

ROBERT BYRON

PART I

*Venice, August 20th, 1933.*—Here as a joy-hog: a pleasant change after that pension on the Giudecca two years ago. We went to the Lido this morning, and the Doge's Palace looked more beautiful from a speed-boat than it ever did from a gondola. The bathing, on a calm day, must be the worst in Europe: water like hot saliva, cigars floating into one's mouth, and shoals of jelly-fish.

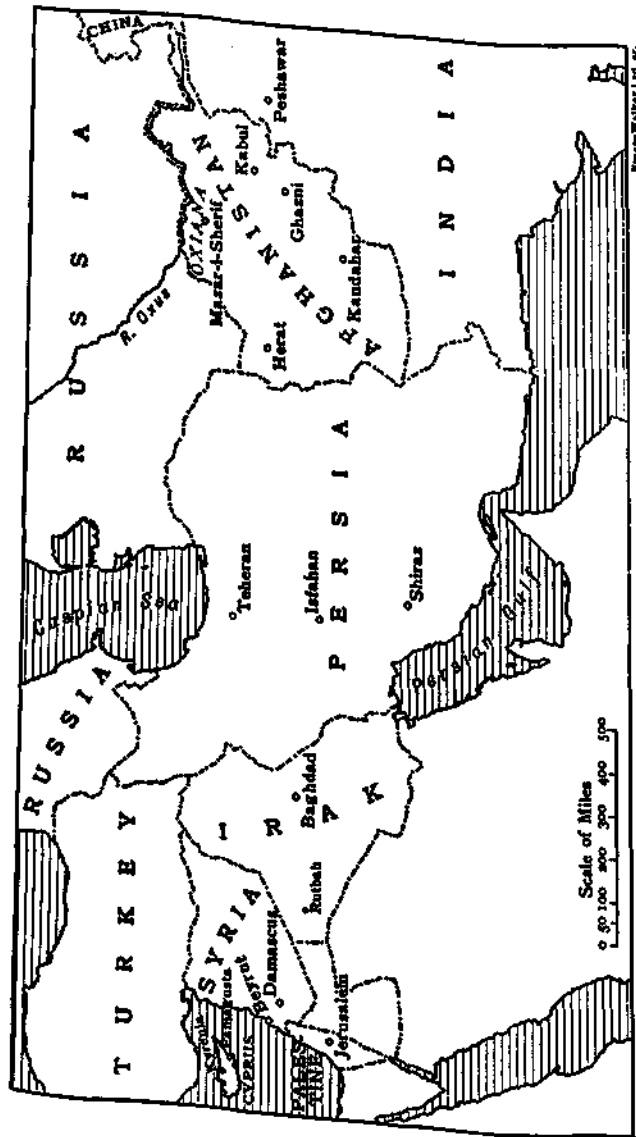
Lifar came to dinner. Bertie mentioned that all whales have syphilis.

*Venice, August 21st.*—After inspecting two palaces, the Labiena, containing Tiepolo's fresco of Cleopatra's Banquet, and the Pappadopoli, a stifling labyrinth of plush and royal photographs, we took sanctuary from culture in Harry's Bar. There was an ominous chatter, a quick-fire of greetings: the English are arriving.

In the evening we went back to Harry's Bar, where our host regaled us with a drink compounded of champagne and cherry brandy. "To have the right effect," said Harry confidentially, "it must be the worst cherry brandy." It was.

Before this my acquaintance with our host was limited to the hunting field. He looked unfamiliar in a green beach vest and white mess jacket.

*Venice, August 22nd.*—In a gondola to San Rocco, where Tintoretto's Crucifixion took away my breath; I had forgotten it. The old visitors' book with Lenin's



name in it had been removed. At the Lido there was a breeze; the sea was rough, cool, and free from refuse.

We motored out to tea at Malcontenta, by the new road over the lagoons beside the railway. Nine years ago Landsberg found Malcontenta, though celebrated in every book on Palladio, at the point of ruin, doorless and windowless, a granary of indeterminate farm-produce. He has made it a habitable dwelling. The proportions of the great hall and state rooms are a mathematical paeon. Another man would have filled them with so-called Italian furniture, antique-dealers' rubbish, gilt. Landsberg has had the furniture made of plain wood in the local village. Nothing is "period" except the candles, which are necessary in the absence of electricity.

Outside, people argue over the sides and affect to deplore the back. The front asks no opinion. It is a precedent, a criterion. You can analyse it—nothing could be more lucid; but you cannot question it. I stood with Diane on the lawn below the portico, as the glow before dusk defined for one moment more clearly every stage of the design. Europe could have bid me no fonder farewell than this triumphant affirmation of the European intellect. "It's a mistake to leave civilisation", said Diane, knowing she proved the point by existing. I was lost in gloom.

Inside, the candles were lit and Lifar danced. We drove back through a rainstorm, and I went to bed with an alarm clock.

*S.s. "Italia", August 26th.*—The moustachio'd and portly gondolier attached to the palace was waiting for me at five. All towns are the same at dawn; as even Oxford Street can look beautiful in its emptiness, so

Venice now seemed less insatiably picturesque. Give me Venice as Ruskin first saw it—without a railway; or give me a speed-boat and the international rich. The human museum is horrible, such as those islands off the coast of Holland where the Dutch retain their national dress.

The departure of this boat from Trieste was attended by scenes first performed in the Old Testament. Jewish refugees from Germany were leaving for Palestine. On the one hand was a venerable wonder-rabbi, whose orthodox ringlets and round beaver hat set the fashion for his disciples down to the age of eight; on the other, a flashy group of boys and girls in beach clothes, who stifled their emotions by singing. A crowd had assembled to see them off. As the boat unloosed, each one's personal concerns, the lost valise, the misappropriated corner, were forgotten. The wonder-rabbi and his attendant patriarchs broke into nerveless, uncontrollable waving; the boys and girls struck up a solemn hymn, in which the word Jerusalem was repeated on a note of triumph. The crowd on shore joined in, following the quay to its brink, where they stood till the ship was on the horizon. At that moment Ralph Stockley, A.D.C. to the High Commissioner in Palestine, also arrived on the quay, to find he had missed the boat. His agitation, and subsequent pursuit in a launch, relieved the tension.

A northerly wind flecks the sapphire sea with white, and has silenced those exuberant Jews below. Yesterday we sailed past the Ionian Islands. The familiar shores looked arid and unpeopled, but invincibly beautiful through the rosy air. At the south-west corner of Greece we turned east, passed Kalamata in its bay, and came to Cape Matapan, which I last saw from Taygetus outlined by the distant sea as though on a map. The rocky

faces turned to ruddy gold, the shadows to a gauzy blue. The sun sank, Greece became a ragged silhouette, and the southernmost lighthouse of Europe began to wink. Round the corner, in the next bay, twinkled the electricity of Gytheion.

Stockley recounted an anecdote of his Chief, who was shot in the legs during the Boer War and left for thirty-six hours before help came. Others had been shot likewise, for the Boers had fired low. Some were dead, and the vultures collected. So long as the wounded could move, however feebly, the birds kept off. When they could not, their eyes were pecked out while still alive. Stockley's Chief had described his feelings at the prospect of this fate, while the birds were hovering a few feet above him.

This morning the double peaks of Santorin cut across a red dawn. Rhodes is in sight. We reach Cyprus at mid-day to-morrow. I shall have a week to myself there before the Charcoal-Burners arrive at Beyrut on September 6th.

*CYPRUS: Kyrenia, August 29th.*—History in this island is almost too profuse. It gives one a sort of mental indigestion. At Nicosia, a new Government House has replaced that which the riots destroyed in 1931. Outside it stands a cannon presented by Henry VIII of England to the Order of St. John of Jerusalem in 1527. This bears the Tudor arms. But the coinage, struck to commemorate the jubilee of British rule in 1928, bears the arms of Richard Cœur-de-Lion, who conquered the island and married there in 1191. I landed at Larnaca. A few miles off, in A.D. 45, landed Paul and Barnabas. Lazarus is buried at Larnaca. So are two nephews of Bishop Ken, Ion and William, who died in 1693 and

1707. Dates begin with an Egyptian notice of 1450 B.C. Fame arrived at the end of the XIIth century, with the rule and culture of the Lusignans: to King Peter I, authors so various as Boccaccio and St. Thomas Aquinas dedicated books. In 1489 Queen Catherine Cornaro surrendered her sovereignty to the Venetians, and eighty years later the last Venetian commander was flayed alive by the Turks. The three centuries of oblivion that followed were ended by the Treaty of Berlin, which leased the island to the English. In 1914 we annexed it.

The affinity of the landscape is with Asia rather than the other Greek islands. The earth is bleached to whiteness; only a green patch of vines or a flock of black and tawny goats relieves its arid solitude. Trees were planted along the immaculate tarmac road that brought me from Larnaca to Nicosia, casuarinas and cypresses. But the wind has defeated them, a furious hot blast which gets up off the sea every afternoon and turns the countless water-wheels. These gaunt iron skeletons stand in groves on the outskirts of the towns; their choral creaking is the island's chief song. In the distance are always mountains. And over the whole scene hangs a peculiar light, a glaze of steel and lilac, which sharpens the contours and perspectives, and makes each vagrant goat, each isolated carob tree, stand out from the white earth as though seen through a stereoscope.

The prospect is beautiful in the abstract, but violent and forbidding as the home of man. Even flowers are lacking, at this season, but for a small asphodel, *grey* in colour, whose nod is the nod of a ghost. The Greeks call it "candle-flower". The north face of the mountains, between Nicosia and the coast, is more hospitable. Here, the earth is red, as though more nourishing, and the terraced fields are dotted with carob trees. The carob harvest was in full swing as I passed: men bashing down the fruit with long poles; women loading it into sacks

and loading them on to donkeys. The carob is exported to make cattle-food. It looks like a shrivelled banana and tastes, I found, like a glucose doormat.

I called on the Archbishop in Nicosia, to ask him for a letter to the clergy of Kiti. His attendants were disobliging; for the Church leads the opposition to the English, and they could hardly have known I had spoken for their cause in the English press. But the Archbishop, though old and deaf, seemed pleased to have a visitor, and caused the letter to be typewritten by a secretary. When it was done, they brought him a pen ready dipped in red ink, and with this he signed it, in virtue of a privilege granted by the Emperor Zeno in the Vth century: "+ Cyril of Cyprus". The secular Governors of the island have since usurped this privilege. The Turkish ones did so to annoy, the English to be picturesque.

I went to Bella Paese this morning, to see the abbey. My chauffeur went to see his fiancée, who lives in the adjacent village. She and her aunt gave me coffee and a preserve of sugared walnuts. We sat on a balcony, surrounded as ever by pots of basil and carnations, and looking down across the village roofs to the sea. The aunt's son, aged two, kept pushing chairs about and yelling "I'm a steamer, I'm a motor-car". When the real motor-car, with me in it, left, he broke into a howl of disappointment, which followed me down the mountain.

This afternoon, at the castle, a gentleman wearing a white topee and white beard was pointed out to me as Mr. Jeffery. Since he was responsible for the antiquities of the island, I introduced myself. He recoiled. I tried to make amends by mentioning his book on the sieges of Kyrenia. "I've written many things", he replied. "I can't possibly remember what. But some-

times, you know, I read them, and I find them quite interesting."

