, the season would continue well on into October, but on my arrival at

¹ 'Khorasan and Seistan.'

Zard, on the twelfth of that month, I was disgusted to find that the roaring was practically all over. Another shock I here sustained was the discovery that my servant, for one of those reasons only known to that perverse breed, had at the last moment exchanged my rifle for another, but rather newer one, he had found in the Consulate. Both were Schonauer Mannlichers, but the substitute had not the Lyman rear sight which I had now used for years in preference to any other.

The charm of the country soon dissipated vain regrets. My first camp was on the breast of a hill ankle-deep in grass. Below, a clear stream, half hidden between rocky, fern-grown banks, "murmured its quiet tune." Copses of oak and beech, scattered over the broad hillside, gave an air of sylvan beauty to a scene that to eyes tired with Persia's dust and glare was peculiarly delightful. The hill crests reared up in jagged cliffs about whose summits hung fleecy clouds, while the slopes were cleft by forest-filled coombs. A more delightful shooting-ground the heart could not desire.

It was, I think, with mutual curiosity that I and my wild-looking hunters started on our first morning's walk. The nature of my thoughts may be imagined. Theirs, I think, if expressed in language, would have been anything but complimentary—

“Whose dog is this that our Ilkhani has sent to hunt in our hills? What sort of a madman is he anyhow that wishes to toil about hills, when he might be at home with his wives? He is shaven like a Kizil-bash, and his appearance is as if every day he went to the *hamam*. He is certainly soft, and will be half-dead before he gets to the top of the hill; then perhaps we shall sleep for the rest of the day. However, the Ilkhani's orders are upon our eyes, but, God willing, we shall take a year's revenue from the Kafir. Allah! what a rifle he has! Will he use it himself, or shall we shoot for him? We will in any case take our own guns, and *inshallah* will shoot a red beast or two for food.”

With some difficulty I persuaded one of them to carry my lunch bag, and he slung it across his shoulder in addition to his own rifle, which he flatly refused to leave behind—“for fear of Turkoman.” Ibrahim, as usual, took my rifle, and so we started. We descended the precipitous side of a steep ravine in the dark of the morning, followed the stream that cascaded at the bottom, pushed our way through some dense forest, and then up the opposite side of the valley, emerging on to a bare shoulder about sunrise. Then, for a stiffish ascent of a thousand feet or so, the shikaris put on the pace—a little test of the *Faranghi's* wind

—and so we reached a high ridge that was evidently the spying point they had been making for. The hunters curiously watched me using my glasses,¹ and I was not a little delighted to be able to announce that a stag with a couple of hinds were visible on a distant ridge. Unfortunately, the deer had moved out of sight before I could make certain of the stag's points or the shikaris had seen them at all.

I tested the wind with a little dust. "You are then a *margan* (shikari)?" one of them asked. Such knowledge as this was evidently not expected! I had taken an opportunity of telling them about some other animals—varieties they had never heard of—I had shot in India, and the satisfaction was now mine of knowing that this small, but I had hoped expedient, trumpet had only succeeded in securing me a reputation of quite another kind!

We went on to the ridge where the deer had disappeared and came on a deep ravine, on the

¹ I hold that the best equipment for stalking is a pair of prismatic binoculars, *as well as* an ordinary spying-glass. And if you carry the binoculars, you want the telescope to be bigger than that ordinarily carried, to make it worth carrying at all, say one with an object-glass of $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The best size for the binoculars is + 8. Stalkers in Scotland generally seem to carry a single glass of no considerable power, an instrument it is difficult to pick up game with, and extremely inconvenient to use when the stalk is actually being made.

opposite side of which the shikaris saw some wild sheep with one ram. I had at the time no idea these were other than the ordinary wild sheep of Persia, *Ovis vignei*, well known under the Punjab name of urial. Being very anxious not to risk losing the stag, I decided not to take the very long shot to which the shikaris urged me, or to bother about him at all. This seemed to disgust them. "What sort of shooting was this?" they asked. "The stag had gone into the forest, we should never see him again. I had wantonly thrown away God-given shikar. They themselves could have shot the ram from that distance" (about three hundred yards!), and much more to the same purpose.

Going on, we found the deer had crossed a stony ridge and had gone down into a big forest-filled valley a mile or more in breadth. What was to done? According to the hunters, it was hopeless to follow the beasts in the forest—though I now think this would have been my best chance—and the only thing was to take up a commanding position and hope to see the deer come out on to the open spaces towards evening. Though I intensely disliked the idea of wasting the glorious day in idleness, the course suggested seemed sound, and after climbing up to a high point, we took up a position whence we could

look over a big panorama of country. Lunch, with draughts of pure mountain crystal from a spring close at hand, came next, after which the hunters composed themselves to sleep. For my part, I lay back in the long grass and felt possessed by an extraordinary feeling of delight in my surroundings. Persia, its stony mountains, its heat, its dust, its flies, its festering and dilapidated cities, its sordid politics, were all left far behind, and I was back in the Himalaya, and yet it was not exactly Kashmir, nor yet was it Scotland, but something that reminded one of both,—eminently delightful.

As the afternoon wore on, I wandered about to different commanding points and used my glasses, but so far from seeing anything to please me, saw something that mightily annoyed me. This was a man with a dog that appeared over a distant hill. As he came along he fired the dry grass, and in half an hour the glen was full of drifting blue smoke. I thought at first that his action was deliberately designed to spoil my sport, and felt very like sending a shot across his bows in consequence; but the shikaris told me that he was a hunter from their own village who was returning from a shooting trip, and, ignorant of our presence, he was firing the grass to mark its conclusion. Anyhow he spoiled our chance

of sport for that evening, and we returned clean.

On our arrival in camp, which had in the meantime been shifted further west, we found there the hunter we had seen in the distance. He had shot a sheep, and the head which they exhibited opened my eyes. These sheep, if urial at all, which I doubted, were at least urial of a size utterly unknown before. He was evidently quite a young beast, but had horns measuring thirty-four inches and very heavy. Now, out of a great many urial shot in the best grounds in the Himalaya, my longest, and one of which I thought a lot, was that of a very old ram with horns measuring thirty-one inches. So I had evidently chanced on something worth following up. A vista opened in which, in addition to stags with antlers like trees, there figured sheep of a new and remarkable variety. Early morning and dewy eve would henceforth be spent in looking for deer, while the day would be devoted to the sheep. About the former I may say here that though during the time I then spent on this shooting-ground I never left camp later than the first glimmer of dawn, and never returned till after dark, that one stag seen the first morning was the only glimpse vouchsafed to me of this forest-loving beast.

The next day we spied some sheep on bare, broken ground above us. The stalk, not a very easy one, was well carried out by the chief of my two hunters. We had in the end to crawl up a little spur and the herd would be below us. The first to become visible was a small ram, which the Kurd, very excited, wanted me to take, an easy shot; but my desires were fixed on two big beasts at present out of sight, so to the hunter's great annoyance I refused to shoot at the one in view. The shikari then retired and watched me. "Great Allah," I could imagine him saying, "what is this son of an ass doing!" After some manœuvring I got a shot at the ram I wanted, and to my intense annoyance missed him. The undisguised scorn of the hunters was hard to bear. "If you had left it to us," said one, "we would each have got a ram. Why, in God's name, did you not take the shot when I signed to you?"

"What is this?" said the other coming up; "you told us you were a *margan*!"

Humility, or at any rate suavity and politeness, are the aspects of Mahomedan character that the official European in the East is most familiar with—even in these days of "unrest"! Perhaps it is good for him on occasions to experience something of the opposite kind. It takes some of the conceit out of him, and at the same time opens

his eyes to what exceedingly unpleasant beasts these people can be!

After a miss the first idea is to explain to oneself the "why." This time I could find no excuse. I was steady, unblown, no symptom of "stag fever," the shot easy, the rifle a good one,—this I had ascertained. So the question remained unanswered. To the shikaris I said the only thing possible, that it was not the beast's *qaza* (fate), an argument unanswerable to a Mohammedan; and having said this much, like the tar-baby I "kept on saying nothing." It was not long, however, before the question arose in a redoubly acute form.

After a long round, we were returning along the top of the main ridge when I spotted three rams below us. Again a perfect stalk was made, and lying down I had my rifle on a very fine beast a hundred yards away, more or less. He was standing among some clumps of briar, a trifle above me, and disappeared to the shot. Though surprised at not seeing him drop, I did not doubt that we should find him near. Hope told a flattering tale! The fact was otherwise, and I had achieved another miss!

Life had a very black aspect that day. Jinns and enchantments were the excuses offered for the acceptance of the shikaris this time, but I fear

with a lack of the assurance necessary to carry conviction. I thought of Rahmat, and mentioned that on arrival in camp I should bore a hole in a wheaten cake and pass the spell-bound weapon through it; but I imagined them saying—like Punch's gamekeeper—"Your rifle good? Your cartridges good? Then it's yourself that's no good!"

Later on we blundered on a big herd of sheep in a ravine. The hunter of course made out that I was the one who had made an exhibition of himself on the sky-line and sent them away.

Going home, I put up a stone at which again to test the rifle, and fired ten cartridges with an accuracy that made even the shikaris admit that I was at least a *tafangchi* (rifle-shot), but even so they clearly regarded me in the light a golf professional might a beginner who with unfailing accuracy and a gorgeous swing decapitates daisies, but is stricken with paralysis at the sight of the little white ball on the tee.

We saw yet another beast that day, a ram of no great size, which I refused to stalk, and a little time after my cup of bitterness was filled by discovering that one of my companions had taken French leave and gone after it himself! He rejoined me some time after, when we were

doing our evening spying for stag, and it was balm to my feelings to learn that he also had missed. I seized the moment of his humiliation to indulge in a straight talk, and so that dark day ended.

Now as to the cause of those misses, the chaos of doubt in my soul, after much thinking, focussed itself into the belief that it was due to using a rifle with open sights instead of the Lyman to which I had grown accustomed. Though my own mind is satisfied (?) as to the exact "how" and "why," the point would probably interest no one but myself, so I will say no more.

The following day we saw a herd of sheep, but this time the stalk failed, and it seemed my luck had strayed somewhere. Three days of the six I had allowed myself on the ground had gone and I had shot nothing.

The fourth day, we had spent the morning in fruitless search, and the shikaris had begun talking of their crops, their wives, and other matters which necessitated their presence at home. I saw what was coming, a demand for *rukhsat* (permission to depart), which, if not granted, would be taken all the same. Just at this moment we spotted on a grassy plateau four big rams that were almost immediately lost to view in a bush-filled ravine. There was just a chance that we had not been seen

by the herd, though we had been moving along, so I ran as hard as I could towards the spot. Before getting to the edge, the rams appeared on the far side going off at their heavy canter, and it was clear that they had seen us. I sat down, and as one stopped to take a look round, fired, and to my infinite relief down he went in a heap. The shikari, who had followed me, shouting over his shoulder something like *te margan ye te margan ye*—"you are, you are a shikari," plunged down the cliff to perform the *hallal*. The two other rams were now going away hard along the edge of the ravine, and taking the rearmost, I was lucky enough to hit him with a bullet in the base of the neck, and he went down head over heels into the greenery below. No one who has not experienced the depression in the mental barometer that accompanies such ill weather as I had been having, can understand with what a bound, at such a moment at this, it jumps up to "set fair." My hunters were as extravagant in their delight as they had previously been plain-spoken in their disgust; and when it came to an examination of the dead rams, there was no shock of disappointment for me, as they were a good deal bigger than anything I had previously seen. The horns measured $38\frac{1}{2}$ and 34 inches respectively.

The spell was broken. The following day I

got two out of a herd; and my last day, after bivouacking among the topmost crags in the hope of a shot at ibex—which I did not get—I shot another very big beast as he stood dimly defined against the sky in the mists of the early morning.

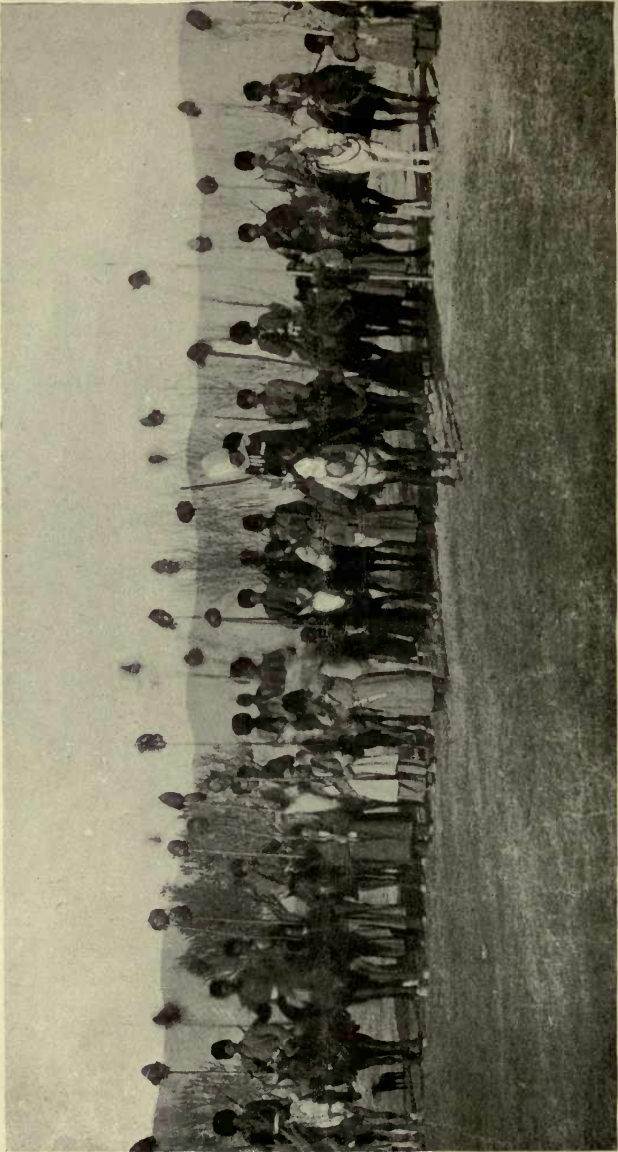
XIII. More about the Bujnurd Sheep.

“Though hunting is an occupation which gives pleasure and delicious food, yet it is more pleasant when indulged in after being disengaged from the execution of affairs, to do which is your bounden duty.”—
‘LETTERS OF THE EMPEROR AURUNGZEB.’

THREE years later found me again among these delectable mountains, this time on furlough and bound for England. I had a shooting companion in Captain Daukes, also on his way to the old country after a spell of duty in Persia. We had planned to go through Bujnurd to the Turkoman country, and thence to Astrabad and Bandar Gez on the Caspian.

