

Freya Stark

*

RIDING TO THE
TIGRIS

Institut kurde de Paris



Freya Stark

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In *Riding to the Tigris* Freya Stark returns to the style that made her first book, *The Valleys of the Assassins*, a classic among travel books. The years and experiences between have deepened and enriched her sensitivity but have not modified her method of traveling; and most of the journey from Lake Van on the high Turkish plateau, through the desolate and mountainous Hakkari, and down to the River Tigris was achieved on horseback. She traveled alone except for muleteers whom providence provided and chance companions—a young Turkish schoolmaster with his violin, a jester with his mad son, and a police escort here and there—who found themselves attached to an unusual traveler, probably the first Western woman to make this journey.

History plays a minor role in this book, for even the greatest movements of people and civilizations have washed round this inhospitable, and till recently dangerous, area which contains the watershed of the Tigris and one of the spots where Noah's ark is reputed to have touched ground.

Freya Stark has a genius for traveling on her own. It is the unexpected, in events and traveling companions, that brings out the best in her and her powers of most vivid description, whether it be falling ill in a hospital empty except for an old Kurdish woman, or an impromptu stay in nomad tents, or having her luggage searched by Turkish police, or the incongruous elements of old Iraq and modern Turkey, or the dangerous behavior of her horse every time she opened her parasol. Beyond being the story of a remarkable achievement this book presents a philosophy both of life and travel, and it is clear that for contemplation in desolate places there is nothing like the saddle of a horse.

Illustrated

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RIDING
TO
THE TIGRIS



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HARCOURT, BRACE AND COMPANY
NEW YORK

I am grateful to Dr. P. H. Davis, Sir Harry Luke
and General J. M. L. Renton for kind information
and advice.

NOTE ON SPELLING

The Turkish letters c, ç and ş are represented
by j, ch and sh and the dotless i is omitted.

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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER: 60-5435

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FIRST AMERICAN EDITION

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
COX AND WYMAN, LTD., LONDON, FAKENHAM AND READING

*To Sybil Cholmondeley
with love and friendship*

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TITLE PAGE WOOD ENGRAVING BY REYNOLDS STONE

'TO THE READER

. . . . But now I may be justly blamed to pretend to give account of . . . matters farre above my reach or capacity, but herein I have described what have come within my knowledge either by view or reading, or relation by others which according to my conception have faithfully Rehearsed, but where I have mistaken in any form or subject matter I easily submit to a correction and will enter such Erratas in a supplement annex to y^e Book of some particulars since remarked; and shall conclude with a hearty wish and recommendation to all, but especially my own Sex, the studdy of those things which tend to Improve the mind and make our Lives pleasant and comfortable as well as profittable in all the Stages and stations of our Lives, and render suffering and age supportable and Death less fformidable and a future State more happy.

CELLA FIENNES

Copied from the MSS of her Diary, *Through England on a Side-saddle in the time of William and Mary*—by kindness of Lord and Lady Saye and Sele.

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THE HAKKIARI

THE HAKKIARI LIE, A DEEP WEDGE WITH STRONG GORGES, between the Tigris and Lake Van, with the country of the upper Euphrates above them and the Mesopotamian cornlands below. The Niphates of the Ancients, they had haunted me for years.

I had set them apart in my mind as one of those dwindling regions where a four-footed animal is still the only help to locomotion; and I had collected the odd and scanty bits of their history at intervals as I came upon them, though, packed like their geography among the greater highways of the world, there is little enough news to be gleaned.

History, such as it is, mostly washes round the eastern or western edges of this land and is to be found under the headings of other peoples—Urartian, Assyrian, Armenian—and among marching armies of Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Seljuk or Ottoman Turks. All these fill the centuries with a confused movement among the great ruins and the steppes of Asia, pushing into our age with the Turco-Russian wars of the nineteenth century along the ancient divide of East and West. The historic line runs north of the Hakkiari massif, where the steppes lift to Ararat (the name is the same as Urartu), or east along the plains that surround the Urmian Lake, or west along the Mesopotamian breaches of Euphrates and Tigris: the mountains remain either impenetrable or unrecorded. 'The most rugged among the regions of Asia'—Canon Wigram, one of their rare travellers, describes them.

The Hakkhari

Sargon, the Assyrian, in 714 B.C. pressing through them in his wars, describes the 'difficult way' the 'hill like a needle', the waterfalls and pathless heights; how he cuts fruit trees for his troops to pass in single file, and—having sent chariots and baggage to Assyria—has his own chariot carried while he rides, leading his men.¹

The Urartians came during the first millennium B.C.; bringing with them their skill in irrigation, their excellence in building and in the working of iron, their inscriptions and the fortresses that scattered out from Van. They met the Assyrians along what is now the Persian border, or in the Tigris highlands of the west. The Cimmerian hordes descended from the north, and the Armenians soon settled in those western regions which the Urartians had vacated on their way.

Detachments at times must have crossed the high pastures or threaded the gorges, but there is no record: only Wigram's vague acquaintance with 'men who claim descent from Nebuchadnezzar'.² In the days of Xenophon the Great King's cavalry of the plain turned back when they reached the mountains, as they have ever done before and since; the Ten Thousand cut through the western edge of the Carduchian country and left it as quickly as they could.

The Roman armies marched through under Lucullus, and in the Christian era a memory of habitation begins to penetrate with Nestorian settlers in these hills. In the long wars of Byzantium with Persia, and later with the Seljuks, the mountain districts must have offered a relative safety, and we hear that people fled to the Hakkhari when Tamerlane in the fourteenth century depopulated the Mosul plain.³ Coins found there bear witness

¹ Lehmann-Haupt: *Armenien einst und jetzt* (*passim*).

² *The Assyrians and their Neighbours*, 179.

³ Wigram 145.

First Sights

to a route for traffic in the earlier medieval centuries of Muslim rule, and this precarious civilization, insufficient for normal trade and unserved by roads, continued right through to our day. It is only now that the Hakkari begin to open to travellers, under the energetic impulse of modern Turkey; but even so I imagine myself to have been the first Western woman to ride through them from East to West, at any rate by myself: and I was grateful to Lucullus and his army since they alone seemed able to provide me with a plausibly historical excuse for my caprice—if a taste for landscape pure and simple, quite generally comprehensible a century or two ago, must now go by that name.

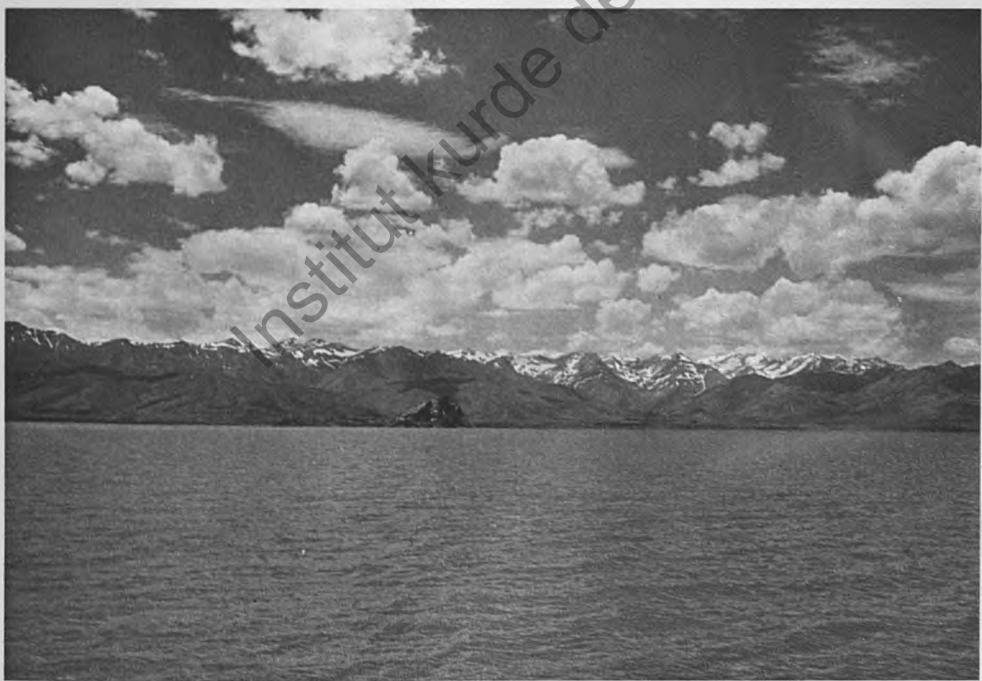
I had heard of the Hakkari every year in Iraq when the seasonal Kurdish war turned one's thoughts to the hills; and I had looked at them from every quarter of the compass except the Persian east. I had driven up from Bitlis to Lake Van and, chugging placidly through its thin alkaline waters in the little steamer, had examined the range that stretches apparently unbroken, worn into dips between high and shallow summits, and flecked in June with snow. The descent from Van to Mosul in the south is over 5000 feet, and I knew enough about mountains to imagine what a wilderness of erosion, what gashes of rock above the tunnelled narrows, must corrugate the spaces of that tremendous fall.

I had looked at the Hakkari from Iraq, driving with Johnny Hawtrey, who commanded the R.A.F. there, into the valley that opens to Dohuk and Amadiya. Mounds of buried villages float above the mists like islands, and the horizon melts in dust to the south. Stubble blows loose in autumn over undulations whose wheat or barley once enriched the black-bearded Assyrians, and here the flocks move from morning to evening in their migrations, with one shepherd ahead of them and one

The Hakkiari

behind them, under the clinging discomfort of their own dust. The dust creeps about the landscape above them, to the height of a man's eyes, and reddens and weighs down their curled fleeces; and the sheep, plodding through the ages, nose the ground and bury their eyes each in the coat of the one before it, kicking up their own troubles from their own soil, patient, unquestioning, and like mankind resolute to hide their faces from the goal of their marching, trusting to a shepherd that only their leader can see. So much for the Assyrian sheep. But we followed a brilliant sunken tongue of verdure of the Dohuk stream into a valley that lay variegated with sudden red hillocks and quiet in the sun with vineyards, until we reached oak scrub, and climbed to pines, and descended to oak trees; and found strong little Kurdish houses built no longer of mud, but solidly of stone against trouble; and paused to bathe in the swimming-pool of the new Sersing hotel where, when I first went to Iraq, no Arab tourist of the plains would venture. So much, but nothing else, had changed in the appearance of the sparsely populated valley; and, on a long spur in the middle of it, Amadiya with its citadel walls appeared in sight. Within its carved medieval gateway the long-bearded Jews with black turbans ply their weaving and keep themselves apart. We left it on the right hand, at a hamlet where Kurdish levies met us with horses, and turned with them to climb to the R.A.F. camp at Ser Amadiya, one and a half hours up the Sherifa Dere gorge.

A natural dyke of hills curves from beyond Dohuk to Sheikh Adi, Aqra, and Rowenduz, making as it were a southern frame for the Hakkiari highlands. Here all sorts of beliefs and sects, Christians, Yezidi Devil-Worshippers, Kurds and Chaldaeans, live secluded in separate villages, in woodlands, under slopes of pitted limestone scooped or built into Assyrian sculptures and strange shrines. The south wall of the Amadiya valley is an



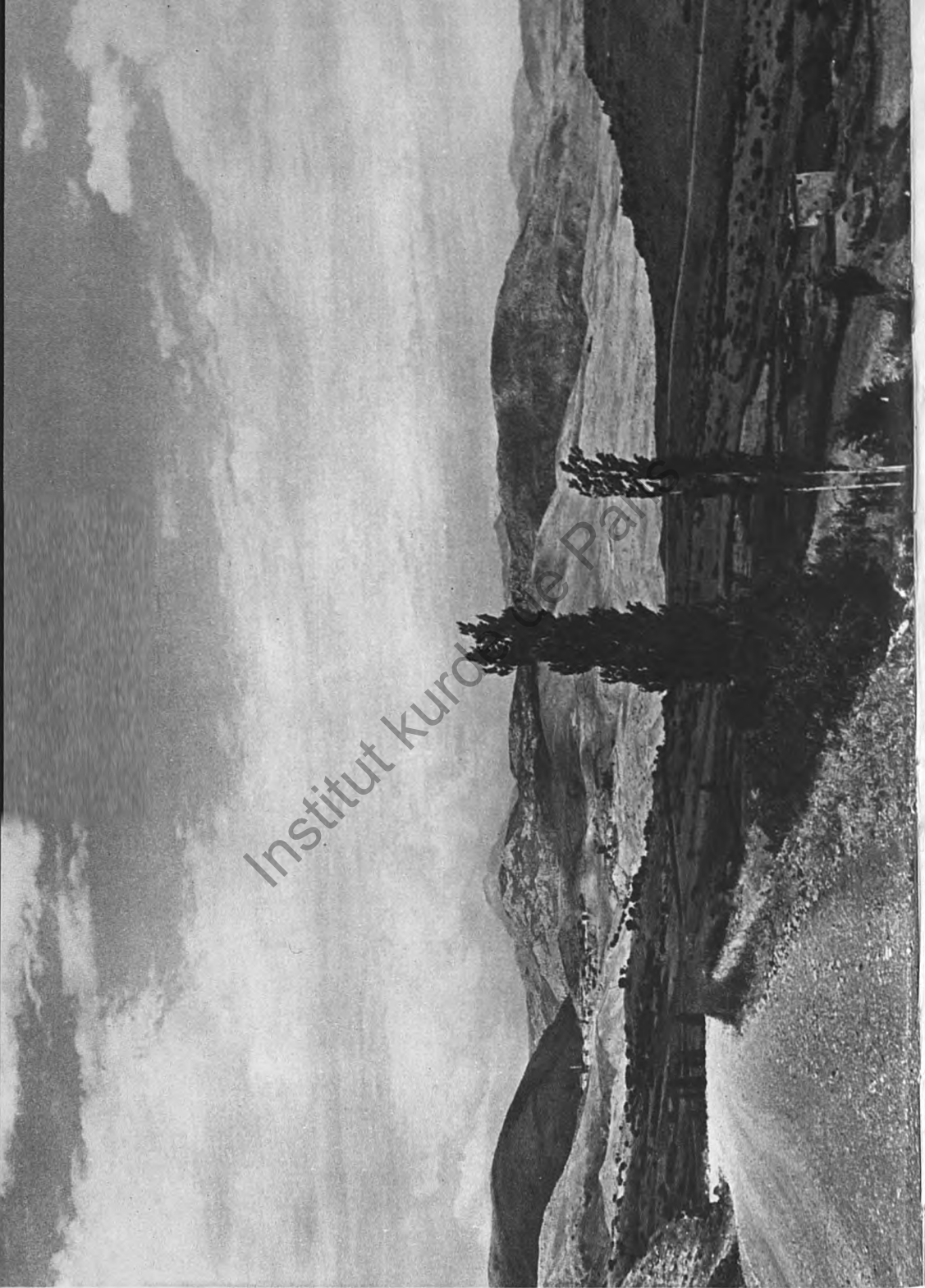
LAKE VAN, LOOKING SOUTH

LAKE VAN, WITH AHTAMAR ISLAND



ROAD TO ZAKHO

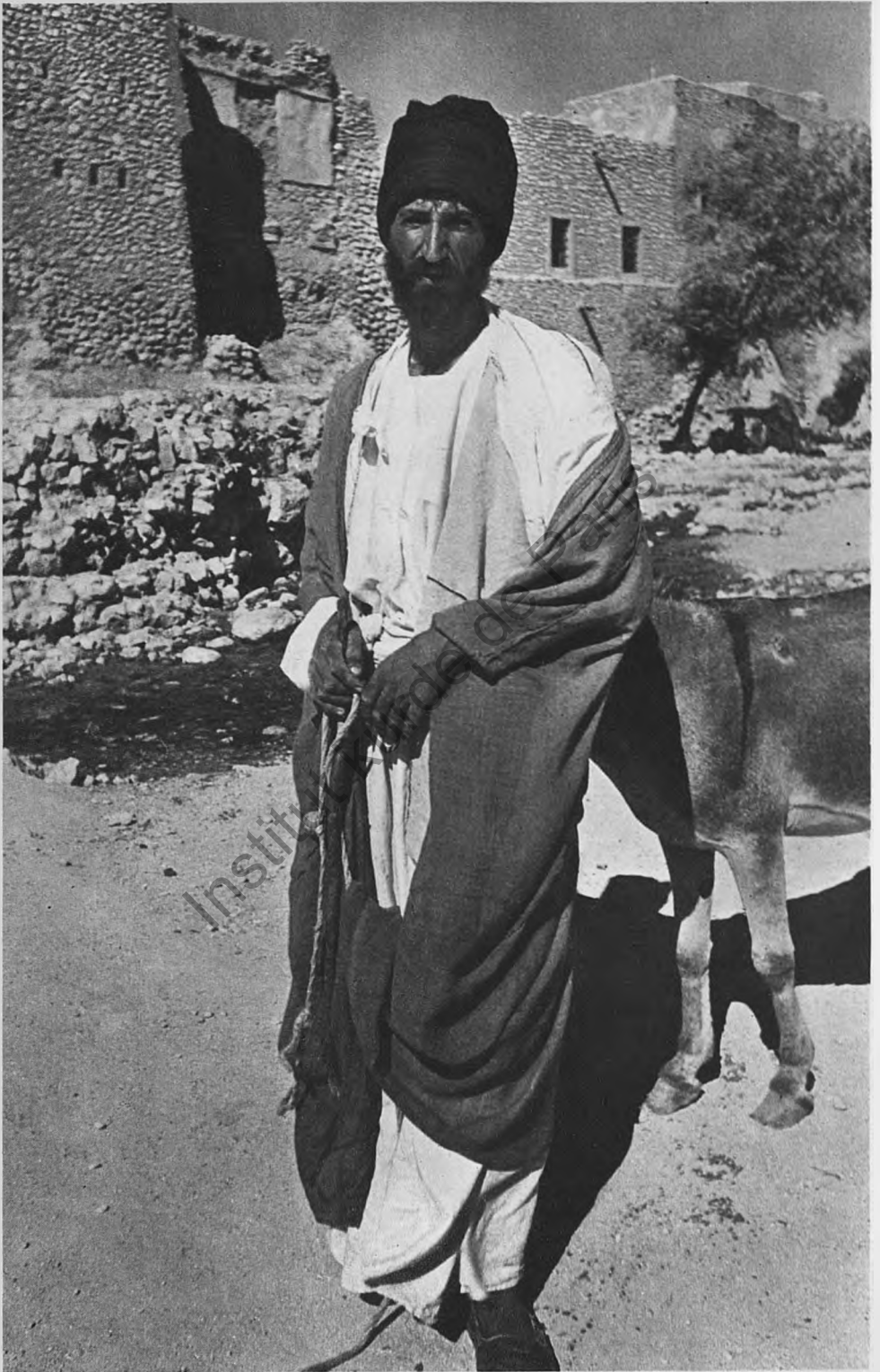




ROAD TO BITLIS



YEZIDIS AT SHEIK 'ADI IN IRAQ



SINJAR YEZIDI



YEZIDIS AT SHEIK 'ADI IN IRAQ



VAN. THE OLD AND NEW CITIES FROM THE ROCK

The Amadiya Valley

advanced line of this breastwork; and the camp was 6145 feet high above it on the northern side. Rows of white tents showed sharp there, and the mountain air isolated the camp and its noises in an empty but living silence. On the north far below, with vast shoulders stooping towards them, the river clefts descended out of sight. There was no foreground, but steepness on every side; thistles in dry grass and slits of rock; and tributaries worming their way in unseen corridors of valleys to the great rivers—Habur and Zab—that flowed, also unseen, to west and east. The neat street of tents made a pleasant line as if following the mountain contour. A camp of Assyrian levies had been pitched here in 1929 or 1930, and was still in sight; and Kurdish tents were close by on the other side of the hill. The levies guarded the mules on their way up from the valley (for a great deal was being stolen). They talked in friendly but respectful intimacy with their decent young blue-eyed officers from England. Assyrian batmen placed jugs of hot water inside the tent flap, and saw that one's shoes were polished to a service standard; and the C.O. and his wife gave us drinks at sunset while the peaks of Turkey shone across the valley. Horses here might have been available and easy; but there was no recognized intercourse, nor any possibility of obtaining permits to cross into those mountains from the south.

I did all I could, and so did my friends in Turkey, to obtain a permit next year for an approach from Van, but we failed. The season passed, and I flew on a long way home from Istanbul to Baghdad, and looked before sunrise across the Tigris lands, towards the Hakkari mountains from the west. They were awakening and uncoiling far below. Beneath an orange rim their amethyst veils were shot with flashing tremors, as if spears of light were wounding the recesses; and cloud cumuli, folded like shells and green-white like the petal-spring of lilies, stood

The Hakkiari

round the eastern bay. The sky there was sharp and clear, and fortress bastions floated in its distance, sheer and unscalable rectangles of cloud.

All this, like an Oliver Messel décor, began to disintegrate and move, with mists wrapping and unwrapping above the scrambled ranges; and from their chaos Tigris and the Western Habur, that flows down to Euphrates, coiled out towards the sun. Already, in the cloister-light of dawn they flashed their mirrors, and wandered apart, one to the sleeping desert, the other to its gorges out of sight. There was no green in the chaos below, but nests of rock, and eel-like writhing ranges with sharp edges, where one could feel the plastic fingers of wind and water working on the substances of earth till rock alone remains. Beyond, in the north-east, the Hakkiari lifted, founded in mists but clearing to sharp outlines, bastion beyond bastion, with the trough of Van like a pencil line for those who knew its sunken waters, and the rounded throne of Ararat far in the sky beyond. In that Dantesque scene, climbing from turmoil to peace in the early morning, I thought of one of the world's great pictures, the Giorgione Madonna at Castelfranco which is near my home; there, too, the eye is carried, from the warrior and the priest in the foreground, by steps miraculously graded, to the Child in the Virgin's lap and the ultimate repose.

