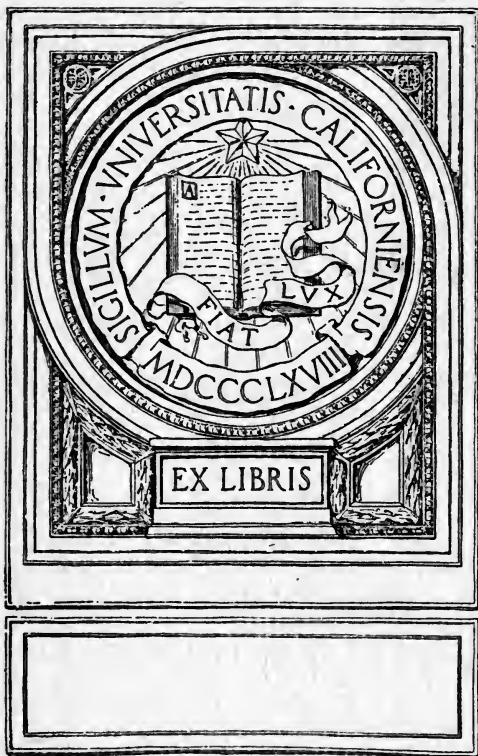


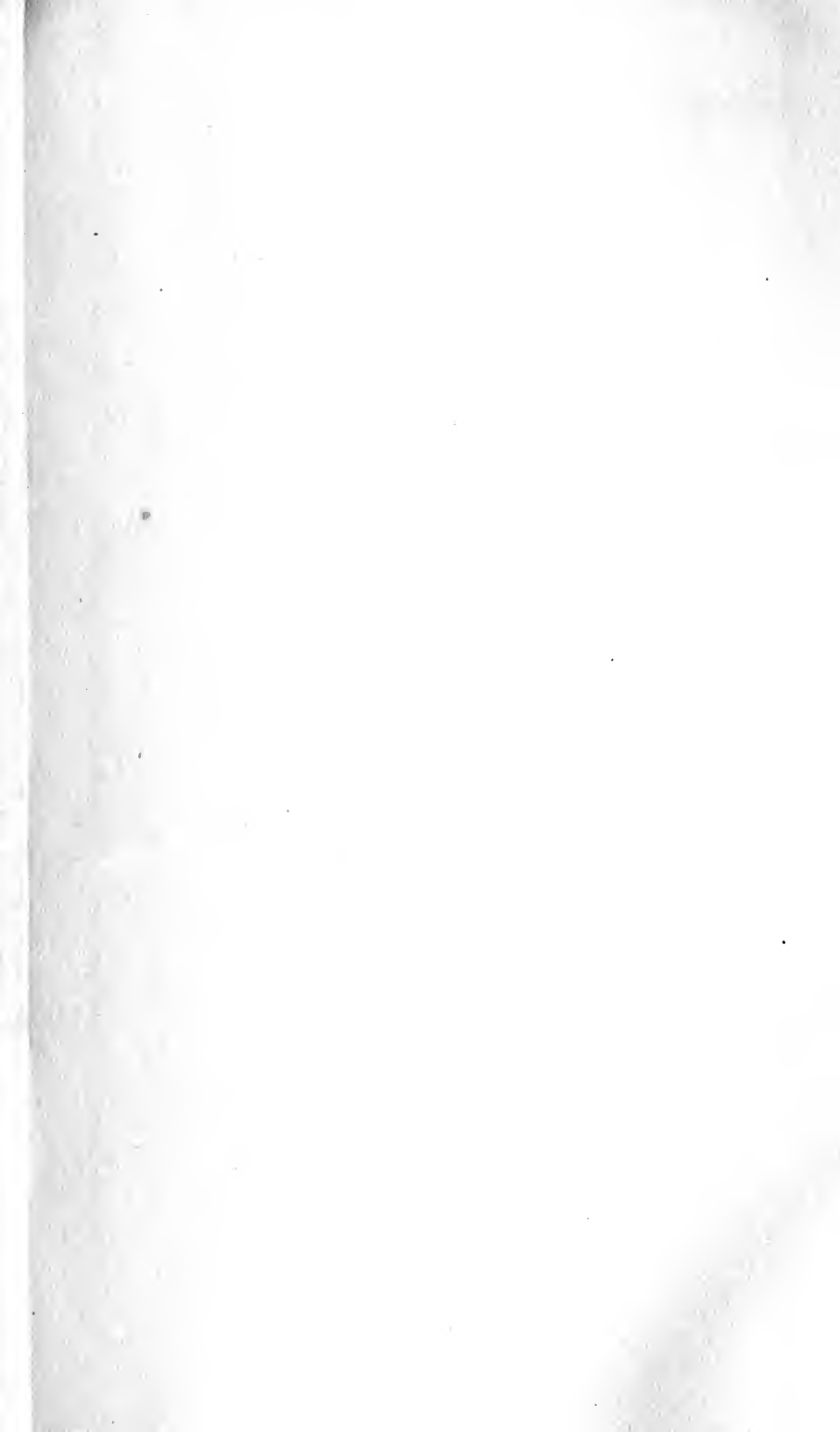