To pass from the country of the Kurds to that of their hereditary enemies wanted some “bandobast,” to use that indispensable Indian word, and in this my friend the Ilkhani of Bujnurd, with his customary politeness and hospitality, did all that was possible from his side. A letter was sent to the frontier *yuz-bashi*, ordering him to escort us to within a stage of the

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Kurds with their human trophies.

nearest Turkoman *obah* (encampment), and to provide grain and flour sufficient for three weeks' shooting in the uninhabited no-man's-land that intervened.

The *yuz-bashi*, a big, black-bearded, boasting swashbuckler, was, according to his own account, the hero of many scores of fights with the Turkoman; and no doubt he had seen many affairs of the sort that take place when two savage peoples want each other's blood, and are not particular as to ways and means. The Turkoman tactics, as in the days of their Parthian forbears, is raid and scuttle; that of the Kurds, who act entirely on the defensive, surprise and ambush. For various reasons, which students of Persian politics will surmise, the Turkoman had been active lately, one of their most recent exploits being the massacre of a party of Arab pilgrims on the Teheran-Meshed road. The Bujnurdis had ambushed one party of the raiders with some success, and I was given a photo of a trophy of Turkoman heads, taken by the leader himself, a combination of barbarism with modern "snap-shotism" that would be hard to beat. The grisly tokens were sent to Meshed, to be displayed in proof of the "Persian victory," and subsequently kicked about the bazar. Incidentally, I have no doubt they made the reputation

of many a Persian brave, for the boast of having slain a Turkoman *quocunque modo* confers, if believed, unique name and fame.¹ As Kipling says—

“The wildest dreams of Kew
Are the facts of Khatmandu,”

and also, I may add, of Khorassan.

Our *yuz-bashi* showed himself a typical Persian in one respect. The grain, he told us, was ready, but his instructions had said nothing about baggage-animals to carry it on. People were just then busy, and animals could only be got by paying about three times the normal rate of hire. This difficulty was met by engaging ponies at the *yuz-bashi*'s exorbitant rates to carry our stuff as far as the first shooting-camp, whence we would take it forward by dog marches on our own baggage-animals during the halts for shooting. The *yuz-bashi*, however, was by no means defeated. He next discovered that his orders had said nothing about sacks in which to carry the grain, and these of course were only purchasable at rates which would have been immoderate if they had been made of silk. Of course, all the poor man wanted was to show us that his favour

¹ The reader may perhaps remember the *chaosh* in 'Haji Baba,' who acquired a great reputation for courage "for having cut off a Turkoman's head whom he had found dead on the road"!

was a valuable—*i.e.*, a purchasable—commodity ; and as soon as this had been recognised by us and acted upon, difficulties vanished.¹ *Mudakhil* (illicit perquisites) and *shirini* (bribery, literally sugar) are indeed the poles about which the Persian world revolves, and that is discovered by the newcomer at once. What is not discovered so soon is that it is an error to fall in with the Persian idiosyncrasy in individual cases too quickly or too liberally. By so doing you only risk your reputation for intelligence, and lay yourself open to enhanced demands. A Persian, descanting on this admitted failing in his own countrymen, once told me a rather amusing story. A high official dreamed a dream. A shining peri appeared to him and said he had brought him a present of 500 tomans in a bag. True to his instincts, he immediately exclaimed, "What! only 500; I won't take a dinar less than 1000." Having said this he incontinently awoke. Throwing himself back on his pillow in an agony of remorse at his lost opportunity, he closed his eyes, folded his arms, and said, "Agreed, say no more, I will take 100."

On this occasion the best of the two shikaris

¹ Persians are avaricious, but not mean. A miserly man is held in much contempt ; the characteristic witticism about a mean person is that he "puts his cheese inside a bottle and rubs it on his bread."

I had had with me on the former trip was not available, owing to a rather characteristic incident. He had recently been for a hunting tour alone, in the course of which he had wounded a stag, and was running up when a shot was fired from cover close by, which took off one of his fingers. A Turkoman, of course, who had thought to make a double bag with one shot,—as the Persians say, *ham khina ham khazina* (at once revenge and booty). The Kurd fled, and his enemy took the quarry.

The ground we tried this time was a continuation westward of the range I was on before, a long ridge separated from the main chain by a deep gorge through which the Gurgan stream flows on its way to the Caspian. From the crest one gets a fine outlook. On the southern side, far below, lies a flat, dust-coloured plain, with the fortified post of Rabat-i-Karabil stuck down in the middle like a tiny pile of toy bricks. Beyond, a mass of *khaki* mountains softened into a dim purple by miles of hazy air. To the north, ridge after ridge of hills fading away into a horizonless mist. Our own hog's-back, running west, trended gradually upwards to a prominent, broad-bosomed hill that reared its wooded slopes up to a magnificent bluff that overhung the Gurgan defile. It was all ideal sheep-ground, with outlines undulat-

ing and almost down-like in parts, while elsewhere there were steep ravines, some wooded, some of the bare, sandy kind that sheep love to take their repose on. There was water in abundance on the hillsides; springs at the bottoms of the valleys, and streams that babbled over stony beds or coursed sluggishly amongst masses of reeds. Our camps were generally pitched near one of these brooklets, and after breakfast had been eaten by the light of candles and a roaring fire of logs, D. and I would go out in different directions, returning in the evening to either the same place or to where camp had in the meantime been removed.

It was sad to see this well-watered, well-timbered country, probably the fairest in the whole of Persia, absolutely bare of habitations. Traces exist in plenty to show that this has not always been its condition.¹ On the highest ridges one comes across circles of moss-covered stones, probably the ruins of watch-towers, and, curiously enough, hollows that seem to be the remains of dew-ponds such as one sees on the South Downs in England, while stone-littered areas at the foot of the hills mark the sites of ancient villages.

¹Major Sykes, the eminent Persian authority, identifies this country with ancient Parthia, and certain sites west of the Gurgan gorge as those of the capitals, Paras and Dara.

Along the hog's-back runs a bridle-track, made by the patrols sent out from the Kurd outposts to watch for Turkoman *alamans*, as their forays are called. We espied one of these patrols one morning as we were sitting having lunch, a black speck in the distance. He came jauntily along, his rifle balanced across his saddle-bow. Presently we could hear snatches of the song with which he beguiled his way. Then he disappeared in a hollow and we waited, expecting to see him emerge close to us. Instead, however, a head surmounted by a big black busby slowly raised itself with levelled rifle from behind a rock, and a voice demanded our business. This was soon explained, and after a few minutes' talk the moss-trooper went gaily singing on his way. These people seemed easily moved to song, and at night, before we fell into the sleep of the weary, that was the last thing we heard. Whether it was some wild border ballad, such as one hears lilted by the Pathans of the North-West, or merely a love ditty, dealing with black eyes and tresses, goodness knows. Anyhow, its cadences, growing fainter and louder as our sentry wandered amongst the hills near our camp, has left a memory of melody by no means unpleasing.

Our luck as usual varied from day to day. Game was most plentiful about midway between

the last Kurd village and the first Turkoman *obah*; but it was size, not numbers, we wanted,—to shoot a head with horns of forty inches or over. Such a head I certainly saw once. Early in the day I had seen an enormous herd, containing, I thought, not less than three hundred beasts, one that raised a dust like a regiment of cavalry; but, as is usual with these very big herds, there was not a shootable beast among them. Later on, I spotted a herd of exactly forty, every one of them a big ram. It is usual at this season to find the biggest rams by themselves, but never before nor since have I seen such a collection as that. This herd lay down on the steep bare side of a deep ravine. To get to the opposite side of the ravine was easy, but from there I found the herd was not in shot, as I had hoped. Three or four hundred yards still separated us, the serious part of the situation being that there was no possibility of getting any nearer. I could get behind them and reach the top of the face they were on; but apart from the great risk of the wind, the chance would be a long and difficult one, and I should not be able to pick my ram. I might also reach a little spur that ran down the slope the sheep were on, but they mostly faced that way, and it was so close to them that a head raised and

a rifle poked over would have sent them off, and among so many on the move, what chance of bagging the "head of heads"? For he was there, that forty-incher; in fact, there were two or three of whom I could confidently say, "I shall not look upon his like again." Yet I would willingly have foregone my chance of a head for a good photograph of the whole herd.¹

As for the shikari, Mahommed, he wanted me to take the shot then and there. "Won't your rifle carry so far?" he asked. This apparently is the question asked themselves by some sportsmen, and being answered in the affirmative, the shot is taken forthwith. Considering, however, the enormous drop a bullet has between 250 and 500 yards, even from the most modern rifle—the drop of the Mannlicher bullet is something like

¹ Photography of wild animals on the plains of Africa has been extremely successful, and the question suggests itself why a similar measure of success should not attend the snap-shooting of hill game elsewhere. It might be possible with modern apparatus, but one would require unlimited time. Game is so much scarcer in a hill country that the number of plates one could expose in a reasonable time would be extremely small. The odds against any single plate turning out a success are enormous, for granting a successful stalk within fifty or sixty yards of a herd, one generally sees them against a background of a hillside, when their "obliterative" colouring would render a photo quite useless from a pictorial point of view. A photo against the sky would very rarely be obtained, and would then most probably only result in a black silhouette. I hope, however, the experiment will be tried by some very leisured person.

65 inches—for those who follow and would defend such practices there is no way out of a dilemma,—they must either claim to have brought the art of judging distance to an impossible degree of perfection, or else must do a lot of unjustifiable maiming.

I therefore, after much anxious deliberation, determined to wait till the sheep should shift their ground. And yet it was tantalising—

“That deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!”

If it had only been a little less wide!

They lay so close together that a shot at the biggest, if it missed him, would almost certainly have got one either above or below him.

We watched the forty for hour after hour; but those hoary old patriarchs were taking life easily, and had no intention of moving till the cool of the evening. Many times during that long day I crawled up to the telescope I had fixed on the ridge line; many times I debated which of those splendid heads I should take when the time came. At each crawl, my shikari implored me to take off my sun hat, to which he had the strongest objection. My hat, however, was covered with the best of invisible shikar cloths, while my head,—well, since youth it has been in that condition when

barbers ask if it is to be "trimmed"! I suggested that my head was probably more conspicuous than my hat. "Oh no," was the blunt reply. "They will take it for a white stone"! I was not affected by the argument. In a country where eagles and tortoises abound, too great a similarity between one's head and a white stone cannot be desirable. One might have one of the reptiles dropped on one's head and meet the fate of the Grecian poet of old! Seriously, however, apart from the necessity of a covered head under a hot sun, a well-coloured helmet, in spite of its size, is not at all a bad thing to stalk in, though I must also admit that the shikari's shaved pate left little to be desired in point of invisibility. Its colour certainly did not require a dressing of "bog earth," as recommended by Scroope,¹ to tone it down!

Every possible and impossible plan was discussed, and still the rams lay. Once, about two o'clock, one or two of them rose and took a few

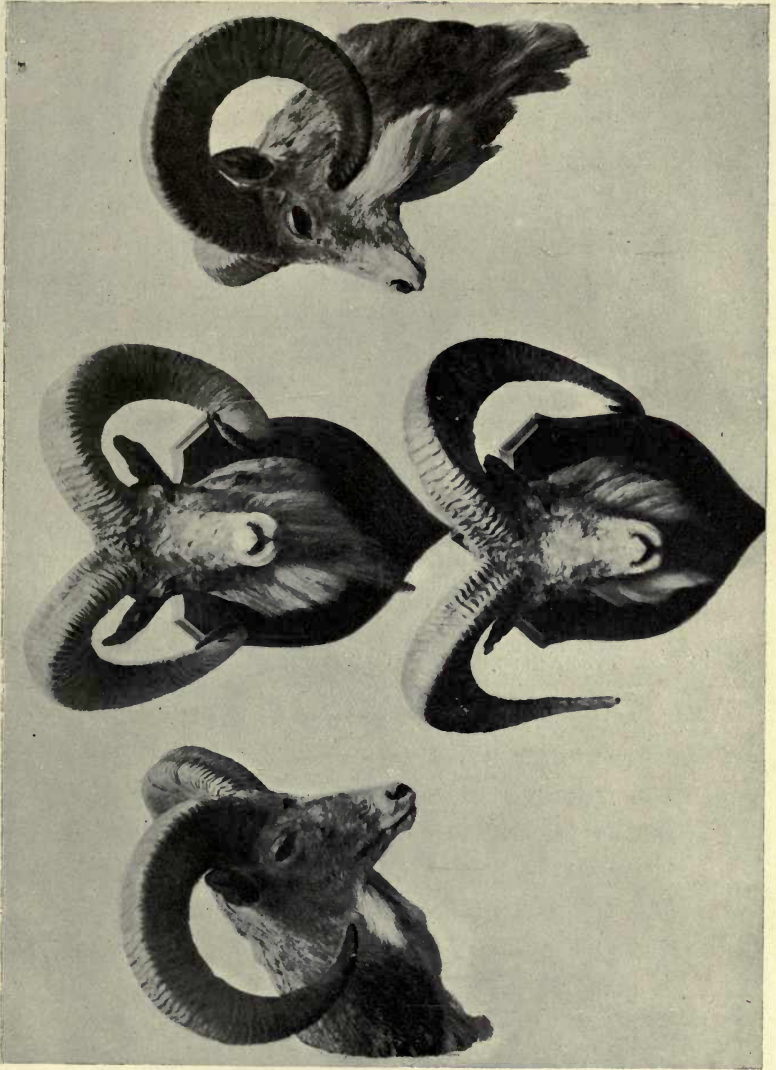
¹ The following amusing passage occurs in Scroope: "I leave it to a deer-stalker's own good sense to consider whether it would not be infinitely better for him to shave his head at once than to run the risk of losing a single shot during the entire season. A man so shorn, with the addition of a little bog earth rubbed scientifically over the crown of his head, would be an absolute Ulysses on the moor, and (*ceteris paribus*) perfectly invincible. Do this or not as you please, gentlemen. I am far from insisting on it with rigour because, to my utter shame and confusion be it spoken, I never did it myself."

bounds, as if disturbed; then the whole herd got on their feet and moved a few yards down towards us; but by whatever cause, their alarm was short-lived, and once more they became a red-brown patch of somnolent sheep on the hill-face. When it grew late, and the ravine was thrown into deep shadow, I determined to go round, feeling sure that by the time the move was accomplished the sheep would have begun grazing, or be moving down to water. We were out of sight of the herd for half an hour before we crept through some juniper bushes, to the top of the little spur I have mentioned, within shot-gun range of where the rams had lain all day. As we did so, a panther glided from in front of us like a shadow. Presumably, he too had been spending an exasperating afternoon. But the sheep had gone.

After some desperate looking about, we discovered them far below us in a deep winding valley, going down to water. We followed, a trifle hurriedly perhaps—it was getting late—and I suppose we must have shown ourselves. Anyhow, as we looked round a turn in the ravine, instead of finding them almost in shot, as we expected, we saw them instead going hard up a distant hill, and evidently meaning going. I never found that splendid herd again.