*Quale allodetta che in aer' si spazia
Prima cantando e poi tace contenta
Dell' ultima dolcezza che la sazia.¹*

I decided that I would make another effort to reach the Hakkiari.

¹ Dante: *Paradiso*.

DIYARBEKR TO LAKE VAN

IT WAS A BAD YEAR. IRAQ HAD JUST BEEN FILLED WITH MURDERS, the Cyprus question was acute, and our government had almost reached that Nirvana of British policy, the allaying of its scruples towards either side by making enemies of both. Demonstrations, not too fervent, but obedient, were going on over Turkey. In spite of this, through the efforts of friends both Turkish and English, the authorities came to be persuaded that eccentricity and not crime was the more probable motive of my journey. A few leading questions about Kurds made it clear that I had no political axe to grind in that or any other direction; I handed in a carefully thought-out list of the places I wished to go to; and, in the course of a few days with my permit in my pocket, was flying to Van by Diyarbekr.

On that little aerodrome the Arabian heat hits out from the Syrian steppes like the blast of a furnace when the door is opened. It was the middle of July, and as I walked, with eyes nearly closed along the tarmac, to a modest building where chairs were scattered under acacia trees, I suddenly realized how long I had been away from the desert air and how deeply I love its arid heat and empty space and hardness. A sort of reception was going on while the Diyarbekr bus was preparing to depart. A young couple, of some importance in the town to judge by the little group that came to meet them, were returning from their honeymoon in England, with a wireless set and a cardboard box from D. H. Evans conspicuous among their things. The wireless was undone and admired, even by us the strangers,

Diyarbekr to Lake Van

who stood removed from the main party but not too far to be drawn into the bustle; for the people of Diyarbekr are very near the Syrian border: the gregariousness, the Arabian curiosity and fancy, the long, thoughtful and beautiful Arab hand and the deep expressive eyes are common among them, and even the Arabic language is frequently understood.

When the bus and the honeymoon car had both departed, and we few remaining passengers had returned to our aeroplane, it flew us eastward across Tigris over country that I knew already from the ground. There I could watch the familiar scene, but with the horizon lifted so as to discover what had been lying as non-existent beyond my sight. There was the river flowing, with blue glances against its shallow western downs. The streams that our road had crossed dripped parallel and leisurely towards it, entangled in sandy islands and palely looped in pools. There was the Batman Su, where the aeroplane's wing hid the Abbasside bridge and the site of the greatest strategic battle of Lucullus beside it, and Tigranocerta—now Silvan—on a hill.

Somewhere in this wide view a northern road has ever climbed from the cornlands of Assyria, whose strength and lion-like quality I had noticed as I drove down from Bitlis to Diyarbekr through a long summer's day. There had been a particular brilliance, washed in a thunderstorm the night before. Shining cloud-palaces had made the distances enchanting, and some little town—white-yellow with a minaret—had been dazzling on a hill saddle with the Bitlis snows behind it. I had parted from a companion and felt released. In Bitlis, a town full of corners and small delightful bridges, with a castle in its midst, I had been breakfasted by Oleg Polunin in a grove of poplars where little labels begged for the preservation of trees and flowers. I had had to wait one-and-a-half hours beyond its time

Lodgings in Van

for my car to start and had then been given lunch by the other passengers beside a tumbling brook. And in the late afternoon we had opened out these ploughlands that pour abundance like life and are never dull or static, for there is no bit of ground that is quite a flat plain beneath the mantle of its harvests, all yellow then with stubble, or blue with thistle, or white with hollyhock flowers that break like foam against their nameless mounds. Between ditches dim blue with the stems and leaves of the smaller thistle, we had made for Diyarbekr in the dusk. Soldiers had come to search the passengers' waist-bands for revolvers; and we had felt the grateful sudden coolness as one reaches a city's gardens in the evening. I remembered all this as we flew in the opposite direction, and recognized the hills, and looked, over their green oak shoulders and little paths of *yailas*, south towards the gaunter ranges that I hoped to reach.

At 3 p.m. we descended on Van in a pleasant air, and a dusty bus presently drove us to what was once the 'Garden City', and is now the new centre, with its dishevelled houses and shapeless streets not much improved from what I knew before. Stranded beside our luggage on the pavement, a rather grim woman from Adrianople and I discovered that—*Noi sem pellegrin come voi sete*—we were both in need of a lodging for the night. Side by side and gradually converging, we also discovered that the best hotel was full, and the second-best had one room only. I devoted myself to its window, which refused to open, while my room-mate went into Van to look for some 'relations'; having discovered one, to both our relief, she took up her parcels and vanished. But we had realized that we were meant to travel in the same direction, and the friendliness of drift-wood took us together to eat in the *lokanta*. At a table in an open yard a young waiter told us he had learnt his craft at the *Hilton* in Istanbul, and presented us with the un-Turkish novelty of a box for tips

Diyarbekr to Lake Van

into which my solitary contribution fell with a hollow sound. The woman from Adrianople agreed that we would go to the *Vali* together next morning and see what prospects there were for cars. I was hoping against hope that there might not be any, for that would add three more days to my riding before the end of the new road was reached at Hakkari.

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VAN

THE TURKS, WITH THE MOST SPLENDID, VARIED AND interesting country in the world, are naturally anxious to obtain tourists, and their difficulties in this respect are caused chiefly by the quite phenomenal badness of their hotels. Leaving Istanbul and Ankara out of count, where better conditions naturally exist, I have not found more than one among about forty small provincial inns able to compare with even a fourth-rate pub in Europe. Now it is no act of friendship to disguise this fact, when it is preventing people you like from getting what they wish for, especially since it would be a simple matter to remedy and since the Turks are perfectly able to organize a good hotel. This is shown by the excellent way in which they use their sugar factories for the welcoming of guests. It is not the building but the *running* of the inns that is so bad. When they are started—new and clean and rather expensive, with the latest available devices—the owner sets out his chair in the shade of his doorstep, places his magenta stockinged feet comfortably out of his shoes on to an opposite chair, reads his paper, and expects his clients to carry on with all remaining details. Some crone upstairs with one tooth in her head is walking around with a handful of rushes that stroke the dust along an unwashed floor; the beds are made with sheets or quilts that may or may not be changed when the guests depart in the morning; and in a year or two every one of the modern devices is wrecked. There *is* an improvement, though a slow one: single rooms or rooms with running water are making their way, and

it seems to me that the percentage of clean sheets is a good deal higher: but the central problem remains in the person of the innkeeper himself. To tell him that his profession is an art, that it requires several years of industry and patience to learn, would surprise him. And no real progress will be made until the Turkish Government, which is admirably ready to send its young men abroad to learn this and that, includes a proper training of hotel-keepers in its programme. If, at frequent intervals, half a dozen were sent to begin at the beginning and spend two or three years learning their trade from A to Z in Switzerland or Italy or Austria, for instance (in all which countries hotelier schools exist) and if a government yearly prize were given to the best-kept small hotel—as was done in Italy with the most astonishingly rapid results—the worst of the tourist problem in Turkey would be solved.

Inspired to these thoughts on this as on various other occasions by the experiences of the night, I was out early and had hailed a ramshackle hooded affair on four wheels which the Turks engagingly call a 'phaeton', to drive me four miles or so to the Rock. This stands among damp meadows—a wreck against which the waves of history beat quietly at last. Each one has left its marks or inscriptions, and more particularly those of the ancient Chaldians (not Chaldaeans)—the Urartians who worked in iron and were experts in irrigation and fought the Kings of Assyria in the south. Their water-tunnels and rock fortresses cluttered with innumerable stairways that now

Like a broken purpose break in air

stand everywhere about here, often overbuilt by later structures; and their cuneiform writings chipped into a terrace altar, or covering the outer walls that from the cliff look out over their

The Fortress

landscapes, tell some of the story and establish several of the dates of the kings of Van.

I had visited the Rock three years before; and it was pleasant to drive down again by a shady road bordered on both sides with water and houses rich and poor beyond it, all built, some very charmingly, of mud. A flagstone, sometimes the tombstone from a Christian cemetery looted in the past, led across the shadowy little streams to each front door; and the early dusting, one hand on the door-post and some pail or bowl or rug to be shaken out in the other, with a glance of interest towards the road and its traffic, was the general housewife note all down the way. The dust was as deep as I remembered, soft as milk and frothing over the wheel-rims, and over face and clothes and hair in thinner volume; bulldozers, promising asphalt for the future, were making it worse at the moment; and a hamlet, with dark mounds of dung stacked up for winter fuel, was sending out its sheep and cattle to crop the water meadows. Here the dust stopped, and the phaeton moved slowly browsing along a grassy path, while I climbed from the Urartian altar along the northern wall of the fortress, noticing its length, which I had forgotten, and the poor quality of the building, and looking for a way in. A boy came striding up over the slope which I found slippery and steep, and said that this, waving his hand over the castle rock and all its history, was his 'garden'. He was on his way to take the Turkish flag down from the ruined minaret, where it was displayed on Sundays.

The traces of the Urartians' fortresses suggest that they too had battlemented walls built of mud but twelve feet or more in height and thicker and better one may suppose than these poor descendents. They were conquered in Van for a short time by the Assyrians, who put up an inscription of their own but were soon chased out again. The Persians then came and

Van

left their mark also on the great southern rock wall; and Xenophon met the Urartian Chaldians¹ among allied tribes at the Centrites crossing, armed 'with long wicker shields and spears'. The present fort is Turkish, with older stones embedded here and there, and a minaret half ruined by earthquake where the Sunday flag is flown. The boy was a blue-eyed shepherd, with a bold profile, and looked after his sheep from one of the houses near by, and was fifteen years old. When he had brought the flag down from its tower, we draped it fairly in front of him so that the star and crescent should show handsomely against the sky, and I photographed him and it together. Below us in the sun the ruined city, that older people remembered in the pains and horrors of the First World War, gaped with broken walls and short truncated shadows, their soft materials sinking with every rainstorm into the dust; so unobtrusively built out of their earth, these mud houses seem as if the land itself were breathing out human lives and then subsiding. Washed pale of all substance, in the sun, a wooden pier showed at the Iskele; a new silo and a new hospital had grown up beside it and the water lay beyond colourless as daylight; otherwise it was the same detached, forgotten world that I remembered. "Too few people," said the driver, flicking his whip as we turned back to the rather down-at-heel modernity of Van.

I had planned to spend a few days there in spite of the hotel squalor, especially since the island of Ahtamar, with a famous eleventh-century church which no one for years was allowed to visit, is now smiled upon by authority as a tourist centre. One can visit its ruins clustered about by thousands of nesting birds that once were safe. On the other side of the lake, in the north, are the strange tombs of Akhlat and the remains of mosque and castle which belonged to the short but glittering

¹ *Anabasis* IV.3.4.

The Lake

medieval prosperity of Van. The lake, too, was secure then, with no enemy craft on its waters—there is no sign of fortification on the water's edge at either of the two castles, Adiljivaz or Akhlát. The tombs and the monuments, and bits of Arabic carved lettering, remain scattered on gently sloping headlands: the piers of wood bleached by sun and snow fill up with their country crowds to meet the steamer—soldiers, slow-walking peasants used to the deep mud, and wives and daughters moving with an easy freedom that belongs to the remote bare land: it might be the north of Scotland, except for the whiteness of the water, streaked with jewel lights and pale as glass. In the daytime, across the lake, the Suphan volcano seems to float in space and only its snow looks solid in the sky; two flights of duck showed black against it, their bodies horizontal between the vertical straining wings. All here round Van is pale, with a quality of light but not of radiance—an aloof, bodiless light that neither hurts nor warms: in its thin atmosphere the movements of the sky seem nearer and swifter: the sun at dawn, the planets at night, leap like runners from their horizons; and a bright star in the north-west spread a broad white band, as if it were a street lamp, across the lake.

THE GREAT ZAB VALLEY

THE *VALI* WAS IN CONFERENCE, AND THE ASSISTANT *VALI*, when the Adrianople woman and I went to see him, was deep in the country crowd and business of the morning, and made rather desperate by the problem of finding transport for a stranger. The Adrianople was by no means an asset, making two bodies to place instead of one. She would no doubt have had to wait for days if my higher priority as a guest and a foreigner had not prevailed, as it has done wherever I have been in Turkey during the last few years. However short the petrol ration—and it is very short indeed just now—and however few the available cars—and, with no importation of new ones or even of spare parts or tyres for the old ones, they too, are scarce—something has always been found if I applied to the right authority; and now the Assistant *Vali's* eye caught sight of a doctor who was touring the country to superintend the vaccination of children; he was seized; he protested; one wife, one son, a Hakkari journalist and doctor already had to be accommodated with all their belongings: he looked at us with distaste which deepened when we described the size and quantity of our luggage; but he yielded. My remarks about preferring to ride a horse whenever possible were ignored in the usual way. At eleven, said the doctor, we were to be ready. We departed, the Adrianople woman to her relations and I to buy provisions for the farther journey, and met again at lunch at the *lokanta*, having taken the remark about our time-table at its proper worth.

Travelling Companions

At twelve we were off, in a car—a jeep pick-up—packed tight with camping things below and a froth of fragile objects above—water-melons, cameras and coats, and an outsize doll in a cardboard box which the Adrianople woman was taking to her grandchild. At his mention alone her features relaxed, forgetful for a moment of the rigidity that respectability requires.

The doctor was fair and blue-eyed, and must have been a handsome young man, with a face worn, I assumed, less by emotions than by cigarettes, for he smoked and threw them away without an interval; he sat in front with the journalist, who had been slightly drunk the evening before and had come to my bedroom to promise hospitality in Hakkiari, much to my discomfort. The driver had already been over most of Turkey vaccinating the children, and handled our overloaded car across the steep dips of the road with admirable dash.

The doctor's wife packed in with us at the back, charmingly gay in spite of the discomfort of our presence. Brought up in Istanbul, she had adopted her husband's nomad life with enjoyment, and told me about remote places in districts they had been touring. A small boy of five with a sad squint, unbelievably spoilt but rather engaging, continually climbed to and fro over the seat that divided his parents; and on the only remaining space of floor sat the young doctor of Hakkiari, on whose hospitality we were relying for the night.

I had been along this road before as far as the castle of Hoshab, and recognized the rounded downs that lift from Van and descend to the shallower valley of the Hoshab stream. Dry and uninhabited, their grassy pastures had already been eaten by the sun when I had visited them late in June. There had then been flowers in damp places—iris, purple gladioli, pink alpine tufts like cushions, and pink antirrhinum—and the yürüks had

The Great Zab Valley

not yet taken their clusters of black tents away to the higher hills. The women of the camps had come out with their stately medieval walk, that accentuates the stomach in the fashion of the fifteenth century, and gives them a rather noble air, unashamed of all that their sex and their childbearing implies. A head-dress of small dangling coins was stretched above their ringlets on a round stiff mortar-board worn aslant above the eyes at a singularly unbecoming angle; and with their Elizabethan skirts, and velvet coatees heavily embroidered, and full-sail carriage, they brushed across their pastures with a triumphant self-sufficiency unknown to their sisters of the city or the plain. An older woman had stepped out from among them to greet and invite me to their *yaila*, lifting my hand to her lips and to her head and smiling, as rugged free and majestic as her hills; and now as we drove by, I remembered the camp in a fold of the empty places, and saw the spring that had fed the flocks through the earliest summer still making a splash of green on the dry grass.

The ruins of Hoshab—the Good Water—stand strategically at a river crossing in the valley, visible from far away on either side. Mud walls, the flesh of their battlements sucked by weather to look like skeletons of caterpillars, go creeping about the lower hillocks; and a little village with some good carved doorways is gathered round an early Ottoman bridge of black and white arches across the Hoshab stream. The road to the south runs here, and the castle has watched it from the time of its Urartian foundations, and through the Middle Ages, when this province, called Waspurakan, joined Ani to drive the Seljuks back to Persia from the Zab in A.D. 1048.

Henry Layard rode up here in the opposite direction from ours, and described the place a hundred years ago, when the government had just rescued it from the hands of two bandit

Henry Layard

brothers whom it sent to exile in Candia. It was Ramadhan when he arrived and found that

'the small garrison of regular troops and undisciplined Albanians had feasted during the night and were now sleeping. We knocked at the iron-bound gate for some time . . . and at length a slipshod sentinel . . . drew back the rusty bolts. He would not, however, admit us until he had received orders from the officer in command, who, with much good nature, slipt on a threadbare uniform, turned out the scarcely awakened guard, and received us with military honours. The castle is falling into ruins, though its towers still rise boldly from the edge of the precipice, overhanging at a giddy height the valley below. In them, open to the cool breezes of the mountain, are the dwelling-rooms of the old Kurdish chiefs, adorned with tasteful lattice work, and with the painted panellings and gilded cornices of Persia. They are now tenanted by the Turkish troops, whose bright arms and highly polished kitchen utensils hang on the gaudy walls. A few long brass guns richly embossed, the work of the early Turkish conquerors of Kurdistan, lie, upset from their carriages, on the crumbling battlements. After drinking coffee and smoking pipes with the captain of the guard, we walked down the narrow pathway leading to the valley and, mounting our horses, joined the caravan, which had preceded us on the road to Wan [Van].'¹

It is pleasant to come in this way upon one's past companions, and the middle of the last century, when Layard's book was written, seems to me to be the golden age for travellers in general. Great distances had become manageable, yet the

¹ A. H. Layard: *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh*, p. 385.

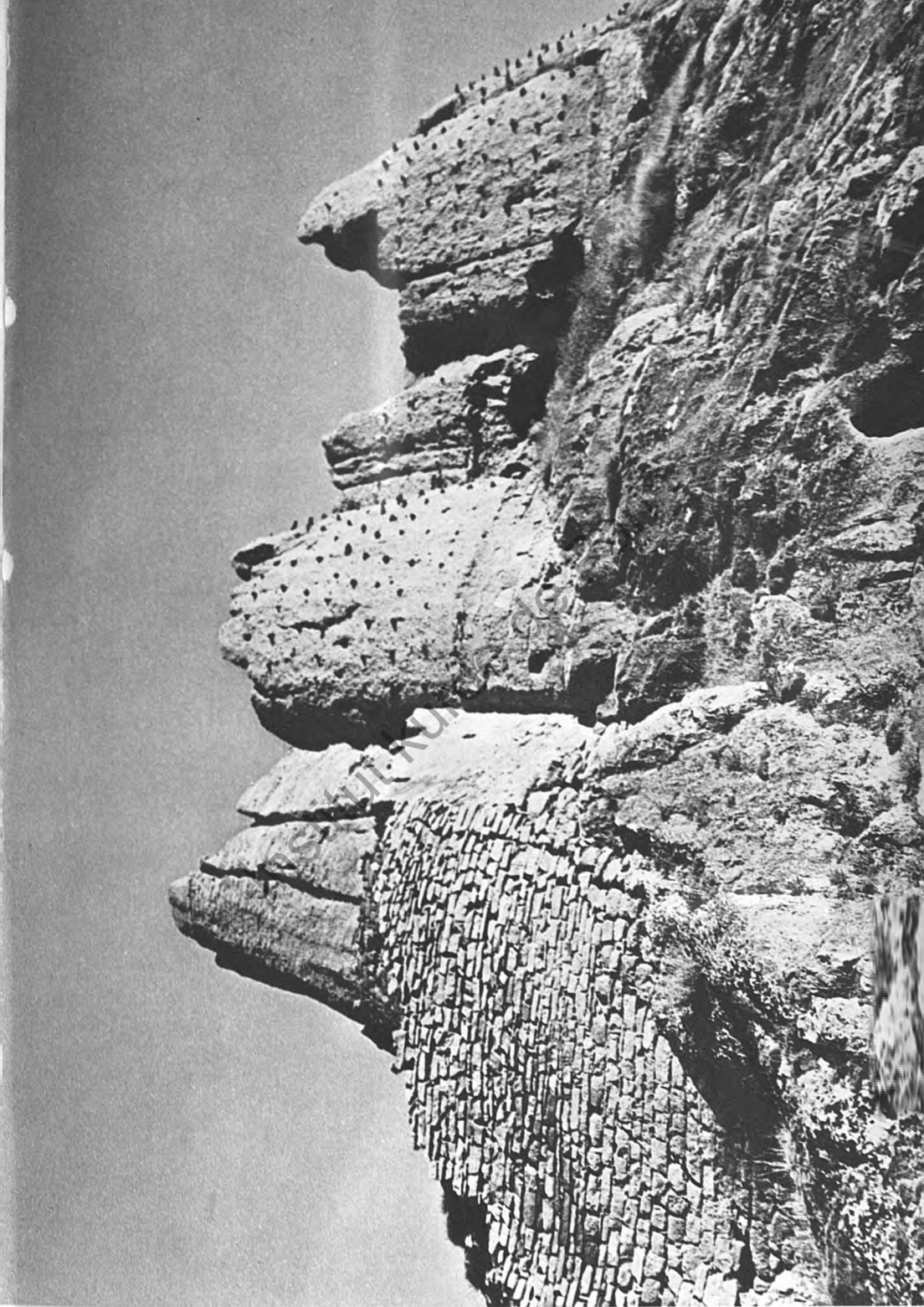
The Great Zab Valley

modern monotony had not invaded them; and a young man of quite moderate means could put the finishing touches to a classical education by seeing the world it had produced practically unaltered, laced with no more than a reasonable amount of discomfort and danger.