We proceeded to the castle, where we found some convicts engaged in desultory excavation. As we appeared, they threw down their spades, threw off their clothes, and ran out of a side door into the sea for their afternoon swim. "A pleasant life", said Mr. Jeffery. "They only come here when they want a rest." He produced a plan of the XIIIth-century foundations, as revealed by the convicts' digging. But exposition made him dry, and we went to the office for a drink of water. "The worst of water is," he said, "it makes you so thirsty".

*Kyrenia, August 30th.*—Mounted on a chocolate-coloured donkey with ears eighteen inches long, I rode up to St. Hilarion's Castle. At the walls we tethered the donkey, and also its fellow brute, a grey mule bearing cold water in a massive clay amphora stopped with carob leaves. Precipitous paths and flights of steps led up through chapels, halls, cisterns, dungeons, to the topmost platform and its sentinel tower. Below the gleaming silver crags and stunted green-feathered pines, the mountain fell three thousand feet to the coastal plain, an endless panorama of rusty red speckled with myriads of little trees and their shadows, beyond which, sixty miles away across the blue sea, appeared the line of Asia Minor and the Taurus Mountains. Even sieges must have had their compensations when solaced by such a view.

*Nicosia (500 ft.), August 31st.*—"Mishap necessitates delay one week so arriving Beyrut fourteenth have informed Christopher stop car not plant at fault."

This gives me an extra week. I shall spend it in

Jerusalem. "Plant", I suppose, means the charcoal apparatus. Considering the cost of telegraphing, I can only assume this doesn't work. Otherwise, why bother to deny it?

Long ago, at the Greek Legation in London, I was introduced to a nervous boy in a long robe, who was holding a glass of lemonade. This was His Beatitude Mar Shimun, Patriarch of the Assyrians; and since he is now an exile in Cyprus, I went to call on him this morning at the Crescent Hotel. A sturdy bearded figure in flannel trousers greeted me in accents peculiar to the English universities (Cambridge in his case). I offered my condolences. He turned to recent events: "As Ai toeld Sir Francis Humphreys, the paepers in Baghdad had been proeclaeming a Jihad against us for months. Ai asked him if he could guarantee our saefety, he said he could, and soe on and soe forth. They put me in prison four months agoe—even then he did nothing, though every one knew what was coming. From here I shall goe to Geneva to plead our cause and soe on and soe forth. They took me away by aeroplane against my will, but what will become of may poor people, raeped, shot down bay machine-guns and soe on and soe forth, Ai doen't knoew." And so on and so forth.

Another landmark in the Betrayal Era of British foreign policy. Will it never stop? No doubt the Assyrians were intractable. But the point Mar Shimun made, which I believe to be true, is that the British authorities knew, or had ample means of knowing, what the Iraklis were intending, and took no steps to prevent it.

*Famagusta, September 2nd.*—There are two towns here: Varosha, the Greek, and Famagusta, the Turkish. They are joined by an Anglo-residential suburb, which contains the offices of the administration, the English club,

a public garden, numerous villas, and the Savoy Hotel where I live. Famagusta is the old town; its walls flank the port.

If Cyprus were owned by the French or Italians, as many tourist boats would visit Famagusta as now go to Rhodes. Under English rule, the visitor is thwarted by a deliberate philistinism. The Gothic nucleus of the town is still completely walled. That this nucleus can still be defaced by any building that anyone likes to put up; that the squalor of the old houses is excelled by that of the new; that the churches are tenanted by indigent families; that the bastions are daily carpeted with human excrement; that the citadel is a carpenter's shop belonging to the Public Works Department; and that the palace can only be approached through the police station—these manifestations of British care, if inartistic, have at least the advantage of defence against the moribund atmosphere of a museum. The absence of guides, postcard-sellers, and their tribe is also an attraction. But that, in the whole of the two towns, there should be only one man who knows even the names of the churches, and he a Greek schoolmaster of such diffidence as to make rational conversation impossible; that the one book, by Mr. Jeffery, which can acquaint the visitor with the history and topography of the place, should be on sale only at Nicosia forty miles away; that every church, except the cathedral, should be always locked and its keys kept, if their whereabouts can be traced at all, by the separate official, priest, or family to whose use it has been consigned, and who is generally to be found, not in Famagusta, but in Varosha; these manifestations were too much even for me, who, though speaking some Greek—which most visitors cannot do—entirely failed in three whole days to complete a tour of the buildings. The spectacle of such indifference has an interest of its own, to students of the English common-

wealth. But it is not the kind of interest to draw shiploads of profitable sightseers. For them there is only one gratification, "Othello's Tower", an absurd fiction which dates from the English occupation. Not only cab-drivers uphold this fiction. There is an official placard on the building, as though it were "Teas" or "Gentlemen". This placard is the sole direction which the authorities, or anyone else, can vouchsafe.

I stand on the Martinengo bastion, a gigantic earth-work faced with cut stone and guarded by a rock-hewn moat forty feet below, into which the sea once flowed. From the bowels of this mountainous fortification two subterranean carriage-drives debouch into the daylight at my feet. To the right and left stretch the parapets of the encircling walls, interrupted by a succession of fat round towers. The foreground is waste; across it moves a string of camels led by a Turk in baggy trousers. A small depression is occupied by two Turkish women, cooking something beneath a fig tree. Beyond them starts the town, a medley of little houses, some of mud, some of stones ravished from the monuments, some of new white stucco roofed in red. There is no plan, no regard for amenity. Palms stand up among the houses; allotments surround them. And out of this confusion tower the crockets and buttresses of a Gothic cathedral, whose orange-coloured stone cuts across the distant union of sky and sea, turquoise and sapphire. A range of lilac mountains continues the coastline on the left. A ship steams out of harbour towards it. A bullock-cart emerges from the ground at my feet. The camels lie down. And a lady in a pink frock and picture-hat is gazing sentimentally in the direction of Nicosia from the top of the next tower but one.

*Larnaca, September 3rd.*—The hotel here is not up to

standard. Elsewhere they are clean, tidy, and above all cheap. The food is not delicious; but even English occupation has been unable to change Greek cooking for the worse. There are some good wines. And the water is sweet.

I drove out to Kiti, eight miles away, where the priest and sacristan, both wearing baggy trousers and high boots, received the Archbishop's letter with respect. They took me to the church, whose mosaic is a beautiful work; its technique seems to me of the Xth century, though others ascribe it to the VIth. The Virgin's robe is smoky mauve, almost charcoal-coloured. The angels beside her wear draperies of white, grey, and buff; and the green of their peacock wings is repeated on the green globes they hold. Faces, hands, and feet are done in smaller cubes than the rest. The whole composition has an extraordinary rhythm. Its dimensions are small, not more than life-size, and the church is so low that the vault containing it can be examined from as near as ten feet.

*S.s. "Martha Washington", September 4th.*—I found Christopher on the pier, adorned with a kempt but reluctant beard five days old. He has heard nothing from the Charcoal-Burners, but welcomes the prospect of Jerusalem.

There are 900 passengers on board. Christopher took me a tour of the third-class quarters. Had their occupants been animals, a good Englishman would have informed the R.S.P.C.A. But the fares are cheap; and being Jews, one knows they could all pay more if they wanted. The first class is not much better. I share a cabin with a French barrister, whose bottles and fopperies leave no room for another pin. He lectured me

on the English cathedrals. Durham was worth seeing. "As for the rest, my dear sir, they are mere plumbing."

At dinner, finding myself next an Englishman, I opened conversation by hoping he had had a fine passage.

He replied: "Indeed we have. Goodness and mercy have followed us throughout".

A tired woman struggled by, leading an unruly child. I said: "I always feel so sorry for women travelling with children".

"I can't agree with you. To me, little children are as glints of sunshine."

I saw the creature later, reading a Bible in a deck-chair. This is what Protestants call a missionary.

*PALESTINE: Jerusalem (2800 ft.), September 6th.*—A Nicaraguan leper would have fared better with the port authorities of a British Mandate than we did yesterday. They came on board at 5 A.M. After waiting two hours in a queue, they asked me how I could land without a visa and when my passport was not even endorsed for Palestine. I said I could buy a visa, and explained that the system of endorsement was merely one of the cruder forms of dishonesty practised by our Foreign Office, which had no real bearing on the validity of a passport. Another busybody then discovered I had been to Russia. When? and why? O, for pleasure was it? Was it pleasurable? And where was I going now? To Afghanistan? Why? Pleasure again, indeed. I was on a pleasure-trip round the world, he supposed. Then they grew so absorbed with Christopher's diplomatic visa that they forgot to give him a card of disembarkation.

A frenzied crowd seethed round the head of the gangway. Physically, Jews can look the best or the worst bred people in the world. These were the worst. They

stank, stared, shoved, and shrieked. One man, who had been there five hours, began to weep. When his rabbi failed to comfort him, Christopher offered him a whisky and soda out of the bar window. He refused it. Our luggage, by degrees, was handed into a boat. I followed it. Christopher had to go back for his card of disembarkation. There was a heavy swell, as we negotiated the surf-bound reef which constitutes the "port" of Jaffa. A woman was sick over my hand. Her husband nursed their child, while supporting in his other arm a tall plant of veronica in a pot.

"Upstairs, please!" The sweating, malformed mob divided into two queues. After half an hour I reached the doctor. He apologised for delay, and gave me a medical certificate without an examination. Downstairs the boatmen were clamouring for money. The transport of ourselves and luggage cost £1 : 2s. "Do you write books?" asked the customs officer, scenting an author of dutiable obscenities. I said I was not Lord Byron, and suggested he should get on with his business. At length we found a car, and putting the hood down in compliment to the Holy Land, set out for Jerusalem.

The King David Hotel is the only good hotel in Asia this side of Shanghai. We treasure every moment spent in it. The general decoration is harmonious and restrained, almost severe. But you might not think so from this notice which hangs in the hall:—

NOTICE FOR THE INTERIOR DECORATION OF  
THE KING DAVID HOTEL, JERUSALEM

The object was to evoke by reminiscence of ancient Semitic styles the ambience of the glorious period of King David.

A faithful reconstruction was impossible, so the artist tried to adopt to modern taste different old Jew styles.

*Entrance Hall:* Period of King David (Assyrian influence).

*Main-Lounge:* Period of King David (Hittite influence).

*Reading-room:* Period of King Salomon.

*Bar:* Period of King Salomon.

*Restaurant:* Greek-Syrian-Style.

*Banquet Hall:* Phenician Style (Assyrian influence), etc.

G. A. HUFSCMID  
Decorator, O.E.V. & S.W.B.,  
Geneva

The beauty of Jerusalem in its landscape can be compared with that of Toledo. The city stands in the mountains, a scape of domes and towers enclosed by crenellated walls and perched on a table of rock above a deep valley. As far as the distant hills of Moab the contours of the country resemble those of a physical map, sweeping up the slopes in regular, stratified curves, and casting grand shadows in the sudden valleys. Earth and rock reflect the lights of a fire-opal. Such an essay in urban emplacement, whether accidental or contrived, has made a work of art.

In detail, even Toledo offers no comparison with the steep winding streets, cobbled in broad steps and so narrow that a single camel causes as much disturbance as a motor coach in an English lane. Jostling up and down King David Street, from dawn to sunset, the crowd is still a picture of "the East", immune as yet from the tide of lounge suits and horn spectacles. Here comes the desert Arab, furiously moustached, sailing by in his voluminous robes of gold-worked camel hair; the Arab woman, with her face tattooed and her dress embroidered, bearing a basket on her head; the priest of Islam, trim of beard and sporting a neat white turban round his fez; the Orthodox Jew, in ringlets, beaver hat,

and black frock coat; the Greek priest and Greek monk, bearded and bunned beneath their tall black chimney-pots; priests and monks from Egypt, Abyssinia, and Armenia; the Latin father in brown robe and white topee; the woman of Bethlehem, whose backward-sloping head-dress beneath a white veil is said to be a legacy of the Norman kingdom; and among them all, as background of the essential commonplace, the occasional lounge suit, the cretonne frock, the camera-strapped tourist.