As a matter of fact, neither of us got the forty-incher that was the summit of our desires, though we each got some fine heads within an inch or so of this length. But that heads even greater than our forty-inch ideal exists, is proved by the fact that D. came on the skull of a ram that was recently dead—the flesh had not entirely disappeared—the horns of which measured no less than $45\frac{1}{2}$ inches, a long way the biggest “urial” that has ever been heard of.

It seems however likely that these sheep are not typical urial, neither are they Gmelin's sheep (*Ovis orientalis*), but belong to a distinct subspecies peculiar to this part of Central Asia. After two visits to this country, I have arrived at the conclusion—curious as it may seem—that on this range two kinds of wild sheep exist almost side by side. There is the true urial, as found all over Eastern Persia, and there is the Bujnurd race under notice. The latter have bigger bodies and bigger and heavier horns, besides a remarkable white ruff unlike the urial's ruff, in which there are always, I think, a good many black hairs. On the hillside their general appearance and heavy gallop reminds one more of Ammon or Poli than of the nimble urial. I am inclined to think also that the two breeds do not inhabit quite the same kind of ground.



The Bujinud sheep.

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The smaller (urial) breed seemed generally to be on typical urial ground—steep, stony ravines—while the bigger (Bujnurd) sheep seemed to affect the more open, down-like country. Take again the mere size of the horns. One generally finds that beasts of the same age in any given locality have on the average about the same-sized horns. Here, if specimens were divided into two classes—big and small horned—there would probably be found an average difference between the two, in beasts of the same age, of six or seven inches, and a corresponding difference in the girth measurement. This view is concurred in by Major J. Watson, a keen sportsman and good naturalist, who has also visited this country on two separate occasions. After all, though one may admit the *primâ facie* improbability of two races of sheep existing on one range, there is nothing impossible in it. Theories have to be squared with facts, not *vice versâ*. The same unlikely state of affairs is found with other kinds of animals sometimes.

Some correspondence that appeared in 'The Field' on the subject of the Bujnurd sheep is given in Appendix V. From this it will be seen that the eminent authority, Mr R. Lydekker, believed this sheep to be a local variety of the

urial which he called *Ovis vigeni arkal*. If further investigations corroborate the view set forth above, that the typical urial also inhabits the same ground, it may be that the Bujnurd sheep will have to be referred to a separate species.

XIV. The Maral Stag.

"Hidden in the alder bushes
 There he waited till the deer came,
 Till he saw two antlers lifted,
 Saw two eyes look from the thicket,
 Saw two nostrils point to windward,
 And a deer came down the pathway,
 Flecked with leafy light and shadows ;
 And his heart within him fluttered,
 Trembled like the leaves above him,
 As the deer came down the pathway."

—LONGFELLOW.—

WE had arrived at the western end of the ground on which we had been hunting sheep, and one morning, from a high point, I looked down on a green, misty ocean of forest. The ground fell away at my feet in tiers of grassy lawns and spinneys to a great depth. On the other side of the valley hills rose steeply, gloomy with almost unbroken woodland; while far away in the purple distance, beyond receding coombs and headlands, the glitter of a stream showed for a space and was again lost. Here and there earth's green garments were rent, revealing naked

scarps of white rock, giving a touch of savageness to a scene that otherwise might have been oppressive. It seemed to me it was some such scene as this that Shelley had in his mind when he wrote those lines—

“ . . . the streams which clove those mountains vast,
Around their inland islets and amid the *panther-peopled forests*.”

This was the stag ground, and from the shooting point of view it looked anything but promising. I spent the day examining the few open spaces that could be seen. Once some dark animals came out, which the glasses showed to be wild pig, a great family of them. No deer showed; but as the evening chill came into the air, from somewhere far away in the sea of green came a low, long-drawn sound, repeated at intervals. It was the first time I heard the roar of the maral stag.

After waiting till it was dark, we made our way down the steep hill to where our camp nestled in deep grass near a spring called Karatikan. Here we abode, and an excellent centre it made, as on the east we had the open sheep ground, while westward there was the forest.

Our hopes of sport were rather damped by the knowledge that in our near proximity was a camp of Turkoman hunters, a fact that caused the

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Royal, shot by Captain Dankes.



The stag country.

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yuz-bashi and our escort apprehensions of things even more serious than blank days. I had seen something of these people the day before. We were on our way to some crags where we hoped to find ibex, when I stopped to spy the slopes of a broad-bosomed green hill. I saw some sheep, but also a man whom my shikaris, in great excitement, declared must be a Turkoman. Indeed, the savages espied by "man Friday" could hardly have had a more perturbing effect. With one accord both of them begged me to stalk and shoot him. "If the Turkoman had seen us first," they urged, "he would have done the same." Finding me obdurate—it was the first time murder had been seriously proposed to me—their last prayer was: "If you will not, at any rate lend us your rifle and we will go and shoot him." But though I should no more condemn a Bujnurd Kurd for stalking and shooting a Turkoman than I would an Indian villager for killing a wolf or man-eating tiger that had levied toll on his relations, I had to make it clear that such shikar could not be countenanced by me, if for no other reason because we purposed travelling through the Turkoman country ourselves.

As we looked we discovered more Turkoman. There were five or six of them moving along on foot in extended line with intervals of a couple

of hundred yards between each, and from the sound of a shot or two that reached us, it seemed that they were engaged in walking the country in line, shooting at whatever they saw,—scarcely a method likely to be successful with wild sheep one would think. My shikaris declared it useless to go on to the ibex ground, which was in view of the place where the “enemy” had their camp, and they were also anxious to go back and warn the *yuz-bashi*; so we made a round in another direction. Later on in the day, after I had shot a wild sheep, we saw one of the Turkoman walking towards us along the bottom of a valley above which we were sitting. Instead of the usual shaggy sheepskin bonnet, he had on his head a red skull-cap, his rifle was slung over his shoulder, and his dog was at his heel.

“God has delivered him into our hands,” whispered a shikari as the unconscious man disappeared for a moment in a turn of the valley. “Shoot the *pidar-sokhta*¹ as he comes round the corner.” When the Turkoman reappeared I hailed him, and he immediately unslung his rifle and took cover behind a rock. Then I told the

¹ *Pidar-sokhta* (lit., son of a burnt father) is a term of much opprobrium in Persia. In this part of Persia one scarcely hears the word “Turkoman” unqualified by this or some still more defamatory epithet.

shikari to explain to him in Turki who I was, what we were doing, and finally that I desired to speak with him. A long shouted harangue followed, in which I suspected the intrusion of a good many uncomplimentary expressions. Something came in reply.

“What does he say?”

“The *pidar-sokhta* says he will have nothing to do with us.”

The man had in the meantime begun to rapidly ascend the hill away from us, only stopping and taking cover to reply to our questions.

“Explain that I am going on to Mahommed Geldis’ *obah* (the tent of the nearest Turkoman chief), and want to send a message to him.”

“He says if we come a step nearer he will shoot.”

“Tell him not to be afraid, we are friends.”

“He says he is not at all afraid, he has a rifle the same as we have.”

This was all we could get out of him. He made no further replies, and soon disappeared from view.

Our Kurds’ fears were as a matter of fact groundless. The Turkoman gave us no bother, and indeed, though no Persian could show his nose inside their country, Europeans, especially

when travelling under Russian auspices, would generally be perfectly safe.

The main ridge of the Karatikan stag ground ran west. On its northern side numerous spurs descended to the Gurgan river, making a series of big corries. On this side woods alternated with open spaces, expanses of grass and flowers, and very notably masses of thorn that offered a much more blank refusal than is connoted in the notorious name "wait-a-bit." On the other, the southern side of the ridge, the forest was almost uninterrupted, a deep gloomy valley into which the sun hardly penetrated. D. and I made two beats of the ground, taking the north and south side alternately, and in the course of the next fortnight obtained some acquaintance with what must be characterised as a vexatious form of sport. I will try to describe some of my meetings with the stags of Karatikan, and the reader will perhaps understand my employment of the adjective.

It is the twilight of dawn on the top of the ridge.

"Night's candles are burnt out and jocund day
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops."

Silently as possible we are brushing through deep grass and blackberry bushes, wringing wet

with dew. Suddenly a big dark beast moves from in front and is gone. The crashing of branches below grows fainter and then stops. He was a stag, but "no good."

We worked along the ridge, and delightful as the walk before sunrise nearly always is among the hills, I can call to mind none pleasanter than those in the beautiful country of the maral. The air keen and laden with woodland scents; at each fresh turn vistas of boscaje; every glade and forest-fringed lawn the ideal feeding-ground of some mighty stag.

Near the end of the ridge we turned south into forest, and went downhill almost as far as the bush-covered plain through which the Gurgan flows. It was now about ten or eleven o'clock, and my Kurd shikari threw himself down in the shade and declared there was nothing more to be done till evening. Mahommed was in truth a lazy beggar, nor did he atone for the defect by any conspicuous merit as a stalker. As the sun grew hot, his morning's keenness seemed to vanish with the dew, and the following is the sort of argument that daily took place about this hour:—

I (looking down on his recumbent figure and restraining a desire to use my boot), "Well, we must be moving. Which way shall we try?"

He (without stirring), "As you like."

"Shall we go west through the forest?"

"What use! the leaves are dry."

"What then?"

"In the evening we will watch the wood where the stag roared this morning. If God wills, we shall kill a stag; if He does not, we shall not kill one."

"The evening! That is six hours away. Think of some plan till then."

"What can I think of? Do as you like."

"My friend, you are a shikari and know the ground. It is for you to show me deer, for me to shoot them."

"What can I do? The ground is dry as tinder. If there were rain the stags would roar by day. Now, what is possible?"

"Do you propose, then, to sleep till evening?"

"What else can we do?"

"We might try hunting in the forest; with luck we may see a stag. If we sit here we certainly shall not."

"Why not? If God wills He will give shikar."

"True. But we also must make an effort."

"You are free, do as you like."

My Baluch henchman Ibrahim, a youth as keen and untiring as the other was lazy and insouciant, would then join in with forceful and sarcastic

remarks, and so we would get our way, the middle of the day being spent in that exasperating form of shikar known as "still-hunting." This first day, however, Mahommed had his way. No, I will confess I did not love my hunter Mahommed, and I may say this much, that he was the first of his trade that I have met whose good points did not much more than counterbalance the bad.

In five minutes Mahommed was in the land of Nod, whither Ibrahim reluctantly followed him. What a wonderful faculty is this of sleeping dog-like at any moment! Possessed by very few Europeans—the great Duke formed a notable exception—it is the common property of most oriental peoples, and in the wear and tear of life it must be a valuable asset.

As they lay, I was listlessly watching the opposite side of dingle we were in, an almost unbroken bank of tree-tops, when in the opening in the foliage I saw a slight movement. The animal was gone before I could turn my glasses that way, but I awoke the sleepers, and half an hour later, in another place, a hind showed, then another. There should be a stag with them at this season; but if there was, he did not betray himself then. After watching for some time, we walked cautiously through for a long time without seeing anything—track-

ing was impossible on the dry leaves. Then as we were climbing a steep bit, there was a rush of some heavy animal. A dark mass stood for a moment behind some hazel bushes; I could just see there were antlers, and throwing up my rifle, fired. The stricken beast went staggering down to the bottom of the ravine, where he collapsed in a pool. He was but a poor six-pointer, and I regretted having shot him.

Two days later I got another shot. We were walking along the main ridge in the early morning. It was the hour when the sun's heralds have appeared in the east, and earth, as if to meet them, has shaken off her dull robes of night and revealed herself in many-hued garments. Turning a corner, I spotted below us some dark forms. Two hinds were crossing a narrow opening in the forest. A beast followed that looked like a big stag. There was no time to lose in examination, and I sat down and fired, knocking him over. I was pleased with the shot, but disappointed with the beast, which turned out to be another small one—not, in fact, worth the shot at all.

My next chance came two days later. We had gone to look for a stag that we had heard roaring late in the previous evening. But when we got to our spying-place the woods were

silent. As a matter of fact, we had arrived rather late on the stag ground for the best of the roaring. The shikaris were a little vague on the subject themselves, but the consensus of opinion seemed to be that roaring begins about the 1st of September and lasts for no less than forty days. We found by practical experience, however, that it was all over before the 5th of October. Indeed stags had stopped roaring in the daytime long before that. Often, after our arrival on the ground on the 21st September, as we sat at dinner in the evening we heard challenges resounding from several quarters at the same time, and sometimes were awoke at night by hearing them close to the camp; but in the morning, by the time it was light enough to use glasses it had come to an end: or if by chance one did hear a stag roaring as late as ten o'clock, it was only an occasional and fitful challenge, and—according to the perverse nature of things—always seemed to be in some distant glen beyond the river that it would have taken half the day to reach. No doubt much depends on the wind. Till nearly the end of our stay in the forest the wind was from the east, and that is the least favourable quarter. A west wind was the one the shikaris prayed for, bringing rain from the Caspian, making tracking

and silent walking possible, and—according to them—causing the stags to roar more.

I felt very hopeful that morning, for, going to my spying-point, had we not found on some soft ground the fresh slot of a big stag near where we had heard the deep-toned roars the previous evening; but as Uncle Remus said, "Tribbalashun seems like she's awaitin' roun' de cornder fer ter ketch one en all un us!"

We were sitting above a face of steep rocky ground on the look-out; to our right a long spur ran down to the plain, bare ground on the one side; on the other—the further one—a deep wood. As we were looking, a stag came out some four hundred yards below us, and I saw at once he was the beast I had come to shoot: certainly fourteen points, it might be more, and a fine spread. He came slowly up the ridge towards where we were sitting, moving along the edge of the forest. A small staggie had crossed the open ground just below us a few minutes before, and had gone out of sight into a valley to our left, and the big fellow kept stopping and looking that way as if to follow, in which case, without moving a yard, I should get an easy shot. On he came. Now he was within two hundred yards. Some twenty yards nearer he turned and stood, presenting a splendid broadside. I was covering

him, and was just about to pull when Mahommed crawled to my side. "Don't shoot! don't shoot! for God's sake don't shoot!" he whispered. "He will come right up, and then you will *assuredly* put him to sleep." I ought to have closed my ears, trusted my own judgment, and taken the shot, for it was a fair chance and I was steady. But a shikari that comes gibbering in one's ear at the very moment one is pressing the trigger with what self-command one can muster! Is he any less condemnable than a golf caddie—if such a thing were possible—that chatters advice as one is putting all one's mental concentration into a drive? Feeble comparison! You have eighteen tee shots each round you play, but this was the chance of a lifetime! In short, I forgot the golden maxim, *carpe diem*, and threw away a fair chance in hopes of a better. The stag came slowly on, then suddenly turned half-left, and as the shikari realised his error and whispered "shoot"—and I mine—he had disappeared amongst the trees. I waited long for him to reappear, and then for hours after crept silently through the forest, but I never saw him again, and what is more, never afterwards saw his equal.