The castle of Hoshab had changed since Layard's day. The dwelling-rooms with all their decoration had gone, and so had the cannon and the garrison itself, and the commandant's uniform, if he had still been there now, would have been spick and span like all their officers' uniforms today. But the building itself remains and so does the Turkish politeness, and a Muhtar soon appeared to show us round. "A.D. 1646," he said, "was the date," and though it is a mixture of one age on top of another, the red stone entrance tower clumsily decorated most probably belongs to that time. Beside it and inside, under poorer and later masonry, a few stones of an earlier age can be discovered—and the trace of the ancient Urartians is either assumed or known. They came from Western Anatolia and their skill was such that Lehmann-Haupt—the chief authority for their history in this region—attributes to them the invention of the black and white buildings, which the later Ottomans practised in the very Hoshab bridge by whose poplars we were sitting. Early in the first millenium B.C. they had fought the Assyrians both in these south-eastern marches and in the lands of Tigris and Euphrates, leaving the Hakkiari gorges unvisited in between as far as any memorial goes; until the Cimmerians came down from the north at the end of the eighth century and 'the king of Urartu went against them and his troops were beaten and the governor of Uasi is fallen'.¹ Uasi was Bashkalé, our next little town along the southern road.

This was a restful day, in spite of the crowded car. The wide

¹ Lehmann-Haupt.



THE FORTRESS OF VAN



KURDISH COSTUME SOUTH OF VAN



THE BEAUTIFUL COSTUME SOUTH OF VAN



Institut kurde de Paris

HOSHAB FROM THE NORTH



HOSHAB CASTLE AND BRIDGE



HOSHAB CASTLE AND ROAD TO PERSIA AND THE GREAT ZAB



HAKKIARI. HAN



HAKKIARI. THE UNFINISHED ROAD TO IRAQ IN THE GREAT ZAB GORGE

The Castle of Hoshab

landscapes lay uncultivated, except in the plain of Van and here and there along the Hoshab river, and away in a far corner of pastoral lands beyond it where a village showed in trees along the Nordost track. That is the easy way, they all told me, in summer from *yaila* to *yaila* to reach the Tigris and the west, and a road (which is indeed planned but is at present non-existent) was marked with red lines on my map. Our own road, however, perfectly good for any sort of car and made only during the last three years, was interrupted on the map at frequent intervals by the little black dots that denote 'tracks doubtful'; and such uncertainty in the mind of the cartographers is a common-place of the Hakkiari. It was not this vagueness, pleasing as it is to get away from the authority of paper, that produced the restfulness, but rather the distance that lapped the patches of men's labour as if these were mere sputniks in the natural firmament of the seasons that clothe or strip these mountains without the help of man. International congresses, I felt, should be held in such quiet places rather than in the busy gay resorts—places where the grassy skyline is a lifting of earth untroubled with houses, and cattle grazing along the coolness of buried waters bring the smoothness of their own lives into the mind of the gazer—if an international congress ever has time to gaze.

From Hoshab castle we followed the stream, until we left it in the south-west, hidden as if in a railway cutting by the beginnings of a valley it was making—a landscape of far-off future gorges. As for us, we continued to climb the eastern edge of the plain, which is contained by the grassy shoulders and passes of the Chokh range, just over 3000 metres in height. Across their watershed, we found a valley creased into many short grassy folds, until the southward-flowing rivers began and the Albak and other head waters of the

The Great Zab Valley

Zab drew together between green snouts that stretch away to the Persian border.

Here, on ground a little higher than the hamlets that lie sparsely about it, is Bashkalé, once a centre for the Jewish merchants of the region. It is now sparsely scattered with mud houses in clumps of poplars or willow, 2380 metres above sea-level and the highest *kaimakamlík* but one, they told me (with that appearance of accuracy which is always to be suspected), in the world. High it was, anyway, as the treeless landscape showed; and the new boxlike houses built of brick for government officials gave it a bleaker air. The castle on the hill above seemed to have but a few fragments of poor wall remaining, untempting to a climb even could such a suggestion have been made. I looked through my glasses at the hillside while the woman from Adrianople was decanted with her doll among her grandchildren and the young doctor was able to sit on a seat at last. We had come half-way, and three and a half hours had gone by, and the afternoon was full upon us. We drove on, keeping now to the plain's western edge, where the watershed rose to more rugged heights on our right above pastures that converged gradually with gathering waters towards the waiting gorges. In a clump of poplars, a fine solitary house was placed like a country house in England; it belonged to the owner of 'over a thousand sheep'. His view sloped like a park from his windows, and in the valley bottom the river wandered between soft banks, not with bright speed like Oxus, but indolent through mirror pools where cattle could drink in shallows, before the steepness of the descent caught and bound together all the parallel streams of the shepherd's plain.

For we were now in a proper valley and the slopes rose as the descending river grew in volume through waters oozing from the deepening sides. The country, lonely before, became

Satanic Heights

deserted. Two small police posts and a cluster of miserable huts was all we saw, nor any people. Faint scratches of paths, tilted at wild angles, showed that human beings reach the valley from hamlets and *yailas* hidden far above. The road continued where a track must always have followed the stream, for the Zab is not immediately contained by naked rock like the Euphrates, but flows in a flat bed scattered with silver willows that live in the perpetual breeze which winds along the river floor.

As the day waned, we seemed to be entering a prison between the beetling crags. Their summits led towards what looked like gulfs of a dark conflagration, because of the flame-like soaring outlines of the rock. *Satanic* was the word. I hunted for it and found it, thinking that no living flame but some such stationary fire long petrified and dead, with no alteration within it but decay, can alone picture the immobility of Hell. The sun by day and the moon by night travel here far away, not unseen but sterile, and the stars can get no answer from dead heights. Ruin alone seemed to depend from those tiered buttresses untouched by vegetation. The sides of the great gorges of Euphrates that run towards Erzinjan are polished like the pillars of a temple, but here the masses of the mountains crumble away in pleats of shale and lie at the feet of all their precipices as baseless, shifting, and nameless as sand.

A sort of fear held me as the evening descended—not of the road, though the doctor who was now driving said it frightened him, but of this cruel darkening enclosure of the hills. The steep triangles of valleys that opened here and there on the southern side towards the lands of Diz and Jilu brought an almost physical relief; and so did the patches where the valley widened, and a scrub of oak trees or cornel or spindle wood clung to the tilted shale. The valley in fact was never a true gorge or excessively narrow, but only seemed to be so from the

The Great Zab Valley

suddenness and the height of its sides above the flat bed of the stream.¹ On our northern bank, two openings only appeared in all our journey, where two tributaries, one considerable and the other lesser, came tumbling down. We were now in that stretch of the valley that crossed the route of the two former travellers, Mrs. Bishop and Earl Percy, who both moved north and south. Some slight thing went wrong here with the jeep and I was able to stroll and look up towards a northern peak that shone in the last of the sunset above the blueness of its base and closed its valley as if all the light of the world lay beyond. Two hours away up there, under the highest pastures, on a sloping alp between mountain torrents, was the village of Qudshanis where the patriarch of the Assyrians lived when he heard of the outbreak of the 1914 War. In the trek by which they left their lands soon after, never to return, they divided into two columns of which one, with the patriarch, came up to the Zab from the south, and crossed the gorge not very far below me. They made for Bashkalé, and the lake and city of Urmi, across the *yailas*, and the patriarch was able for the last time to look down upon the little green alp that marked the site of his own village. "When shall I ever drink the waters of Qudshanis again?" he murmured, and 'the words were caught by as attentive ears as those of the three mighty men who followed the son of Jesse. Without a word to their chieftain a small party of devoted warriors broke away from the line of march, burst through the Kurdish picket that attempted to bar the path against them, and brought back to their beloved patriarch a pitcher of water from the Qudshanis spring'.²

¹ The highest peaks on the gorge are nearly 14,000 feet and their crests not more than twelve miles apart; the river level there is 4,000 feet above sea level. Wigram: *The Cradle of Mankind*, p. 284.

² *Ibid.*, p. 374.

The Niphates

This mountain range, the Niphates of Virgil and of Horace,
where Satan

toward the coast of Earth beneath,
Down from the ecliptic, sped with hoped success . . .
Nor stayed, till on Niphates' top he lights¹

strangely enough, is considered by the Nestorian tradition to nurse in the Great Zab the Pison, one of the four rivers of Eden; which only goes to show what the eye of affection will do towards its own. It looked less like Paradise than ever when having left the tributary valleys the new road broke away into a bold engineering venture that crept along the crumbling steepness high above the stream, and dipped where necessary into tunnels. These were insecure because chunks of the shaly rock obviously fell at intervals from their ceiling. The whole hillside disintegrating in this way like a *millefeuille* piece of pastry, will finally be retrieved in part by the marshmen of the lower Tigris, who live close to where the garden of Eden has also been located, at Qurna. They build up new river lands by lifting slabs of mud out of the Tigris, so that the Great Zab, incorporated there and travelling so far, may be considered to be sanctified twice over.

The doctor kept close in from the crumbling edge, and we watched the yellow streak of the stream below fade into evening shadows, until the road turned a sudden corner and climbed northward, into an amphitheatre of gentler slopes suspended under a more quiet skyline, out of sight of the imprisoned steepness below.

¹ *Paradise Lost* III, p. 739.

OF JULAMERK WHICH IS NOW HAKKIARI

IT WAS ALREADY DARK, AND WE TURNED ASIDE TO THE HOSPITAL, which stood, apparently deserted, on an isolated spur. "No one comes," said the young doctor. "They think that if one goes to hospital one dies."

I was rather pleased to find a whitewashed room with a metal bed and walls clean because of bareness. The two doctors went off to make contacts, and the doctor's wife bestirred herself like an old campaigner. With echoing steps down the empty corridors, water was brought in petrol tins, for this prime necessity had not yet reached the waiting taps. The young doctor, Doğan was his name, was indeed rather disheartened, for he had nothing but the shell of a hospital to work with, and the only nurse in sight was the village midwife who lived in a houselet of her own near by and would have vanished long ago if her husband had not been a soldier in the garrison.

Doğan was a gay young man, liked by everyone in this official island and most kind to me during the six days which I was now fated to spend here. He had taught himself adequate English, and would declare at intervals that he meant to keep me for a long time so as to get some practice in speaking. Having gone to the *Vali* to explain the sudden invasion of guests, he had been told, quite reasonably, that nowhere could so many empty beds be found as in his hospital: so there we unpacked our things, and climbed into the jeep and drove up the hill in darkness to dine with the *memurs* of Hakkiari.

I came to know this little society during the days that fol-

Turkish Outposts

lowed, and left them at last with very friendly feelings, under the impression that I had lived down the suspicion with which a western traveller here is still received. This is perfectly natural from the Turkish point of view, for there have been extremely few visitors of late years and the books that were written in the past about the eastern edges of Turkey—mostly in the second half of the nineteenth century—are nearly always outspoken in defence of some minority and loud in criticism of the Turks. The *Vali* himself, when I came to know him, explained that they had this complaint to make even of modern travellers 'whom we have treated with all the courtesy we can'; and I made up my mind that here in this wild land, being as it were a guest, I would behave as a guest should do when writing afterwards about it.

It was no pleasure to any of them to be posted here, to the extreme outpost of their rule. Even with the road made, it takes a man on foot four days to bring letters as far as Bashkalé during the six months' winter when riding is often out of the question, and the farther way to Hakkari is only ventured on according to the weather. Now, in the last of the summer, the posts depended on an occasional lorry once a week or so; and a motor-cycle in the little High Street was pointed out to me as the only combustion engine not in government hands. The complications of living were caused by the difficulty of carrying on permanent housekeeping in a nomad country—where the population inhabits its villages in winter only, and spends all the summer months in the high *yailas* with its flocks. With the making of roads, and the coming of shops and stores, the life of a centre like Hakkari will gradually become easy; but the road was still new, and the one-roomed shops of the High Street had little except cottons for the women's clothes and hardware and ironware and odds and ends that did not spoil with keeping.

Of Julamerk which is now Hakkiari

The simplest things to eat—*yaourt* and eggs and cheese—were up in the *yailas*, or, like vegetables, merely non-existent; and I was not surprised to learn that few of the officials kept their wives there, while the government does its best to send only young bachelors, who are broken in during the first three years or so of their career.

All this the *memurs* explained, while they bustled round in their small club and put together as excellent a dinner as they could find. Their kindness was particularly due to Doğan, whom they kissed on his return from the great world of Van and evidently rejoiced to have back with them again; and gradually introduced themselves—the police chief and his assistant, the four lawyers and judges, the teachers of the elementary and secondary schools; and later, in the next few days, the officers of the garrison who lived in quarters of their own.

The *Vali* was away next day so that I could not call on him, but I had expected no difficulty in taking photographs of the valley which the darkness of last evening had prevented. The elder doctor, preparing his vaccination tour in the hills around, promised to run me down in the jeep, and to this the chief of police agreed when I drank a glass of tea in his office in the morning. I wandered up again later through the streets where a few heaps of corn and sacks of wool made the basis of trade, and the tall narrow-faced mountaineers stood round with an air of inexhaustible leisure. They seemed neither busy nor friendly, and there were practically no women. Only far away on the hillsides bright little cavalcades could be seen riding up or down, as if all the real life were going on out of sight of this home of exile. They would not settle in the village for another month or so.

At the police office, the morning easiness had vanished. No chance to take a photograph till the *Vali* returned. 'No one is

Lesser Gods

ever surprised at words ceasing to mean anything,' I find written rather bitterly in my diary. 'Wait, wait, hope for *Vali* tomorrow.' I walked down the hill again, and strolled beyond the hospital to see the elder doctor and his son bathe in the reservoir of a stream that made the electric light. Beautifully trained and amiable, the doctor's wife watched the dust and heat rolling off them, while I sat beside her with far less carefully disciplined feelings, enslaved by decorum. Except in the vicinity of Istanbul, the Turkish women are still kept from bathing even in the sea—let alone in a mountain stream. The next day when the *Vali* was sitting in his office, I walked up his hillside again.

The *Valis* in Turkey or even the *Kaimakams* are very different from their equivalents in the English Civil Service. They are more like those lesser gods whom the Olympians allowed to be absolute in limited realms. Whatever may happen in private and out of sight, in the face of their own public their prestige is upheld and their rule is unquestioned; no Secretaries of State come hurtling by air to put things right and wreck their representatives in the eyes of the flock. As in the Roman Church, the humblest carries about with him that power which, temporal or divine, is the only thing that ever makes bureaucracy effective; and the result is that, in spite of the creaking cumbersome wheels that pull the government across enormous Turkish spaces, the *Valis* and the *Kaimakams* are really able, and very often willing, to get things done. The *Vali* Bey in Hakkari was a sort of Caesar among his band, young *valis* and *beys* of the future; his word was law, and nothing indeed could happen without it; and he had the head—slanting forehead and nose all in one line, and mouth with a slight perpetual upward curve—of a jovial master whom it would be ill-advised to contradict. He was, I thought, like one of those bold profiles on the

Of Julamerk which is now Hakkiari

coins that commemorate the Bactrian, Pontic or Cappadocian kings; and when I got to know him better I told him so.

At the moment he was sitting at his table pretending to be finishing off some paper so that no illusion as to my own importance should come into my mind. When he raised his head he was agreeably surprised—for I had lost the strictly functional hat I usually wear when riding about in Asia and had been forced to put on one of those little things embroidered with flowers which enliven the French Riviera. It had a certain success in the Hakkiari, and lifted, or lowered, me at once into a harmless feminine category. The *Vali* took my dossier from the hands of the Assistant of Police, agreed that it was perfectly in order, agreed, reluctantly, that as there was no road yet to the Tigris at Jizre I would have to ride, but remarked that it was out of the question to take photographs, as the permit I carried expressly forbade them.

This was indeed a very weak point in my position, and one I had been aware of ever since my permit's arrival just before I left Ankara. The clause about photography must have been added by one of those zealous underlings who sooner or later in Turkey manage to wreck the traveller's repose, for the Chief of Security there, when questioned later, knew nothing about it. But there it was, and no time to get it altered; and I explained it all to the *Vali* and added that, as I imagined the clause referred to military matters, I promised to turn my eyes away from every soldier's self, house, or equipment, and furthermore to take no pictures that could possibly do any harm to the prestige of his country abroad. "You can understand," I said, "that I have come all this way only to write a book, and a book without pictures *olmaz*."

This is a magic word and, with its opposite *olur*, is as important to the Turkish traveller as ever *shut* and *open Sesame* were

Travellers' Reception

to Ali Baba. And in the mouth of anyone who ever has to do anything it has the same effect. I had often suffered under the shutting word, and now decided to try it myself, and whether it was that, or his own natural sagacity, the *Vali* saw my point. "You might send a policeman with me, and I would only take the Great Zab in its gorge and the road which is such an *admirable* achievement" (and indeed it is), I pleaded.

The Assistant of Police was ready to come with me; the doctor who had been setting out on his tour was asked to postpone it and take us down in his jeep and amiably accepted; and we retraced our steep zig-zags to the river to see it under the morning sun which now poured down, almost vertically, into the depths of the valley.

It was not quite as fierce as it had been in the evening shadows, but tremendous enough as it flowed, some fifty feet across, like yellow ochre through the ruinous gorge. A horse track follows it, they told me, all the way though with bad places, for two days till it emerges into Iraq near Amadiya. Lucullus, returning with his army, may have marched by this valley, unless he crossed to Jizre by the way I meant to ride.

We drove down to the bottom, where bulldozers were nosing about at a new road which is to open the way to Iraq in ten years' time and would transform the Hakkiari into a transit land. The home of brigandage since Xenophon's adventure and before it, it was described, as late as 1914, as 'not an accessible country, even when judged by half-civilized standards'.¹ In 1819 the traveller Schultz, who discovered the Van inscriptions, was murdered by a Kurd near Bashkalé and Wigram in 1907 describes the reluctance of government to risk the marching of troops across it. It seems to me a most remarkable achievement to have produced a peaceful and orderly life here

¹ Wigram, Preface.

Of Julamerk which is now Hakkiari

today. Equally remarkable is the road-building which can only be carried on for five or six months in the year. Though the valley opens now and then in a good winter, avalanches pouring down its sides close it again in spring, and a snowfall of fourteen feet is recorded even as far south as Amadiya.¹

As we drove back towards the town in its hanging valley I stopped to photograph the only old building I found here (apart from a wrecked church on the hill). It looked like a *han* with a fine carved door and a ruined inner court of simple columns and the date, 1112 A.H. (A.D. 1733-4), over what looks like an older door. Of the Jews who in ancient times had a centre here, no trace seems to remain.²

The doctor was now in a hurry to leave, and his wife had got everything ready. They were going by a sketchy road to see the children vaccinated in the Yüksekova, east of the highlands of Jilu, where a German party had recently been climbing. It gave an almost overcrowded feeling to the hills. I was sorry to see them go, and to lose even the spoilt little boy whose fits of fury were more violent than anything I had seen in one so small. Now and then his father, when he could stand no more, would suddenly hit him and then make it up with renewed embraces; and this seemed a perfect way for combining discipline with devotion, for the child never knew whether a caress or a slap were in the offing: far from producing any signs of a developing complex, it seemed to be giving him an elastic outlook no doubt useful in later life.

Next day I myself could have left, for a jeep was to be sent with some chieftains of tribes towards the west. A new road, not finished, led for a distance across the pasture lands, and no preference of mine for horses was of any account wherever a

¹ Layard, p. 382.

² Labourt, p. 7.

In Hospital

jeep could go. But a lunch with Doğan in the only eating house of Hakkiari had at once given me dysentery, and there was nothing for it but to lie quietly in my hospital and wait for the trouble to pass. Doğan would look in on me in the morning and go his ways, until late in the evening he returned, perhaps with friends, and their steps would be heard echoing down the corridors as they took their choice of the empty rooms. As for me, I lay through the days and read the *Divine Comedy* (leaving out the *Inferno* as too depressing). From my wide uncurtained window I looked to where the sun spun webs of silk across the unresponsive precipices of Sünbül Dagh above the invisible valley. The gaunt lacework looked as if it trembled and swam in light, and one small patch of snow remained. Reaped corn-fields stretched and dipped away, and mud houses with poplars stood on a ridge, with the other side of the river like the background of a cage behind them.

In the quiet sunlit emptiness of the morning, little cavalcades would ride up slowly, a man leading a mule with some sick women on its back: and be turned away as often as not because the hospital was empty. It distressed me to see them go, and it distressed the doctor, too: but he was alone, with work all round, and what could he do?—with a hospital, too, without water: they were hoping to get the pipes laid in a year or two to bring it from the stream.

The cruelty of human beings depressed me. The midwife for instance, living in her untidy houselet next door. With or without payment, she could have done something for the people who came; she sat, with gilt ornaments as unreal as herself, and her mother wandered about with slatternly hair and filthy clothes, smoking: they came from the western coast and thought themselves better than their naked and austere surroundings. They never came, out of compassion, to see me

Of Julamerk which is now Hakkari

when I was sick; but when I grew better and walked across to ask for a little rice, gave it with that readiness which allows no one in Turkey to starve within sight of food. They were unattractive, but with compensations, like the rest of us.

I was unmanned during these few days, for I have been ill alone too often in such sorts of places and have an inhibition about it. "Why should I be here," I kept on asking myself, "on the edge of these inhospitable gorges?" And every day, as I made my bed, which was comfortable, but tarnished by the fact that other people had been ill in it before me, I repeated the firm resolution that this should be the last of my solitary journeys. "I will give Jock my hat and parasol to keep in his archives as the record of a past age," I decided, "and will sit in my garden and write."

I was extremely lucky to be a friend of Doğan's, who lent me his kettle to boil tea in and left me to be looked after by the overseer, a tall careless Kurd with hard blue eyes who was never anywhere about, nor brought any change from what I gave him for the market. This produced nothing eatable but bread, and that only when the man happened to remember; but he finally sent a peasant from a farm with a tinned pail of *yaourt*, from which I dipped at intervals as it stood in the corner of my room—and this uncompromising diet, together with the sugarless tea which Doğan had ordered, cured me in three days.