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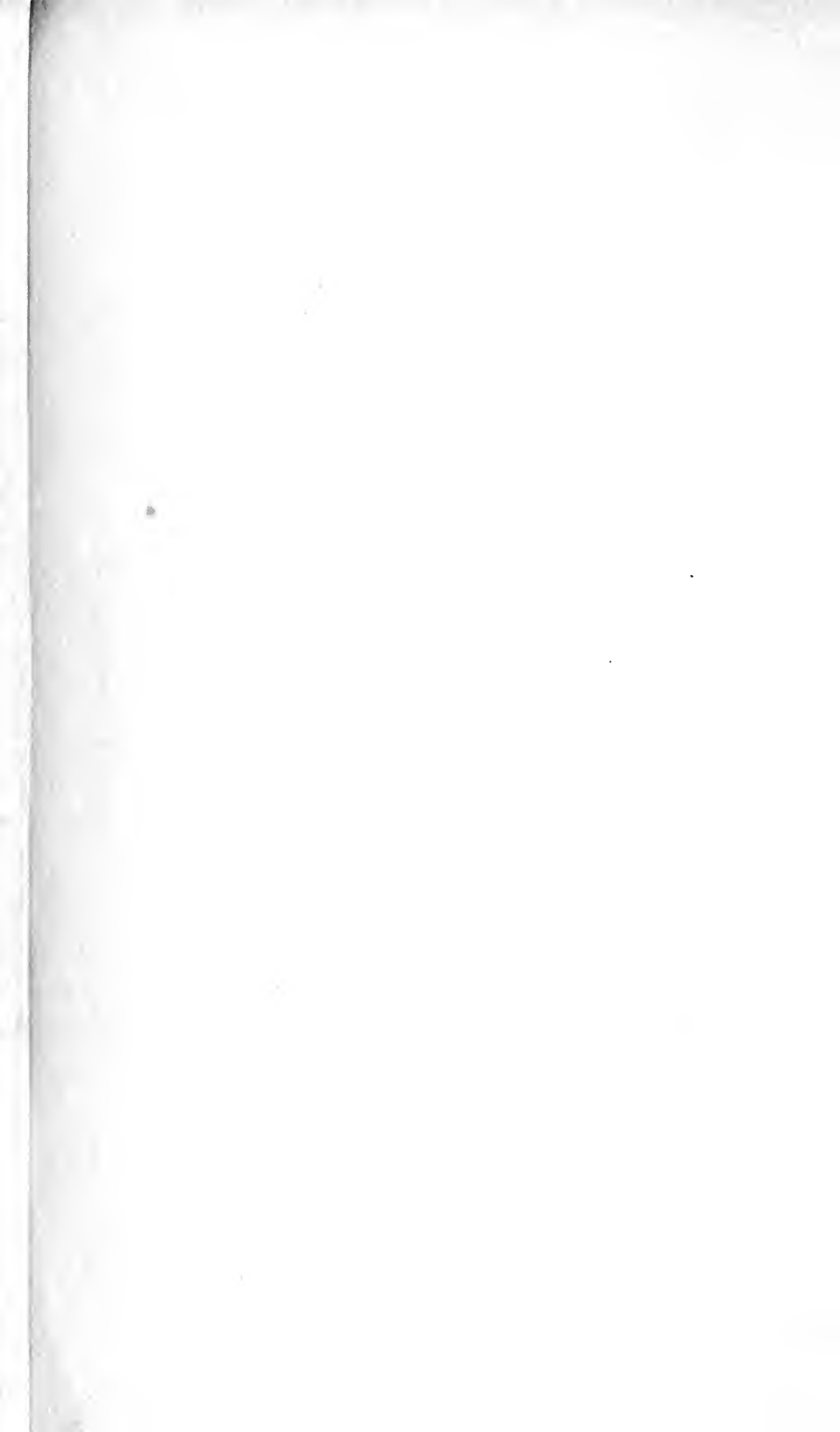