There is always a tendency to expect, or at any rate to hope, that history will repeat itself.

Often afterwards I repaired to that spot, and waiting there at break of day turned my glasses on half a dozen different likely points: the grassy ridge on the far side of a distant jungle-filled ravine; the open shoulder deep in blue daisies, across which the clump of tall beeches threw a shadow; the tangle of thorn and willows where the river pursued a tortuous course far below; the still pool in the wood that glinted through the tree-tops; but most often my glasses would return to that point on the bare ridge below me, and the particular tree that bordered it, under which the big stag first showed himself. Perhaps in the dim future I may see him, and if so I shall know what *not* to do.

XV. The Maral Stag (*continued*).

“ But Johnie’s busk’t up his gude bend bow,
 His arrows ane by ane,
 And he has gone to Durrisdeer
 To hunt the dun deer down.

As he came down to merrie mass,
 And in by his benty line,
 There he espied a deer lying
 Aneath a bush of ling.”

—*Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border.*

I GOT two other stags on the Karatikan ground. The first was a ten-pointer, spotted far below us, wandering restlessly about in the bush near the river. He disappeared in the cover, but on going down to look for him, he jumped up like a hare from her form. I hit him as he was going off, and got him after a little trouble.

The other was an evening stalk. We were spying a big expanse of ground below us about sunset, when I turned my glasses on a steep hill under the low sun. There was a cliff of red clay at the bottom of which began the thorn jungle, and on this, in the heavy blue shadow, I could

just discern three animals, one of which I knew was a stag, as I was able to see his white points, but in the glare could not count them. It was not far from where I had seen the fourteen-pointer, and I had hopes it was he. In Scotland it is often impossible to distinguish anything against a low sun, and a beast on the hillside is as invisible as on a dark night; but in the East, owing to the air being drier, the veil of haze is less hopelessly opaque. Mahommed could not pick up the deer at all, so after pointing out the exact spot, I told him to lead on and take me there as quickly as possible. He demurred, "the day was gone—the animals were far—we should never get through the thorn scrub in time," concluding with the notorious Persian phrase, *farda inshallah* (to-morrow, please God). My wrath burst forth and he started at a run, but after getting half-way he jibbed at the thorn and said he could get no farther. Ibrahim and I then left him, and by some lucky fluke found a way through, Mahommed sheepishly following at a distance. Then came some precipitous ground, and we got hung up. Peering over a thorn-bush, I could just see the deer some way below me. It was impossible to get nearer, and I had to take a long shot there and then or not at all. Sitting down, I found my view

was intercepted, so I took the shot standing, steadying my rifle on my stick, and had the satisfaction of seeing him go tumbling down the hill. He was stone dead; but when the head was brought in next day I was disappointed to find he was no better than a good ten-pointer, with one of his brow antlers broken off. The stalk and the shot, however, gave me a deal of satisfaction, as a fair stalk is a rarity in this country.

The "still hunting" to which one is condemned during the inside of the day, though not without charm, is often tedious. Tracking, at this time of year at any rate, is impossible, and even after the heavy rain we had towards the end of our trip, results were the same. The rain certainly seemed to give a fresh impetus to the roaring, but it seemed as if the deer, moving quietly along, left no perceptible spoor—perceptible, that is, to the ordinary human being. I could not help thinking, however, that a certain Bhil of my acquaintance could have shown these people a thing or two. There was thus nothing for it but to walk quietly along and trust to luck. Each step had to be taken with the greatest care, eyes in two places at the same time—ahead, to look out, on the ground, to avoid cracking twigs. The slopes, many of

them at least, carpeted with dead leaves, had a slipperiness that nothing else has. On them I found my beloved Persian *givas* worse than useless; nailed shooting-boots, at any rate those with worn nails, little better; so that both D. and I found it in places absolutely necessary to discard all footgear, chance the thorns, and do our walking in our stockinged feet. It was certainly arduous toil, and after some hours it became a struggle between the human tendency to relax care and attention in ever so slight a degree, and the conviction that the moment I did so would be that selected by fate to send a stag across my path.

The maral, like others of the family, at this season has a sweet musk-like scent. To me personally it was not noticeable unless the animal was quite close, but both Ibrahim and the shikari had a pointer-like capacity for detecting a taint in the air. Up would go their noses, they would whisper "*Gao*," and step by step we would draw up wind. I never actually found a stag in this curious way, but there was no humbug about it. D. discovered that he was endowed with a nose even keener than his shikaris, and could make a point as well as any of them!

There were other denizens of these forests besides maral. We would sometimes catch a

glimpse of little red animals disappearing from in front of us. They were roe, and like woodcock they seemed to be particularly clever at getting a trunk between themselves and the gun. At any rate, neither of us got a shot at one. Wild pig were daily seen in extraordinary numbers rooting about among the dead leaves. Usually they were in sounders of a dozen or more squeakers, with a few big ones. They often let us approach within twenty yards; then up would go a head, the little eyes would stare a moment, then a grunted alarm, and all would vanish like a herd of black devils.

We also became aware of another small animal that infests these forests. Our shikaris had a habit, that at first seemed monstrous unpleasant, of snatching every spare moment to hunt for vermin on their persons. But it was soon clear that this superior attitude of ours was not unlike that of the historic sailor who was heard to exclaim, "Look at that dirty beast brushing his teeth!" I suspect that the wild pigs were the original hosts of the minute black ticks that swarmed in the dry leaves, but their tastes were evidently catholic, and they were certainly hungry. After the attachment had lasted a short time, one became aware of a small painful tumulus with the tick occupying

a firm seat in the centre. The relation of my first experience of this kind before the camp-fire one night caused my companion unfeeling merriment. Suddenly his face fell. "Did you say like a small boil? Now I come to think, tubbing this evening—here, would you mind having a look at my back? Two or three of them, do you say? Oh, —! —! Gone, are they? Thanks awfully." I luckily had a good supply of "Keating" with me, for the makers of which I suggest a motto—"*A vinculo et thoro.*"

The best head of the trip was a very fine fourteen-pointer shot by D., of which I will tell the story. About ten one morning I had arrived at the end of my beat without seeing anything. The Karatikan ridge here divides into two forest-crowned spurs, enclosing a large corrie deep in grass, and sprinkled with blackberry and other bushes. We crossed the corrie, and there my hunter sat down to eat. High up above us was a rock, on which the black figure of D.'s shikari suddenly stood out, making signs and pointing to somewhere about the middle of the corrie. Nothing, however, was to be seen. The figures then disappeared, and we, after waiting a bit, moved up the corrie looking carefully about, and so worked back. Reaching camp late in the

evening after a long round, tired and dispirited with a succession of blank days, I found D. bathed, shaved, and sitting down to dinner; while, in the light of the fire, propped up in front of him, reposed a magnificent head, horns heavy, rough, and well pearly, with fourteen white points. "You've had bad luck, Major," he said; "that beast ought to have been yours." D.'s morning had been spent thus. When he and his shikari arrived at the ridge on which I had seen them, they spied in the corrie a very big stag with some hinds. Almost immediately they saw us, and supposed that I was stalking the deer. The latter were, as a matter of fact, hidden from us in a hollow, though we passed close by them. When they saw that we were ignorant of the deers' presence, signals were made; and D., very nobly and generously, sent his shikari round to show me where they were, he himself going back to spy some rocks for ibex. The shikari took some time to get down through the forest, and, of course, found us gone. Then D. returned, saw his shikari below, and the deer quite undisturbed. He then followed down, made the stalk with his shikari, and got a running shot. The stag, badly hit, went down to the Gurgan river and eventually dropped dead, and so they got him. But their adventures were not ended. Whilst D. went to

get a drink of water, some Turkoman came up, and when D. returned he found his shikari shivering in their midst. The Turkoman, however, placated by the meat, showed themselves friendly, and allowed D. and his man to depart in peace with the skull and skin. The latter was the shikari's perquisite, and he must have felt himself in luck's way that night, as he had certainly not expected to escape with his own skin, let alone the stag's.

D. had by now shot three very good stags, while the only really good beast I had seen had escaped me as already related; so as D. wanted more sheep and also a gazelle or two from the plain below Karatikan, we temporarily separated, and I went on to some forest the other side of the Gurgan gorge. Here I was glad to pick up two shikaris from Husseinabad—I met them while still hunting in the forest, and they nearly shot me in mistake for Turkoman! These men were better hunters than the Kurds from Zard. One of them, a little wizened old chap in a tattered blue robe and a skull-cap made from the spotted hide of a roebuck that looked like nature's own covering, was a proficient on the instrument known as a *gaokal*, a bit of ibex horn used to call stags with. A maral's roar, by the way, is really much more like the bellow of a domestic ox than

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the noise made by either the Scotch or the Kashmir stag, and this no doubt is the reason the Persians' name for the beast is *gao-kuhi*, or "hill-ox." These shikaris had a profound belief in the efficacy of their instrument, and the mimicry, if not perfect, was certainly clever. After having established *rapport* with a distant stag, they engage him in what they call "question and answer," and by the opportune use of all the expressive noises used in stag language, from the low mooing made when the lord is herding his harem to the fiercely-roared challenge, they claimed to be able to almost compel his approach. Let us hope they exaggerated! They were never successful when with me, but this they attributed to the lateness of the season.

Once, I think, they very nearly did the trick. There had been some heavy rain, and during the night, from my tent perched up on a high ridge, I had heard a lot of roaring in the forest below. This had all ceased by the time it was light, and as we walked along the spur and looked down through the trees, about which the mists hung and drifted like ghosts, no sound could be heard but the drip of water on sodden leaves. About ten o'clock, however, a grand roar came from below. The shikari responded. Then another challenge came, nearer this time. But after that,

though the shikari ran the whole gamut of seductive and defiant noises and the stag kept answering, he would come no closer. Then I crept down into the forest to try and locate him. He gave one splendid roar when I was about 200 yards from him. Another stag then roared from far down the valley on the other side, and the next roar from our stag was miles away. We went down after him but never saw him.

The maral is a big long-faced deer with very marked woodland habits as will have been gathered. Except in the spring and autumn, they seem very rarely to emerge from their sylvan retreats. In the spring, when they come out on open spaces for the young grass and flowers, they are in wretched condition, and the wild sheep being plentiful, hunting-parties generally leave them alone, so in this part at any rate it is only in the autumn that they are systematically harried.

The senses of the maral are as acute as those of other races of deer. Mahommed certainly made out that so long as you guarded your scent carefully, it did not so much matter about concealment; but I rather think that this theory suggested itself to him for the first time when it was a question of approaching a stag either over rather open ground or through some very

ugly thorns—for Mahommed was as bad as a faint-hearted spaniel when it came to thorns—and he did not like to go back on his pronouncement afterwards.

Antlers from this part of Persia vary a good deal in weight, shape, and colour. The spotted skull-cap man told me he had seen a head with thirty points, but “long ago.” It is certain that no such skulls are to be got now. I personally have never seen anything better than a skull with seventeen points—evidently a picked-up specimen—that was in the customs house at Astrabad.¹ With these deer, the bay tine seems invariably to be present, but the amount of palmation and the arrangement of the tops seems to vary a good deal. The old man talked of a cup he had seen that was developed enough to hold water, but I should say that the majority of tops are branched rather than cupped. None of my native acquaintances in these parts had ever so much as heard of a hummel.

As to colour, dark antlers are the most common,

¹ I have seen some skulls of a rather different type, with thinner antlers, that were reported to come from the long, queer-shaped spit of land that runs into the Caspian by Ashuradeh. Some time ago they used to have tremendous deer-drives on this peninsula, which rather lends itself to that form of slaughter. I have been told that deer are still to be found there, though the density of the bush would make shooting difficult.

and in this connection it is interesting to notice that in these forests there are (I believe) no firs or spruces, nearly all the trees being of deciduous kinds such as oak, beech, sycamore, chestnut, hazel, &c. Light-coloured, smooth horns were, I was told, those that had not been shed in the spring. According to the same authority, a stag's head never improved after he was six years old. But the old head under the spotted cap was full of strange ideas. He gravely informed me that old stags—like so many other animals in Asia that one would least suspect of carnivorous habits—were snake-eaters. His yarn—I fear it must be called a “fish story”—was that they catch the serpents by the tail, dash them about on their antlers till dead, and then swallow them. Hence it comes, he explained, that the exudation from the lachrymal glands is an antidote to snake poison. It is at any rate administered to newly born infants with this object in “a wine-glass full of water.” Another concoction: when the antlers are soft they are boiled down into a jelly and are much appreciated. But these people do not, like the Chinese, use them as a basis for “love philtres.” For this purpose they use a different part of the stag's anatomy.

The shooting of my best stag was unaccompanied by any very notable circumstances, yet

since it was my best, the story shall conclude this sketch.

Through the hot hours of the day we have been still hunting, creeping silently—or as silently as we can—through the forest. In some places, where the tall boles of beech trees rise to form high above us a gothic tracery of green leaves and interlacing branches, we are in cool twilight as of a cathedral. Elsewhere we are in the deeper but more airless shade of oaks, looking homelike with their mistletoe-decked boughs. It is a primeval forest in all the stages, from companies of sturdy young saplings to hoary moss-bearded veterans. Some are leaning against one another for support, some lie rotting on the ground. Everywhere new life and decay. We pass through open sunlit spaces, warm and odorous with flowers and aromatic herbs. From these we get views, through tree-tops and across deep intervening valleys, of distant hills and glens, and even beyond, where one can imagine rather than see the dry sandy deserts of Trans-Caspia. Sometimes a precipitous ravine, making a gash through the forest, bars our progress till a way across has been found; a rocky coomb with clinging moss and ferns, and water trickling from every crevice. Then once more we are in the gloom of the forest. The woods at this season are intensely still. No

bird voices are heard, so that the tap tap of a woodpecker sounds startlingly clear and loud. You can almost imagine you hear the fritillaries fluttering among the branches overhead. In the moist bottom of a valley we find the fresh spoor of a heavy stag, and later come upon the mud-hole where he wallowed last night. But many times before we have come on such signs without finding the beast that made them. It seems from the feeling in the air to be getting on in the afternoon when we arrive at a dell overgrown with greenery—a spot enchanted.

“Deep in the shady sadness of a veil,
Far from the healthy breath of morn,
Far from the fiery noon and eve’s one star.”

But it is not the form of the old god Saturn that, half concealed in a thicket, rises slowly to his feet. Only an old grey stag. His sharp ears have caught the whisper of the dry leaves; perhaps he thinks it is some rival stag. Boldly he trots out into the open and wheels about facing us, his antlers thrown back—and dies.

He was a very old stag whose head had gone back, but still a royal.



The joint bag.



Kurd shikaris.