Doğan had added to his kindnesses by sending me a woman from one of the mud houses scattered about the hanging amphitheatre valley in which we lived. What she was by race or language I never knew, for we could not speak to each other beyond a few Turkish words: she must have been either Kurdish or Assyrian. She was very tall, with smouldering eyes in rugged features, and the wreck of beauty, and movements made clumsy by being too big for ordinary life, as if she had under-

The Hakkiari Nurse

studied Mrs. Siddons in her youth. With her head tied in white cotton like a helmet, with locks of dark hair straggling, she brought me water to drink (from some way off at a spring) and boiled the tea, and poured what was left about the floor to lay the dust—for water is never wasted. I looked on with some discomfort, since it made everything smell damp, but would not interfere with what has become part of a ritual that in the extreme simplicity of their lives invests them with their few spots here and there of small and gallant splendour. The whole business of tea is part of ceremony and it is ceremony that makes the hard lives possible in surroundings where the morale of the official, used to a higher general standard, breaks down.

When she had finished mopping up the dampness with a handful of twigs, the Hakkiari woman would squat against the wall and look at me, for a long time, sighing at intervals with a desperate passion, fixing on this or that among my scattered clothes, and fingering her own patched cotton with shakings of the head. She did this with no servility, but with a noble air, as of some dethroned Boadicea. She had asked me, and I had told her that I was English, and she had said 'Iraq' as if England were there. She had been once, I gathered, to Mosul, and no efforts of mine imperfectly to explain the difference could make her believe that London was far away. Perhaps it was her youth that she remembered, or who knows: but on the strength of it she gave me a passionate and disturbing devotion. On the second day I offered her a yellow flowered kerchief for her head, and she took it, opened her gown to lay it against the naked breast, rose with it in her hand to pass it up and down above my head with looks of sorrow, and finally before going bent her tall thin body to hold my head in both her hands and lay her forehead upon it, leaving me shattered by the general drama of life.

THE VALI'S BEZIQUE

I WAS NOW BETTER, AND ABLE TO SAUNTER IN THE EVENINGS along the little ridges that hold the irrigation, or to stroll and watch the sun sink behind a peak as sharp as an engine-turned machine. A cool wind wanders over the slopes that tilt above the gorges, and it drops into the valleys when the heat of the day is over. The soldiers of the garrison, who had been bathing in pools, would gallop by on their few horses, or walk with kerchiefs tied up round small green pears that are the only eatable fruit grown here. The thin pack animals, that had plodded at dawn below my window to the *yailas*, now returned under their loads of hay with shaggy men dressed in white walking behind them. In this soothing hour a short and tender glow caressed the higher slopes. At six it was dark already, and the extraordinary difference in the summer time was a constant reminder of how enormous is the spread of Turkey to the east, and how remote from the normal daylight of Istanbul.

I was now ready to go, and could walk up the hill to one of the government houses to call on the chief accountant's wife, who had given us lunch the day after our arrival. She was among the few official wives there, and had made a home, small and neat, with a garden and two sheep, and fed us with the only good meal the mountain villages afforded during my journey—a proof that agreeable food would be possible if there were anyone about to take the time and trouble to produce it: rice wrapped in vine leaves, beans and salad and stew, were all brought in on a round tray which could scarcely be



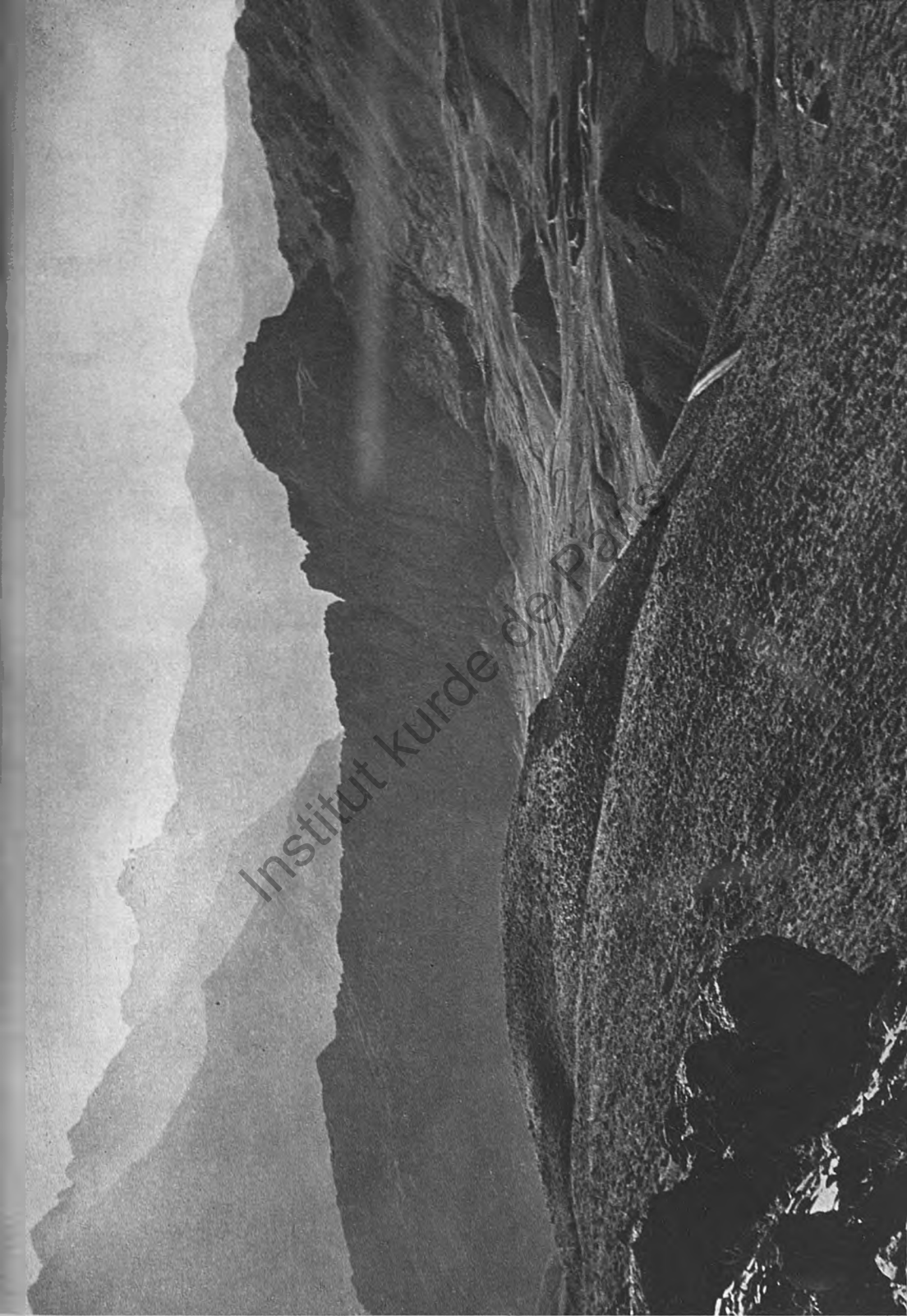
THE VALI OF HAKKIARI

HAKKIARI. THE VALI'S WIFE





HAKKIARI. SÜN BÜL DAGH



Institut kurde de Paris

HAKKIARI. ABOVE THE GREAT ZAB GORGE



END OF THE ROAD

ABOVE SOMA

The Vali and his Family

lifted through the doorway, and the husband lamented that officials cannot be seen digging, or he too could have helped to cultivate the little plot of ground and fed us better still. They were one of the most gentle couples I have ever seen, with the same expression of sweetness—on his face under grey hair and on hers surrounded by a white cotton wimple like a nun—and it must have come partly from their living happily together, for the eldest son, a boy of ten, had it too. He had come down with us to the photographing of the valley, and I had given him a sweet, which he put away quietly in his pocket and handed to his sister when we reached their home.

When I called, the mother was alone with this baby. Dressed for housework in enormous cotton trousers, she was preparing a stew of egg-plants for the fire; and whenever she moved to get anything, the baby toddled after her, holding on to one of the trousered legs as if it were a column. Mother and child looked like an old Dutch picture of domestic life. She asked me to stay, but I was invited to the *Vali's*, and presently made my way towards the grandest two-storeyed house in Hakkari, set among accidental fruit trees in a garden patched with marigolds and other small clumps of familiar flowers.

Here was a different atmosphere, and it divided the house as if with a double stream—a current of genial activity round the *Vali* and of boredom amounting to stagnation round his pretty wife, who was so fair and plump and untouched by the sun that she might have been carved in butter. Her people had come into Anatolia from the north, and the *Vali*, from the Black Sea coast, had met her in Bursa. Sitting there with the Garrison Commander's wife, who agreed in every way, she described the dullness of life in Hakkari and the length of the winters and the total absence of anything to do. As we dallied with the subject of clothes in its infinite variety, I could see that

The Vali's Bezique

my suède suit left her unenthusiastic, for she probably never in her life had needed anything stronger than muslin for her indoor wear and tear: but my hat scored a small triumph. The ladies tried it on, and thought it suited them—as it did; and the *Vali's* wife told me that she would like to appear under it in my book. With this permission it is printed. I would have left it with her, but I had no other; so she and the Commandant's wife wore it turn and turn about, during the morning.

One of the basic differences between the English and the Eastern Mediterranean is their attitude to clothes, and I think one might clear up a serious little pocket of ignorance if one could make the substance of this difference quite plain. I tried to describe it to the *Vali's* wife, but too much prejudice has already grown up round the question for a morning's labour to dissipate. The whole difficulty is that the English attitude is one of *place*, while the Mediterranean in general and the eastern part of it in particular look upon clothes as a visible expression of *status*; we dress for *where* we are, irrespective of status, and the Turks for *what* they are, irrespective of place. To us it seems ridiculous that the clerk in his mountain exile should have to go about in the thin weaving of the city while the tribesmen all around him wear the good strong homespuns meant for durability and warmth; but to the Turk it seems that when we photograph the picturesque striped garments of the hills, that are still worn, we are deliberately insulting the bureaucracy and ranging ourselves on the side of what they hope may very soon disappear. I tried to explain, but I failed to convince them. I held up my leather jacket, battered with many years of travel, and drew a fancy picture of Mr. Macmillan wearing just such a garment when he goes off for a week-end in the country; it might have pained him, could he have known; and anyway it carried no conviction. The *Vali's*

Barbarians All

wife shook my hat with her pretty head inside it, and said that it looked like the peasants. She herself was wearing a *décolleté* summer frock with silver lines running through it. The Commandant's wife exchanged a look with her. "They all love the peasant clothes," she murmured, as if it were a habit like opium. Just then the *Vali* came in. He began on the equally divergent topic of Cyprus: "And why," he asked, "does the B.B.C. refer to the Turks as barbarians?"

This I simply could not tell him. If they did, I wish that they did not, for it has spoilt my comfort in many a conversation. "But does it really matter?" I asked. "We have all been barbarians at some time: it is a thing that doesn't upset the English."

As for Cyprus, the early ineptitude of our handling has seemed to me so glaring that I thought it best to say little, particularly as the '*Vali Foot*' was being made a scapegoat for British mistakes so that the general credit of our country was spared. My private opinion is that for years we should have known how Turkey, with a trump card in her hand, would sooner or later play it. The main fact was that *whatever concessions were made, we could not afford to alienate the Turks, simply because of the strategic line of Turkey's eastern frontier.* This was a *geographic* fact, and sentiment should never have been allowed to sway it away from this basic form. If sentiment is invoked in a decision, the losing party is insulted; but nobody's prestige is damaged by a geographical necessity; and if we had stuck to geography, so that the Greeks realized that Turkish consent was essential, a note of realism would much sooner have appeared in everybody's dealing. The absurd rumour that the Turks might not use their trump card unless we stirred them up to do so, we could have discounted from the beginning. Having made it clear that beyond the Turkish consent we could not

The Vali's Bezique

afford to go, and having thus put Turkish confidence in us on a firm foundation—we could then have brought pressure to bear on them to get as favourable an agreement as possible for the Greeks. One can pull from one side of a stream or from the other, and in this case the geography determined which one it had to be. The attempt to keep two parties steady from a slippery stand in mid-current is doomed to fail.

As it is, the encouragement given to Greek claims by 'phil-hellenes' in England was just such a disservice as ended in the Smyrna troubles of 1922: when the moment for action came, we would again have been forced to withdraw any assurance, and leave them to their disappointment or their fate. It is only by a narrow margin that we pulled out of ambiguity in time, and in any case, between the writing and the printing of this paragraph, the matter is happily settled.

I naturally did not develop my views to the *Vali* and his friends, my Turkish anyway not being good enough for very subtle discussion. But I reminded them that Cyprus, after all, belongs to us. And as they complained that the Turks were being shot at every day, I pointed out that our people had been targets for much longer—a point which seemed to have passed unnoticed by them all.

There was a lot of coming and going at the *Vali's*, and everyone discussed my journey. The Mayor of Beiteshebab, beyond the end of the new road, promised to wait in his tents for my arrival. I was probably the first Western woman, or Eastern one either, to travel alone in this country for pleasure, and nowhere could anything so peculiar have been accepted more naturally or with greater kindness. We talked of the road, which was the *Vali's* pride and which I admired; of the marchings of Roman armies; of the poverty of the villages before the advantages of the modern dispensation were felt. "When I was

Domestic Life

a boy," said the Member for Hakkari who happened to be in residence at the moment, "I remember how a cigarette among the villagers would be cut into three portions."

He sat, immaculately dressed in pale grey suiting, playing bezique with the *Vali* under a cherry tree, while the people coming and going looked on. The *Vali* cheated with a quick decided manner, in the best tradition of the Pontic or Bithynian kings whom he so much resembled: the Chief of Police and the Head Engineer looked over his shoulder and smiled when the Member of Parliament protested, goaded into speech: the *Vali*, not at all put out, replaced whatever he had been seizing and went on to the next step with only a slightly added curve to his lips. "I am winning a lot," he said now and then, glancing up at his wife and me, and everyone laughed. Two pretty children of Slavonic fairness were playing in a mixed wilderness of vegetables and flowers; and the village below stretched towards the drop of its valley, with soldiers marching out, marching back, carrying cauldrons of food two by two with a pole through the handle, and squatting down to eat it in a ring. As the sun began to slope towards one or other of our encircling valleys, I said good-bye: a jeep with a young engineer would be taking me next morning as far as the road could go.

When I reached the hospital, I was glad to find my Mrs. Siddons waiting, for I had thought not to see her, and felt that a woollen scarf and some socks, which I had entrusted to the blue-eyed Kurd, might never reach their destination, even though he had put his hand on the hollow place where his heart was assumed to be. Surely enough, she had not received them, and when I had succeeded in making her understand (for this was an extra present and she had not expected it), she went off with dramatic strides. She came back with the socks alone, which were full of holes and not very valuable even in Hakkari;

The Vali's Bezique

and only after another explanation, and with an increase of the smouldering light in her eyes, returned victorious with the wool wrapped round her shoulders. "He was angry," she said, and lifted her hands, building the anger up till it reached the heights of the opposite mountain. Then she stroked the scarf on her chest, and again looked at me with that devotion which is so much more than one deserves. "My lady's gift to me," she said. Three eggs that remained I gave and she bestowed somewhere about her, and I watched her go, her long white and black cotton gown patched and flowered against the mountain, like a Michelangelo figure full of dignity and fate. I was glad she would have the soft wool in winter, and would think of me—someone never to see again yet always to be remembered in her years. Why she had cared for me I can never know; but at the Day of Judgement she would stand up and speak for one, I reflected; and because I had been ill, this unknown and unexplained devotion meant a great deal.

Next day, when already the mules had gone by to their *yailas* in the silence of the morning, the jeep came to fetch me. Doğan turned out with his reddish hair still tousled, and 'because I might need it on my journey' refused every little gift I could think of. He said good-bye. We took the western track out of the amphitheatre of Hakkiari and climbed by steep zig-zags to upper pastures, with gorges blue below us like veins in a wrist, wandering with hidden currents to wherever their extremities might be.

THE HIGHLAND ROAD

THE ROAD TO BEITESHEBAB, WHICH IS THE MEETING-PLACE of the old tracks of the mountains, was to be finished, they told me, in a matter of months. At the moment, it was one of those delightful roads, as I remember them in Hadhramaut or Luristan; it swung along in curves with never a passenger upon it. Two riders we met in the course of the day, but they were some way off on the old track, which went uphill straight, with no regard for engines. Otherwise the day was spent in a solitude animated almost entirely by birds.

The jeep, with the engineer and myself and the driver, first climbed the western pastures in steep, but earthy gradients. They had little left of their spring sweetness—euphorbia and larkspur, hollyhock and thistle were all the flowers, and thin strips of green showed rarely under skeleton stems of grasses where some trickle of water seeped underground. But the blue thistle made a veil through which the mountain background appeared; pink hollyhock worked in with it into a Persian pattern; and the white hollyhock had the low morning sun shining through it, transparent at every corner of the road.

The Zab defile wound, a river of mists with crags emerging, fathomless as dreams whose roots are out of sight. We soon lost it as we crossed the upland shoulders; and saw another tributary basin, with another defile falling below in declensions of slopes and ruin, and the village of Seraye on terraces of walnut trees or corn, held in a high-suspended hollow.

We looked down upon it from above, and kept to the upper

The Highland Road

level, beneath vertical palisades of the limestone, and came by long loops to an open valley, with Pianis and other villages spread along the banks of an easy stream, the Kachi Chay, descending from the north. Here one comes into the other track from Van, which, passing by Nordost and Martanis, interested me as being the alternative for Lucullus's march to Jizre. It is, they told me, the easier of the two, but very high; we were soon climbing to 3000 metres, the watershed between the Great Zab and Habur.

In all this while we had stopped only twice, each time to pass the time of day with two young lads who lived in a round white tent and attended to the transport for the workers on the road. The engineer spoke to them and then relapsed into silence, for he had no thoughts beyond his road that I could discover, nor any interest in any thoughts of mine. He was indeed dull, and every remark he made was one that I had heard already. And to him I was a New Idea, a thing which he avoided. No doubt, on his own nice lonely road, he found me out of place.

But we were happy for all this, and drank cold water together when we passed a wayside spring. And the company was provided by the birds. Hoopoes flopped in grassy hollows, near the ground; partridges led their broods among the boulders; yellow wagtails, a slaty bird well-tailored like a blackbird, a blue kingfisher who combined Cambridge and Oxford on his wings, dipped or hovered by the stream. Larks were about. The eagles bathed in sunlight on the rocks, and the sky was never without a bird of prey: the voices of kites seemed like the opening and shutting of tiny trapdoors of light.

Below us, on the descending lands, we would now and then see flocks, or herds of cattle, though their *yailas* were hidden. And when we came to the watershed we looked out

The Road-makers

towards the north over downs as broken and multitudinous as waves.

We were on the highest ridge, so broad and sprinkled with small dunce-cap pinnacles of rock among the pasture that one hardly noticed it as the great backbone between rivers. The new road was being cut towards its summit, with cheerful gangs of tribesmen and a bulldozer slicing the first layer of matted roots and grasses. On all the slopes, wind-cropped bushes of gum tragacanth were scattered, reminding me again of the hills of Luristan.

The road-makers had a small camp of white tents in a hollow, and here the engineer was relaxing in the obvious belief that the labours of his day were over, when I reminded him that it was not in the middle of emptiness in the hands of the foreman from Erzerum that I was to be deposited, but in the tents of the Mayor of Beiteshebab in his *yaila*. Accounts in Hakkiari had varied as to the distance of these tents, making them anything between half an hour's walk and a day's ride; and I had expected and now discovered the longer distance to be the right one.

The engineer, tied to a road as if it were his umbilical cord, looked round the vast ranges of hills now tremblingly aetherial in the midday sun. A Pegasus, he seemed to think, might break out of the landscape. But nothing was in sight except flocks of sheep and goats, whose spacing on various slopes made the distances vaster and the loneliness more secure. The goats were scattered in dots, the sheep strung in lines like trails of streptococci, and the two together, the white and the black, made a sort of musical notation among the rocks. I sat contemplating it in a pleasant peace, comfortably provided with a mattress, delighted to have reached the end of the road, and sure that something useful would happen fairly soon, since no one would want to have me on their hands without a tent to sleep in.

The Highland Road

The foreman and his mates brought water from the spring, and prepared a lunch of cucumbers and chops. And the engineer, having made some inquiries apart, came back to ask if I could walk for a few hours.

“I can, if necessary,” said I. “But what about all that luggage?”

The engineer had never been brought up to contemplate life on anything but wheels: he looked at my bundles, carefully designed as the load for one mule, and relapsed into gloom. It was the foreman from Erzerum who finally took matters in hand and declared that a jeep could drive across country to within half an hour of the *yaila*, and he knew the way.

There is something peculiarly exhilarating to my mind in the sight of a machine being treated as if it were human; it makes up, perhaps, in some subtle way for a few out of the innumerable occasions when human beings are treated as if they were machines.

Our excellent and delighted driver evidently shared this feeling and the challenge to his skill. He took the jeep across two hillsides, and came down into a corrie where ponies were grazing. Without a thought for such natural assistance, he now took a track just wide enough for wheels, that led from the easy highlands towards the stress of the gorges. Far down in that deeply seamed labyrinth was Beiteshebab, out of sight.

When the track grew too narrow, or its edges too uncertain, the jeep was taken up among the gum tragacanth and down again, following the Erzerum leader on foot; another jeep, he said, had done this some weeks before: the driver bit his lips tight and went ahead; I tried to take a snapshot knowing that no picture would give the sharpness of the slope; and the engineer walked alone, looking less sad but keeping his thoughts to himself. When the valley turned over into a falling avalanche of

The Highland Road

cliffs and rocky places, a little group of women with their milking skins on their backs and distaffs in their hands came walking up the hill towards their flocks. The tents of the *yaila* were a twenty minutes' walk away, in sight under a scarp beside a stream.