Yet Jerusalem is more than picturesque, more than shoddy in the style of so many Oriental towns. There may be filth, but there is no brick or plaster, no crumbling and discolourment. The buildings are wholly of stone, a whitish cheese-like stone, candid and luminous, which the sun turns to all tones of ruddy gold. Charm and romance have no place. All is open and harmonious. The associations of history and belief, deep-rooted in the first memories of childhood, dissolve before the actual apparition. The outpourings of faith, the lamentations of Jew and Christian, the devotion of Islam to the holy Rock, have enshrouded the *genius loci* with no mystery. That spirit is an imperious emanation, evoking superstitious homage, sustained thereby perhaps, but existing independently of it. Its sympathy is with the centurions rather than the priests. And the centurions are here again. They wear shorts and topees, and answer, when addressed, with a Yorkshire accent.

Set in this radiant environment, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre appears the meanest of churches. Its darkness seems darker than it is, its architecture worse, its cult more degraded. The visitor is in conflict with himself. To pretend to detachment is supercilious; to pretend to reverence, hypocritical. The choice lies between them. Yet for me that choice has been averted.



I met a friend in the doorway, and it was he who showed me how to cope with the Holy Places.

My friend was a black-robed monk, wearing short beard, long hair, and a tall cylindrical hat.

"Hail," said I in Greek. "You come from Mount Athos?"

"I do," he replied, "from the monastery of Docheiariou. My name is Gabriel."

"You are the brother of Aristarchus?"

"I am."

"And Aristarchus is dead?"

"He is. But who could have told you?"

I have described Aristarchus in another book. He was a monk at Vatopedi, the richest of the Athonite monasteries, whither we arrived, after five weeks on the Holy Mountain, tired and underfed. Aristarchus looked after us. He had once been a servant on an English yacht, and he called us every morning with the question: "What time would you like lunch today, sir?" He was young, efficient, and material, entirely unsuited to the monastic vocation and determined, if he could, to save enough money to take him to America. He hated the older monks, who humiliated him.

One day, a year or two after our visit, he acquired a revolver and shot a couple of these venerable bullies. So the story goes. What is certain is that he then committed suicide. A saner man, externally, than Aristarchus never existed, and the Athonite community was filled with shame and reticence at the tragedy.

"Aristarchus was cracked in the head", said Gabriel, tapping his own. Gabriel, I knew—for Aristarchus had told me—was happy in his vocation and could see in his brother's violence only an aberration. "Is this your first visit to Jerusalem?" he continued, changing the subject.

"We arrived this morning."

"I'll show you round. Yesterday I was in the Tomb

itself. Tomorrow I go in again at eleven. This way."

We were now in a broad circular chamber as high as a cathedral, whose shallow dome was supported on a ring of massive piers. In the middle of the empty floor stood the shrine, a miniature church resembling an old-fashioned railway engine.

"When were you last on Mount Athos?" asked Gabriel.

"In 1927."

"I remember. You came to Docheiariou."

"Yes. And how is my friend Synesios?"

"Very well. But he's too young yet to be an Elder. Come in here."

I found myself in a small marble chamber, carved in the Turkish baroque style. The way to the inner sanctuary was blocked by three kneeling Franciscans.

"Whom else do you know at Docheiariou?"

"I know Frankfort. Is he well?"

"Frankfort?"

"Frankfort, Synesios's cat."

"Ah! his cat. . . . Don't mind those men; they're Catholics. It's a black cat—"

"Yes, and jumps."

"I know. Now here we are. Mind your head."

Stepping through the Franciscans as though they were nettles, Gabriel dived into a hole three feet high, from which came a bright light. I followed. The inner chamber was about seven feet square. At a low slab of stone knelt a Frenchwoman in ecstasy. By her side stood another Greek monk.

"This gentleman has been to Mount Athos," announced Gabriel to his crony, who shook hands with me across the body of the Frenchwoman. "It was six years ago and he remembers Synesios's cat. . . . This is the 'Tomb'—pointing to the slab of stone—"I shall be in here all day tomorrow. You must come and see me. There's not much room, is there? Let's go out. Now I'll

show you the other places. This red stone is where they washed the body. Four of the lamps are Greek, the others Catholic and Armenian. Calvary's upstairs. Ask your friend to come up. This is the Greek part, that the Catholic. But these are Catholics at the Greek altar, because Calvary was there. Look at the inscription over the cross. It's in real diamonds and was given by the Tsar. And look at this image. Catholics come and give these things to her."

Gabriel pointed to a glass case. Inside I beheld a wax Virgin, draped in a pawnbroker's stock of chains, watches, and pendants.

"My friend here is a Catholic," I informed Gabriel maliciously.

"Oh, is he? And what are you? Protestant? Or nothing at all?"

"I think I shall be Orthodox while I'm here."

"I shall tell God that. You see these two holes? They put Christ in them, one leg in each."

"But is that in the Bible?"

"Of course it's in the Bible. This cave is the place of the Skull. That's where the earthquake split the rock. My mother in Samos had thirteen children. Now only my brother in America, my sister in Constantinople, and myself are left. That there is Nicodemus's tomb, and that the tomb of Joseph of Arimathaea."

"And what are the two little tombs?"

"They're for the children of Joseph of Arimathaea."

"I thought Joseph of Arimathaea was buried in England."

Gabriel smiled, as though to say "Tell that to the marines".

"Here," he continued, "is a picture of Alexander the Great visiting Jerusalem, and being received by one of the prophets—I can't remember which."

"But did Alexander ever visit Jerusalem?"

"Certainly. I only tell you the truth."

"I'm sorry. I thought it might be a legend."

We emerged at last into the daylight.

"If you come and see me the day after tomorrow, I shall be out of the Tomb again. I come out at eleven, after being in all night."

"But won't you want to sleep?"

"No. I don't like sleeping."

The other holy sites are the Weeping Wall and the Dome of the Rock. Nodding and ululating over their books, squeezing their heads into crevices of the enormous masonry, the Jewish mourners are not more attractive than the performers in the Sepulchre. But at least it is light; the sun shines, and the Wall itself is comparable to the walls of the Incas. The Dome of the Rock shelters an enormous crag, whence Mohammad the Prophet took off on his ride up to Heaven. And here at last, apart from its associations, is a monument worthy of Jerusalem. A white marble platform, several acres in extent and commanding a view of the city walls and the Mount of Olives, is approached on different sides by eight flights of steps announced by lines of arches. In the middle of the platform, dwarfed by the space around it, stands a low octagon spangled with blue tiles and supporting a blue-tiled drum, whose breadth is about one-third of the octagon's. On top of the drum is a dome, faintly bulbous and powdered with ancient gilt. To one side stands another miniature octagon, as it were a child of the larger, resting on pillars and sheltering a fountain. The inside has a Greek impress: the marble pillars uphold Byzantine capitals, and the vaults of gold mosaic, adorned with twirling arabesques, must be the work of Greek craftsmen. Iron screens commemorate a Christian interlude, when the Crusaders turned the place into a church. As a mosque, it was founded in the VIIth century. But many ages have contributed to its present form. Quite lately, the

Byzantine capitals have been too brightly regilded. They will tone down in time.

When we first saw the mosque, it was too late to go in; but we could just get a glimpse of it from the entrance at the bottom of King David Street. An Arab planted himself in our way and began to be informative. I said I would rather *see* the mosque for the moment, and hear about it tomorrow; would he be so kind as to move to one side? To this he answered: "I am an Arab and I shall stay where I please. This mosque belongs to me, not you." So much for Arab charm.

This evening we went to Bethlehem. It was already dusk, and we could hardly distinguish the magnificent rows of columns which support the basilica. The guides were almost more tiresome than at the Sepulchre. I left Christopher to see the manger, or whatever it is they show, by himself.

*Jerusalem, September 7th.*—As I was sitting beneath an olive tree in the court of the Dome of the Rock, an Arab boy came to share the shade and repeat his lessons out loud. They were English lessons. "Gulfs and promontories, gulfs and promontories, gulfs and promontories," he reiterated.

"It's not promontories," I interrupted, "but promontories."

"Gulfs and promontories, gulfs and promontories, gulfs and promontories. Deliver Mosul, deliver Mosul, deliver Mosul. Gulfs and . . ." He said he was first in his drawing class, and hoped to go to Cairo, where he could study to be an artist.

Stockley gave a dinner-party last night, at which two Arab guests proved good company. One of them, who

used to be in the Turkish Foreign Office, knew Kemal and his mother in the old days. The War found him consul at Salonica, whence he was deported by Sarraïl to Toulon—an unnecessary hardship since the Turkish frontier was so near, and one which lost him all his furniture and possessions. Talk turned on the Arlosorov, the Jewish leader, who was shot on the sands of Jaffa while walking with his wife. The murderers are supposed to have been Jewish revisionists, an extreme party that want to be rid of the English and set up a Jewish state. I don't know how long they think the Arabs would suffer a single Jew to exist once the English went.

This morning we went to Tel Aviv as the guests of Mr. Joshua Gordon, chief showman of the Jewish agency. At the municipality, where Christopher was received as the son of his father, the walls were hung with portraits of the apostles of Zionism: Balfour, Samuel, Allenby, Einstein, Reading. A map showed the development of the place by years, from a struggling Utopia of only 3000 people to a bursting community of 70,000. Over Jaffa hock in the Palestine Hotel, I tried the Arab arguments on Mr. Gordon. He was contemptuous. A commission had been set up to look after landless Arabs. It could only find a few hundred. Meanwhile, the Arabs of Transjordan were begging the Jews to go there and develop the country.

I asked if it might not pay the Jews to placate the Arabs, even at inconvenience to themselves, with a view to peace in the future. Mr. Gordon said no. The only possible basis of an Arab-Jewish understanding was joint opposition to the English, and this the Jewish leaders would not countenance. "If the country is to be developed, the Arabs must suffer, because they don't like development. And that's the end of it." The sons of the desert have had enough apologists lately. I find it more refreshing to contemplate an expanding budget—the

only one in the world at the moment—and congratulate the Jews.

The Italians were another snake in Mr. Gordon's grass. Some time ago, he and others had tried to start an Anglo-Palestinian shipping line, which might carry the mails instead of Italian boats. They failed, for lack of English co-operation. The Italians offer free education in Rome to all Palestinians, with reduced fares thrown in. Admittedly, only about 200 a year go. But Mr. Gordon grew bitter when he considered the difficulties encountered by any student who wishes to finish his education in London, even at his own cost.

After visiting the orange-belt and the opera-house, we went to bathe. Suddenly, out of the crowd on the sea-front, stepped Mr. Aaranson of the *Italia*. "Hello, hello—you here too? Jerusalem's so dead at this time of year, isn't it? But I may look in tomorrow. Goodbye."

If Tel Aviv were in Russia, the world would be raving over its planning and architecture, its smiling communal life, its intellectual pursuits, and its air of youth enthroned. But the difference from Russia is, that instead of being still only a goal for the future, these things are an accomplished fact.