XVI. A Hyrcan Tiger.

“Tiger, tiger, burning bright
 In the forests of the night,
 What immortal hand or eye
 Could frame thy awful symmetry?”

ONE day, with thoughts intent on deer, we were climbing a forest-covered hill, when we came on a big sounder of pig. There was nothing unusual in this, for the whole country was full of them. The Eastern Elburz, in this respect, would be a hunting Paradise for the Continental sportsman, with whom this animal—as one writer puts it, “essentiellement harneux et doué d’un détestable caractère”—ranks high among the beasts to be pursued with a rifle. To the Britisher, reared in the belief that the fittest death for the mighty boar is by the *arme blanche*, pig-shooting appeals but little, but it is quite possible that in this superior attitude he is wrong. A Belgian official at Astrabad—evidently a good sportsman—gave me a graphic description of his hunting in the

Mazanderan forests. The boar would charge furiously; he would wait till it was quite close, and then—"un, deux," he would step aside and place his bullet behind the beast's shoulder—"une lutte vraiment impressionante." Perhaps there was a little picturesque exaggeration about his account, but this prerogative is not confined to any one nationality or form of sport.

Some of these boars are of enormous size—bigger than any I have seen in India. I was within an ace of shooting one such, in mistake for a bear.¹ He was rooting about in bushes, and I could only see his red hairy body and a pair of furry ears that I could have sworn could only be a bear's. I was just pulling on him when he gave a whisk of his tail, thus—if the Hibernicism may be allowed—displaying the cloven hoof and saving his bacon. This was the biggest boar I have ever seen; solitary and with a coat of red bristles that looked like thick fur. Seeing his huge size, I half put up my rifle again, but lowered it. Not a soul in camp would eat or even touch it, and I had no desire to spend half the day in taking off the skull myself. He would, however, have looked very fine stuffed in the South Kensington Museum. Our people in camp were of course all Mahomme-

¹ Bears exist in these forests, but I never did more than see their tracks, and traces of their depredations on wild walnut trees.

dans, to whom the flesh of swine is forbidden.¹ Vambéry relates how, when travelling in these parts disguised as a Mahomedan, he was attacked near here by a savage sow. The Turkoman then told him that his escape was a special matter for congratulation, as "death by the wound of a wild boar would send even the most pious Mussalman unclean into the next world, where even a hundred years burning would not purge him"!

All this, however, has nothing to do with the sounder of pig encountered that afternoon. The remarkable point about these was that, instead of bolting away from us, they were rushing in our direction; so it did not require a Sherlock Holmes of the jungle to deduce from their behaviour that some animal at least as formidable as myself was about. When, at the same time, there came a noise, indescribable, not a growl, still less a roar, a vibration of the air such as might proceed from a large member of the cat tribe, suspicion became certainty. I gathered that we had disturbed a panther at an interesting moment. We poked about in the bushes

¹ Persian Shias, however, especially those of the upper classes, have a touching belief in the mercy of Allah, and it is currently rumoured that in the capital itself the forbidden thing is consumed, and thoroughly appreciated, under the name of "*ghost-i-bulbul*"—nightingale's meat!

whence I thought that vibrant-toned protest had come, but saw nothing. We had not gone very far on, perhaps a quarter of a mile, when an appalling odour struck us in the face, the cause of which was discovered to be a big boar that lay dead in the middle of a thicket. He had been killed and half eaten, perhaps thirty-six hours ago, and the slayer was a tiger.

Now, though I knew that tigers existed in the forests of Mazanderan, the old Hyrcania — the tigers that long ago were brought to the Roman *bestiarii*, and even in Shakespear's¹ time seem to have been better known than their relatives of Bengal (since become so famous) — I knew also they were very scarce, so that their serious quest had never found a place in our programme. As Mahommed would have said, "If God willed we should get a tiger, otherwise we should not." There was, moreover, no plan, even granted the proved presence of a tiger in our neighbourhood, by which he could be brought to bag. We might "tie up," but there was the initial difficulty of finding a beast to fill the roll of bait. Our Kurd escort's horses would have been valued at their weight in silver for such a purpose. There were, of course, the Government horses of our own Indian

¹ "Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,
The armed rhinoceros, or the Hyrcan tiger."

escort, but supposing one of the poor beasts did happen to get killed! A bald entry "eaten by tiger" would certainly be considered "unusual" by those whose business it is to scrutinise consular horse returns and suchlike formal reports, and might have led to awkward inquiries! It is tolerably certain, however, that tying up would have been useless. The forests swarmed with pig, tigers' favourite food, deer were not un plentiful, and it was 1000 to 1 against a tiger coming to any tied-up beast. I therefore put a meeting with the pig-slaying tiger out of my head as altogether outside the circle of probabilities.

That evening, at the usual spying time, we were sitting above an open expanse in the middle of the forest. The sun had set, but the western sky still glowed rose and saffron, and over forest, hill, and dale hung a solemn silence. The day was dying in peaceful beauty; in a few moments the light would be gone, and

"evening's dusky car,
Crowned with her dewy star,
Steal o'er the sky in shadowy flight."

It was one of those scenes that remain indelibly fixed in the memory, and in my appreciation of it I felt as much alone as if my companions had been two dogs.

Q

It is remarkable how oblivious are all hunters of the East, honest souls though they may be, to natural beauties. In these rough-hewn chunks the æsthetic sense seems almost wanting, at any rate so far as nature's loveliness is concerned. I can hardly remember a shikari bestowing a second glance on a sublime Alpine view, a bank aglow with flowery stars, or a more than usually glorious sunset—

“A primrose by a river's brim
A yellow primrose was to him,
And it was nothing more.”

It may be that in this particular faculty their evolution has not proceeded far enough. The enjoyment occasioned in us by lovely scenery must, I imagine, have existed in the brains of our ancestors as a feeling of pleasure in seeing before them a likely-looking hunting-ground. The elementary instinct of the past, having lost its primary use, becomes the æsthetic sensation of the present. Rahmat and his tribe, however, are still hunting animals, and to them the forest glade, the silent pool, the purple upland, appeal as such, and “nothing more.”

Well, no deer had shown themselves, and I was watching the passing day and debating whether it would not be the wiser course to make

the most of the failing light by starting on my long walk to camp, when Ibrahim from near me whispered in great excitement that he had seen a big animal—perhaps a panther—come out of the forest to our left. I noticed his mouth seemed quite dry. The ground that fell away immediately in front of me was concealed by thorn bushes. I crept through these to get a view. Some sixty yards below me a long dark form was stalking slowly through the yellow grass. The tiger!

I took the shot standing, and with a stifled grunt he fell over. I gave him a *coup-de-grâce*, but he did not want it, and we went up to view the prize. He was a big heavy male in perfect condition. Ibrahim had never seen a tiger before, and his delight was unbounded—mine hardly less. He took the great head in his lap, stroked him all over, examined the huge forearm and pads, all to a muttered accompaniment of “*ai babar! ai babar!*” (oh tiger! oh tiger!) “Sahib,” he said, “our *qismat* (luck) has been so bad with the deer, my liver has been on fire; I tell you the truth, I have not been able to swallow my bread. Say, is not this tiger better than a twelve-pointer? better than a fourteen-pointer? better than all the stags in the world? Never shall I forget this day. If I could but have a photo of

the tiger and myself to take with me to Seistan, it would be a *yad-dasht* (memento) I would treasure to the end of my life."

We had a truly awful job in taking off the pelt and head in the dark and "toting" it to camp, but it was a proud moment for Ibrahim when, before an admiring audience, he unfolded the skin and exhibited the head, with eyes yet unglazed, in the light of the camp fire. Next day I took the photo he wanted, which never came out. As for Ibrahim, he never saw his beloved Seistan again nor the girl he had just married, for he died at Birjand on his way back. I heard of his death a month after reaching England, and it was a heavy blow indeed. Poor Ibrahim, for whom no day was too long, no chance too hopeless, as long as there was prospect of a shot, even when hope had departed.

It was late when the tiger was shot, and I had no ready means of taking his measurement as it ought to be taken. He was, however, certainly as big as a good Indian tiger; the skin when pegged out measured eleven feet six. Rowland Ward told me that the only differences he could see between it and the Indian type were the somewhat thicker coat of the Persian specimen, and the fact that the skull was a little broader. The coat is of course nothing like that of a winter

Siberian tiger, but perhaps a little longer than an Indian "Christmas" tiger.¹

Under the skin on the tiger's shoulder I found a lump which turned out to be a round leaden bullet enveloped in tissue. It was fired no doubt by some Turkoman shikari, and I should like to have heard the history of the shot! Was the sequel, I wonder, "a smile on the face of the tiger"? I should not have cared to fire that bullet at a tiger myself!

The hunter who was proficient on the *gaokal* told me that man-eating tigers, meaning tigers that regularly preyed on man in preference to game, were unknown in Mazanderan, and in the course of his life he had only known two men killed by tigers, both of them by beasts they had wounded. The hunters that do visit this no-man's-land, if they see a tiger, generally "pass by on the other side." The inferiority of their weapons is good and sufficient reason why they should do so, but I need hardly say that the usual Persian story is rather more sensational. Before visiting Mazanderan, I was given a spirited description how the people of this province were in the habit of following up tigers on foot and

¹ The diminutive specimen labelled *Felis tigris virgata* in the Natural History Museum does not, I think, adequately represent the Persian species.

killing them with their hatchets. The old name of this district was Tabaristan, "the country of hatchets," and I fear that, slender though the foundation may seem, this fact—together with the vivid Persian imagination—was the true origin of the story.¹

Considering the abundance of game and the fewness of the tigers' foes, it is quite a problem why the latter are not more numerous in these parts. A similar question arises, I believe, with regard to lions in some parts of Africa. The answer perhaps lies in the existence of a natural law, the tendency of which is in the inverse direction to that known as the "struggle for existence," in which the main factors are food and foes. It may be that if a periodic census of the carnivora were taken it would be discovered that "good times" diminish fecundity.

Although, as I have said, one might wander in these forests for an indefinite time without seeing a single tiger, I had the fortune to come across another; and as few records, if any, exist of meetings with the tiger of Persia, I tell the tale.

¹ Thomas Herbert, writing in 1638, quotes another still queerer story about the inhabitants of Hyrcania:—

"Hyrcanæque admorunt ubera Tygres."
 ("Them with their duggs the Hyrcan Tygers fed!")

It was after I had moved my camp to the south side of the Gurgan river, and again the time was evening. We had gained the summit of a ridge. Below and in front was a deep coomb thickly wooded; to our left an undulating plateau deep in yellow grass, the highest shoulder of which, overlooking the Dasht plain far below, was sprinkled with white stones. It was a graveyard—the only lasting relic of some ancient Parthian city, the buildings of which are long since mingled with the dust, while the place of the human inhabitants has been taken by another and not more savage fauna. A grass-covered arm from this plateau straggled into the forest on the opposite side of the valley half a mile or so distant. On this the beams of the sun still lingered, and there Ibrahim and I simultaneously spotted a tiger. He was sitting up like a huge cat—I will not swear he was not washing his face! Then he rolled over on his side in the long grass, enjoying the warmth of the sun—precisely the action of a cat on a hearthrug.

Having pointed out the spot to the shikari, I told him to take me the shortest road possible through the forest to a little bare knoll forty yards or so above the tiger. There is a story of an Eastern king who sent for a certain man

that was accused of a crime. In his place a relative appeared, who gave forty-nine reasons why the accused could not come. The fiftieth reason offered was that the man was dead! The shikari gave me a few reasons, and I am sure had in reserve many more, why it was impossible for him to take me up to that tiger: the fiftieth was that he had no intention of going near him. Ibrahim and I, if left to our unaided selves, would have taken at least half an hour to get through the mass of thorn and jungle that lay in front; so without mincing matters, I intimated to the reluctant one that if I got the tiger a reward of twenty tomans would be his, while if he refused to try, I would regretfully have to resort to the *argumentum ad baculinum*. He read inexorable resolve in my eye, and preferred to chance the tiger. So after crawling cautiously back over the ridge, he began bounding along in front of me like a roebuck, and at such a pace that I could scarcely keep up with him.

Pushing through the forest growth on the far side, we came face to face with a stag that went crashing down the side of the valley as if demons were after him, as no doubt he thought they were. In a very short time, breathless but "there," I crept out of the forest and gained the knoll—but no tiger was to be seen.

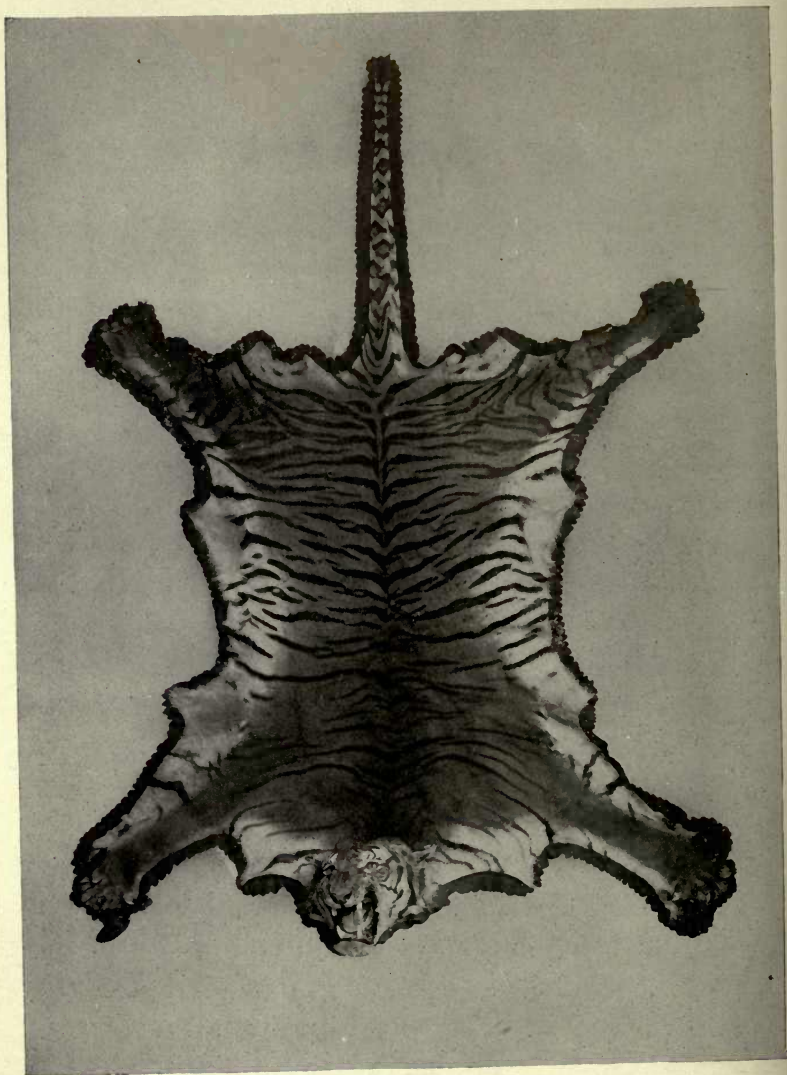
Then I caught sight of a red head and shoulders in the long grass close to the jungle and about eighty yards below me. There was no time to waste, so I sat down and took the shot, rather a hurried one, at what I could see of the tiger, and seemingly missed. At any rate, without speaking, he took a great bound, and stood looking about broadside on,—a fine sight and a rare chance! I fired again, and he went down like a shot rabbit. I never saw a beast fall apparently deader. All over but the shouting! Such was my idea, and also that of my companions. Ibrahim patted my back. The erstwhile reluctant one was, I think, about to fall on my neck. Then I thought, "A tiger—I'd better make sure of him." I was sitting down to put the thought into action and give him another shot, when the brute uttered a guttural exclamation, and before I could put up my rifle, found his legs and had disappeared in the jungle, tail in the air!