Institut kurde de Paris

THE YAILA OF SOMA

THE ENGINEER WALKED ON AHEAD, BUT A HORSE WAS TO BE sent for me and I waited a little beside the jeep and the luggage, and then decided to walk, too. It was many years since I had spent a night among the tents; the sight of them, seventy or so in the hollow of the mountain, filled me as it always does with delight and pity; for they seem to me to show what our houses forget or disguise—a security based not on strength but on fragility, at rest on the surface of the world like a seagull on a wave. In and out of the splintered rocks above them a flock of sheep were browsing; they would sleep there, curled in the crevices, watched by their dogs in the gully through the night. As I drew near the small and shallow stream, I met an old woman or two dipping a pitcher for water, or walking up the hillside with a knife to gather thorny scrub for burning; I passed among the pegs and ropes and open dark interiors of the tents, where the whole population was gathered to watch the strange phenomenon—the first Western woman they had seen; they waved me on, towards the middle of the camp, where the side of the main tent stood open and carpets were spread. The Mayor and the engineer reclined there on mattresses and bolsters, with three rows or so of elders in a semi-circle round them, and the faces of women half seen through the patterned reed-work that fences the woollen tent-roofs from the ground.

The engineer was sitting in an aloof way with his shoes on, but I stopped to take mine off at the edge of the carpet and

Kurds

immediately became popular; a gentle murmur of approval went round, and the old men took their pipes out of their mouths to greet me. I have often wondered whether my later troubles were not brought on by this popularity, which the engineer appeared to disapprove of: to his mind the *yaila* of Soma was a savage little island of which he and the Mayor, and a policeman who had joined us down the hill, were the only civilized inhabitants at the moment: the Kurds with their narrow eyes and long sunburnt faces were, though they seemed not to have noticed it, inferior. Patched and rather ragged in dingy white, with the dust of the camp on their hair and eyelashes, they clustered cheerfully around, and their obvious pleasure in having a new sort of female to look at irritated the engineer almost past endurance.

The etiquette in Hakkari is never to mention the existence of the Kurds. This is a pity, since the government's work here with schools and roads and the general progress of modern life is admirable, and it is no small task to bring security into regions that, in the whole course of their history, have never known it. Even forty years ago, it would have been impossible to travel through this country without some special friendship of the tribes; I had tried and failed twenty years ago to do so, when the Herki were going up to their summer pastures near Lake Urmiah from the foothills of Erbil; and now a man with his horse and a mule were going to take me through the very heart of the land with no danger at all. "We know all about the Kurds," I kept on repeating to the *Vali*. "We used to fight a little war with them every summer in Iraq."

In spite of such assurance—which was sincere on my part, for I had no wish or reason to criticize officials who were being kind to me when they were devoting themselves to a difficult job with success—my attitude towards minorities in general and

The Yaila of Soma

Kurds in particular might obviously be very easily suspected, and I put this down not to any tactlessness of my own, but to the writings of people before me. The zealous Victorians were always wondering to whom the Turkish empire was to be distributed; the fact that lots of people are now following the same line of thought with the British does nothing to soften the Turkish reaction: the word Armenia was erased from maps and school-books and even Bibles long before Turkey became a republic, and every English man or woman travelling in these far provinces is felt to be a possible champion of any of the unmentionable minorities whose continued existence is so glaringly obvious when one happens to be in their country and unable, because of their language, to make oneself understood.

The *Vali*, and the older and more experienced officials have learnt to become realists and to take the nomadic lives as a natural phenomenon to be slowly dissipated by the building of roads. But the young *memur*, ardent from the ghastly nationalisms of the school-room, still has to learn the fundamental equality of men. He spends the early years of his career in the fierce unfriendly fastness of the mountains, feeling as if wild animals were all around him, and yet heroic in his determination to do that and more for his country if the need exists. He can be compared with the young Englishman in the days of our empire sent out to look after secluded places, except for this basic difference that the English Government official nearly always *liked* the wilder people in his charge.

This, perhaps, I thought, as I lay at rest after lunch with the wall of rock shining beyond the tent's opening in the sun: this perhaps is the answer to the *Vali's* question 'what is it to be a barbarian'? Is it the not-recognizing of ways other than one's own? The essence of civilization is to respect the variety of life; and how few of us do so? And this foundation of

Modern Kurds

tolerance the young *memur* in his school-room ignorance has not yet learnt.

We, too, for many years in Iraq had the Kurds to deal with, and we made a less tidy job of it than the Turks. Yet because we liked them for being different, we helped them, through many disorders, to keep their self-reliance and their self-respect.

The *memur* of today is not likely to obtain this result in the mountains; but, in another ten years or so, a young generation of Kurds trained in Turkish ways and language will obtain it. They will come with an understanding of the background as *memurs* to their own villages, and their people will admire them for being good at the sort of life which is there recognized and known. For the present, the gap that separates the *effendi* is too great.

So I pondered, while the engineer was off on a tour with the Mayor, and the camp—emptied of flocks and dogs and many of its people—lay dusty in the afternoon. A few men passed, dressed in close-fitting jackets and wide trousers of the cloth that one buys at Diyarbekr or Zakho, where the Habur reaches the plains; it is a sort of goatswool *moiré* woven in plain whites or blues or browns, or with stripes, and never looks crumpled, and wears for ever. I have a suit of it made in Paris by Chanel, where the material was wondered at and admired. Not all here could afford it, and the poorer went around in white cotton, gathered amply round the ankles or under the knees.

The women sailed about with long light gowns and full, and a dark overdress that came half-way round from the back, as rich as they could make it. All was held in by a wide sash, with the head covered and the face framed in white; and both men and women wind a long undersleeve from wrist to elbow, by which they can tie their hands together to help them in the lifting of a load.

The Yaila of Soma

Some were weaving in the shade of their tents, and the patterns of the kilims, in which everything has a meaning, were growing, stretched out along the ground. I would have liked to stay long enough to watch a kilim of my own preparing, with all the things said in it that I wanted to say. It would take a month, as far as I could understand. The women spoke no Turkish, nor did many of the men; and the interpreting was done by children, who had learnt at school.

The sun left our valley long before its setting and the flocks began to find their evening stations round the rocks of the precipice above. The dogs came back to camp and moved about, aggressive but leisurely, their spiky iron collars, where a wolf would like to bite them, set well round their necks in the thick fur. They carried their tails straight up, plumed over the back, and looked friendly, but ready for a fight.

The children played in the cool light, throwing clots of earth in the open spaces, and every tent began to show its private fire. One could look straight in at the open side, and see the families gathered, and a woman bent over some black cauldron set on sticks.

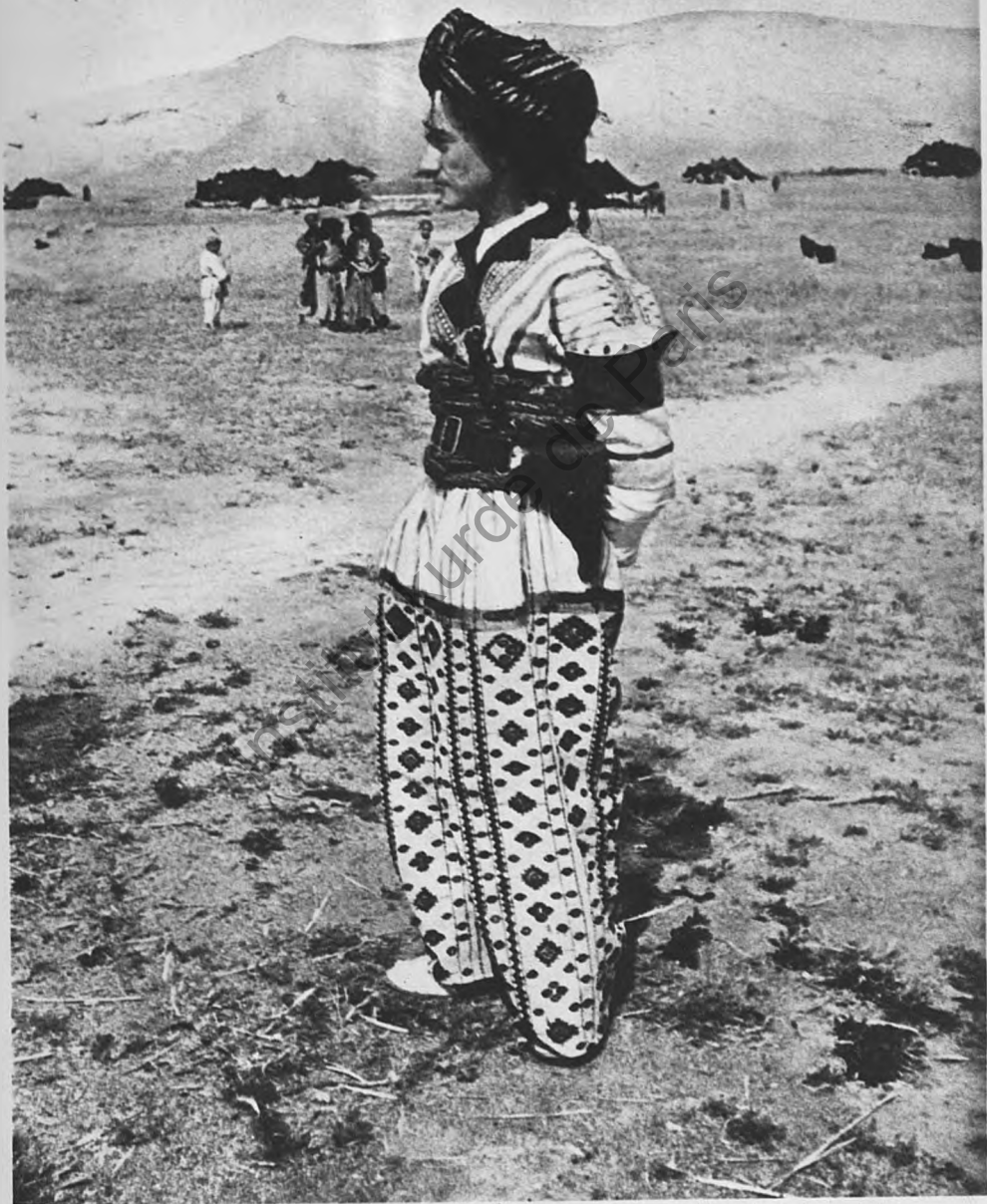
When we, too, had eaten our dinner of meat and rice, and drunk our glasses of tea and talked a while, the Mayor's sister took me to my room. It was partitioned from the guest tent with a curtain of crimson wool, and a hanging had been stretched for privacy across the open front. A carpet and mattress were spread with clean quilts and pillows on the ground, and here I undressed and lay down with that feeling of safety which I remembered, though it was over twenty years since I had slept in the tents of a tribe. The wall of reeds was plaited—not like the elaborate colours of Luristan, but plainly with brown wool. One could look out but not in through its partitions, and the same could be said of the roof. Through loosely





SOMA SHEPHERD

SOMA WEAVERS



A HERKI TRIBESMAN FROM IRAQ



THE TENTS OF SOMA

Tents

woven dark goatswool the moon shone dim and a star or two looked brightly in at the open seams.

Perhaps the nearness of earth gives the feeling of security in the open tents, or in one's camp bed on the ground—a memory of the time when a child nestles against its mother in ignorance of danger. Or perhaps it is the absence of human walls; the black partitions askew in the moonlight are too frail to shut away an older bond forged through thousands of years before houses were invented, when men would think of their safety as they lay down in some cranny of the quiet world. *Safety* would be their thought as they settled to sleep, a thought endlessly repeated through unrecorded aeons, till it survives with our inherited feelings when we chance to dip again into the natural stream. It lapped me round in spite of all the noises and small incidents of the night. The dogs growled and snarled as they moved, apparently in rival packs, and met each other round the tents they were protecting; and a sudden shadow on the wall beside me startled me in the moonlight, till I saw two huge ears and realized that a donkey, with its usual sagacity, had found the most sheltered place under my awning. Horses whinnied and the cocks began to crow in the darkness; and finally I fell asleep as the moon was waning, and never woke till scattered clouds floating above our precipice caught the light of dawn, as if the lid of our box were mother-of-pearl. Down below, in the tents, the fires were being started. The *yaila* was slowly awakening, and coffee was brought to the guest tent. The bringer stopped at the edge of the carpet to take his shoes off: they were made of rubber, stamped in a mould to imitate brogues with laces, and are evidently popular in the Kurdish hills.

We loitered about, while a young woman baked bread for our journey, and saddle-bags were sought for the luggage.

The Yaila of Soma

Abdullah, a man with a nice open-air face, had been found the night before to be my guide, and appeared with a mule for the policeman and a small bay for me.

We had only two hours of a slow but easy descent to Beit-eshebab, which is on a shelf. Below it the valley accumulates its steepness and pours into its defiles. Five thousand feet or more beneath our watershed of yesterday, we felt as if sliding between narrowing walls into a hole.

Institut kurde de Paris

NIGHT IN A KURDISH GARDEN

THERE SEEMED TO BE VERY FEW HOUSES IN BETTESHEBAB apart from some mud-built barracks and whitewashed cottages built for officials; and it is its strategic position rather than any exuberance in population that gives it a Kaimakam and a permanent garrison. They lead an isolated life, with no telephone in winter and no doctor, and live in expectation of their road; and pointed hills press in on them on every side as if a crowd were there. It is only when one can look at the situation from far away across several ranges that one sees how the place lies in the centre of two troughs that run roughly north to south, east to west, and make it a necessary point on the routes from Hakkiari to Jizre, and from Van to Zakho. There is nothing, however, to show, in the almost invisible paths that wind towards the gorges, that here is a chief cross-roads of the hills.

The village could be charming on its narrow slip between the climbing slopes. It is warmer than Hakkiari, and maize grows on its terraces. Walnut trees, vines, runner beans, and yellow pumpkin flowers were all about it; and if one thought of an Italian mountain village in such a situation, one could see how it might fit itself architecturally with climbing steps and coloured porticoes, to give its landscape a meaning.

Here there was nothing, not even the pretty bow-window of Turkey or the fortress-like house that I was to find among the Kurds; but the little company of the *memurs* received me with the same cordiality and politeness as in Hakkiari, and sat round

Night in a Kurdish Garden

the bare office room of their exile in a cheerful and friendly row, bringing coins to look at, and talking of antiquities along this, the main route by Nordost from Van. "It leads with no ravines," they said, "across the *yailas* of the downs you saw yesterday, and leaves the town of Hakkari with its new road out altogether. That will follow the Zab in the defiles, and in ten years' time will break out into Iraq at Chukurbagh."

There were many antiquities, they said; but I suspect that most of them are late or perhaps medieval—for the coins they showed me had no script earlier than Cufic or Seljuk (Ortakid?), of which I could only decipher that 'there is no God but God'. In the afternoon I rode with Abdullah across the western ridge along the Perveri track, to a more gentle valley dotted with cottages and a pool of sulphurous water that pours into the river from a cleft. Along this path, near the ridge, some fortified city or village still showed its boulders, too overgrown and indistinct to be located in time. There was also the ruin of a tower near the water, and tombstones—not very ancient—under trees: and the whole atmosphere was that of habitation now decayed. When we returned, I knew already where to go, for the *memurs* had consulted as to the best house to receive me, and my things had been carried to a small whitewashed cottage with a terrace in a garden.

It was perched in a fairy-tale way, beside a block of rock that slanted at a Gothic angle into the ravine below; and its garden was not Gothic at all, but fertile with every sort of vegetable and fruit tree. The house was clean and neat, with objects brought from far away—bedsteads and a sewing machine—in two large airy rooms. It seemed entirely inhabited by women—an old woman and five beautiful daughters, and an orphan granddaughter who alone could speak Turkish, being still young enough for school.

Beiteshebab Household

The grandmother was very old, but she ruled her household, and saw to it that I had water to wash in, and a towel, and a mattress to rest on, ordering her girls about and patting my shoulder with the free rather abrupt manner of a great lady, which she was.

They were Kurds—the grandchild translated—from Amadiya in Iraq; and the English had killed her husband long ago. She laughed as if this were an amusing idiosyncrasy, and we paused to shake hands upon the ancient feud; and she went on to explain how she and her children had crossed the mountains and found a refuge here. The English had behaved decently, and sent her the Amadiya revenues regularly; and, a few years ago, her son had again crossed the border, to visit his kinsmen—they were all among the chief people of Amadiya—and to see the hotel which is built on his property, where Johnny Hawtrey and I had paused to bathe in the swimming-pool when first I came to look upon the Hakkiari from the south.

She was a fragile old woman now, with blue eyes almost washed away, and sparse hair white no doubt under the bright henna; and her mouth, that must have been full of sweetness and decision, had lost its contour and could no longer use anything but the poor and inadequate language of words. When young she must have been light on her feet and full of fire, and she still remembered this condition, holding on to any human being or inanimate object to help her to move more quickly, or tightening a blue silk scarf round her forehead to try to deaden the pain that haunted her all the time. The five beautiful women laughed and whispered and busied themselves with their children round her, like a pageant, it must have seemed, of her own youth; but the orphan grandchild, whose parents had evidently died in the same troubles in Iraq, belonged to her and went about with her, holding her hand.

Night in a Kurdish Garden

The five young ones were astonishingly lovely, with almond-shaped eyes so brilliant with the mountain air and so uncom-promising from the mascara which framed them, that at first one noticed nothing except these black lagoons of light in their faces. But the actual features were beautiful, too, from broad forehead to straight nose and pointed chin so delicately modelled that the Kate Greenaway figures looked like flowers moving and swaying and bending about the house, balanced over high-waisted gowns that touched the ground. All these women, and many in the villages I came to, had a look of race which could have done in a Sargent or a Lavery portrait, long-limbed and with so proud a poise of the head. But beyond friendliness there could be no conversation with them since there was no language, until a son and son-in-law, the only husbands in residence at the moment, turned up during the evening to talk Turkish. The latter was an intelligent man who ran all the trade of Beiteshebab and—in spite of the non-existence of a road—organized stores to arrive from Istanbul as they never did in Hakkari. "We Kurds are a useless lot," he said. "We could cultivate this valley to the top, but never think of doing so while there is just enough corn to keep us through the winter and nothing to spare."

I was left to undress and to climb on to the bedstead, and then my old hostess came, as she had said she would do, to sleep on a mattress on the floor beside me. When she had settled, a baby was brought in its cradle, and then another mattress was laid down for one of the five daughters and the orphan child. This more or less covered the floor space, and by a dim little oil lamp we went to sleep. But it was not a restful night, though in the garden the leaves of the maize lay flattened and shining like spearblades, as if hypnotized under the moon. The baby cried, and then, when the lamp had gone out and the moon had sunk,

Early Start

in the darkness, the old woman moaned, and tied her head tight with her sash, and spoke sadly to herself. "Oh Allah, let me go," she said: "for nothing is in me but pain."

I began to move, since Abdullah was to come for me at four o'clock before the daylight and the sun: but "he will not be here for an hour," said the old woman, "and we shall hear his hooves," and she was right. He came with my mare at five, and we rode through the village to collect a schoolmaster who was to escort us as far as his first post, a two days' ride away. He too was not yet there, and in fact fast asleep in a cheerless little official house. His mule came along with a box of the wrong shape already askew on its back, and had to be reloaded with some of my more manageable luggage so that the young neophyte might have somewhere on the animal to sit. He was about the age of the engineer and had looked at me the day before with the same disparagement. This was nothing to the want of zest with which I contemplated him as he tried to mount with a violin case in his hand and explained that he had a headache from sitting up late with his friends.

"Headaches get worse in the sun," I said as discouragingly as I could: "and you see it is already catching the tops of the mountains. We are just an hour and a half late in starting, and have an eight hours' ride today."

RIDE TO DIRAHINI

THERE WAS NOTHING WRONG WITH THE MORNING ONCE WE were off. The shade remained cool in the depth of the valley, to whose river we descended from the walnut trees of Beiteshebab by a small reddish path in the eroded soil. The Sengeré was crossed by a wooden bridge, and its green water flowed steep but not precipitous through banks where wild pear trees, guelder, spindle, willow and hawthorn were overgrown with vines. The vine is said to have come from the western borderlands of Persia, and all this day we saw it flung here and there like a carpet along the edges of the streams. The valley was just wide enough not to be called a defile, solitary under red precipices hung about with steepnesses of oak, ash and pinewoods now and then in openings high above. The track led at intervals over the brows of cliffs, and pools appeared below, full of fish with their heads upstream; or we crossed by fords in shallows. There were no travellers, nor any sign of them except the path and a few woodcutters' fires; and, as Abdullah trotted now and then ahead of me along the more level places, I could see, from the easiness of his back, that he was happy.

The intimacy of the open air united us in silence.

As I rode along I began to wonder at this word and what it means; truthfulness above all things, the relative truthfulness, at all events, of one person responding to that of another, without which there can be no friendship, marriage, or good human relationship at all. And after that, so as to become possible,

Companions

intimacy must be articulate—not necessarily in language, but by some medium which both can understand. Now Abdullah and I could not communicate very much, because his Turkish did not yet come naturally to him, but we both belonged to the open air and were at home in the hills, and not many words were needed between us. But the young teacher, whether he talked with either of us or remained silent, was just as much a stranger as ever, for he had been too overlaid with education to be truthful for a moment even with himself. It would take years of experience, I reflected, for Psyche to work itself out of that cocoon.