*On the Road to Kut*



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*On the Road to Kut*  
*A Soldier's Story of the*  
*Mesopotamian Campaign*

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WITH 56 ILLUSTRATIONS AND  
A MAP

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# ON THE ROAD TO KUT

## CHAPTER I

**T**HE magic orders that had set half Europe hurrying to their places in the ranks reached us at last! We had thought the war would be over before we could get there—that we in India were on the scrap heap; even now should we be in time?

No one who has never gone through the agonies of a general mobilization can have any conception of what it means. There seem to be a million things to do, all at the same time; hundreds of books to be got ready and written up for the men, medical inspections, gear inspections, animal inspections, identity discs, papers, boots, coats and food to be dealt with. And then, the awful uncertainty—is it France, Egypt, East Africa, or, horrid thought, Persian Gulf?

Days went by which lengthened into weeks ; had we been forgotten after all this hurry and trouble ? But at last we received our orders to entrain in an almost impossible time for an unknown destination. A long heavy day's work, followed by a march to the station through an inquisitive crowd—deeply interested in our old mascot mule, who wore his seven ribbons with white-metal medals, in case of theft ; a hurly-burly of loading, men and animals, and at last we were off.

A two days' journey brought us to Bombay, where, after being loaded on three ships, we learnt that we were for the Gulf. Alas ! we had provided ourselves with thick serge clothing for France. However, we consoled ourselves with the reflection that even the Gulf is cold in winter, and that clothing is not required in summer, and, in any case, were prepared to go in any sort of rig so long as we got there.

Our three ships parted company at Bombay on November 9th, 1914, to meet nearly a month later at Basra. As we left harbour we passed several ships conveying " Terriers " to India, and we wondered how they would like it. They were escorted by a very interesting-

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looking French cruiser, interesting because of its curious smoke stack and double funnels.

We sighted land on the 12th, and ran into two storms on the 13th, with wonderful lightning effects. These storms, which are called locally "Shumals," last from a few minutes to six or seven hours, and are usually very violent.

On Saturday, November 14th, we arrived, a fleet of eight ships, at the head of the Gulf, near Fao, and anchored outside the bar, a mud-bank eighteen feet below the surface. There we got news of a scrap near Abadan oilworks, in which Major Duckett, 20th P.I., was killed, an officer of Dorsets wounded, ten men killed and thirty-five wounded. However, the Turks apparently had heavier casualties, as thirty of their dead were found. We also heard that all British subjects, including women and children, had been removed from Mohammerah and Basra to Baghdad, and that the *Emden* had been sunk by *H.M.S. Sydney*.