I went to the spot, saw the pool of blood where he had lain, the blood-stained bushes through which he had burst, and did the only thing possible under the circumstances, left him till to-morrow. The shikari said if ever he had seen a dead beast it was that tiger: he was willing to wager his twenty tomons we should

find him dead on the morrow within twenty yards of where he had vanished. Ibrahim said the same thing. For my part, I liked not the last glimpse I got of his cocked tail. My rifle, I may explain, was the same one with which I had shot the first tiger, a '280 Ross,—not, of course, a weapon one would select for tiger-shooting, but still no toy.

Next morning we followed him, I with a double magnum smooth-bore loaded with ball, while Ibrahim had my Ross rifle and the shikari his own gun. There was plenty of blood at first. He had gone straight downhill, through the most awful thick stuff it has ever been my lot to track an animal in. At some places we had literally to worm ourselves along the ground, and I admit, without any sense of shame, that my attitude of mind at times was not at all dissimilar to that of the sportsman in Punch's picture, under which ran the legend—"When you go out hunting lions, make quite sure that you really want to find one!"

To cut a long story short, the blood got less and less, though sometimes I was cheered by the sight of a lump of fat on a twig; then it became difficult to track him at all. Blood-drops got fewer and fewer, each one took longer to find, and finally they stopped altogether. With no



The Hyrcan tiger.

blood spoor, it was like looking for a needle in a haystack. We got far down to the water, explored up and down the stream, all to no good; in fact, lost him. And yet I still believe that tiger was dead within a mile of us. He was a very fine beast, bigger I think than the first one. So dog-tired, very disgusted, clothing torn, wet with sweat from the most arduous of combinations, steep slopes and dense undergrowth, we crawled back to camp just as it began to rain in torrents, and put a stopper for ever on any idea of renewing the search on the morrow.

XVII. On the Road to the Caspian.

“Turkoman countless as their flocks led forth
From th' aromatic pastures of the north.”

—MOORE.

AFTER the last day I had allowed myself on the stag ground, I rejoined D. at a romantic spot called Ishaki, in the Gurgan gorge. The clear stream here dashes over a boulder-strewn bed. On the north side sheer limestone cliffs rose in solid tiers one above the other to a great height, while facing them were dark, wooded hills of gracious outline, the topmost tinted with autumnal shades of gold that lower down melted into the deep greens of late summer. I think the march down this valley into the country of the Yamut Turkoman equalled anything I had seen in quiet loveliness even in Kashmir. I asked Ibrahim one day in that glorious country of forest and mountain how it compared with the dusty wind-swept plains of Seistan. “Sahib,” he replied, “for us people

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Reed-beds in Gurgan valley.



Turkoman obahs.

Seistan is best." He was quite right. As well expect the lizard of the salt desert to appreciate being plumped down in soft green grass by the side of still waters !

Sometimes we were riding under umbrageous trees—sycamores, planes, and beeches—through what might have been a wild bit in an English park, sometimes splashing through becks dappled with sun and shadow, or quiet streams in which the fringing willows trailed their branches. The cooing of turtle-doves, the flap of a startled wood-pigeon, the occasional crow of a cock-pheasant, made it hard to realise we were yet in the East. In the open stretches of country, up to our horses' knees in grass and wild-flowers, the incense from which hung in the warm air, there was the hum of bees, the unceasing dance of wondrous butterflies. Blackberries grew in extraordinary profusion, and of a size I have seen nowhere else, and we picked them as we rode along.

"The blushing Rose grows here ; the Violet
And Parthyan Mirtle in choice order set."

Every prospect pleases, and as for man—well, you have the Turkoman. We soon came across the first *obahs*, clusters of brown dome-shaped tents of felt. They make by no means uncomfortable

dwellings, and when decorated with rugs and hangings of the rare and beautiful carpet-work of the country, glowing with colour, and hung about with guns and swords, their interiors have a thoroughly oriental picturesqueness.

The appearance of these Turkoman barbarians is certainly not such as to give the lie to the character they bear for cruelty of all kinds. A Yamut is tall and bony, with high cheek-bones, hairless face, and sallow skin, giving an impression of a human vulture. The women are as unattractive as the men, though the children, in skull-caps ornamented with silver, as is usual among the plainest breeds of beasts and men, are not devoid of prettiness. It is indeed extraordinary, considering the centuries during which the Turkoman have been in the habit of stealing their brides and slaves from Persia, how the original type has been preserved. The Goklan, whose country marches with the Yamut, are of apparently better physique, with ruddier complexions and black beards; and having a smaller admixture of the Mongol strain, are more prepossessing than their neighbours. Their reputation for savagery, however, is no better—rather worse, in fact—than that of their kinsmen; and villages burnt and lands laid waste, even up to the very walls of the Persian town of Astrabad, made one realise

the meaning of the Turkoman terror. For our part, we experienced no bother of any kind when passing through the Turkoman country, not even the loss of a baggage-animal, and for this we were indebted, not to our official position,—for that we had left behind,—but to the fact of our being Britishers, and also to the kind assistance of the Russian Commissioner at Gunbaz-i-Qabus, for whose word the Goklan and Yamut have a very profound respect. Unprepossessing as the Turkoman is in his physiognomy, his *tout ensemble* is very striking. A cloak, often of red or striped Bokhara silk, tied in at the waist, baggy trousers tucked into long crinkled riding-boots, the whole surmounted by a huge bonnet of black or brown sheepskin. About him are hung etceteras in the way of guns, pistols, and knives, and finally, he is mounted on a horse with skin like satin, which he sits like a centaur, and holds dearer than his wife. The figure belongs to a savage and romantic East that is fast passing away.

As we proceeded west after leaving the Gurgan gorge, the hills on our right dwindled and finally disappeared, while those on the left retreated to become a distant dark wall, so that we presently found ourselves marching through a spacious green steppe of wonderful natural fertility. But these people are herdsmen and bandits, not cultivators,

and except immediately round the *obahs*, the plain was absolutely untilled. Numerous streams from the mountains meander across the steppe, sometimes pursuing a brisk course, more often wandering sluggishly through great brakes of reeds. One of these reed-beds was the reputed haunt of a large and fierce tiger, but one had only to look at the growth, so high that an elephant would be lost in it, to realise the futility of any effort to get a shot at him.

It was where the reed-beds invaded the savannah in promontories and islets that we had the novel satisfaction of shooting each day a few real wild pheasants, the original *Phasianus Colchicus*¹ that supplied the tables of Roman epicures, and was eventually brought to England to become in these days the "old English" pheasant. I think if, the big-game shooting over, we had not been in a hurry to get to England and had spent a day at one or two places in arranging drives, we might have made respectable bags. As it was, we simply walked through the likely-looking places we came across in the course of the march, making a line with our mounted men—the very worst of beaters—and in this way were able to pick up five or six

¹ A hundred miles or so east of this, in the valley of the Hari Rud, another pheasant is found, which, according to Major P. M. Sykes, is the *Phasianus principalis*, the "Prince of Wales pheasant."

brace in the course of a morning's march. They were not, as I had expected, at all inferior to the English pheasant in size, their plumage was exactly the same, and they ran with equal speed and rose with the same fuss and commotion. But when they appeared on the camp table in the evening, not even the hunger that is said to make the best sauce could blind us to the fact that as table birds they were vastly inferior. It was not so much tenderness in which they failed as flavour. It is possible that if, instead of an unlimited supply of hunger, we had had some bread-sauce and fried crumbs, and the birds had been cooked, in the higher and better sense of the word, I should have been able to give these original pheasants a greater meed of praise. The Emperor Baber, in his memoirs, speaks of a pheasant they shot in Farghana, "the extreme border of the habitable world," and describes them as "so fat that four persons may dine on one and not finish it." The bird was perhaps the same, but I must own that this was not exactly the experience of D. and myself. In fact, I think I remember sitting down to a pheasant and a bustard and leaving little of either.

It seemed odd that the ground on which we found pheasants was almost invariably the swampy reed brakes. In England one is inclined to be

R

surprised at putting pheasants up in a bog where one would rather expect to find snipe; but the occurrence should, I suppose, be regarded as a case of atavism. Ibrahim, remembering the swamps and reeds of Seistan, would persist in referring to the bird as "murghabi" (water-fowl)!

It was October when we passed through this country, and many of the numerous soft patches of bog held snipe. We bagged a few, much to the surprise of the onlooking Turkoman. For if the expenditure of valuable cartridges in shooting pheasants in the air seemed to them extravagant folly, the same action with regard to snipe—miserable little water-birds weighing not more than a *miscal* or *two* apiece, and possibly not even lawful food—was nothing less than criminal waste and the act of lunatics.

We visited a good many of the *obahs* in the hope of buying a few of the famous rugs woven by the nomad ladies for the adornment of their tents, and got a few bits, smooth as velvet and of those exquisitely soft and harmonious shades of madder and indigo, with whites toned into a delicate cream by years of smoke, that make the old Turkoman carpet one of the most beautiful of Eastern fabrics. The rugs of the Goklan and Yamut sections never quite equalled those of the

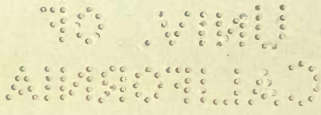
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On the steppe.



Carpet dealing.

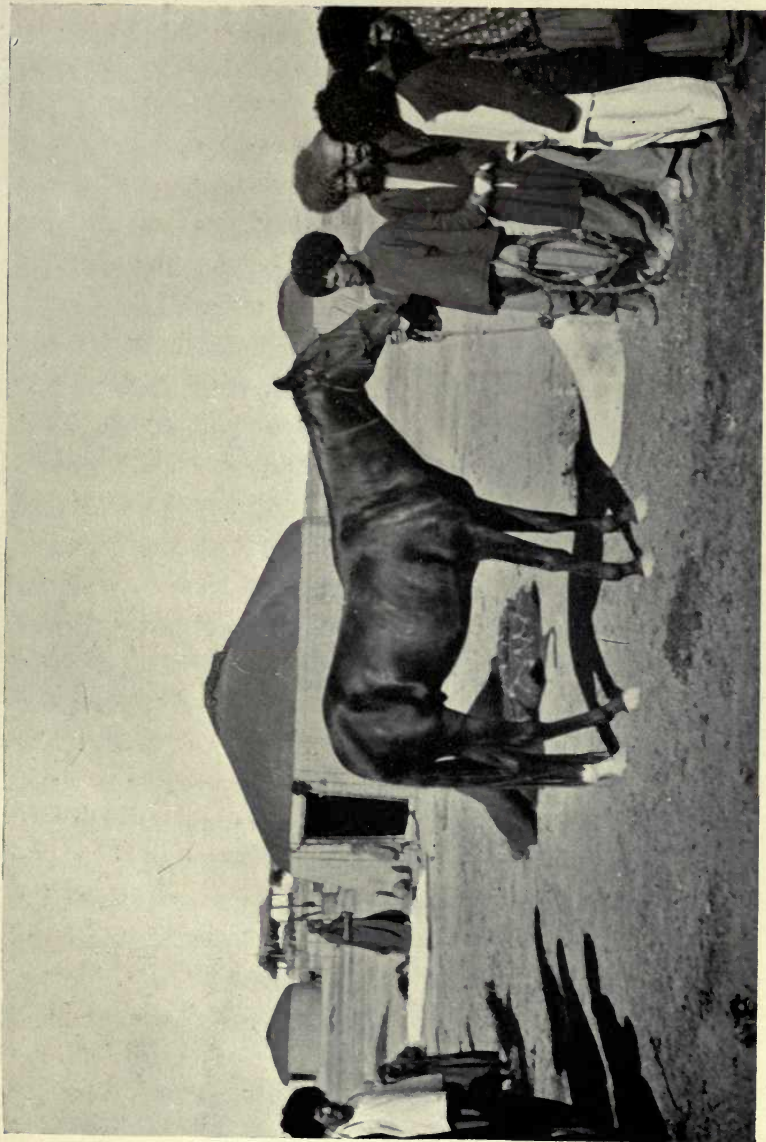


Tekke and Sarik Turkoman. But in these days the art has almost disappeared among the former, whilst the rugs turned out by the latter in Russian territory, being made for the European market, have much deteriorated. These "trade" rugs are sold in London under the designation "Bokhara," many of them cleverly faked up to turn the present-day crude and raw colours into the soft tones of the old vegetable dyes.

At the time of our visit the Turkoman had their horses, which have been the chief source of their pride and power, outside the *obahs* for the purpose of feeding them on the last of the green crops before the winter. We passed long rows of them picketed outside the fields, all rugged up to the ears according to the Turkoman custom. One which the owner kindly brought up for our inspection was in a sweat under three or four *numdahs*, but having satisfied our curiosity, he piled them all on again. This treatment is designed to keep their coats fine, and in this it certainly succeeds, as most of the horses we saw had a gloss on that would have passed in an English racing stable. These horses have a reputation for extraordinary powers of endurance. Vambéry stated that he had seen horses that had carried their riders, with Persian captives bound behind, at a gallop for twenty

hours; and in Malcolm's history we read that when engaged in a raid they covered 150 miles daily, and incredible as these tales may seem, they are eclipsed by the stories the Turkoman themselves relate of their steeds' powers.¹ There can, at any rate, be no doubt that their staying capacity is something altogether out of the ordinary. This must be so when one considers the distances they travelled. Even so far south as Neh, some 400 miles as the crow flies from the Turkoman country, the flat fields surrounding villages are still dotted with little round "Turkoman towers," the refuges which cultivators in the fields took to on the first appearance of one of the dreaded *alamans*, and which thus answered the same purpose as martello towers on the pirate-ridden coast of Italy. The practice was to block up the little entrance hole at the bottom by a huge stone, the raiders apparently being in too much of a hurry to knock the towers down or otherwise bolt the occupants. These wonderful forays are now almost things of the past. The Yamut and Goklan raid but little if anything

¹ They were, of course, specially trained, their diet at the conclusion being what in India is called a "nahari" ("never get weary") of flour and fat. In the long-distance trials held in '92 from Vienna to Berlin, the distance of 360 miles was covered by the winning horse in 71½ hours, by the second in 73 hours, and by the third in 74½ hours, but all died from their exertions!