*Jerusalem, September 10th.*—Yesterday we lunched with Colonel Kish. Christopher entered the room first. But the Colonel made for me with the words: "You, I can see, are Sir Mark Sykes's son"—the implication being, we supposed, that no Englishman of such parentage could possibly wear a beard. During lunch our host informed us of King Feisal's death in Switzerland. On the wall hung a fine painting of Jerusalem by Ruben, whom Mr. Gordon had meant us to visit in Tel Aviv if he had not been away.

I went to swim at the Y.M.C.A. opposite the hotel. This necessitated paying two shillings, the waiving of a medical examination, changing among a lot of hairy dwarves who smelt of garlic, and finally having a hot shower accompanied by an acrimonious argument because I refused to scour my body with a cake of insecticide soap. I then reached the bath, swam a few yards in and out of a game of water-football conducted by the Physical Director, and emerged so perfumed with anti-septic that I had to rush back and have a bath before going out to dinner.

We dined with the High Commissioner, most pleasantly. There were none of those official formalities which are very well at large parties, but embarrass small ones. In fact, but for the Arab servants, we might have been dining in an English country-house. Did Pontius Pilate remind his guests of an Italian squire?

There was a dance at the hotel when we got back. Christopher met a school friend in the bar, who begged him, in the name of Alma Mater, to remove his beard. "I mean to say, Sykes, you know, daffinitely, no I don't like to say it, well I mean, daffinitely, never mind, I'd rather not say daffinitely, you see old boy it's like this, I mean daffinitely I should take off that beard of yours if I were you, because people daffinitely think you know, I mean, no honestly I won't say it, no daffinitely I can't, it wouldn't be fair, daffinitely it wouldn't, well then if you really want to know, you've pressed me for it haven't you, daffinitely, it's like this, I mean people might think you were a bit of a cad you know, daffinitely."

When everyone had gone to bed, I walked to the old town. The streets were shrouded in fog; it might have been London in November. In the church of the Holy Sepulchre, an Orthodox service was in progress at the

Tomb, accompanied by a choir of Russian peasant women. Those Russian chants changed everything; the place grew solemn and real, as the white-bearded bishop in his bulbous diamond crown and embroidered cope emerged from the door of the shrine into the soft blaze of candles. Gabriel appeared, and after the service shoved me into the sacristy to have coffee with the old man and the treasurer. It was half-past three when I got home.

*SYRIA: Damascus (2200 ft.), September 12th.*—Here is the East in its pristine confusion. My window looks out on a narrow, cobbled street, whose odour of spiced cooking has temporarily vanished in a draught of cool air. It is dawn. People are stirring, roused by the muezzin's unearthly treble from a small minaret opposite, and the answer of distant others. The clamour of vendors and the clatter of hoofs will soon begin.

I regret having left Palestine. It is refreshing to find a country endowed with great natural beauty, with a capital whose appearance is worthy of its fame, with a prosperous cultivation and a prodigiously expanding revenue, with the germ of an indigenous modern culture in the form of painters, musicians, and architects, and with an administration whose conduct resembles that of a benevolent Lord of the Manor among his dependants. There is no need to be a Zionist to see that this state of things is due to the Jews. They are pouring in. Last year permission was given for 6000: 17,000 arrived, the extra 11,000 by frontiers which cannot be guarded. Once in Palestine, they throw away their passports, and so cannot be deported. Yet there appear to be means of supporting them. They have enterprise, persistence, technical training, and capital.

The cloud on the horizon is Arab hostility. To a super-

ficial observer it seems that the Government, by deferring to the susceptibility of the Arabs, is encouraging their sense of aggrievement, while obtaining none of their goodwill. The Arabs hate the English, and lose no opportunity of venting their ill-manners on them. I cannot see why this should support their case in the eyes of the Government. They have not the Indian excuse, the colour-bar.

At dinner here last night Christopher was talking of Persia, when he noticed a party at the same table gazing at us. Suddenly he heard them talking Persian. He tried to recall, in whispers to me, if he had said anything derogatory to the Shah or his country. We seem to be approaching a mediaeval tyranny of modern sensibilities. There was a diplomatic incident when Mrs. Nicolson told the English public she could buy no marmalade in Teheran.

*Damascus, September 13th.*—The Omayyad Mosque, though much restored after a fire in 1893, dates from the VIIIth century. Its grand arcade, with gallery above, is as well proportioned, and proceeds with as stately a rhythm, in its bare, Islamic way, as the Sansovino Library in Venice. Originally, its bareness was clothed in a glitter of mosaics. Some remain: the first landscapes of the European tradition. For all their Pompeian picturesqueness, their colonnaded palaces and crag-bound castles, they are real landscapes, more than mere decoration, concerned inside formal limits with the identity of a tree or the energy of a stream. They must have been done by Greeks, and they foreshadow, properly enough, El Greco's landscapes of Toledo. Even now, as the sun catches a fragment on the outside wall, one can imagine the first splendour of green and gold, when the whole court shone with those magic scenes

conceived by Arab fiction to recompense the parched eternities of the desert.

*Beyrut, September 14th.*—To come here, we took two seats in a car. Beside us, at the back, sat an Arab gentleman of vast proportions, who was dressed like a wasp in a gown of black and yellow stripes and held between his knees a basket of vegetables. In front was an Arab widow, accompanied by another basket of vegetables and a small son. Every twenty minutes she was sick out of the window. Sometimes we stopped; when we did not, her vomit flew back into the car by the other window. It was not a pleasant three hours.

The post has brought newspaper cuttings describing the departure of the Charcoal-Burners. Even *The Times* has half a column. The *Daily Express* writes:

Five men left a West-end hotel last night on a secret expedition. It may prove to be the most romantic expedition ever undertaken.

They left London for Marseilles and the Sahara Desert. After that, few men know what their destination will be.

A PREMATURE ANNOUNCEMENT MIGHT ENTAIL SERIOUS POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES.

These five men will travel by two lorries driven by portable gas plants. The fuel used is ordinary charcoal, and re-fuelling is necessary only every fifty or sixty miles. It is the first time this new invention has been used, but it is probable that it will be universally utilised for road transport in the future.

It is a nuisance to find one's name associated with such rot.

We now await the *Champollion*, with cars and party on board.

*Beyrut, September 16th.*—My forebodings have come true.

I went on board the *Champollion* at daybreak. Goldman? Henderson? Deux camions? No one had heard of them. But Rutter was there, with a tale of disaster and absurdity.

The cars broke down at Abbeville. They might have continued on petrol, but have been secretly returned to England, where the invention is to be further perfected and a new start is to be made, this time unknown to the press, in a month or so. Lest I also should return and give the failure away by my presence in London, Rutter has been sent on ahead to expedite me safely into Persia. In fact I am gratuitously invested with the powers and character of a blackmailer.

We have spent most of the day in the sea, recovering from shock, and have booked places in the Nairn bus for Baghdad on Tuesday.

Mr. Nairn himself came in for a drink this evening, inquisitive about the charcoal cars. Having known of the invention for many years, or others like it, he was sceptical, and with the best will in the world we could not oppose much faith to his doubts. All Syria is excited by the pictures of his new Pullman bus, which is to arrive in November.

*Damascus, September 18th.*—Since our arrival on these coasts, Christopher and I have learned that the cost of everything from a royal suite to a bottle of soda water

can be halved by the simple expedient of saying it must be halved. Our technique was nicely employed in the hotel at Baalbek.

"Four hundred piastres for *that* room? *Four hundred* did you say? Good God! Away! Call the car. Three hundred and fifty? *One* hundred and fifty you mean. Three hundred? Are you deaf, can't you hear? I said a hundred and fifty. We must go. There are other hotels. Come, load the luggage. I doubt if we shall stay in Baalbek at all."

"But, sir, this is first-class hotel. I give you very good dinner, five courses. This is our best room, sir, it has bath and view of ruins, very fine."

"God in heaven, are the ruins yours? Must we pay for the very air? Five courses for dinner is too much, and I don't suppose the bath works. You still say three hundred? Come down. I say, come down a bit. That's better, two hundred and fifty. I said a hundred and fifty. I'll say two hundred. You'll have to pay the other fifty out of your own pocket, will you? Well *do*, please. I shall be delighted. Two hundred then? No? Very good. (*We run downstairs and out of the door.*) Goodbye. What? I didn't hear. Two hundred. I thought so.

"And now a whisky and soda. What do you charge for that? Fifty piastres. Fifty piastres indeed. Who do you think we are? Anyhow you always give too much whisky. I'll pay *fifteen* piastres, not fifty. Don't laugh. Don't go away either. I want exactly this much whisky, no more, no less; that's only half a full portion. Thirty, you say? Is thirty half fifty? Can you do arithmetic? Soda water indeed. Twenty now. No *not* twenty-five. Twenty. There is all the difference, if you could only realise it. Bring the bottle at once, and for heaven's sake don't argue."

During the five-course dinner, we complimented the man on some succulent birds.

"Partridges, sir," he replied, "I make them fat in little houses."

Admission to the ruins costs five shillings per person per visit. Having secured a reduction of this charge by telephoning to Beyrut, we walked across to visit them.

"Guide, Monsieur?"

Silence.

"Guide, Monsieur?"

Silence.

"Qu'est-ce que vous désirez, Monsieur?"

Silence.

"D'où venez-vous, Monsieur?"

Silence.

"Où allez-vous, Monsieur?"

Silence.

"Vous avez des affaires ici, Monsieur?"

"Non."

"Vous avez des affaires à Bagdad, Monsieur?"

"Non."

"Vous avez des affaires à Téhéran, Monsieur?"

"Non."

"Alors, qu'est-ce que vous faites, Monsieur?"

"Je fais un voyage en Syrie."

"Vous êtes un officier naval, Monsieur?"

"Non."

"Alors, qu'est-ce que vous êtes, Monsieur?"

"Je suis homme."

"Quoi?"

"HOMME."

"Je comprends. Touriste."

Even "voyageur" is obsolete; and with reason: the word has a complimentary air. The traveller of old was one who went in search of knowledge and whom the indigènes were proud to entertain with their local interests. In Europe this attitude of reciprocal apprecia-

tion has long evaporated. But there at least the "tourist" is no longer a phenomenon. He is part of the landscape, and in nine cases out of ten has little money to spend beyond what he has paid for his tour. Here, he is still an aberration. If you can come from London to Syria on business, you must be rich. If you can come so far without business, you must be very rich. No one cares if you like the place, or hate it, or why. You are simply a tourist, as a skunk is a skunk, a parasitic variation of the human species, which exists to be tapped like a milch cow or a gum tree.

At the turnstile, that final outrage, a palsied dotard took ten minutes to write out each ticket. After which we escaped from these trivialities into the glory of Antiquity.

Baalbek is the triumph of stone; of lapidary magnificence on a scale whose language, being still the language of the eye, dwarfs New York into a home of ants. The stone is peach-coloured, and is marked in ruddy gold as the columns of St. Martin-in-the-Fields are marked in soot. It has a marmoreal texture, not transparent, but faintly powdered, like bloom on a plum. Dawn is the time to see it, to look up at the Six Columns, when peach-gold and blue air shine with equal radiance, and even the empty bases that uphold no columns have a living, sun-blest identity against the violet deeps of the firmament. Look up, look up; up this quarried flesh, these thrice-enormous shafts, to the broken capitals and the cornice as big as a house, all floating in the blue. Look over the walls, to the green groves of white-stemmed poplars; and over them to the distant Lebanon, a shimmer of mauve and blue and gold and rose. Look along the mountains to the void: the desert, that stony, empty sea. Drink the high air. Stroke the stone with your own soft hands. Say goodbye to the West if you own it. And then turn, *tourist*, to the East.