No people in the world are I believe as docile, or respond as willingly to education, as the Turks, except perhaps the Germans who resemble them in many ways though their manners are not so good. And this docility, I went on meditating, must really be the greatest of qualities from the government's point of view. People who possess it are ready to think of themselves as a part of something else and not as separate individuals all the time. Even the Turkish language, all rules and no exceptions, shows this peculiar trend, whose advantages—which are immense—do, however, load teaching with a heavy responsibility, since it is obviously important that a rule should be good in the first place if it is never to be broken. We English rely for success almost desperately on the breaking of rules, and it will be a poor day when we forget to do so, for this idiosyncrasy may rescue us in a deluge of the second-rate. It incidentally gives us an advantage in the understanding of traditions other than our own which more logical nations find difficult to master.

Take for instance the United States and Turkey, brought up with a similar bias towards strong traditions that incline great numbers of their subjects to say and think the same. The similarity ought to make them love each other, but it does not. The

Ride to Dirahini

fact is that formulas for thinking in one way are unintelligible to people who live by other formulas, not quite identical: one set does not understand the other. The individualist alone can be universal and able with an untrammelled mind to enjoy the variety of his friends.

This is a gloomy conclusion to come to with the world as it is, and I began to wonder how the shortcomings of docility could be redeemed. *Excellence* is perhaps the answer—the necessity of our time. To bring the mind constantly to dwell on whatever has reached its own summit, supremely beautiful or good. This was done, even for simple people, by religion in the Bible or Quran; by architecture, poetry or art, when they pervaded life and gave to the normal day a yardstick or perspective by which civilization could stand on its own feet, independent of however many new inventions there may be. For the actual stature of man is no greater now than it was near his beginning: he is made tall only by standing on the heap of his ages, and using his past.

Looking around, I noticed that I had forgotten landscape when I listed in my mind the excellences of this world; for here, after two hours' riding, we turned into a great beauty of oak glades in a tributary valley, and followed a dark water that hurried under white aquatic flowers, with catmint at its edge. It sped among willowy roots under a canopy of leaves, so that mostly the sound alone went drumming and beating beside us; and its gaiety led us to where the slope of the valley softened near a few solitary huts among fruit trees, that show the dwindled site of Eski, or Old, Beiteshebab.

A tower, its base solid boulders and all the rest crumbled, suggested that we were following the main mountain track, and we had passed tombstones at the turn of the valley, so mottled with lichen and the oak-tree shadows that their age and even

Eski Beiteshebab

their shape were hard to tell. Generally, in all this country, one assumes that a ruined site belonged most recently to the Assyrians. In the first years of the First World War they hesitated and then, feeling themselves unsafe, sided with the Allies, and drew into their highest fastnesses while the Kurds plundered their lands—the valleys of the Zab and mountain districts round Diz and Jilu, and the West to which we were travelling. Thence, leaving all this in ruins, they achieved their famous trek, above Hakkari and Qudshanis ‘through one of the most rugged and the most difficult of the mountain districts in Asia’—to Urmiah, and, when the Russian collapse left them stranded, back with the loss of about half their numbers to Iraq. These things are unhappy and far-off, not in time but in the rapidity of the transformations of Asia. The valleys are still haunted and emptier than they should be, and some little ruined chapel now built up as a byre will remind one that here the oldest, or very nearly so, of the Christian liturgies was practised for more than fifteen hundred years. The sonnet of Milton was in my mind as I travelled where their dead were scattered:

‘Even they who kept Thy faith so pure of old.’

Before the First World War, the difficulties of the Assyrians had already been increasing:

‘Until Abdul Hamid’s day, the parties (Assyrians and Kurds) were fairly matched on the whole; and generations of cross-raiding had evolved an understanding. . . . Each side used old guns of much the same character; flint-locks to wit, with home-made powder and bullets. . . . The powder the folk of the mountains manufactured for themselves, being able to get sulphur in plenty in their hills, and burning their own charcoal. Nitre could always be gathered in some caverns where the sheep were folded, but our knowledge of

Ride to Dirahini

chemistry does not enable us to say exactly how. Bullets were easy to come by, for lead crops out in thick veins in certain gorges, and can be easily cut out of the rock in chunks for the purpose. As for the casting, it is wonderful what unsuspected uses there are for a thimble! Nobody dreams of using it hereabouts as an assistance to sewing; but when set in a lump of clay, it makes a very tolerable bullet-mould! . . .

‘But of late years things have changed for the worse . . . and the free distribution of rifles among the Kurds . . . when the Sultan raised the Hamidie battalions . . . has done away with all the old equality.’

This was written by Wigram in 1914; and since then, a few years after the war, the relative strength of such Assyrian villages as still remained in the mountains was further enfeebled by recruiting for the ‘Assyrian Levies’ in Iraq. A friend of mine, an English officer who travelled among them on this business, was so filled with sorrow over their helplessness and its consequence to the villages when their youth had left them, that he handed over his year’s pay to the Patriarch as a private atonement for the public mistake.

Such individual feelings are comforting to remember, plentifully scattered as they are over the British enterprises of the Middle East in modern times: for it must be admitted that the public mistakes are many. The matter of the Assyrians is one of them. They were our allies and we did, as soon as the war was over, see to it that they returned to the then almost empty Hakkari from which they came. The recruiting of the levies, however, weakened this return, and the villages—not yet firmly established—were unable to hold out against their enemies. The British officials in Iraq pressed this matter urgently on the

The End of Warfare

government at home, or so I remember being told when first I went out there in 1929; but Whitehall was busy, and the matter was shelved, and by the time they got round to it, the chance of a solid resettlement had gone. The Assyrian had been harassed and driven out during the frontier disputes of thirty-five years ago and the Kurds had taken over the empty lands north of the Zab which they now so sparsely inhabit; and it is entirely to the Turkish interest to leave things as they are. The constant hereditary warfare has come to an end with the disappearance of one of the two sides; and now, with no difference of religion to make a barrier, and with an active policy of roads and schools, a prosperous and peaceful Turkish Kurdistan is probably in sight. But the sadness remains, and it is no pleasure to look at history in the making. I thought of the Lady Surma, an old woman now, the aunt of the Patriarch, who endured these marches and was put in charge of the ammunition depot at Urmiah—criticized for ‘nervousness’ by her tribesmen when she forbade them to smoke near the dump. She lives in Ealing and I met her not long ago, and told her as I said good-bye that I hoped to see her mountains, and she looked at me from under her white hair with the eyes of her youth. “Ah,” said she, “the highlands of Qudshanis! I rode there for days over the grass and flowers.”

The district in which I was now riding was mentioned at the turn of this century as the home of the ‘dreaded Artoushas from the south’.¹ It was peaceful enough now. The cottages of Eski Beiteshebab, few as they were, were empty and their inhabitants up in their pastures till September. Only a boy or two with a handful of sheep sat under the trees, and *yaourt* was all the food they had to give us. They brought out a pan and we rested and then continued for half an hour till the easy valley

¹ Earl Percy: *Highlands of Asiatic Turkey* 139.

Ride to Dirahini

ended in a bowl of rocks and grass beneath a Dolomite crest called Deri Dagh. Pleated stiff like starched lace or the plumes of an Indian chieftain, it shone as we climbed beneath it, and tired the mare and the mules for another hour on the zig-zags of a grassy col. From here we could look back over ranges, and see our ride spread out under the dark blue morning sky. The ledge of Beiteshebab looked what it was, a nest or cradle in the four pathways of the hills, with the Hammam valley of the hot spring beside it and the whole country rising in gradations to the downs of Van and the openings towards Iraq or Sirt, in north and east and west.

On the far side of the col, after the first descent of a gully, we still found Deri Dagh above us, its landscape now opening magnificently on to a country of moraines. They wound from their precipices, and in the central trough of their concealed barren waves held a long valley, a river of crops called Zatkar. It looked like a Persian landscape of sand-coloured slopes that held the brilliant trees and small mud houses, with patches of orange or green peppers drying on the roofs. As our path followed the valley windings dangerously on a shelving and gritty surface high above, it was as if a ship, merely passing, were suddenly, from an overhanging wave's edge, to see some little fishing fleet about its accustomed business, puny but at home in the hollow cradle of its sea.

The main track must originally have followed this inhabited depression. Three ruined watch-towers dominated it, spaced in sight one of the other along the glacia of the moraine and built, like the one seen in the morning, with a solid foundation of boulders, such as mountaineers might design in any age.

One of the officials in Beiteshebab, who attended to the forestry and was interested in antiquities, had told me of a fortress with square walls not far off our road and had taken the

Roman Ruins

trouble to explain the exact location to Abdullah, who now said that this was it, pointing to the best preserved of the towers, on which a careful examination through my glasses showed not a trace of Roman work in sight. Either the official or Abdullah were wrong, almost certainly the latter. He had no inclination to lengthen his route in the middle of the day, and had already shown me that ruins were not, to his mind, worth the most passing thought. But I was disappointed. *The Cradle of Mankind*, which I carried with me, describes a Roman fortress still, as far as I can tell, unidentified, and vaguely sited 'somewhere to the west of the Urmi-Van road and up among the highest of the mountains'.

'There,' it says, 'is a pass open practically all the year round, between the plain of Mesopotamia and the Armenian plateau. It should be a highroad for commerce; but the Kurds who live in it are too turbulent to allow any traveller to pass that way as a rule, and it is very little known in consequence. It was a passage of strategic importance, however, in the days when Rome held Nisibis as her frontier post on the Persian border; and when Armenia was a buffer state of most uncertain loyalty, between the Roman and Sassanid Persian empires. Hence it was a road to guard; and Roman engineers planted upon it one of the grandest of Roman fortresses, which stands to this day practically unruined. Diocletian, who fortified this strategic frontier, was probably its builder; and it must have been evacuated when Jovian ceded the provinces to Persia some fifty years after his day. Since then it has remained derelict, for anyone to occupy who cared; and so it stands still—one of the grandest Roman relics anywhere.

'It is a great square fortress, built after the pattern of their

Ride to Dirahini

camps, with the praetorium as its citadel in the centre of the western side. One wall, the northern, has been pulled down to provide material for the medieval Kurdish *kala* into which the general's quarters have been transformed; but this probably embodies much of the old citadel in itself. . . .'

With the most irritating vagueness, Canon Wigram omits all further geography, leaving one in the mountains as if searching among the needles of a hedgehog for a flea: but if any other traveller has a chance, he might do worse than to look for the ruin somewhere on a hill overhanging the western slopes of Deri Dagh, along the obvious track that leads towards the Tigris.

By the time we reached the bottom of this long descent, we came to trees and a little stream, and I settled to rest before we got involved in houses. The hamlet anyway was empty, said Abdullah, and the people were 'bad'; and he began to unload our animals, without even replying to the schoolmaster who, with a last little flicker of confidence, seemed to think he was leading the party and wished to find an imaginary colleague in an almost certainly non-existent school. Or at least he hoped, I fear, gazing aggrieved at the banks of our bucolic water, to find an empty chair in an empty room to sit on.

I was sorry for him, still damp from the egg with youth, and so anxious to be grand. While we had squatted comfortably with shepherd boys on the ground, drinking their *yaourt*, he had stood, refusing the half of my Burberry and eventually preferring a little patch of waterlogged earth of his own. He was not unfriendly, but anxious about his dignity, and that takes all one's time when sitting on one's luggage on a mule. But now we had been out for five hours; the sun had been shining upon us down the shadeless slopes, and without a hat and with his thin shoes and his civilized clothes, and a headache, and the violin





BEITESHEBAB FROM DERI DAGH COL.



VALLEY BELOW DERI DAGH: ZATKAR



JAMHAS TO DIRAHINI
ABDULLAH. SENGĒRĒ VALLEY

The Schoolmaster

case in his hand, he had watched me ride under my parasol on my clever little pony while Abdullah dismounted and walked the laden mule. I had offered to tie the violin in with my bedding, but he clung to it, "for it is what I shall please myself with in my solitary evenings during the next few years"; and he had rejected my suggestion that a handkerchief, wetted and knotted, might keep the sun off and relieve his head. In a burst of confidence, he had told me of his home, and of his training in the teachers' college, and—looking at the forbidding ranges that piled themselves between him and his memories more solidly with every passing hour—had said that he had thought in a year or so to marry, "but how could I bring a wife here, into this savage land?"

He now lay with his eyes shut, vexed and exhausted, while Abdullah and I discovered that he had brought himself nothing to eat. "I rely," he remarked in a grandiose way as if we had insulted him, "on the hospitality of my countrymen and tea is all I want." I had some, but alas, had brought no kettle, having flown light from Ankara; and I had also, because of dysentery and the absence of stores in Hakkiari, let myself run out of sugar; so that the brew, in an open pan and sweetened with lollipops, was a poor substitute for what he expected; but Abdullah and I were happy enough, sharing our bread and opening a tin of sardines, while two handsome boys came up from the houses and brought us *yaourt* and little green pears.

There are two things which I have never been able to obtain in spite of constant endeavour: one is to find breakfast ready for me when I get up in the morning; and the other is to be given a proper rest through the heat of the day. "We will start at half past two," I said to Abdullah: "and that will allow for the three hours you say we need to reach our village before dark." And I held out, though he woke me up at intervals as

Ride to Dirahini

soon as he got bored, and we finally compromised and started at half past one in the very hottest of the afternoon.

We rode downstream and crossed the hamlet, its few houses buried in maize fields; Jamhas was its name. It had what looked like the apse of a small church, converted to poorer uses. Our rivulet, now growing deep and strong, ran steeply down to join the river of the morning and eventually the Habur, somewhere in the gorges of the south. Up here it tunnelled its way under ledges scooped out by its own labours, so that the path had to climb above it, touching the river-bed only at intervals; until we turned again into a westerly direction, up another tributary valley, with gentler trees and meadow spaces, from which rocks high but open emerged.

There were signs here and there of cultivation, and some wayfarers had joined us—an old man full of jokes who walked with a loping step in moccasins knitted on to slices of motor tyre that made a good durable sole. He had to hurry to keep up with our mounts, but he did so for the sake of company, and for an hour or two I had his back in front of me, bobbing up and down inside a waistcoat that was embroidered with what looked like masonic symbols, the fancy of the tents. A good-looking man of about forty also added himself to us, leading his idiot son a week's journey from the hills on a grey horse to some hospital in Mardin or Diyarbekr. It was an only son, a lad of eighteen, who sat with witless eyes and drooping mouth, rousing now and then to sudden dim rages of his private world. In spite of this the father loved him; I could see it from the way in which he thanked me when I offered the boy some sweetmeat; and this company of the old jester and the madman seemed to give our cavalcade a Shakespearian touch, except that their philosophies, if they had any, were dumb.

We rode for three hours, while the light flooded the westerly

Dirahini

valley. It lit the rough stones that had been built in steps at overhangs, where my pony trod with neatness and skill: until, with the falling twilight, the landscape widened to a simplicity reminiscent of the Arabian hills. We were very little north of the Iraq frontier, travelling parallel to it up the valley.

We were near our night's village, and cattle walked towards it along the valley floor. They went with nodding heads and leisure all about them, and the track turned a corner and showed maize fields in flower, a slope with gushing brooks and many houses half hidden in trees; this was Dirahini. The Dirahini river wound beneath it in a flat and peaceful bend, catching the last daylight as we asked for the Muhtar's house.

Institut kurde de Paris

THE RIDE TO ULU DERE

A MOUNTAIN VILLAGE ALWAYS WAKES UP TOWARDS EVENING, when the animals come in from their grazing, and Dirahini was enjoying a treble dose of excitement, for not only had a young lad fallen off the path earlier in the day and been buried that afternoon, but a German party had arrived, travelling in the direction opposite to ours. They had two Beys and one woman, and had gone to bathe in the river—a luxury which as far as I was concerned my solitary propriety forbade. They were expected back at the Muhtar's house when we presented ourselves there, and I suggested that I should put up my bed and share the roof with them.

There seemed to be crowds of people after the bare hamlets of the higher hills and the day's solitude. The young men, gathered in a row three deep to watch my unpacking, were dressed in a variety of fashions that showed their coming and going with Iraq. Chiefly white or striped wool, the fancy touches were added by thick stockings knitted in patterns and tied with coloured ribbons, and more colour in sashes and turbans and pagoda caps like those of the old Assyrians, or a tasselled silk from Mosul here and there. The border is so near that even coffee is plentiful, which is scarcely to be found anywhere else in Turkey just now.

Down below in the porch the women were preparing dinner for us all—wildish and handsome as hawks to look at, and very free and easy in their comments, no doubt at our expense. I could naturally not understand a word, but recognized a look

The Muhtar's Guests

of discomfort in the masculine audience, kept for those rare occasions when women say what they think and the conventions are scattered. I went down to shake hands with them, and it was taken very coolly; two parties in one day was too much, and the schoolmaster's reception, to his mortification, was just as cool: the young lads however were friendly over the putting up of the bed and the setting out of all the gadgets for the night: the Muhtar himself moved about with no pleasure, though with the feeling for hospitality stronger than all; and an added wave of bustle soon greeted the return of the Germans.

They were part of an anthropologists' expedition from Berlin and they came to study the lives and habits of the Kurds; and it is still a mystery to me why they should have had no difficulty in investigating these officially non-existent provincials when every English traveller has had so many obstacles to overcome. They had a tape recorder, which could not be used because of the day's funeral, and they were going to write a book, and they could take as many photographs as they pleased; and they were in fact friendly people to sit and talk to in the moonlight after dinner, though they were obviously hearing a great many disobliging things about the government from a swashbuckling dragoman Kurd with enormous moustaches, whose stories I would have disbelieved at sight.

The moon was nearly full. As we lay in our roof-beds we looked across the valley and its clumps of trees and the flowering maize, to the river and the slopes smooth in shadow that had killed a boy that morning for all their pointed beauty in the night. Small clouds swollen with moonlight were steering through the sky. The waters babbled downhill in many contaminated little streams. Having sprayed DDT around me as a precaution against mosquitoes, I was lying at peace with the world in a trance of ecstasy and silence, when the bees who lived

The Ride to Ulu Dere

in a wattled hive let into the mud wall behind me made an organized attack and began to sting.

It was probably the smell of the DDT that brought them, and I thought at first that I had merely been accidentally in the way of some belated forager on his road home. But more and more came out into the moonlight, and, filled with patriotism and venom, entangled themselves in my dressing-gown and hair; till I fled, and found a corner near the Germans, where the wind of the valley kept them off.

Next morning at five we left—an hour late again because Abdullah, who had gone off to sleep in the house of some relative, could find no food there for our caravan. The mules kept their thoughts to themselves as they usually do, but my mare went droopingly, disinclined even to give her habitually nerve-racking exhibition of starting backwards when I opened my parasol.

“Surely,” I said to Abdullah, “you could find some feed in a village of over a thousand houses among your own people?”

“They asked one lira for a handful of maize,” said he, brooding over the toughness of his kin.

I protested. “You know that we can’t take tired animals unfed over another pass 3000 metres high.” Abdullah raised his chin in that eloquent gesture which is the Turkish equivalent of a blank wall. “We need only ride on half an hour,” he conceded; “and then we will find some fields out of sight of the village and help ourselves.”

This half-hour was nearly my last. The cultivation stopped and the valley narrowed, and the stream became a mountain water dropping, golden-brown, from rock to rock. The path had to climb to skirt waterfalls and precipices not very high, but sufficient: it was not quite one of those mountain ways described by Wigram as leading to villages ‘immune to raiders owing to

A Fall

the fact that no quadruped can be led' along them, for it was the main track to Ulu Dere at the centre of the hills. We were, however, in the land where 'the paths are seldom wide enough for two men to walk abreast', and this one was of that kind. Wherever it grew so steep that the loose gravel rolled off it, its stones were worn by centuries of men and animals to an alabaster polish, and it was just at one of these corners, with a vertical face of rock and two waterfalls below, that the uninterested little mare slipped one leg over the edge. It was luckily the hindleg, and I pulled her head by instinct inwards towards the rocks: even so there was a moment of uncertainty that seemed long, while I watched the paralysed face of Abdullah some way off, horrified by what must have appeared like the sketch of a Bernini fountain. Her quarter practically over the precipice, the mare gave a heave which strained her saddle to the point when Levantine girths can be trusted to break. They did so, with the saddle and me on the inside, and the freed mare rose like one of Poseidon's horses back on to the path, quivering and ashamed.

I was luckily not only not hurt, but not frightened. Everything had gone too quickly, very differently from the gradual approach of microbes that demoralize me indoors. But Abdullah was shaken to his roots. He led on the mare, whose nerves had to be given time to recover, and when I remarked that the whole of this was due to lack of breakfast for the horses, pointed to a little maize patch, on a slope near by, which he intended to loot. "It would have caused us a lot of trouble if anything had happened to you," he at last found it in his mind to say.

We were all of us glad of some food and a rest. Our comrades of the day before were also travelling, and had trapped a partridge; they had begun to pluck its feathers alive, which I

The Ride to Ulu Dere

stopped, and they now cut its throat in the name of Allah and watched it bleed. If I had gone over the edge, I reflected, the partridge would have enjoyed a few more days or years: it is all this or that: and I saw a small heap of myself, indistinguishable, on the slab near the waterfall at the bottom of the rocks, and turned my thought away, enjoying the sun on my back, and the mountain air, the depth of the blue sky and the wrinkled stone against it, and the simple delight of being alive, never, or probably never, to be repeated quite the same.

We followed the water to its source and continued—a two and a half hour's ride from Dirahini altogether—to the pass which is the watershed between the Habur and the Hizil Chay. It was all westward, a slow dull mounting with rocks overhanging, and an animal's skeleton by the wayside.

“There are always dead on this track,” said the old jester, in his happiest vein. “The avalanches get them and then in summer they are found.” His smile with one tooth in it was the most cheerful and the poorest I saw in all my journey.

We were climbing north and parallel to the Tanina range; and now, from the pass, we looked westward over slowly subsiding mountains into the porphyry-coloured Mesopotamian dust.