Turkoman horse.



south of the Tehran-Meshed road, while the Tekke and other tribes in Russian territory raid not at all; so that the breed of horses is probably doomed, at any rate so far as its most famous characteristics are concerned. Already the Russians have had to apply the usual artificial stimulus of shows and prizes.

It is curious how Arab descent is claimed for all the best strains of horses in the East—the Kathiawar, Marwari, and Waziri in India, the Khatgani in Afghanistan, and here the Turkoman. There is a story that the Emperor Timur, in the fourteenth century, sent 5000 Arab stallions to the Turkoman; and another, that when Nadir Shah was slain towards the end of the seventeenth century, his Arab horses that had been sent to graze near this country became the prize of the nomads. However this may be, the Turkoman horse of the present day bears as little resemblance to an Arab as does an English thoroughbred. He stands much higher,—from fifteen to sixteen hands is not uncommon,—is weedier looking, and has a head much more like an English horse's than an Arabian's. Taken all round, his appearance is distinctly bloodlike. The Arab, in fact, seems to have developed on similar lines in England and in Turkomania, the increase in size being in both cases probably

due to the better feeding than that they were accustomed to in their desert home. In both cases, of course, there is a large admixture of other than Arab blood, especially in the female line. Another way in which the curious family resemblance between the English thoroughbred and the Turkoman may be more than skin deep, is by reason of the strain in the former of the sire known as the Byerly Turk. I believe it is not known whence this horse came, but seeing a picture of him in a recent 'Field,' I could not help being struck by the likeness he bore to the Turkoman race. It is possible, if not probable, that he came from this country.

To any one with leisure to spend a few days after small game, the green Gurgan plain offers many attractions. Sand grouse, mostly the Imperial variety, are often seen in small flocks, while later on in December, Majors Sykes and Watson report having seen the pintailed variety coming to water in countless swarms. There are also to be seen great numbers of the lesser bustard.¹ The latter are quite as wary as their bigger relatives, and though it was a common sight to see hundreds in the air and scores running along the ground in front of us—at a very

¹ *Otis tetrax*.

respectful distance—we found them difficult to get into the bag. Their flight is slow and laboured, with a peculiar fluttering action, due, I suppose, to the shortness of their wings compared to their weight. In the air they exhibit a good deal of white which is quite unnoticeable on the ground. To eat they are rank, or at least they were when we passed through this country,—very different to the Houbara bustard we used occasionally to shoot in Seistan. We did not see any woodcock, though they are reputed to visit this part and the whole of the southern Caspian littoral in great numbers in winter. The Belgian Customs Officer at Bandar Gez indeed told me that round about that port in the winter there were so many snipe and woodcock that he got tired of shooting and eating them!¹

¹ A mysterious bird is mentioned in Meynard's 'Dictionnaire de la Perse' under the name of *kungur*. According to the Persian author quoted, this bird, about the size of a pigeon, with a curved bill and a tail like a parroquet's, arrives in Tabarestan in the spring, followed by birds like sparrows, but with particoloured plumage. Every day one of the latter brings food to the *kungur*, but in the evening the ungrateful bird falls upon his attendant and devours him. In like manner each day a small bird sacrifices himself. The spring over, they all disappear together.

Another bird of a less mythical character, sometimes seen on the tops of the mountains in these parts, is the Kabk-i-Darreh, the "Partridge of the Valley." From a skin I have seen, the bird

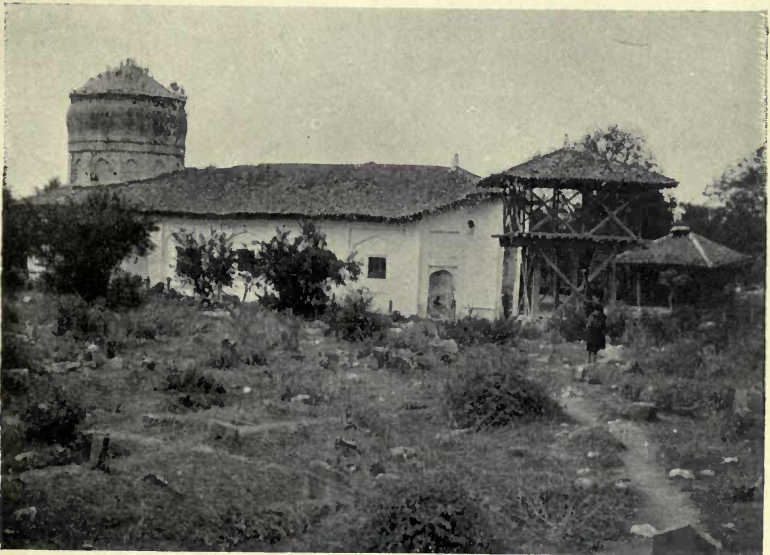
The second day after leaving the mountains, a spire is noticed on the distant horizon, which, as you traverse the thirty odd miles of flat plain that intervene, rises and waxes larger till it dominates the whole scene. In shape rather like some old Scottish tower, rising straight from the bare plain, it seems the very centre round which that remote world revolves, wonderfully impressive in its simple solemnity and size. The hideous iron-roofed buildings at its foot, in which resides the Russian Commissioner, and the white barrack buildings around, in which are housed his escort, add to the effect by contrast. This is the Gunbaz-i-Qabus, the "dome" of Qabus, a prince who, as is not unusual in Asia, had no other possible claim to the remembrance of posterity.

Passing on from this place, where we met with the usual Russian kindness and hospitality, we marched in two days to Astrabad, a Persian city that, with its red-tiled roofs amid the dark green of pomegranate scrub and against a background of forest-clad mountain, looked as un-Persian as possible. The two short stages from

seems to be almost identical with the well-known snow-cock of the Himalayas (*Tetraogallus Himalayensis*). The authorities, however, refer to it as the "Caspian snow-cock." The Persians have an extraordinary story how this bird defends itself from the attacks of birds of prey, but it would not look well in print.



Gunbaz-i-Kabus.



Mosque near Astrabad.

here to Bander Gez lay through a profusion of vegetation, that in spite of the European forest trees, the undergrowth of hazel and dog-rose, the festoons of wild hops and honeysuckle, seemed almost tropical. Here we took steamer across the blue Caspian and shook off the dust of Persia's "sacred soil."

The first part of the paper is devoted to a study of the general theory of the subject. The author discusses the various methods of solution and the conditions under which they are applicable. He also gives a list of references to the literature on the subject.

APPENDIX I.

THE SEISTAN LEOPARD.

Note on leopard skin from Palang Kuh by Mr R. LYDEKKER,
published in 'The Field.'

MAJOR KENNION has presented to the Natural History Museum the skin of a leopard from Seistan, Eastern Persia, of an undescribed variety. It is that of a rather small animal in the winter coat, and is characterised by the length of the fur and the very pale tint of the ground-colour, which is buffy white on the back, passing into pure white on the under parts and lower portions of the limbs. Another peculiarity is the ill-defined character of the dark rosettes, especially on the back, approximating in these respects to a Persian leopard, but having both these features more pronounced. In connection with this subject it may be mentioned that it was long supposed that the presence of black dots within the rosettes was a peculiarity of the jaguar as distinct from the leopard. Of late years it has, however, been shown that certain leopard skins from Eastern Asia exhibit this jaguar-like feature, although, so far as I am aware, the exact place of origin is unknown. It is, therefore, of interest to note that Dr Charles Hose has in his possession one of these jaguar-like leopard skins which came from Siam, thus indicating at least

one country where this type occurs. It is, of course, in the Far East that we should naturally expect the leopard to take on a more or less pronounced jaguar-like character.

APPENDIX II.

THE PERSIAN IBEX.

Note by Mr R. LYDEKKER on the range of the Sind (or Persian) ibex, published in 'The Field.'

NEW LOCALITY FOR SIND IBEX.—Major Kennion has just sent to the British Museum the skulls and horns of two urial and of a wild goat, or so-called Sind ibex, from the Kopet Dagh, on the frontier of Persia and Turkestan. So far as I know, this is a new locality for the Sind ibex, and forms, indeed, a marked north-easterly extension of the known range of the wild goat as a whole. The latter species is thus brought within a comparatively short distance of the habitat of the Asiatic ibex, while the Kopet Dagh seems to be the only locality where it is found in company with true urial. The single pair of horns is probably insufficient for determining whether the wild goat of the Kopet Dagh is distinguishable from the Sind ibex.

[The horns which formed the subject of the above note actually came from Kain, not from the frontier of Persia and Turkestan. I have, however, shot the "Sind" ibex in the latter locality, and have noticed no peculiarity about them, other than that the horns are more massive than usual—due no doubt to better feeding.—AUTHOR.]

APPENDIX III.

THE BEZOAR STONE.

Note by Mr R. LYDEKKER, published in 'The Field.'

In response to the request at the end of my article on "Natural Hair Balls" ('Field,' Feb. 25), two donors have kindly sent specimens of these objects. The most interesting are four sent by Mr G. Stallard, of Horton Crescent, Rugby, who states that he took them from the stomachs of chamois. They are shaped somewhat like pebbles with the two lateral surfaces much flattened, and the longer diameter, which ranges between three and four inches, about one-third greater than the transverse diameter. In two of them the outer surface has much the appearance of brown clay, but the other two are coated with a polished layer of a black substance, looking almost like pitch. Internally they are composed mainly of very fine vegetable fibres, some of which look like rootlets, mingled apparently with a small quantity of hairs.

According to the donor's statement, these balls are not uncommon in the stomachs of chamois, and are known to the inhabitants of the German cantons of the Alps as *Gemskugeln*. He quotes certain passages from F. C. Keller's work on the chamois, *Die Gemse* (Klagenfurt, 1885-87), to the effect that they are regarded as having wonderful medicinal properties, and as being highly efficacious in a number of ailments, such as headache, palpitation of the heart, and various stomachic and intestinal disorders. Usually a small quantity of their substance is mixed with a little olive oil into a pill. Further mention of these chamois balls will be found in Mr

Baillie Grohman's 'Sport in the Alps,' where mention is made of one with a circumference of $8\frac{1}{4}$ inches, a size at least equalled by the largest of Mr Stallard's specimens.

At the close of his letter Mr Stallard states that "these chamois balls are the historic bezoar stones, which were at one time worth nearly their weight in gold." The true Persian bezoar is, however, a very different substance, occurring in the stomach of the wild goat or pasang (*Capra ægagrus*), often miscalled ibex. On this subject the late Dr W. T. Blanford wrote as follows in the second volume of 'Eastern Persia':—

"I believe it is well known that the true bezoar, a calcareous concretion, to which extraordinary virtues were formerly attributed as an antidote to poison, is obtained from the stomach of this animal (the pasang). The Governor of Karman gave specimens to Major St John and myself when we were at that city, and assured us that they were only to be obtained from the ibex inhabiting the hills between Karman and Shiraz. They still bear a high value in Persia, being employed not merely as an antidote to poison, but as a universal remedy for all diseases. They are also worn by women, enclosed in cases of filigree gold. The specimen is 0·75 by 0·65 inches broad, egg-shaped, of a dark olive colour, with a highly polished surface. The size, shape, and colour of these concretions are, however, variable."

It is added in a footnote, on the authority of Sir Oliver St John, that the word bezoar is Persian, the true name being *pa-zahr*, a corruption of *fa-zahr*, "useful for poison." Some authors have supposed it to be derived from pasang, the name for the animal in which it is found, but this is incorrect.

It would be of interest to ascertain whether the notion of the medicinal value of the chamois balls has been

derived from Persia or whether it is indigenous to the Alps. Information is also desirable as to whether any of the species of true ibex have real bezoar stones, and also whether vegetable and hair balls like those of the chamois are ever found in the stomachs of wild goats and ibex.

APPENDIX IV.

THE GAZELLES OF EASTERN PERSIA.

Notes by Mr R. LYDEKKER.

(1) Published in 'Nature'¹—

Major R. L. Kennion, British Consul at Seistan, has had the good fortune to bring to light what are practically two new species of gazelle from the Kain and Seistan districts of eastern Persia, specimens of both of these, presented by Major Kennion, being exhibited in the Natural History Museum. Of the first of these species, typified by the mounted head of a buck from Kain, two notices by myself appeared in 'The Field' newspaper for 1908 (vol. cxi., pp. 70 and 499). In the earlier of these it was compared to the edmi gazelle (*Gazella cuvieri*) and Merrill's gazelle (*G. merrilli*) of Palestine, with the former of which, and probably also with the latter, it agrees in the presence of horns in the female. Compared with the type-skull of Merrill's gazelle figured by Mr O. Thomas in the 'Proceedings of the Zoological Society' for 1904, vol. ii., p. 348, the head

¹ Communicated by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

of the Kain gazelle differs by its larger ($11\frac{1}{4}$ inches) and more fully ringed horns, the number of rings in this specimen being sixteen, and also by their less distinctly S-shaped curvature in profile, and rather more sublyrate form when seen from in front. In the general contour of the horns, the characters of the face-markings, the very tall ears, and the large bodily size, this gazelle comes, indeed, very close to the edmi, and in all these respects differs from the goitred gazelle (*G. subgutturosa*) of Western Persia, as it also does by the smaller extent of the white area on the buttocks, which does not reach up to the root of the tail, but is restricted to the inner sides of the thighs. In this latter feature, shown in a mounted specimen, the Kain gazelle agrees with the Indian *G. bennetti*, from which it differs by its superior size (shoulder-height of a fully adult buck probably about 28 inches), larger ears, and more distinctly sublyrate and slightly incurving horns.

In the second notice I compared the Kain gazelle with the Yarkand gazelle (which I regard as specifically distinct from the goitred species), and named it *G. yarcandensis kennioni*, not being then aware that it differed by the presence of horns in the female and the smaller amount of white on the buttocks. The name *kennioni* would stand as a specific title were it not that in the 'Proceedings of the Zoological Society' for 1873, p. 317, Dr Blanford described a horned female gazelle from Jalk, on the Baluchi border of eastern Persia, as a new species under the name of *G. fuscifrons*. In a paper published in the same volume, p. 545, this species was recognised as valid by the late Sir Victor Brooke, who particularly referred to the large size of its ears as a distinctive feature, especially as compared to *subgutturosa*. Later on, however, Dr Blanford, in the 'Fauna of British India' (where Jalk is stated to be

in Baluchistan, although in 'Eastern Persia' he had rightly referred to it as forming the southern edge of the Seistan desert), identified *fuscifrons* with *bennetti*, on the ground that a male obtained by Sir O. St John appeared inseparable from the latter. From the fact, however, that the Kain district, which is the northern continuation of the Seistan desert, is the home of a large gazelle allied to *bennetti*, in the presence of horns in the female and the small extent of the white area on the rump, but with larger ears and rather more sublyrate horns, there can be no doubt that this gazelle is no other than *fuscifrons*, which must be re-established as a species. *Gazella yarcandensis kennioni* therefore becomes *G. fuscifrons*, although Kennion's gazelle may be retained as the English name.