We did, when the ruins closed. It was dusk. Ladies and gentlemen in separate parties were picnicking on a grass meadow, beside a stream. Some sat on chairs by marble fountains, drawing at their hubble-bubbles; others on the grass beneath occasional trees, eating by their own lanterns. The stars came out and the mountain slopes grew black. I felt the peace of Islam. And if I mention this commonplace experience, it is because in Egypt and Turkey that peace is now denied; while in India Islam appears, like everything else, uniquely and exclusively Indian. In a sense it is so; for neither man nor institution can meet that overpowering environment without a change of identity. But I will say this for my own sense: that when travelling in Mohammadan India without previous knowledge of Persia, I compared myself to an Indian observing European classicism, who had started on the shores of the Baltic instead of the Mediterranean.

Yesterday afternoon at Baalbek, Christopher complained of lassitude and lay on his bed, which deferred our going till it was dark and bitterly cold on top of the Lebanon. On reaching Damascus, he went to bed with two quinine tablets, developed such a headache that he dreamt he was a rhinoceros with a horn, and woke up this morning with a temperature of 102, though the crisis is past. We have cancelled our seats in the Nairn bus for tomorrow, and booked them for Friday instead.

*Damascus, September 21st.*—A young Jew has attached himself to us. This happened because there is a waiter in the hotel who is the spit of Hitler, and when I remarked on the fact the Jew, the manager, and the waiter himself broke into such paroxysms of laughter that they could hardly stand.



As Rutter and I were crossing a bit of dusty ground left waste by the French bombardment, we saw a fortune-teller making marks on a tray of sand, while a poor woman and her emaciated child awaited news of the child's fate. Near by was a similar fortune-teller, unpatronised. I squatted down. He put a little sand in my palm and told me to sprinkle it on the tray. Then he dabbed three lines of hieroglyphics in the sand, went over them once or twice as though dealing out patience cards, paused in thought before making a sudden deep diagonal, and spoke these words, which Rutter, who once spent nine months in Mecca disguised as an Arab, may be supposed to have translated with sufficient accuracy:

"You have a friend of whom you are fond and who is fond of you. In a few days he will send you some money for the expenses of your journey. He will join you later. You will have a successful journey."

My blackmailing powers, it seems, are working of their own accord.

The hotel is owned by M. Alouf, whose children inhabit the top floor. One evening he led us into an airless cellar lined with glass cases and a safe. From these he took the following objects:

A pair of big silver bowls, stamped with Christian symbols and a picture of the Annunciation.

A document written on mud-coloured cloth, between three and four feet long and eighteen inches broad, purporting to be the will of Abu Bakr, the first Caliph, and said to have been brought from Medina by the family of King Hussein in 1925.

A Byzantine bottle of dark-blue glass as thin as an egg-shell, unbroken, and about ten inches high.

A gold Hellenistic head, with parted lips, glass eyes, and bright blue eyebrows.

A gold mummy in a trunk.

And a silver statuette nine and a half inches high, which, for lack of anything to compare it with, M. Alouf called Hittite. This object, if genuine, must be one of the most remarkable discoveries of recent years in the Near East. The figure is that of a man, with broad shoulders and narrow hips. On his head he wears a pointed cap as tall as his own body. His left arm is broken; his right carries a horned bull in its crook and holds a sceptre. Round the waist are bands of wire. This wire, the sceptre, the tail and horns of the bull, and the cap are all of gold. And the gold is so pliable that M. Alouf gaily bent the sceptre at a right-angle and put it straight again. No persuasions could induce him to let me photograph the object. One wonders when and how it will be rescued from that cellar.

Christopher got up on Wednesday, and Rutter took us to tea with El Haj Mohammad ibn el Bassam, an old man of seventy or more, dressed in Bedouin clothes. His family befriended Doughty and he is a famous figure to Arabophiles. Having made a fortune out of camels in the War, he lost £40,000 after it by speculating in German marks. We had tea at a marble table, which the height of the chairs just enabled us to touch with our chins. The noise of the Arabic conversation, punctuated by gurgles and gulps, reminded me of Winston Churchill making a speech.

The Arabs hate the French more than they hate us. Having more reason to do so, they are more polite; in other words, they have learnt not to try it on, when they meet a European. This makes Damascus a pleasant city from the visitor's point of view.

*IRAK: Baghdad (115 ft.), September 27th.*—If anything on earth could have made this place attractive by

contrast, it was the journey that brought us here. We travelled in a banana-shaped tender on two wheels, which was attached to the dickey of a two-seater Buick and euphemistically known as the aero-bus. A larger bus, the father of all motor-coaches, followed behind. Hermetically sealed, owing to the dust, yet swamped in water from a leaky drinking-tank, we jolted across the pathless desert at forty miles an hour, beaten upon by the sun, deafened by the battery of stones against the thin floor, and stifled by the odour of five sweating companions. At noon we stopped for lunch, which was provided by the company in a cardboard box labelled "Service with a Smile". It will be Service with a Frown if we ever run transport in these parts. Butter-paper and egg-shells floated away to ruin the Arabian countryside. At sunset we came to Rutbah, which had been surrounded, since I lunched there on my way to India in 1929, by coolie lines and an encampment: the result of the Mosul pipe-line. Here we dined; whiskies and sodas cost six shillings each. At night our spirits lifted; the moon shone in at the window; the five Iraklis, led by Mrs. Mullah, sang. We passed a convoy of armoured cars, which were escorting Feisal's brothers, ex-King Ali and the Emir Abdullah, back from Feisal's funeral. Dawn discovered, not the golden desert, but mud, unending mud. As we neared Baghdad, the desolation increased. Mrs. Mullah, till now so coy, hid her charms in a thick black veil. The men brought out black forage-caps. And by nine o'clock we could have imagined ourselves at the lost end of the Edgware Road, as the city of the Arabian Nights unfolded its solitary thoroughfare.

It is little solace to recall that Mesopotamia was *once* so rich, so fertile of art and invention, so hospitable to the Sumerians, the Seleucids, and the Sasanids. The prime fact of Mesopotamian history is that in the XIIIth

century Hulagu destroyed the irrigation system; and that from that day to this Mesopotamia has remained a land of mud deprived of mud's only possible advantage, vegetable fertility. It is a mud plain, so flat that a single heron, reposing on one leg beside some rare trickle of water in a ditch, looks as tall as a wireless aerial. From this plain rise villages of mud and cities of mud. The rivers flow with liquid mud. The air is composed of mud refined into a gas. The people are mud-coloured; they wear mud-coloured clothes, and their national hat is nothing more than a formalised mud-pie. Baghdad is the capital one would expect of this divinely favoured land. It lurks in a mud fog; when the temperature drops below 110, the residents complain of the chill and get out their furs. For only one thing is it now justly famous: a kind of boil which takes nine months to heal, and leaves a scar.

Christopher, who dislikes the place more than I do, calls it a paradise compared with Teheran. Indeed, if I believed all he told me about Persia, I should view our departure tomorrow as a sentence of transportation. I don't. For Christopher is in love with Persia. He talks like this as a well-bred Chinaman, if you ask after his wife, will reply that the scarecrow of a bitch is not actually dead—meaning that his respected and beautiful consort is in the pink.

The hotel is run by Assyrians, pathetic, pugnacious little people with affectionate ways, who are still half in terror of their lives. There is only one I would consign to the Baghdadis, a snappy youth called Daood (David), who has put up the prices of all cars to Teheran and referred to the arch of Ctesiphon as "Fine show, sir, high show".

This arch rises 121½ feet from the ground and has a

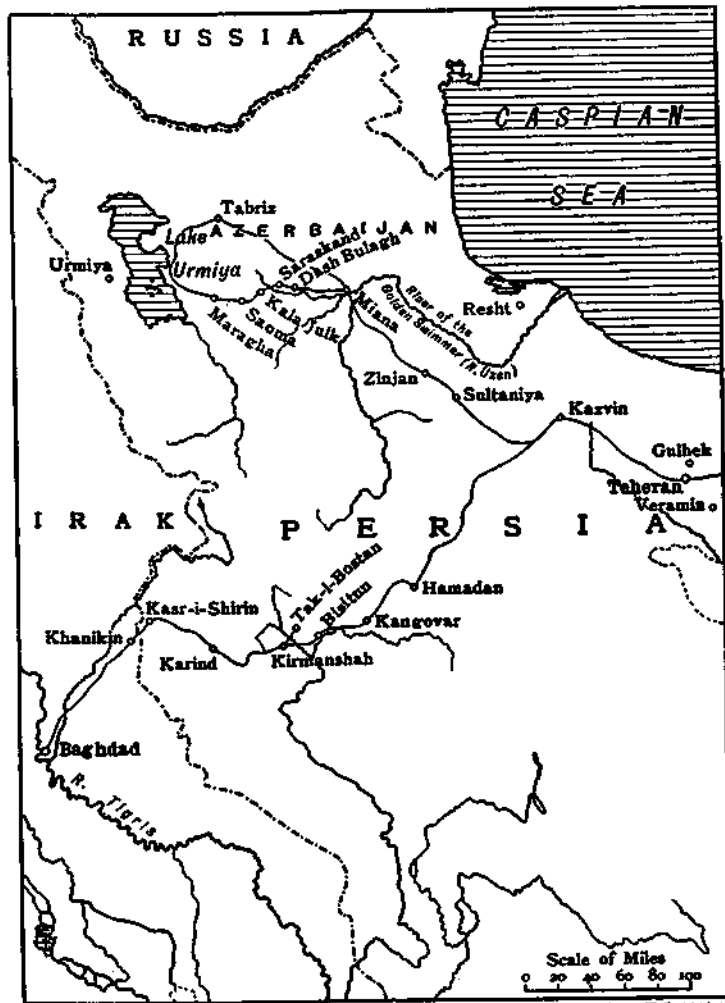
span of 82. It also is of mud; but has nevertheless lasted fourteen centuries. Photographs exist which show two sides instead of one, and the front of the arch as well. In mass, the ill-fired bricks are a beautiful colour, whitish buff against a sky which is blue again, now that we are out of Baghdad. The base has lately been repaired; probably for the first time since it was built.

The museum here is guarded, not so that the treasures of Ur may be safe, but lest visitors should defile the brass of the show-cases by leaning on them. Since none of the exhibits is bigger than a thimble, it was thus impossible to see the treasures of Ur. On the wall outside, King Feisal has erected a memorial tablet to Gertrude Bell. Presuming the inscription was meant by King Feisal to be read, I stepped up to read it. At which four policemen set up a shout and dragged me away. I asked the director of the museum why this was. "If you have short sight, you can get special leave", he snapped. So much, again, for Arab charm.

We dined with Peter Scarlett, whose friend, Ward, told a story of Feisal's funeral. It was a broiling day and a large negro had made his way into the enclosure reserved for the dignitaries. After a little time he was removed. "God damn," yelled the Commander of the English troops, "they've taken away my shade."

Money was waiting for me here, as the fortune-teller promised.

## PART II



## PART II

*PERSIA: Kirmanshah (4900 ft.), September 29th.*—We travelled for twenty hours yesterday. The effort was more in argument than locomotion.