For two more hours we rode or walked down to the water level, and then, past stubble fields and deserted walls all dull with a limestone dryness, reached the first village called Niro, stretched along the closeness of its valley with vineyards above it, from which grapes in panniers were being carried to its *yailas* out of sight.

From here our way was not long, though shackled and strange, for the mountains held it in two high unbroken walls that wound in a windless climate and separated it from the surrounding world. It was like some Arabian tale, where every-

The Way from Niro

thing is granted but escape; for the imprisoned valley grew richer as we advanced, with clusters from vines hanging over the pathway, and fig trees with purple fruit in pools of shade. The water was drained into channels, and small muddy paths ran alongside, overhung with brambles; and in the bottom where the main water ran, troops of children laughed naked and splashing in every pool. Here, too, the maize was still in flower, and the corn gathered; and horses or oxen, or both together, were trampling chaff on the threshing floors, five or six of them circling with heads down and hind legs kicking, and the ropes held by a youth with a whip in his hand at the centre.

All this was in a very narrow compass, and the whole valley, at the height where its crops and gardens ended, was less than a mile across. The fortress-houses climbed mostly on the north bank—cubes of roughly evened stones that gave their walls a shiny broken surface, pierced by small windows in which glass was rarely shown. The doors were arched and set a foot or so inside a larger arched recess built in the wall. These were the better buildings, and the rest, fashioned of mud and stone, tumbled as they could down the mountain side, letting the valley road go by under their upper storeys or across their little patios in the sun. Everywhere beside them were small terraces of beaten earth in the shade of a tree or two for the women to sit out on; and everywhere the gurgling waters mixed their voices with the bass of the river below. When we had ridden an hour or so, one village touching the next one, and had lost ourselves in the paths, we noticed a few white buildings with tiled roofs on the southern bank, and, finding out that this must be what it looked, the Karakol and seat of government, took the steep way down to a ford and up again, and saw a little company of *memurs* gathered in a circle on their hard chairs in the shade.

THE CENTRE OF THE MOUNTAINS

THERE WAS A GARRISON COMMANDANT IN ULU DERE AND he looked through my permit and passport efficiently and kindly, without a flicker to show that the arrival of solitary English women was at all unusual. He was immaculately uniformed, shaved, and spick and span, like all the officers about these mountains, with an elegance that I always admired in such lonely places. I also admired just as much or perhaps even more so the pluck of the wives who come, unhardened, from Istanbul or Ankara or Bursa, and make their home in the wilderness for three or four years at a time. With no resources except what the place itself can provide, and very sketchy lodgings, and no liking for anything at all they see around them, they deal with their problems and their children, and keep civilized standards; nor did they ever, man or woman, describe the toughness of their life and its climate of exile except with the attitude that this and more must be done for one's country if required.

In a back room of the building where the *memurs* were sitting—which belonged to the Ministry of Education—I found the new Commandant's wife, just come from Istanbul. She was pretty and young, in a light summer dress from the city, with two children of seven and eight to look after, and all the compartments of life neatly arranged in the separate corners of the one big room. She set herself to get me some food, and a flat copper pan with water to wash in, and was evidently pleased to find a woman she could talk to, for

The Commandant's Wife

she was still under the shock of her arrival ten days or so before.

"I had no idea of this sort of life," she said. "I come from Istanbul."

She held up a little white shoe with a high heel.

"How shall I walk," she asked, "in winter? Even now, I can hardly step beyond the door."

"Is it difficult to get things sent?" I asked.

"Very. And so costly. And the post comes only sometimes, when it happens. It took us ten days to get here, with the children and all our things—eleven hours from Sirnakh the last day, riding on mules."

"You will get accustomed," said I. "And it is healthy for the children; and you will soon get a house."

"One of these village houses, earth floors and mud walls. I look at the mountains," she added; "see how they go, straight up from where we live, on all four sides like walls; one feels as if one were in prison. And I think of my parents; they are used to seeing me and they long for me, and flying is too expensive, and any other way makes it seem so far away. But it is for one's country," she added, as if that were the hand-rail of her life—which indeed it usually is; and I was pleased to be able to find a pair of sandals, some aspirin, and trousers, to help with her first winter's supplies.

My ride had been five hours from Dirahini without counting pauses, so I was glad to sleep a little, and put off calling on the Kaimakam until the Director of Education came to wake me, pointing out that we would not find the office open if we delayed.

The Director was a blond and happy twenty-year-old Georgian from Artvin, where Turkey and the Caucasus meet. He had eleven new schools in this area to deal with and liked

The Centre of the Mountains

the valley, and had learnt the people's language, for he had spent two years here already and the village women spinning on their steep platforms greeted him as we passed. The Kaimakam in his office was a man of the valley with a black moustache, and he too looked over my permit with care.

"Have you been taking photographs in the mountains?" he asked.

"Yes," said I. "Many. But only such as I had permission for from the *Vali* Bey in Hakkari. Nothing military," I explained "nor anything like a beggar, or a tumble-down hovel, which I know you don't like to have exhibited."

There was a reticence in the Kaimakam's manner, but no more; and as I left, a very handsome young officer standing in the shadow bowed gravely. On the way back I lingered with the Director to drink glasses of tea with some of his village friends, turning aside to where one of the earth platforms had been covered by a summer-house. Curtained with blankets and roofed with oak-leaf boughs. This was far more comfortable in the heat of the valley than houses, and a group of women with a child or two were sitting there on bright woollen divans, spinning white wool off their distaffs while one of them made tea over a primus on the ground. They were unveiled as the Kurdish women are, and very friendly, and liked the lad with his blue eyes. When we left them, the valley was pooled in shadows. The daylight travelled remote and bright above it—the familiar contrast of the gorges, in whose recesses the visible passages of time seem scarcely to belong.

A few more of the *memurs* were gathered in the porch, and I joined their circle and sat talking till the handsome officer, who came up the hill and stood listening to us for a few minutes, asked if I would go in so that he could speak to me. And then the bombshell fell.

Police Search

A telegram, looping from rock to rock all the way from Hakkari, had ordered him to take my films. He said this in the kindest possible way, gave one look at my face, and remarked that he knew what I felt as he was a photographer himself. But it was an order.

There was nothing to be done.

My luggage was in the next room, and he came with me, knowing his business very well. I unlocked the only bag that was shut, and he went through it all. He felt every object conscientiously as he took it out and put it on one side. When one bag was finished, the next was taken, and I watched the operation as if someone had slapped me in the face; it was the primitive feeling that extends one's own self to one's possessions and is outraged by foreign fingers fumbling among them. He found two rolls of film. "Is that all?" I lifted my chin and opened my hands. "How many pictures in each roll?" "Thirty-seven." It seemed a lot. He put everything back, while I mastered myself slowly; and then with genuine sympathy asked my forgiveness. "It is very unpleasant for me to do this," he said.

"I know," I said. "You have to do it." The tumult inside me was tidy enough now for words. The Director and one or two of the friendly people had come in and were standing by full of concern. "It's the *stupidity*," I said, "that I mind so. When a permit to travel is asked for, the people in Ankara have every chance to investigate and if they feel that one is not a friend they need not give one. But when you *do* give it to a friend and then treat him like an enemy, you *make* an enemy of him."

"That is so," said one; and they all, I think, felt it.

They tried to console me. The films would be returned. "Spoilt," said I, and waited to read a paper before I signed

The Centre of the Mountains

it, that was to travel with them to Hakkari. It was a mere handing over. I added a paragraph with my feelings and the assurance that I had taken only innocuous pictures; and the young officer, though he had not bargained for any personal additions, let it go. I may say that every sympathy was expressed in Ankara also, and every effort promised, but I have never seen my films again.

Far too agitated to continue the evening conversation in the porch, I took refuge with the Commandant and his wife, and went to bed as soon as I had eaten. I had said good-bye to Abdullah with a gift of a pair of shoes which he looked at critically and then brightened and approved of. Another man with his son, from a village up the river, had promised to bring mules by four o'clock next morning. I was exhausted, chiefly by emotion; and I now lay in my bed and never slept. Anger poured over me in waves as if it were the hot tide of a sea. It was not in me: it was outside, and it overwhelmed me. The monstrosity of bureaucracy, I thought: always the pint-pot judging the gallon, the scribe's, the door-keeper's world. Always the stupidity of people who feel certain about things they never try to find out. A world that *educates* people to be ignorant—that is what this world of ours is. In my turmoil, one resolution stood fixed: never, never again would I travel in this difficult manner any more.

With a nostalgia that hurt like a pain I thought of England; perhaps it was the singing of the waters in the night that brought her so poignantly before me. But it was of her people that I thought: a modest people, where this terrible nationalism is rare and one is not always being told about virtues that one likes to discover for oneself: where, almost alone in the world today, the variety of tastes and opinions, the entrancing *variety* of the world which must be pleasing to God since He made it

Bureaucracy

so, is still encouraged and respected. People, I thought longingly, who when they go about are able here and there to care for other and different people as much as for their own. Perhaps it is only the best of any nation that can do this, and when we owned much of the world we often sent our best: but I was not thinking of being fair in the darkness of the night. The flint, I thought, is fire and the pebble mere stone: and people are civilized when *ideas*, however foreign, will strike a spark inside them: and England is now perhaps among those rare and happy nations where the fierce intellectual qualities of Greece have been toned down to a native goodness like the Turkish—a mixture that could produce civilization. If that is so, it is the treasure of treasures—and better to be conquered having it than to lack it among the threatening barbarians of our day.

This word, which had so upset the *Vali* of Hakkari, brought my thoughts back from such a general geographic dispersal to where my body lay, so strangely, in the narrow valley and the night: and I began to remember how much kindness, how freely and generously offered, had brought me so far on my way.

I thought of Doğan, and the other doctor, and the old lady of Beiteshebab, and the *Vali* himself and his family: and of the wayfarers—Abdullah, and the *memurs* of Hakkari, and the man with his mad son, and the old woman who had loved me when I was ill. These touched me more than the more educated and efficient, perhaps because in their humility they are nearer to the true proportions of our mystery—not in actual knowledge, but in the *proportion*, for they know themselves ignorant, and that is well, when the background is infinity.

So, in my mind, going over the past days, I realized that

The Centre of the Mountains

this was the first time that I had met anything but help, and my anger ebbed away. I felt limp as if I had been beaten, but it was time to get up, if we were really going to start at four; and I was soon ready, and stepped out to the terrace, which the four quarters of the valley held in their corrugated walls.

It was still far from daylight. The high dome of heaven was revolving with peacock colours and secret constellations among the outlined rocks. There was, of course, no sign of the muleteers. I sat there for over an hour, watching the moonlight retreat from the rocky bastions, a process of infinite majesty and peace. I felt, as Firdausi says, like dust in the lion's paw. In the beginning of dawn, before the valley's awakening, the Director of Education came out, sleepy in his pyjamas:

"Yalan—liars," said he, looking along the river pathway for the caravan. "It makes a bad impression," he added: for he was touchingly anxious to make me as happy as he could.

We sat there side by side in a companionable silence, and I began to wonder again, as I had done through the night, but this time without anger—why I, and so many others like me, should find ourselves in these recondite places. We like our life intensified perhaps. Travel does what good novelists also do to the life of every day, placing it like a picture in a frame or a gem in its setting, so that the intrinsic qualities are made more clear. Travel does this with the very stuff that everyday life is made of, giving to it the sharp contour and meaning of art: and unless it succeeds in doing this, its effect on the human being is not, I believe, very great. To the deeply imaginative, no doubt architecture, painting or music, and to the less adventurous the art of fiction are sufficient strengtheners and discriminators—and most people anyway try to avoid having their feelings intensified: for indeed one must be strong to place oneself alone against the impact of the unknown world.



AMADIYA KURDS (IRAQ)

AKRA KURD (IRAQ)

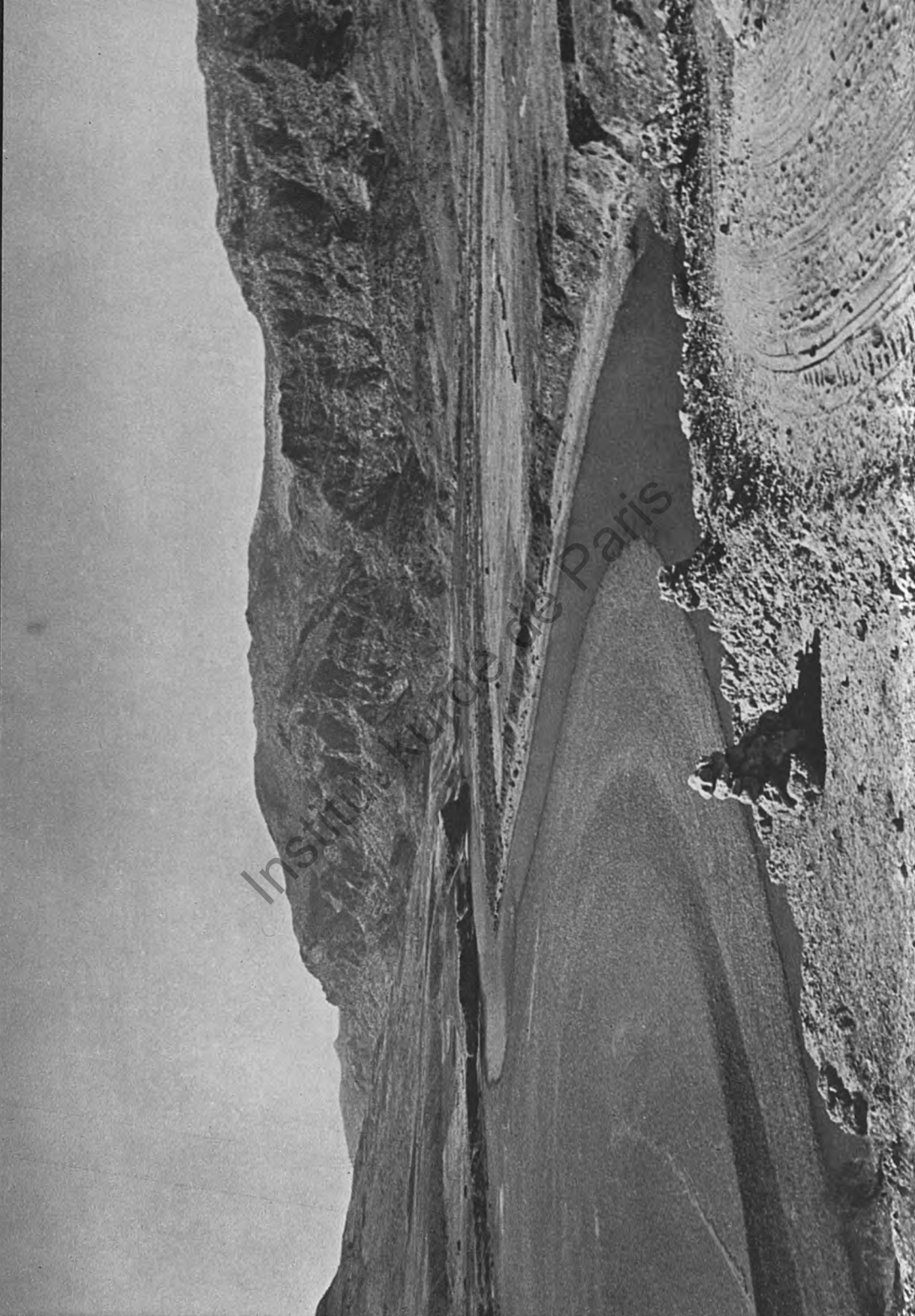


DIRAHINI TO NIRO



JUDI DAGH FROM MILLI KARAKOL

ZAKHO BRIDGE



THE TIGRIS ABOVE JIZRE

Military Escort

After five, when the sunlight was already slanting among the upper bays, the muleteers arrived—a bent little father anxious to please, and his son who had acquired a dignified Turkish manner together with something of the language as a soldier. He had a face with skin tight at the corners of the eyes, as if it were made up for the pantomime, and this gave a gaiety of which he was, of course, unconscious, and which in fact did not exist—for he was of an anxious nature, and the recommendations of the *memurs*, now gathered about us, were evidently worrying him with the thought that English women must be different from any others and important not to be damaged or mislaid. On the roof of a house across the stream the two soldiers who were to be my escort could be seen buckling on their cartridges and bayonets: from here to the Tigris lands I was to be guarded, and whether it was because of danger or of photography I never knew. But I felt constricted, and the shock of the night was still with me, and the general kindness with which everyone surrounded my disappointment moved me so greatly that I was unable to speak at all; my camera was packed, and I had nothing to stop for: and as I left the valley with its secluded climate and square climbing houses, and the rock-sides with their slanting water channels, and oblique streaks of paths and the world of their *yailas* unseen but felt above them, it seemed to me that I was dropping, rather dislocated, out of some planet isolated and unfamiliar as the moon.

THE TIGRIS WATERSHED

THE VALLEY NARROWED AS WE DESCENDED FROM HAMLET to hamlet; houses and cultivation grew scantier; and the path soon ceased to find itself on somebody's roof or patio, and followed a cool solitude close by the water that beat, impetuous and transparent, against roots of sycamore, walnut or willow. Sometimes we crossed on bridges built across planks with brushwood, full of holes; and at times had to climb up and down to avoid short ravines where the stream burrowed under ledges and left no space for a track. We were descending all the time, and the hills were opening, and let us out at last into lands of tillage, and rare villages at the centre of their fields. Our torrent, now a green river, flowed away from us but in sight, under easy banks still thick with willow and hawthorn, ash and vine, and the beautiful Morris-pattern leaves of the wild pear tree. From clefts on our right another of the Hizil tributaries came down to add its waters. We rested to breakfast beside it, at a ford where a bridge long ruined showed what once must have been the main route for traffic from the Tigris at Jizre into the Hakkari.

Although still early, the heat was strong in these lowlands. We rode from dip to dip among stubble-fields enclosed in brambly hedges, and, at about nine o'clock, saw the flag of the star and crescent flying on the thatch of a hamlet—three tiers of primitive building no higher than their doorposts and piled up, with a charming effect of Chinoiserie, in a bowl of maize between three small pointed hills.

Shekerek

This was the police post of Shekerek. The tiny garrison, to whom my escort handed me over, received me in a friendly way and took me to a cottage near by, where the Commandant's wife was living with a three-year-old son, as fair-haired and blue-eyed as a Scandinavian. She, too, was fair, neat and small, and came from Adrianople, and her husband was away on his rounds. She had done her best with the dark low room and mud walls and earthen floor; the bed and a divan and the child's cot were all covered with clean striped cloths, and the Commandant's best uniform, ironed and spotless, hung on a nail. She had been here for three years, alone as far as female society went except for the women of the hamlet, whose language she had learnt, and of whom two or three were sitting by the hearth in their medieval dresses. But she saw that I was tired, and soon got rid of them, and looked after me like a sister, providing water and towels to wash, and food, and at last a sleep on her bed; and woke me gently after I had sunk into what seemed an aeon of forgetfulness, to tell me that the muleteers and the soldiers were asking to start.

"Let them," I said, or words to that effect. Nothing would make me ride through the middle of the day down here in the heat, and the next Karakol was less than two hours away. "I will start at three," I said, and sank back again on the kindly bed with thanksgiving in my heart for the inviolable Harem, on whose threshold even bureaucracy must pause. My equanimity by now was anyway restored. By one of those chances that are possibly fostered by experience in Asia, the best of my photographs had found themselves tucked away; the handsome officer had done everything that could possibly be expected of him, but had not found them, and the fact that I take so great a number of pictures (for he had inquired how many there were in every roll) had no doubt misled him. I had not felt

The Tigris Watershed

bound to say that three more must be somewhere about; I had not liked to look before to arrange for their safety; but I now investigated and settled them; and went to sleep with a certain feeling of satisfaction which I hope the Turkish tourist office may share when they realize how beautiful and harmless these landscapes are.

At a quarter to three we left, with a gay couple of new soldiers, of whom one carried an angular piece of metal which was some sort of a gun that looked as if it could mean business. The two lads coursed like greyhounds among the scrub—not searching for enemies so much as enjoying the use of their young limbs. Enemies are there still, they said. It is natural in these empty lands so near the border; and we had a moment's trouble with a shepherd chopping branches in a wood. When his dogs came at us, he gave a look and turned back to his cutting without calling them off—the only time that I have ever seen such a thing happen with the fierce dogs of Asia: and the boy with the Sten gun had something to say which, armed as we were, ended peaceably. I rode on, having long ago discovered that, when there is trouble, a woman's presence makes it worse.

It was a ride through the pleasant foothills. At about half an hour from Shekerek we crossed the Hizil Chay, pale like one of those faces with wide-spaced eyes, light blue among white boulders. The voices of the Ten Thousand seemed to float there, pausing when they pulled their boots off as our men were now doing with shoes and trousers and thick white knitted socks before they waded through. It used to be assumed that the Greeks came down upon Zakho on the Habur and therefore must have crossed the Hizil (though much farther downstream than I did). But I have since come to think with Lehmann-Haupt that the fighting took place *in* but not *across*

Towards Milli

the Zakho range, and that the Greeks followed the Tigris more or less closely until the mountains of Jizre blocked them.

We were making for this country through lands which Wigram's map gives to the Sindiguli Kurds and which my map gave to no one at all: nor, apart from the unfriendly shepherd, did we meet a single wayfarer or house. The hills were gentle, covered with glades of hawthorn trees and oak of many different sorts with rose-bushes and blackberries among them, and long shadows met us as we rode towards the west. It was four-thirty by the time we reached the next police post at Beste, a one-roomed hut with four men and a *berceau* of oak-boughs before it, and wooded empty landscapes all around. Here, except for me, nobody wanted to linger, and Milli, they said, with a Commandant and every comfort was only two hours away. We changed our escort, and drank some water, and rode on for another three hours.