This being so, it is doubtful whether the Indian *G. bennetti* really occurs in Persia at all. In 'Eastern Persia' Dr Blanford stated that he obtained a male referable to that species from the Bampur district of eastern Persia (alluded to as being in Baluchistan), which differed from Indian examples only in some details of the horns, adding that he believed this gazelle to extend on the lowlands to the head of the Persian Gulf, while above the 3000-foot contour it was replaced by the goitred gazelle, distinguishable, even at a distance, by its lighter colour. From the new evidence it appears that the lowland gazelle of the Persian Gulf is *fuscifrons* rather than *bennetti*.

The second of the Seistan gazelles is represented by an adult male standing about 39 inches at the shoulder, and characterised by the great size of the ears, the marked incurving of the tips of the sublyrate horns, and the small extent of the white area on the rump, which does not reach the root of the tail. In most of these features this species resembles the Yarkand gazelle, as it also does in the absence of horns in the female, although it differs by

the small extent of the white on the rump, which in the Yarkand species (Plate v. of Blanford's 'Mammals of the Second Yarkand Mission') is very large and ascends high up on each side of the root of the tail. This gazelle greatly exceeds *subgutturosa* in size, as well as in the much larger ears, less divergent horns, and the smaller white rump-patch, but resembles that species in that the male has a "goitre." Taking the mounted specimen in the museum as the type, it may be known as the Seistan gazelle, *G. seistanica*.

The foregoing species collectively indicate a transition from the *edmi* and *bennetti* type, on the one hand, to that of the goitred gazelle on the other, as is indicated in the case of some of the Asiatic species by the following table:—

(a) Females horned; no goitre; tips of horns not distinctly inturned; rump-patch small.

(1) Indian gazelle—*G. bennetti*.

Height about 25 or 26 inches; ears moderate; no inturning of horn-tips.

(2) Kennion's gazelle—*G. fuscifrons*.

Larger, height probably about 28 inches; ears longer; horn-tips slightly inturned.

(a') Females (except *marica*) hornless; a goitre; tips of horns distinctly inturned.

(b) Rump-patch small; face-markings distinct.

(3) Seistan gazelle—*G. seistanica*.

Very large; height about 29 inches; ears very long; horns sublyrate.

(b') Rump-patch large.

(c) Face-markings; horns sublyrate; colour, dark.

(4) Saikik, or Yarkand gazelle—*G. yarcandensis*.

About the size of last, but ears apparently shorter.

(c') Face-markings nearly obsolete; horns divergent; colour in winter, very pale.

(5) Goitred gazelle—*G. subgutturosa*.

Size, small, 24 to 26 inches; ears short; females hornless; dark lateral band, faint.

(6) Marica gazelle—*G. marica*.

Ears taller; females horned; dark lateral band, distinct.

The African edmi, and probably the Syrian Merrill's gazelle, come in the first group. The Mongolian *G. gutturosa* is a larger member of the last group, distinguished by the small size and peculiar form of the horns of the bucks, which do not diverge after the fashion of *subgutturosa*. The Central Asia *G. przewalskii* is another allied type.

(2) Published in 'Country Life.'

By the courtesy of Major R. L. Kennion, I am enabled to reproduce a photograph¹ of a couple of specimens of a new gazelle recently discovered by him in the Seistan province of Persia, and described by myself in 'Nature' (vol. lxxxiii., page 201, 1910) under the name of *Gazella seistanica*—this, so far as I am aware, being the first portrait of the species published. Here I may take the opportunity of mentioning my regret that I was unable to name this species after its discoverer; but it unfortunately happened that I bestowed the name of *Gazella kennioni* on a second species of gazelle brought by Major Kennion from the Kain district, to the north of Seistan, which subsequently turned out to be identical with one from the same region previously described by the late Dr W. T. Blanford as *G. fuscifrons*. Accordingly, by the rules of zoological nomenclature, not only must the earlier title have the preference, but the use of the name *kennioni* in another sense is barred for all time.

¹ Photograph, page 121.

In order to make the best amends for this barring of the latter name, I have suggested that the English designation of *Gazella fuscifrons* should be Kennion's gazelle. Kennion's gazelle, it may be observed, is a large species characterised by the presence of horns in the female and the comparatively slight incurving of the tips of those of the bucks. On the other hand, the females of *Gazella seistanica* are devoid of horns, while those of the bucks curve in markedly at the tips, as is well shown in the illustration; while the bucks have a peculiar glandular swelling in the throat similar to that which gives the name of goitred gazelle to an allied Persian species (*G. subgutturosa*), this "goitre" being absent in Kennion's gazelle. From the Persian species the new Seistan gazelle is broadly distinguished by its superior size, longer ears, and the much smaller extent of the white area on the rump. The photograph was taken, I believe, from tame specimens in the possession of Major Kennion, who is to be congratulated not only on the discovery of this species of gazelle, but on being the first to make us fully acquainted with a second.

(3) Published in 'Country Life.'

A few weeks ago you were good enough to publish a photograph of two bucks of the newly-discovered Seistan gazelle (*Gazella seistanica*), together with a note on that species, and the very different Kennion's gazelle (*G. fuscifrons*) of the same district. Thanks to Major Kennion, I am now in a position to show the marked difference between the horns of the two species. In the accompanying photograph¹ of thirteen heads the eight upper figures represent bucks of the Seistan

¹ Photograph, page 127.

gazelle, and the five lower ones four bucks and a doe of Kennion's gazelle. The female of the latter species, it will be observed, carries horns which are very nearly smaller and more slender replicas of those of the bucks, but the female of the other species is hornless. This is one point of difference. Another is to be found in the more or less lyrate and terminally incurved horns of the bucks of the Seistan gazelle, and the comparative straightness and little or no incurving of those of Kennion's gazelle. Age or individual variations, of course, occur, as is exemplified by the middle specimen of the former species as compared with the two lateral ones; but in none is there any difficulty in deciding the species of any fully adult individual. There is also a difference in the face-markings, which had escaped my notice until I received the present photograph. In the Seistan gazelle, for instance, the central dark face-streak is broad, and stops short of the muzzle, which is wholly white; whereas in the other species it is narrower, more sharply defined, and extends right down to the nostril, although tending—more especially in the female—to become lighter at the muzzle than elsewhere.

[With reference to Mr Lydekker's letters above, I can lay no claim to have "discovered" the Seistan gazelle in any but a zoological sense. Though I was the first to bring this gazelle to the notice of the zoological authorities of the British Museum, it was certainly known to others before this, notably to Major J. Watson and Captain T. Keyes, who had some in their garden in the Turbat Consulate. The existence of the other gazelle (called by Mr Lydekker *fuscifrons* or Kennion's) in Persia was, so far as I am aware, unknown to anybody.—
AUTHOR.]

APPENDIX V.

CORRESPONDENCE IN 'THE FIELD' ABOUT THE
BUJNURD SHEEP.

(1) EXTRACT FROM AUTHOR'S LETTER.

. . . The object of this letter is to elicit some information as to what these wild sheep are. I have a long and intimate acquaintance with *Ovis vignei*, which I have shot under various native names in Ladak, Gilgit, Chitral, the Punjab, and Baluchistan, and I am quite certain that my latest acquisitions are not to be confounded with these. They are distinctly bigger than *Ovis vignei*, and, indeed, to see them on the hillside reminded me far more of *Ovis hodgsoni* (or *Ovis ammon*) of Tibet. I supposed at the time that they were *Ovis gmelini*; but on referring to Lydekker's 'Wild Oxen, Sheep, and Goats,' I see that the typical horns of that species curve back to approach one another over the withers, whereas in my sheep they curve forward, and have a tendency to a second curve. The following are the measurements:—

No.	Approx. Age.	Length of Horn.		Basal Circumference.	
		Right.	Left.	Right.	Left.
1	4½	27¾	29	11¾	11¾
2	4½	33¼	32	12	12⅛
3	5½	33½	32½	11⅞	11⅞
4	5½	37	38¼	12	12½
5	8½	38	38½	11⅞	10¾

It will be seen that these measurements are greatly in excess of average measurements of any of the varieties of *Ovis orientalis* (or *Ovis vignei*), especially those de-

noting massiveness. I am sure that the rams I secured were not abnormal specimens, and that the measurements are typical of the species, whatever it may be. . . . I see in the work already referred to that an *Ovis arkal* comes from the Turkoman country on the eastern precincts of the Caspian; . . . perhaps my sheep may be identified with them. . . .

(2) EDITORIAL NOTE.

We take this to be the Armenian race of the Asiatic Mouflon *Ovis orientalis*, which is found not only in the mountains of Elburz, Northern Persia, but also in Armenia, and in the Taurus range of Asia Minor. In old rams the horns are characterised by having the front outer angle well marked, so that the front surface is clearly defined from the outer one, as shown in the illustration.

(3) LETTER FROM MR R. LYDEKKER.

The wild sheep skulls and horns from the north side of the Elburz range, figured and described by Major Kennion in 'The Field' of March 30, are certainly of the urial or shapu type, as distinguished from that of the Armenian wild sheep (*Ovis orientalis*, or *Ovis gmelini*). It is, however, very remarkable that the wild sheep obtained from the Elburz by the Hon. W. Erskine, and described by myself in 'The Field' for 1905 (vol. civ., p. 1031), were of the Armenian type, although presenting certain resemblances to the urial. As Mr Erskine started on his expedition from Tehran, it seems highly probable that his specimens were obtained on the southern flank of the Elburz; and, if so, the watershed of that range may prove the division between the habitat of sheep of

the urial and of the Armenian type. Further eastward, sheep of the urial type, which I have identified with Brandt's *O. arkal*, occur in the Kopet Dagh range, between Persia and Russian Turkestan, and it may be that, as Major Kennion suggests, the North Elburz sheep are nearly allied to or identical with them. I hope to induce Major Kennion to send a specimen to the British Museum.

(4) EXTRACT FROM LETTER FROM MR R. LYDEKKER (headed "VARIATION IN HORNS OF MOUFLON").

. . . I may mention in conclusion that Major Kennion has presented to the Natural History Museum the skins of some of the wild sheep shot by him on the north side of the Elburz range, as described in 'The Field' of March 30 (p. 529). From the evidence of these skins, which show no whitish saddle-mark, as well as from information supplied to me in a letter from Major Kennion himself, I am convinced that these sheep are urial and not Armenian wild sheep. Furthermore, I believe they will prove to be identical with the wild sheep of the Kopet Dagh (a branch of the Elburz range), which I have described under the name of *Ovis vignei arkal*, although the typical locality of that race is the Usturt plateau, west of Lake Baikal. The latter point I shall be able to decide when the heads of Major Kennion's specimens (one of which he has kindly promised to give to the Natural History Museum) arrive in this country.

From the evidence afforded by these sheep and others from the south side of the Elburz, described by me in 'The Field' for 1904 (vol. civ., p. 1031) under the name of *Ovis gmelini erskinii*, it may now be stated that while urial occur on the north side of the Elburz range, that

species is replaced on its southern flanks by the Armenian wild sheep. The above-mentioned Elburz race of the latter shows signs of approximations towards the urial type; and with the evidence afforded by the mouflon horns forming the proper subject of this communication, it would not surprise me to find that *Ovis vignei* and *O. orientalis* (= *gmelini*) intergrade.

(5) LETTER FROM AUTHOR.

Before this can reach London, no doubt Mr Lydekker will have set at rest the question whether the sheep I shot on the northern slopes of the Elburz are urial or belong to some other species of wild sheep. I should have mentioned the locality more precisely in my original letter, for the term Elburz (being, I believe, unknown in Eastern Persia, where the range merges into the Paropamisus) is apt to be misleading. The nullahs I was shooting in were some draining into the Gurgan river, which itself flows into the Caspian. Though the animals were certainly of the urial *type*, as I previously mentioned, they seemed to me bigger beasts, and I shall be surprised if this is not borne out by cranial measurements.

As regards the statement that urial, which occur on the northern side of the Elburz, are replaced by the Armenian species on the southern flanks, I would point out that an animal, indistinguishable from the urial, is found in most of the hills of Eastern Persia. I have myself shot them in Kain, and in the hills north-east of Meshed. The last-named locality must, I should think, from a zoological point of view, be called the "southern slopes of the Elburz" (though the drainage is actually to the north), while the former is, of course, a good deal south of the Elburz.

With respect to the right-hand or left-hand spiral, or, as I should prefer to call it, the outward or inward twist of the horns, I was rather surprised to learn that it was considered a sufficiently fixed peculiarity to distinguish species. For instance, I should say the greater number of urial I have shot have horns in one plane or with a twist outwards, but I have certainly shot a few with a twist in the opposite direction. There is, I think, one in the Srinagar Club, which perhaps one of your readers in that delectable spot may corroborate.

It may interest your readers to learn that a ewe of the kind, shot by me in the Elburz, is now on the way to the Zoological Gardens. . . .

(6) LETTER FROM MR R. LYDEKKER.

Three of the heads of the wild sheep obtained by Major R. L. Kennion near Bujnurd, Persia, previously referred to in 'The Field,' March 30, April 6, and July 30, are now mounted, and one of them has been handed over to the British Museum by Mr Rowland Ward. As Bujnurd is situated in the valley lying between the Ala Dagh on the south and the Kopet Dagh on the north, it was from the first practically certain that the sheep would turn out to belong to the Kopet Dagh race of the urial (*Ovis vignei arkal*). As the result of a comparison of one of Major Kennion's specimens with a skull and horns presented to the Museum by Mr St George Littledale some years ago, this is now definitely proved to be the case, both examples showing the peculiarly wide, flat, and sparsely ridged front surface of the horns distinctive of that race. The horns of the two finest of the Bujnurd rams are very large, forming rather more than a complete circle. The white ruffs of the same two specimens are also very large

—larger and more wholly white, I think, than in any other race of the urial. In this respect these sheep differ very markedly from *Ovis orientalis*, which occurs on the south side of the Elburz range, near Tehran, the ruff in all the specimens which have come under my observation being comparatively small, and chiefly composed of black or blackish hairs on the lower part of the throat.

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	PAGE		
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HISTORY	42	PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY	56
LATIN AND GREEK	43	PSYCHOLOGY AND LOGIC	56
MODERN LANGUAGES	50	FORESTRY	56
MATHEMATICS	53	ELEMENTARY SERIES	57
GEOGRAPHY	54	WRITING AND COPY BOOKS	64
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GEOLOGY	55		

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