A burning dust-storm wafted us along the road to Khanikin. Through the murk loomed a line of hills. Christopher grasped my arm. "The ramparts of Iran!" he announced solemnly. A minute later we breasted a small incline and were on the flat again. This happened every five miles, till an oasis of sour green proclaimed the town and frontier.

Here we changed cars, since Persia and Irak refuse admission to one another's chauffeurs. Otherwise our reception was hospitable: the Persian officials offered us their sympathy in this disgusting business of customs, and kept us three hours. When I paid duty on some films and medicines, they took the money with eyes averted, as a duchess collects for charity.

I remarked to Christopher on the indignity of the people's clothes: "Why does the Shah make them wear those hats?"

"Sh. You mustn't mention the Shah out loud. Call him Mr. Smith."

"I always call Mussolini Mr. Smith in Italy."

"Well, Mr. Brown."

"No, that's Stalin's name in Russia."

"Mr. Jones then."

"Jones is no good either. Hitler has to have it now that Primo de Rivera is dead. And anyhow I get confused with these ordinary names. We had better call him Marjoribanks, if we want to remember whom we mean."

"All right. And you had better write it too, in case they confiscate your diary."

I shall in future.

At Kasr-i-Shirin we stopped another hour, while the police gave us a permit for Teheran. Then indeed the grandeur of Iran unfolded. Lit from behind by the fallen sun, and from in front by the rising moon, a vast panorama of rounded foothills rolled away from the Sasanian ruins, twinkling here and there with the amber lights of villages; till out of the far distance rose a mighty range of peaks, the real ramparts at last. Up and down we sped through the fresh tonic air, to the foot of the mountains; then up and up, to a pass between jagged pine-tufted pinnacles that mixed with the pattern of the stars. On the other side was Karind, where we dined to the music of streams and crickets, looking out on a garden of moon-washed poplars and munching baskets of sweet grapes. The room was hung with printed stuffs depicting a female Persia reposing in the arms of Marjoribanks, on whom Jamshyd, Artaxerxes, and Darius looked down approvingly from the top of the arch at Ctesiphon.

*Teheran (3900 ft.), October 2nd.*—At Kirmanshah the chauffeur gave way to temperament. He did not wish to spend the night at Hamadan; he wished to sleep at Kazvin. Why, he could not say—and I doubt if he knew; he was like a child who wants one doll rather than another. To stop the argument, which had begun to involve the whole staff of the hotel, I went off to Tak-i-Bostan for the morning. It thus became impossible for us to go further than Hamadan that day.

More than one sculptor must have worked in the grottoes at Tak-i-Bostan. The angels over the arch have

Coptic faces, and their drapery is as low and delicate as a Renaissance bronze medal. The side-panels inside the arch are in higher relief, but themselves differ; for while that on the left is exquisitely finished and modelled, its fellow opposite was never finished, being carved in a series of flat planes which look as though they had accrued to the rock instead of come forth from it. Then at the back, in violent contrast to these mobile, cinematograph-like scenes of hunt and court, stands the giant figure of a mounted king whose empty ruthlessness reminds one of a German war memorial. This is typically Sasanian. It is hard to believe that the other artists were Persian at all.

The grottoes are cut in the base of a huge mountain escarpment, and are reflected in a reservoir. Beside them stands a tumble-down pleasure-house, in which, at this moment, a party of ladies were having a picnic. The romance of the place was completed when they were joined by a hatchet-faced gentleman wearing a soiled shirt with the tails outside, lilac sateen plus-fours, and cotton stockings upheld by lilac suspenders.

Bisitun delayed us a minute, with its great cuneiform inscription cut like the pages of a book on the blood-coloured rock; and also Kangovar, a ruinous little place which boasts the wreck of a Hellenistic temple and a tribe of children who threw bricks at us. At Hamadan we eschewed the tombs of Esther and Avicenna, but visited the Gumbad-i-Alaviyan, a Seljuk mausoleum of the XIIth century, whose uncoloured stucco panels, puffed and punctured into a riot of vegetable exuberance, are yet as formal and rich as Versailles—perhaps richer considering their economy of means; for when splendour is got by a chisel and a lump of plaster instead of the wealth of the world, it is splendour of design alone. This at last wipes the taste of the Alhambra and the Taj Mahal out of one's mouth, where Mohammadan

art is concerned. I came to Persia to get rid of that taste.

The day's journey had a wild exhilaration. Up and down the mountains, over the endless flats, we bumped and swooped. The sun flayed us. Great spirals of dust, dancing like demons over the desert, stopped our dashing Chevrolet and choked us. Suddenly, from far across a valley, came the flash of a turquoise jar, bobbing along on a donkey. Its owner walked beside it, clad in a duller blue. And seeing the two lost in that gigantic stony waste, I understood why blue is the Persian colour, and why the Persian word for it means water as well.

We reached the capital by night. Not a glimmer of light on the horizon warned us of it. Trees, then houses, suddenly enveloped us. By day it is a Balkan sort of place. But the Elburz mountains, which usurp half the sky, give a surprising interest to the streets that face them.

*Teheran, October 3rd.*—At the English club we found Krefter, Herzfeld's assistant at Persepolis, deep in conversation with Wadsworth, the American First Secretary. Their secret, which both were too excited to contain, was that in Herzfeld's absence abroad, Krefter had dug up a number of gold and silver plaques which record the foundation of Persepolis by Darius. He calculated their positions by abstract mathematics; and there they lay, in stone boxes, when the holes were dug. Rather unwillingly he showed us photographs of them; archaeological jealousy and suspicion glanced from his eyes. Herzfeld, it seems, has turned Persepolis into his private domain, and forbids anyone to photograph there.

This afternoon I called on Mirza Yantz, a courteous diminutive old gentleman. We sat in his study, over-

looking a round pool and a garden of geraniums and petunias which he had planted with his own hand. He is deputy for the Armenian colony of Julfa outside Isfahan, and has translated *The Corsair* into Armenian, since Byron is cherished by the national sentiment for his notice of the Armenian monastery at Venice. We talked of the War, when most Persians had their money (literally as well as metaphorically) on the Central Powers. Having no conception of sea-power, they could not imagine what injury England could inflict on Germany, 200 farsakhs away. Mirza Yantz was more far-sighted:

"I used to tell people the following story. I was traveling once from Basra to Baghdad, and stayed with a sheikh for a few days, who did his best to entertain me. He was a rich man, and he gave me to ride a beautiful grey mare, which danced and bucked, while he himself paced sedately by my side on a black mare of no spirit. So I asked him: 'Why do you give me this fine animal, when you keep for yourself only that slow black mare who goes along with her head between her legs?'"

"'Do you think she is slow?' said the sheikh. 'Let us have a race.'"

"For the first quarter of a mile I drew ahead. Then I looked round. 'Go on, go on', motioned the sheikh with his hand, like this. I went on. After a little while I was aware that the black mare was approaching. I spurred my horse. It was useless. The black mare passed me, still as it seemed without spirit, still with her head between her legs.

"I used to tell people that the grey mare was Germany, and the black mare England."

*Gulhek (4500 ft.), October 5th.*—A lazy morning. Trees dappling the rush blinds of the loggia. Mountains and blue sky through the trees. A stream from the hills

rippling into a blue-tiled pool. *The Magic Flute* on the gramophone.

This is the Simla of Teheran.

The bag has come up this fortnight from Baghdad in charge of an Air Force officer, who helped evacuate the Assyrians. He said that if he and his fellow officers had been ordered to bomb the Assyrians, as was mooted, they would have resigned their commissions. The aerodrome where they landed near Mosul was strewn with bodies, mostly shot in the genitals; they, the British, had to bury them. From the windward of the village also came a frightful stench, which reminded the older officers of the War. They took photographs of the bodies, but these were confiscated on return to Baghdad, and orders were given that nothing was to be said of what they had seen. He was furiously indignant, as anyone might be when it comes to saving British face by the concealment of atrocities.

At lunch we met Mr. Wylie, an American big-game hunter, who has been after wild ass near Isfahan. Conversation turned on the Caspian tiger and seal, the wild horse and the Persian lion. Tiger and seal are quite common. A horse is alleged to have been shot by a German two years ago; but unfortunately his servants ate not only its flesh but its skin, so that no one else ever saw it. The last lion was seen in the War near Shustar.

The mountains looked very beautiful, as we rode out through gardens and orchards on to the bare foothills: clear and affirmative as a voice calling. A lonely cap of snow on the east was Demavend. The sun declined. Our shadows lengthened, merging into one huge shadow over the whole plain. The lower hills were engulfed; the upper; the peaks themselves. Still Demavend knew the sun, a pink coal in the darkling sky. And then, as we

turned the horses, the transformation was reversed and repeated; for the sun had set behind a bank of cloud and now reappeared beneath it. Demavend was in shadow, while the foothills were in light. Quicker this time, the shadow ascended. The range darkened. The pink coal glowed again—for but one minute. And the stars came out of hiding.

News arrived this evening that Teimur Tash died in prison at ten o'clock the night before last, after he had been deprived of all comforts, including his bed. Even I, who was in Moscow during his reception there in 1932, find it sad; those who knew and liked him as the all-powerful vizier are much affected. But justice here is royal and personal; he might well have been kicked to death in public. Marjoribanks rules this country by fear, and the ultimate fear is that of the royal boot. One can argue that this is to his credit in an age of weapons that deal death from a distance.

*Teheran, October 7th.*—With a view to facilitating my journeys, I called on various people, including Jam, the Minister of the Interior, Mustafa Fateh, Distribution Manager of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, and Farajollah Bazl the epigraphist. Then to tea with Mirza Yantz, where the conversation was in English, Greek, Armenian, Russian, and Persian. The chief guest was Emir-i-Jang, brother of Sardar Assad the Minister of War, and one of the great Bakhtiari chiefs. He had brought a present to Mirza Yantz's daughter of gilt doll's furniture upholstered in plush. This sent the party into raptures, everyone exclaiming "Bha! Bha!"

Shir Ahmad, the Afghan Ambassador, looks like a tiger dressed up as a Jew. I said: "If Your Excellency gives me permission, I am hoping to visit Afghanistan".

"Hoping to visit Afghanistan? (*Roaring*) OF COURSE you will visit Afghanistan."

According to him, there really is a road from Herat to Mazar-i-Sherif.

*Teheran, October 10th.*—There is a fluted grave-tower at Ray about six miles off, whose lower part is Seljuk; and another at Veramin further on, which is more graceful but less monumental. This one has a roof, and was tenanted by an opium fiend who looked up from cooking his lunch to tell us that it was his home and 3000 years old. The mosque at Veramin dates from the XIVth century. From a distance, it resembles a ruined abbey, Tintern for example; but has a dome instead of a steeple, which rises from an octagonal middle storey above the square sanctuary chamber at the west end. The whole is of plain, café-au-lait brick, strong, unpretentious, and well-proportioned; it expresses the idea of content, as Moorish and Indian façade-architecture never does. Inside is a stucco mihrab of the same technique as the Gumbad-i-Alaviyan at Hamadan; but the design, being later, is coarse and confused.

A man looking like a decayed railway porter—as most Persians do under the present sumptuary laws—joined us in the mosque. On his wrist perched a speckled grey-and-white falcon wearing a leather hood. He had taken it from the nest.