It was wonderfully peaceful—the peace of the dangerous lands. Even animals were absent—the bears, wolves, ibex, pig, and leopard which Wigram enumerates had never shown themselves, though the dogs' spiked iron collars bear witness that some of these at any rate exist. Even the birds had become rare: their chirping sounded singly as they settled among the branches for the night.

I was tired after so many hours on a barrel-vaulted pack saddle, with nothing but a looped rope by way of stirrup and a hard home-woven kilim to sit on. But the mule plodded on, steady and reliable, and I was able to change my posture when the going was easy, and balance precariously as if on a side-saddle without a pommel. The mule was sleek and strong, with no sign of temperament except when the soldiers' guns came near its head: then it would slant its long black ears and catch the sunset on them like oars dipped back from water.

The Tigris Watershed

The soldiers came alongside now and then, and talked about their homes scattered over the length and breadth of Turkey. Their uniforms were ragged, but the shoes and arms were good, and they themselves full of contentment and pride—as fine to be with as anyone could wish for.

I was happy to be out in the wild and open world, with night and the long-unaccustomed slight spice of danger. Darkness fell at six-thirty, but the moon rose behind us, and trees and shrubs, distorted into strange sub-human shapes in the twilight, swam clear out into loveliness, as if their earth had crumbled into gold. The path showed quite distinct. The two little people of the land, the muleteer and his father, padded in soundless moccasins ahead through the labyrinth of tossing wooded hills that were their natural home. The sound of water, the ever-present sound of Europe, was absent; a warm and friendly silence lay about us, in which only the voices of night-birds now and then followed, as if along aloof arcades of shadow, the pathways of the moon.

We were crossing the Tigris watershed, and now the land broke westward, and the long promontory of Judi Dagh, that hangs over North Mesopotamia, appeared on our left, divided into three more or less equal portions by ravines that were unapparent in the night. On the western tip of the most easterly ravine—the one, that is to say, attached to the central highlands—is the chapel that commemorates the stepping-out of Noah from the Ark. Gertrude Bell in *Amurath to Amurath*,¹ that excellent book, describes it, for we were now approaching lands visited by most of the Mesopotamian travellers during the last hundred years. Wigram, too, refers to the legend as a tale already of unknown antiquity in the year A.D. 300, and adds that 'no people here, save the Armenians, look on . . . Ararat . . .

¹ p. 289.

Milli

as the spot where the Ark rested';¹ and I myself remember seeing the snow-powdered line of Judi from the Shammar tents and being told how Nuh the prophet landed there, after first hitting Jebel Sinjar with his hull. On September 14th, says Canon Wigram, 'all faiths and all nations come together, letting all feuds sleep on that occasion, to commemorate an event which is older than any of their divisions'.

The actual tomb of Noah, and his vineyard, are 'lower down on the hillside hard by the Nestorian village of Hasana', and this, too, was invisible to us, in a great sloping bowl of darkness as we rode. But I saw a fire burning far away, and asked if it were a village, and the muleteer said: "No. No villages there; but people protecting their vines." It fitted the tradition.

We could feel the vast slant of the earth towards the Tigris, but could see nothing in detail, not even our path now, for we were rounding a rather crumbling gulf that lay in shadow. The mule had to be trusted, since neither his hooves nor what they trod on could be seen and there was a feeling of emptiness on the left hand; but we emerged in time with relief, and saw the Karakol of Milli shining in high pale air, above a little *yaila* and a clump of walnut trees among the moonlit rocks.

¹ p. 335.

TIGRIS AND THE TEN THOUSAND

THE COMMANDANT WAS AWAY, AND HIS GARRISON OF EIGHT or nine men, delighted with visitors, received us. They brought me to a platform under a roof of oak-boughs, and set about the cooking of our dinner; and cats and kittens played, and a sheep dog came to be patted, while the moonlit world tossed itself away to diminishing ridges far below. They gave me the best room in their small building, with a bed and a table, and their Sunday uniforms hanging along the wall; showed me where the WC had been arranged among convenient rocks over running water (not good for the *yaila* below) and left me to fall gratefully asleep. When we set out next morning I had difficulty in persuading them to accept even the small presents of odds and ends and coffee that I had with me, nor would their hospitality have been the less without them.

We were in no great hurry, since the ride was short before us; and a mishap delayed us. The baggage mule had jabbed itself against a broken bough on the steepish place where it was tethered for the night, and a large though superficial gash showed on its quarter. The two men were desperate, for these animals were all their wealth; nor did they ever look expectantly for any human kindness around them. If they needed anything—fodder for instance—they would come to me and say: “*you* ask, for you can get it,” and it made me feel a sort of personal remorse, like that awakened by the Untouchables in Simla, to see human beings treated so differently one from the other. We poured the contents of a phial of iodine I carried

The Hand of Government

over the wound; and the mule, with its red muscle showing, walked composedly as if it did not mind; for it, too, no doubt, had learnt that in this world it is better to rely upon oneself.

Our journey continued round the bowl that tilts to the Tigris valley, bedded in mist or dust. After a little over an hour we reached a village *han* and sat to wait for the Milli Commandant. It was lucky that he had been absent the night before, for he presently arrived with a clatter of horses, looking in every way like Pongo in the Godot play, and seemed disappointed over what should have pleased him—the unimpeachable impeccability of my passport and permit. “This hunger for enemies is what gets me down,” I find written in my diary. The matter of the photographs was evidently still rankling in my mind.

He thought better of me when he heard that I had prescribed iodine for the mule. He looked at it, and said it was not serious, and we left him and his soldiers behind us. We were again loose in the world, with a pleasant but rather ungrateful feeling of escape. The country, still empty of inhabitants, was peaceful, swelling to slopes of cultivation among its stony scrub. As recently as 1914 Wigram wrote¹ that this district was ‘practically unknown to Europeans; being inhabited only by wild tribes of Kurds, with a scattering of Christians mostly of the Nestorian church as their *rayats*’; and when he asked permission of the *Vali* to travel, the answer was that ‘two companies of soldiers would not be enough to guard’ him.

Gertrude Bell, in 1911, draws the same sort of picture:²

““Have you suffered at the hand of the government?” I asked my guide.

““We suffer from the Kurds,” he replied, “and there is no

¹ p. 337.

² p. 295.

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one to protect us but God. Effendim, the aghawat . . . come over the pass and claim hospitality from us. We are poor men—in all Hasanah [we were looking towards it across the cultivation] there is not one who is not ignorant of hunger; how shall we feed the aghawat and their mares, and the followers they bring with them? And how shall we refuse when they are armed with rifles?"

"“Sir,” said Kas Mattai, “last year they took my bed, and that which was too worthless to carry away they broke and threw upon the fire. But if we resisted they would burn the village”.”

This was less than fifty years ago, and now I had travelled in safety unguarded through the heart of the mountains, and the escort of the last two days was probably intended, I could not help suspecting, to look more after me than after Kurds. Surely this situation is an achievement a government might be proud of and one which the English, at this particular moment, have every reason to envy:¹ So why the complex of reticence about it? It is probably due, as I had thought from the first in Hakiari, to those writers of the nineteenth century who had come with a previous interest in one or other of the mountain sects or races and, finding the Turkish Government in the deepest trough of its weakness, had written it off as more or less non-existent: this, added to our natural enjoyment of the picturesqueness of disorder as such, is enough to explain the deep suspicion we arouse when harmlessly out for pleasure.

The morning had been going by in a leisurely way, and it was ten o'clock already before we touched the bulldozers' road

¹ This was written at the height of our difficulties in Cyprus. The Kurdish question, though now fortunately beyond the pale of English responsibility, shows every sign of becoming acute enough to demonstrate the efficiency of Turkish management on their side of the border.

The Kaimakam of Sirnakh

that now reaches Sirnakh and plans to push into the mountains from the west. These machines churn up the top soil so easily that the Turks recklessly sketch out one streak after another across the grassy regions of their land, and this one was newly made to lead down to the Tigris. We had a mile or so to ride to Sirnakh along it, with the women of the little town beside us, who had descended in a bevy to fetch their day's supply of water from a spring. They carried the heavy skins on their backs, laughing with unveiled faces, and greeted me and said they were Armenian. The small girls dealt with their yet smaller brothers, in pouches woven like kilims with fringes, also on their backs.

We were now below the level of the oakwoods, and Sirnakh showed itself on a treeless slope, a cheerful shabby place tiered like an inverted theatre with brushwood roofs laid flat on low mud walls. An old *konak*, square and smooth, showed the good stone-work of these regions, and so did the *serai* with its Kurdish angle-tower, still firm and dignified while the new building, though unfinished, already showed some shoddy wear and tear. I was received in the office room of the old one, lop-sided as it was with a faded old-fashioned Turkish elegance still hovering about it like a ghost. The Kaimakam, too, sallow and narrow of face like an Italian painting, with a low voice refreshing after the harsh shouting of my muleteers, and a liking for history, and no reticence or suspicion at all about Kurds or Armenians or anybody else, made me feel at home in a civilized world.

The first thing to do was to ask for a vet for the mule; and then to part with my men, who would have been full of friendship if they had not felt so humble. I gave the younger one a little knife with the picture of a gondola, bought in Venice. He had hankered for it as I was handing one like it to the garrison

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at Milli, but had handed it back to me saying sadly: "This is for the soldiers," and now he was deeply pleased. As for the father, having no Turkish except two words, he turned up his hands and his eyes and said: "*Ya memleket*—oh, country" at intervals, which went to show that it is one's feelings and not one's meanings that make the beginning of conversation.

The question of transport solved itself as usual more readily than I could have wished, for I would not have minded a day or two of rest in Sirmakh. But an engineer from Diyarbekr was taking a 'pick-up' with bits of a bulldozer that had to be mended, and the chance, I was told, might not recur for a long time. Everyone agreed in chorus that I would never find any transport in Jizre where I had meant to ride. So the luggage was piled in the main street where nobody would touch it, and the Kaimakam and I waited, and nothing much happened, until we decided to have lunch with the roadmakers at their tents outside the town. Here we ate at a tablecloth spread on the grass, while a piece of the bulldozer was extracted and loaded on the pick-up, which looked like a bright orange lorry: Ahmet the engineer and Günel Bey his friend, and the driver and I crowded into the front and we set off in the heat of noon.

It was all downhill, along the inside edge of a jagged bowl filled with little mounds, some grey, some yellow, and all waterless. Into this inhospitable but not precipitous bit of country the Ten Thousand turned when they were forced to leave the Tigris banks.

'When it was about the last watch, and enough of the night remained to allow them to cross the plain in the dark, at that time they arose upon the word of command and set out on their march; and they reached the mountain at day-break. Here Cheirisophus, with his own division and all

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the light-armed troops, led the van, while Xenophon followed behind with the hoplites of the rearguard, but without any light troops at all; for there seemed to be no danger of any pursuit from behind while they were proceeding uphill. And Cheirisophus reached the summit of the pass before any of the enemy perceived him; then he led on slowly, and each division of the army as it passed over the summit followed along to the villages which lay in the hollows and nooks of the mountains . . . ' (north-west of Sirnakh).¹

Sirnakh, or whatever then represented the little town, could have looked down on them if it had been awake, for since they were making upstream from Mesopotamia they probably skirted the north of this waterless bowl—which was a place to be avoided—and fought their way across the limestone ridges of its edge. They never got or attempted to get beyond the lower and outer rampart of Kurdistan before they descended into the Bohtan valley which they called Centrites, and found their fortunate passage close to where it flows into the Tigris at Til.

The place where they left the river is determined by nature at the Kasrik gorge, the low but obvious defile which we were now approaching. Water was dripping here from rocks under a curtain of maidenhair, and gathered in a desultory way into pools where the passage narrowed. The ribs of the mountains came down on either side, not high nor sheer, but sliced into smooth surfaces as if they were walls, and a few fragments of medieval defence works clung among them. The independent and primitive sort of country the Ten Thousand were entering is suggested by the fact that so clear a fortress-site had not been

¹ Xenophon, *Anabasis*, IV, I, 5-7, Loeb Trans.

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used. Then, as now, the Mesopotamians preferred to leave the hills alone, and it was where the Tigris level ends that their cavalry gave up its pursuit, not to reappear till the Bohtan valley opened up the boundless easy reaches of Assyria.

The Tigris, in which Ahmet and Günel were by now sharing my interest, appeared as we turned the corner of the defile. There it curved, not sprawling but compact, blue and startling as a kingfisher's wing, with yellow grassland on its far bank and Jizre—the Roman Bezabde—a small poor place with black walls dusty and in ruins, visible at the water's edge downstream. A *plage* of a few reed huts was on the sandy bank, and two ferry boats—one modern with a shelving prow to grate upon the pebbles and one older for donkeys and camels—were there plying their many-times millennial trade. It was a David Roberts' picture with the same leisure and simplicity of colour about it, and an atmosphere of unseen spaces, both in extent and time. The ruins of the upper bridge had left a few fragments here and there, and, below Jizre, the complete arch of the lower one was clear through my glasses, but unapproachable across the Syrian border. Farther south, lost in its dusty haze, was the frontier of Iraq with the wraith of the Zakho mountains behind it and Nineveh and Mosul and Babylon clear to the imagination beyond. There they had struggled and marched up, not—I believe—crossing and going inland to Zakho, but fighting alone the foothills¹ by a way that still runs under Zaferan to Feshabur. However this may be, they were marching along the Tigris bank when they came opposite Jizre, a place, then as now, where four ways met.

'The prisoners said that the region to the south lay on the road towards Babylon and Media, the identical province they

¹ See Lehmann-Haupt.

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had just passed through; that the road to the eastward led to Susa and Ecbatana, where the king is said to spend his summers; across the river and on to the west was the way to Lydia and Ionia; while the route through the mountains and northward led to the country of the Carduchians.¹

They turned inland, it is said, from the place called Mansuriyah, where we were now standing above the Tigris bank, about half-way between Jizre and the defile. They saw what we were seeing, the glaucous slope and unmanageable cliff that barred their river way. A very narrow ribbon of land continues easy at the water's edge and soon disappears; and above it Tigris cuts through the familiar gorges. No traveller that I know of has not been forced away from the bank to circumvent the most difficult places. But the Ten Thousand, with the local information which always seems surprisingly good in the Greek ventures, took as easy a way as that impossible country afforded, since they cut inland across the *yailas* avoiding the deep ravines. They reached the river again where it flows through gentler gradients, and followed it across the uplands that Lucullus and Pompey and Corbulo were to make famous with their battles, across the watershed of Mesopotamia into the plains of Mush.

There I had planned to ride, but I was tired; and anxious, too, as to what could have happened to occasion the drama of my films. If I would go to his road-makers' camp, Ahmet said kindly, he would get me on to Diyarbekr in a day or two, whereas, once marooned in Jizre, nothing would ever take me on.

That little town did look singularly forlorn, tucked in between three uncommunicating frontiers, and I decided to

¹ Xenophon, *Anabasis*, III, V, 15, Loeb Trans.

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accept the invitation of the camp. It was afternoon; the warm dry air had the desert taste, the life-giving lightness that lifts its heat away. The rolling plains, pasture or stubble, rose with scarcely perceptible variations, showing, through their summer-hardened grasses, the darkness of their soil. The Tigris kept on our right hand out of sight, its steep eastern bank visibly rising into highlands; they opened to blue landscapes of hills and at last to the level heights that run behind Silvan and the Tigris sources and hold Mesopotamia.

The road had been crossing this landscape with various bulldozing experiments, and we were on the most recent, which was to be finished in a few months. No country in the world, I am told, has built so many new roads in so short a time as Turkey. The camp had been laid out beside it, on the open steppe—well-ordered and symmetrical, with tents, and beds inside them, round two sides of a square. Repair sheds, parks for lorries, a neat canteen with cool water to drink or wash in, were ranged along the other sides; and I was thinking with pleasure of a quiet day or so in this quiet place when I saw Günel who, far from relaxing, was looking suspiciously active with our car.

“You are not going off?” I asked.

“Yes,” said he. “In half an hour. They want the bulldozer in a hurry. I can get it to Diyarbekr by midnight. Would you like to come or stay here? It might be five days or so before anything else is going.”

I hesitated, and if it had not been for the affair of the photographs I would have stayed. But the trip was really over. I asked for a tent, changed from my riding trousers into a dress, and set off again with Günel and the driver, who was luckily excellent and quick, for we had three hundred kilometres to go. We crossed the hills of Tur Abdin in the sunset, where the

Looking Back

chapels described by Gertrude Bell showed here and there their ancient barrel-vaulted roofs and simple apses. It is a country ground into poverty by erosion, with scrub oak in cracks of limestone and fields scooped in the hard bottoms like shallow bright-red lakes. Cattle in long droves were coming home to every village. The moon rose, full and curving with the same curve as the hills. At the double townlet of Midyat, Muslim and Christian, it was night already, and we continued in darkness. We dined in a garden beside an unseen waterfall at Suvir, where sound and dampness made a coolness in the night. There was no one on the roads now, except the soldiers policing their country, plodding with their guns shining on their shoulders, two by two. Günel Bey turned on the wireless to hear the songs of the children's hour which reminded him of his own days at school. "It makes me feel a child again," he said with a gentle look; and told me how he lived in Istanbul, and loved music, and had a fiancée of eighteen "very little", he said, breaking into English. He was twenty-five, and wished to marry her, but his life was still too unsettled: "always the road, coming and going in camps, from 5 a.m. every morning."

I began to look back over my journey, rethreading its various windings day by day.

'How can I know what I think till I hear what I say?' The quotation came into my mind, and another one from Mr. Gladstone, who is supposed to have remarked that he never met anyone from whom he couldn't learn something, but it was not always worth while to find out what it was. Perhaps to find out what one thinks is one of the reasons for travel and for writing, too.

My journey, which I have repeated as it happened, had taught me something: it had strengthened two feelings that existed before—my love for the people of Turkey in general

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and my prejudice against the fashion of nationalism. I had met what one meets in every country, people good and bad, pleasant and unpleasant, kind and cruel, and all of them were more or less triumphantly successful in being individuals, in spite of every effort of their own.

A government education in a fine tradition produces its nobility, and this happens in Turkey today in a very particular way: but this is not nationalism: patriotism seems to me the truer and finer word.

Nationalism, as we see it all about us, is a reliance on the virtues of *other* people and not our own, and as soon as patriotism suffers this bogus complexion, it might, like any other principle of life when it becomes a cliché, as soon be dead. That there are more kind, generous and hospitable people in Turkey than in many more sophisticated regions is as far as I would go towards a national appraisal, after my fortnight's wandering through the remotest outposts of their land.

We passed the flat citadel of Mardin with the Bear above it, and had to change a tyre; then ran out of petrol; and at 3 a.m. entered the familiar basalt walls of Diyarbekr, the most Arabian of the Turkish cities, where I found a room in the Turistic hotel.

The fortnight's adventure was over, and I went to the post office next morning to announce my flight to Ankara that day. But I had forgotten to bring the necessary sheet of paper on which to write a telegram, and the shops seemed far away in the heat of the first day of September in the plain. "Won't this bit of an old envelope do?" I asked.

"Yok," said the man at the desk, with that well-known, *lasciate ogni speranza* lifting of the chin.

At that moment a soldier came in for a telegram to his home, with the proper sheet of paper in his hand. The official took it

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from him, tore it into two neat halves, and gave us one each to write on. It pleased and touched me, and appeared to me as the epitome of the Turkish method—a bureaucracy whose wheels go round because of the constant kindness of individual human beings.

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NOTE ON PLACE-NAMES

The map positions between Beiteshebab and Sirnakh are only approximate as no compass bearings could be taken.

I have given local names as I heard them between Hakkari and Shekerek : but they do not always correspond with the names of the 1941 official map, which, following my route from Hakkari, are :

Karaman is my Scraye—Pianis—Levin Suyu is my Kachi Suyu—Elkidaglari is the watershed between Zab and Habur—Chuchaha Dere are the mountains above Beiteshebab—Elk is Beiteshebab—Beiteshebab Dere is my Sengeré—Katmühend Dagh is my Deri Dagh (2900 m.)—Zerbil valley is my Zatkar—Bishi is my Jamhas—Derahini Dere is Dirahini—Guyan is in Ulu Dere—Kilaban is Ulu Dere centre—Karakol Rabin—Gelliguyan Dere—Shekerek.

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Sir Henry Layard : *Nineveh and Babylon*. London, 1853. He reached Van from the eastern side skirting the Hakkari mountains and Gertrude Bell in *Amurath to Amurath*, London, 1911, did the same on the western side.

W. Bachmann : *Kirchen und Moscheen in Armenien und Kurdistan*, Leipzig, 1913, penetrated from Amadiya by the Zab valley.

Lehmann-Haupt : *Armenien einst und jetzt*, Berlin, 1910-1931, is the most useful authority for the ancient Urartians as well as for some of the details of Xenophon's march.

Dr. P. H. Davis who is writing the major botanical work on Turkey, has travelled the northern edge of my bit of country and has written an interesting account in the Royal Geographical Society's Journal, vol. CXX 11, pt. 2, June, 1956.

Selected Letters of Gertrude Bell, Penguin, 1953. For Sir Henry Dobbs' account of the frontier dispute between Iraq and Turkey referred to in Chapter 10.

Mrs. Bishop (Isabella L. Bird) : *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, London, 1891, for the country east of Hakkari. Her route from Urmiah to Van crossed mine at the flowing-in of the Qudshanis tributary to the Zab. She was travelling south to north and I was going east to west. Her account is the most graphic for the insecurity of this region even so short a while ago and the

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same may be said for Earl Percy: *Highlands of Asiatic Turkey*, London, 1901 and *Notes from a Diary in Asiatic Turkey*, London, 1898.

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So far as I know, no description exists of the route between Hakkari and Sirmakh, though the Germans followed it last year and it must presumably have been visited by someone who inserted the few names to be found in the map.

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