We dined with Hannibal, who is descended, like Pushkin, from Peter the Great's negro, and is thereby cousin to certain English royalties. Having escaped from the Bolsheviks, he has become a Persian subject, and now lives in a style more Persian than the Persians. A servant carrying a paper lantern three feet high conducted us to his house through the labyrinths of the old

bazaar. The other guests were a Kajar prince, son of Firman Firma, and his wife, who had been brought up in Hongkong. They, being more English than the English, were disconcerted at having to eat off the floor. The house was tiny; but its miniature wind-tower and sunken court gave it an air. Hannibal is busy instituting a Firdaussi library in honour of the poet's millennium next year.

*Zinjan (5500 ft.), October 12th.*—We have been trying, and still are, to reach Tabriz by lorry. So far the journey has not gone according to plan. The lorry was due to leave at four. At half past four the garage sent us in a cab to another garage outside the Kazvin Gate. At five this garage tried to send us off in a broken-down bus, revealing at the same time that there had never been any lorry at all. We therefore hired a car, but resolved before starting to make the first garage disgorge our deposits. This caused a riot. Meanwhile a lorry had become available, at which the driver of the car threatened to go to the police if we forsook him. We did not.

In Kazvin next morning we hired another car, whose driver refused to lower the hood. When, therefore, he took a dip at forty miles an hour and my forehead came crack against a wooden strut, I gave him a sharp prod in the back. The car stopped dead. We bade him go on. He did so, at ten miles an hour. We bade him go faster. He did so for a little, then slowed down again.

*Christopher:* Faster! Faster!

*Driver:* How can I drive if you all hit me?

*R.B.:* Go on!

*Driver:* How can I drive if the aga doesn't like me?

*Christopher:* Drive carefully. We don't dislike you, but we hate dangerous driving.



*Driver:* Alas, how can I drive? The aga hates me. My times are bitter.

*Christopher:* The aga does like you.

*Driver:* How can he if I have broken his head?

And so on for miles, till we came to a police-post. Here he stopped dead, saying he must register a complaint. There was only one thing to do: complain first. We jumped from the car and strode towards the office. This alarmed the man; for it was evident that if we sought the police with such alacrity they must be on our side instead of his. He suggested going on instead. We agreed.

The incident was an illustration, and a warning, of the acute horror which Persians feel towards even the pretence of physical violence.

Mile after mile we pursued a straight line between parallel ranges of mountains. The dome of Sultaniya loomed over the desert. To reach it we had to break down a whole irrigation system. There we found a different Persia. Though but a few miles off the main road, the modern Pahlevi hat was replaced by the old helm-shaped cap that appears in the reliefs at Persepolis. Most of the villagers spoke Turkish. Securing a bowl of curds and a flap of bread as big as a tent from the tea-house, we entered the mausoleum.

This remarkable building was finished by the Mongol prince Uljaitu in 1313. An egg-shaped dome about 100 feet high rests on a tall octagon, and is enclosed by a stockade of eight minarets which stand on the parapet of the octagon at the corners. The brick is pinkish. But the minarets were originally turquoise, and trefoils of the same colour, outlined in lapis, glitter round the base of the dome. Against the flat desert, pressed about by mud hovels, this gigantic memorial of the Mongol Empire bears witness to that Central Asian virility which produced, under the Seljuks, Mongols, and Timurids,

the happiest inspirations of Persian architecture. Certainly, this is façade-architecture: the prototype of the Taj and a hundred other shrines. But it still breathes power and content, while its offspring achieve only scenic refinement. It has the audacity of true invention; the graces are sacrificed to the idea, and the result, imperfect as it may be, represents the triumph of the idea over technical limitations. Much great architecture is of this kind. One thinks of Brunelleschi.

The inn here is labelled "Grand Hotel—Town Hall". We have not been wholly dependent on it, since Hussein Mohammad Angorani, the local agent of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, invited us to supper. He received us in a long white room with a brilliantly painted ceiling; even the doors and windows were covered with white muslin. The furniture consisted of two brass bedsteads appointed with satin bolsters, and a ring of stiff settees, upholstered in white, before each of which stood a small white-covered table bearing dishes of melon, grapes, and sweets. In the middle of the floor, which was covered with two layers of carpets, stood three tall oil lamps, unshaded. A grey-bearded steward in a buff frock-coat, whom our host addressed as "aga", attended us.

Our letter of introduction had said we wished to visit Sultaniya. If we returned this way, said our host, he would take us in his car. A trouble? He visited Sultaniya every day, for business or sport. In fact he had a house there, in which he could entertain us. In my innocence I believed these courtesies. But Christopher knew better. After an enormous meal, which we ate with our hands, the steward led us back to our bare cubicle in the Grand Hotel—Town Hall.

I am sitting in the street outside it; for the morning sun is the only available warmth. A pompous old fellow in check tweeds, who looks like Lloyd George, has just

come up and announced himself as the Reis-i-Shosa. This means Captain of the Chaussées, in other words District Road Superintendent. He accompanied the English to Baku, where the reward of his help was a Bolshevik prison.

*Tabriz (4500 ft.), October 15th.*—In Zinjan at last we picked up a lorry. As Christopher was taking a photograph of me sitting in the back, a policeman stepped up and said photographing was forbidden. The driver was an Assyrian from near Lake Urmiya, and by his side sat an Assyrian schoolmistress, who was returning from a missionary conference in Teheran. She regaled us with slices of quince. They were much interested in my acquaintance with Mar Shimun, and advised me to say nothing about it in Tabriz, since there was a persecution of Christians at the moment, and Mrs. Cochran's Women's Club in Urmiya had been shut by the police. At the thought of this, they sang *Lead, Kindly Light* in unison, the schoolmistress informing me that she had taught the driver this to prevent his singing the usual drivers' songs. I said I should have preferred the drivers' songs. She added that she had also persuaded him to remove the blue beads from his radiator-cap; they were a superstition of "these Moslems". When I told her they were a superstition generally practised by Christians of the Orthodox Church, she was dumbfounded. She admitted then that superstitions sometimes worked: there was a devil named Mehmet, for instance, with a human wife, through whom he had prophesied the War in her father-in-law's parlour. She called herself a bible-worker, and wanted to know if most people in England smoked or did not smoke. Why doctors did not forbid smoking and drinking, instead of doing so themselves, she could not understand.

I began to sympathise with the Persian authorities.

Missionaries do noble work. But once they make converts, or find indigenous Christians, their usefulness is not so great.

Christopher, at this stage, was reading in the back of the lorry, where his companions were a Teherani, an Isfahani, two muleteers, and the driver's assistant.

*Teherani:* What's this book?

*Christopher:* A book of history.

*Teherani:* What history?

*Christopher:* The history of Rum and the countries near it, such as Persia, Egypt, Turkey, and Frankistan.

*Assistant (opening the book):* Ya Ali! What characters!

*Teherani:* Can you read it?

*Christopher:* Of course. It's my language.

*Teherani:* Read it to us.

*Christopher:* But you cannot understand the language.

*Isfahani:* No matter. Read a little.

*Muleteers:* Go on! Go on!

*Christopher:* "It may occasion some surprise that the Roman pontiff should erect, in the heart of France, the tribunal from whence he hurled his anathemas against the king; but our surprise will vanish so soon as we form a just estimate of a king of France in the eleventh century."

*Teherani:* What's that about?

*Christopher:* About the Pope.

*Teherani:* The Foof? Who's that?

*Christopher:* The Caliph of Rum.

*Muleteer:* It's a history of the Caliph of Rum.

*Teherani:* Shut up! Is it a new book?

*Assistant:* Is it full of clean thoughts?

*Christopher:* It is without religion. The man who wrote it did not believe in the prophets.

*Teherani:* Did he believe in God?

*Christopher:* Perhaps. But he despised the prophets. He

said that Jesus was an ordinary man (*general agreement*) and that Mohammad was an ordinary man (*general depression*) and that Zoroaster was an ordinary man.

*Muleteer (who speaks Turkish and doesn't understand well):*

Was he called Zoroaster?

*Christopher:* No, Gibbon.

*Chorus:* Ghiboon! Ghiboon!

*Teherani:* Is there any religion which says there is no god?

*Christopher:* I think not. But in Africa they worship idols.

*Teherani:* Are there many idolaters in England?

The road led into mountains, where a great gorge brought us to the river of the Golden Swimmer. He was a shepherd, a Leander, who used to swim across to visit his beloved, until at last she built the truly magnificent bridge by which we also crossed. A herd of gazelle frisked along beside us. At length we came out on the Azerbaijan highlands, a dun sweeping country like Spain in winter. We passed through Miana, which is famous for a bug that bites only strangers, and spent the night in a lonely caravanserai where a wolf was tethered in the courtyard. At Tabriz the police asked us for five photographs each (they did not get them) and the following information:

#### AVIS

*Je soussigné* { Robert Byron  
Christopher Sykes

*Sujet* { anglais  
anglais

*et exerçant la profession de* { peintre  
philosophe

*déclare être arrivé en date du* { 13<sup>me</sup> octobre  
13<sup>me</sup> octobre

*accompagné de* { un djinn  
un livre par Henry James

etc.

The features of Tabriz are a view of plush-coloured mountains, approached by lemon-coloured foothills; a drinkable white wine and a disgusting beer; several miles of superb brick-vaulted bazaars; and a new municipal garden containing a bronze statue of Marjoribanks in a cloak. There are two monuments: the wreck of the famous Blue Mosque, veneered in XVth-century mosaic; and the Ark, or Citadel, a mountain of small russet bricks laid with consummate art, which looks as if it had once been a mosque, and if so, one of the biggest ever built. Turkish is the only language, except among officials. The merchants were formerly prosperous, but have been ruined by Marjoribanks's belief in a planned economy.

*Maragha (4900 ft.), October 16th.*—We drove here this morning in four hours, through country that reminded me of Donegal. Lake Urmiya appeared in the distance, a streak of blue and silver, with mountains beyond. Square pigeon-towers, perforated at the top, gave the villages a fortified appearance. Round about were vineyards, and groves of *sanjuk*<sup>1</sup> trees, which have narrow grey leaves and clusters of small yellow fruit.

Maragha itself is not attractive. Broad straight streets have been cut through the old bazaars, and take away its character. A Persian-speaking infant adorned with eyelashes as long as ospreys conducted us to the necessary officials, and these in their turn showed us a fine polygonal grave-tower of the XIIth century, which is known as the grave of the Mother of Hulagu and is built of plum-red brick arranged in patterns and inscriptions. The effect of this cosy old material, transferred as it were from an English kitchen-garden to the

<sup>1</sup> So called by the local Turks; Persian: *sinjid*; a relation of the English service tree.

service of Koranic texts, and inlaid with glistening blue, is surprisingly beautiful. There is a Kufic frieze inside, below which the walls have been lined with nesting-holes for pigeons.

We have conceived the idea of riding from here direct to Miana, thus cutting off two sides of a triangle with Tabriz at its apex. This should take us through unknown country, unknown at least architecturally; it is empty enough on the map. Horses are the difficulty. We agreed to one owner's price; at which he was much taken aback, having lately lost his wife, and having no one to care for his children during the journey. An hour's argument overcame this objection. But then, having seen the horses, we revived it on our own account, to escape from the bargain. The innkeeper is looking for others. We hope to start tomorrow evening. It is the custom in this country to start in the evening.

*Tasr Kand (c. 5000 ft.), October 17th.*—I have done my best with the orthography of this place, though it is not important, consisting of one house, and that only a farsakh from Maragha. The farsakh (Xenophon's parasang) will be of interest to us now. It has been "stabilised" at four miles, but in common parlance varies from three to seven.

Our sheepskin coats and sleeping-bags are spread in an upper room. Through the unglazed window peer the tops of poplars and the last gleam of a sky that threatens winter. . . . A match flickers, a lantern lights up the asperities of the mud wall; the window goes black. Abbas the policeman crouches over a brazier, heating a cube of opium in a pair of tongs. He has just given me a puff, which tasted of potato. The muleteer in the corner is named Haji Baba. Christopher is still reading

Gibbon. Chicken and onions are simmering in a pot. And I reflect that had we foreseen this journey we might have brought some food, and also insecticide.

The officials in Maragha had heard of the Rasatkhana, which means "star-house" or observatory; but none had ever seen it. It was built by Hulagu in the XIIIth century, and its observations were Islam's last contribution to astronomy till Ulugh Beg revised the calendar at the beginning of the XVth. We set out early, breasted a mountain at full gallop, and found ourselves on a level table, where various mounds were approached from four points of the compass by straight cobbled paths intersecting at right angles. These paths, we supposed, were constructed to assist astronomical calculations; the mounds were the remains of buildings. But if here was our objective, where was the rest of the party, the Mayor, Chief of Police, and Military Commandant, who had preceded us? As our escort galloped hither and thither in search of them, we stood on the edge of the table, overlooking a great stretch of country with Lake Urmiya in the distance, and half expecting hounds to go away from a covert of poplars at the foot of the mountain. Suddenly the missing functionaries were discovered half way down the precipice at our feet, and literally underneath us; for as we slithered down to them, leading the horses, we saw that the rock had been hollowed away in a semicircle, and that in the middle of this was the entrance to a cave. The latter may originally have been natural, but had certainly been artificially enlarged.

Inside the cave we found two altars, one facing the entrance, southward, and the other on the right, or east. Each was hewn from the living rock, and situated in a kind of raised chancel with a pointed vault. A rough mihrab was carved in the wall behind the altar on the right, pointing away from Mecca. On either side of the

back altar were entrances to two tunnels. These gave on to small chambers, whose walls had scoops in them for lamps, and then went on, but were too clogged with earth for us to follow them. We wondered if they had ever communicated with the observatory above, and if so, whether observations were taken by daylight. They say it is possible to see stars from the bottom of a well when the sun is shining.

While I was photographing the interior of the cave, and thinking how uninteresting the results would seem to others, Christopher overheard the Chief of Police whisper to the Military Commandant: "I wonder why the British Government wants photographs of this cave". Well he might.

Sitting on their haunches, the horses had been dragged down the cliff to the village at the bottom. We slid after them, to find fruit, tea, and arak awaiting us in the chief house.

As we left the town this evening, I espied another XIIth-century tower just outside the gate, again of old strawberry brick, but square, and mounted on a foundation of cut stone. Three of the sides were divided each into two arched panels, in which the bricks were arranged in tweed patterns. The corners were turned with semicircular columns. On the fourth side, one big panel, framed in a curving inset, surrounded a doorway adorned with Kufic lettering and blue inlay. The interior disclosed a shallow dome upheld by four deep, but very low, squinches. There was no ornament here, and none was needed; the proportions were enough. Such classic, cubic perfection, so lyrical and yet so strong, reveals a new architectural world to the European. This quality, he imagines, is his own particular invention, whatever may be the other beauties of Asiatic building. It is astonishing to find it, not only in Asia,

but speaking in an altogether different architectural language.

*Saoma (c. 5500 ft.), October 18th.*—Abbas and the muleteers were too chloroformed with opium this morning to start punctually. When we complained, they laughed in our faces. In fact their manners are vile; and in a country which sets a premium on manners, there is no need to be good-humoured about it. This evening, therefore, when they began to settle down in our room, I shooed them out, hubble-bubble, samovar, and all. At this Christopher was perturbed, saying it was against custom, and illustrating his point by a story of how once, when he was staying with a Bakhtiari chief and wished to say something in private, he positively appalled his host by suggesting that the servants should be sent out of the room. I answered that I also have customs, and one of them is not to be inconvenienced by the pipe or presence of muleteers in my own employ.

We rode five farsakhs today, sustained by a single bowl of curds and tortured by the wooden saddles. Soon after Tasr Kand, the road crossed a fine old bridge whose three arches, alternating with two little ones above the stone piers, were again of a mellow red brick. Thereafter we ascended into rolling highlands, broad, bare, and sombre in the closing autumn. Parts were ploughed, showing a rich brown earth; but the whole country is cultivable, and could support a larger population than it does. This was the first large village. In the middle of it stands a massive stone slab upheld by a primitive stone ram, on which the villagers make their oil.

We occupy the best room of the headman's house, which is over the stable and smells of it. The walls are

newly whitewashed; there is a proper fireplace at one end; and round the walls are niches holding household objects, ewers, basins, and mugs of pewter, some of which contain a pot-pourri of rose-leaves and herbs. There is no furniture but carpets. Along the wainscot lie heaps of bolsters and quilts, covered with old-fashioned chintzes. Before the War these chintzes were specially made in Russia for the Central Asian market: one bolster depicts steamships, early motor-cars, and the first aeroplane, vignettted in circles of flowers on a vermilion background. They look gay and clean. But a flea has just hopped off my hand, and I dread the night, not for myself who am never bitten, but for Christopher to whom fleas are more than a music-hall joke.

A bowl of milk has arrived warm from the cow. We have opened the whisky in its honour.

When speaking Persian, the Azerbaijanis pronounce *k* like *ch*. But when they come to *ch* they pronounce it *ts*.

*Kala Julk (c. 5500 ft.), October 19th.*—Small clouds are shining in the blue. We rise by gentle slopes to a panorama of dun rolling country, chequered with red and black plough, and sheltering grey, turreted villages in its folds; breaking against the far mountains into hills streaked with pink and lemon; bounded at last by range upon range of jagged lilac. The twin peaks above Tabriz go with us. So do a flight of yellow butterflies. Far below a horseman approaches. "Peace to you." "Peace to you." Clip, clop, clip, clop, clip, clop. . . . We are alone again.

Yesterday Christopher gave our host a two-toman note to change. This morning Abbas, who took the change, refused to give it up. "Are you a thief?" asked Christopher. "Yes I am", he replied. He then complained bitterly of the insult, said he had 1000 tomans in his

pocket, and in the same breath asked how he could live without a present now and then. Our relations with him, already cool enough, were further strained when he tried to steal the money we paid for the loan of a house to lunch in. He raised his whip against the owner, an old man, and would have struck him if I had not ridden them apart and called Abbas the son of a burnt father.

It was thus humiliating to discover, as we were riding by a salt stream through a lonely breathless valley, that Christopher had lost his wallet with our money in it; for we are now entirely dependent on Abbas to beg shelter for us gratis. At the moment he was behind, having said he must visit an outlying village, and we suspected that having found the wallet, he had absconded for good. A few minutes later he rejoined us. We explained our predicament. He triumphed slightly, but has sent back one of the muleteers to look for the wallet.

As a slight compensation, we have been most hospitably received here by the steward of some local magnate, and are now reclining beside a sweet-smelling fire over a game of two-handed bridge. There is comfort in the simmering of the samovar. Pray God the muleteer has been successful—he has just come in. No he hasn't; in fact he hasn't started yet, and now wants Haji Baba to go with him, at the price of a toman each. I have given them two out of my remaining twelve, and here we are in the middle of Azerbaijan with just over a pound to get us back to Teheran.

*Later.*—Christopher has found the wallet buttoned in his shirt. It is too late to stop the muleteers, but we have given Abbas two tomans to make up for our suspicions, unspoken though they were.

*Ak Bulagh (c. 5500 ft.), October 20th.*—Christopher was ill when he woke up, from the fleas. Seeing this, the steward

brought him a cone of black honey and said that if he ate this for four days, at the same time abstaining from curds and rogand, the rancid butter in which everything is cooked, the fleas would avoid him as they do me. While we breakfasted by the fire off milk and eggs, a boy of some fourteen years old walked in attended by an old man and a train of servants. This, it appeared, was the squire, to whom we owed so much good food and attention, and the old man was his uncle. His name is Mohammad Ali Khan, and our host of tonight describes him as "the lord of all the villages".

The muleteers walked twenty miles in the night, to the village where we lunched, and back. They were as active as usual today, perhaps more so, having had no opium.

One farsakh brought us to Saraskand, a village-town dignified by an old brick tea-house. Here we bought some grapes at a shop which also sold Bavarian pencils, steel nibs, and chintz. In the afternoon we came to Dash Bulagh, and rested by a stream to contemplate the little cluster of grey mud houses, the conical towers overspread with drying dung, and the tall white stems of golden-green trees against the bare rose-tinted hills.

Ak Bulagh is higher and very exposed; one stunted, wind-blown tree is all its shelter. The sun has set behind the twin peaks. By lantern-light in our squalid windowless room I have been sponging Christopher with cold water, as the flea-bites have given him fever; in fact some are so raw that we have put whisky on them, in lieu of any other disinfectant. Fortunately he is not too ill to repay the headman's courtesies:

"Peace to you."

"Peace to you."

"The condition of Your Highness is good, God willing?"

"Thanks be to God, owing to the kindness of Your Excellency, it is very good."

"Everything Your Highness commands your loving slave will endeavour to perform. This house is your house. May I be your sacrifice."

"May the shadow of Your Excellency never grow less."

He is a grave old man, sitting in the ceremonial way, with his legs under him, his hands hid, and his eyelids dropped, while we sprawl about the carpets like babies out of arms. Seventeen years ago, he says, four Russians came here; before and since they have never seen a Frank. His son Ismail sits beside him, a delicate child, who was so ill a few years ago that his father went to Meshed to pray for him.

For medicine Christopher has taken a dose of opium and a bowl of liquid black honey. It is the best we can do.

*Zinjan, October 22nd.*—"Grand Hotel—Town Hall" again.

The long descent to Miana grew increasingly tedious as that place refused to appear. A shepherd-boy dressed like Darius asked us for a "papyrus", meaning the Russian word for cigarette. We were often addressed in Russian at the tea-houses along the road, but it seemed strange to hear it up in these remote hills. The muleteers and Abbas smoked their midday pipe in a lonely blockhouse, which was the only house we passed in twenty miles. When Miana came in sight the horses quickened, though it was still two hours away. After crossing a broad river-bed, we entered the town from the west.

We might have dropped from heaven. People rushed

from their thresholds. A crowd besieged us. I took the brunt of the Civil Police. Christopher called on the Road Police, to which Abbas belongs, and returned with its captain. He was extremely suspicious.

"Did you photograph anything on the road?"

"Yes," answered Christopher blandly, "a delicious old stone, a ram in fact, at Saoma. Really, aga, you ought to go and look at it yourself."

His suspicions were not allayed when Abbas confirmed the truth of this statement.

The muleteers of course had been told to collect more money than was due to them. Christopher gave them one of his Persian visiting cards, and suggested they should either knock their employer down or complain to the British Consul in Tabriz. We hopped into a lorry, reached here at one in the morning, and were given the box-room to sleep in. This morning I killed sixteen bugs, five fleas, and a louse in my sleeping-bag.

Christopher is in a sad state. His legs are swollen up to the knee and covered with water blisters. We have taken seats in a car which leaves here this afternoon, and should reach Teheran by midnight.

### PART III