Our force was the remainder of the Poona Division; the 16th Brigade, under Brigadier-General Delamain, having preceded us on the outbreak of war with Turkey. On

November 7th, supported by the guns of *H.M.S.* —, they took possession of Fao, a small town and signal station with a mud fort, driving out the small Turkish force then occupying it. Following this success, the brigade moved thirty miles up the river in boats to Camp Seihan, where they entrenched, the holding of Fao being left to the Navy and a small detachment of Indian troops. There had been a night attack, when the Turks were repulsed; and another when they were driven out of a neighbouring village. The Turks were then probably reinforced from Basra, for an attack just afterwards by our troops was not entirely successful.

The ships containing our force, headed by the Divisional Staff, proceeded up the river, followed daily by any other ships arriving at Fao. Our own particular transport left Fao, piloted by a lieutenant-commander from *H.M.S. Ocean*, and anchored at Abadan opposite the refineries of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, passing *en route* several places which showed shell marks. A few shots were fired at us by lurking Arabs, but fell short; the horses had been moved from our main deck to down below in case of this happening.

Next day we moved two miles higher up the river, opposite Camp Seihan, where Major Duckett was killed. We found nineteen ships anchored in the reach of the river, also several gunboats and armed launches. All the transports were being unloaded under the greatest of difficulties, as there were practically no barges, no steamboats or tugs, and no landing-stages on shore. The swiftness of the current, especially when the tide was running out, increased the difficulties of loading animals, guns and stores from the ships on to *mehelas* (river craft of the dhow type), and unloading them on to the bank of the river, which at low tide could not be reached by several yards. These intervening yards became a perfect Slough of Despond to those in charge of operations.

The Euphrates is a tidal river, roughly nine fathoms deep at high water, and protected at its mouth by a bar. It is otherwise navigable for large ships for a long distance. The width of the river to Abadan averages half a mile, though at Fao it is quite a mile and a half. At Mohammerah there is a second bar, caused by the inflow of a tributary stream, the Karun river; the result being that only ships

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of about eighteen feet draught can pass up to Basra. The banks of the river are low, flat and muddy, and covered to an average depth inland of a quarter to half a mile with date-palms; beyond the palms lies the desert.

In spite of all difficulties, the disembarkation had to be hastened, as news had arrived of the approach of strong Turkish reinforcements; though rumour said they were mostly "Catch-'em-alive-o's" scraped together from anywhere, with artillery composed of old and practically obsolete guns. The unloading, particularly of artillery, continued throughout the night, the darkness infinitely increasing the difficulties already described. Before dawn everything necessary had been landed, and the force moved out at daybreak, advancing along the right bank of the river.

All those left in the ships took up their positions in the rigging, or wherever they could best watch the battle. We saw our force wind round the bend of the river some two miles away, when suddenly, shrapnel commenced to burst near them; it was quite fascinating watching it, and guessing whether it was ours or the enemy's. Turkish shells we presumed to be those bursting very high;

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those low and to our right we thought were our own, especially as many of them were bursting over a small mud fort known to be occupied by the Turks.

We watched our troops move to the attack. As they were performing a flank movement to the left (presumably with the intention of outflanking the Turkish right and pushing them into the date-palms or the river), a heavy thunder shower swept across the No Man's Land between the two forces. I have heard that this enabled us to complete our flanking march and deploy, although during the attack, when the order to double was given, our men were greatly handicapped by their first experience of Mesopotamian mud.

No authentic news of the fight reached us until midnight, but rumours of accidents were coming in all day—eleven men drowned; one gun, two limbers and five sets of harness, from the *Torilla*, sunk in a dhow which overturned; two men of wireless drowned. Eventually we learned that our force had driven the Turks eight miles, inflicted severe loss on them, and captured two guns, all reserve ammunition, and a lot of horses, which were found abandoned in their camp.

It was said that our casualties were three British officers killed, fifteen wounded, thirty-five men killed and three hundred wounded.

Soon afterwards the Turks sank a Hansa liner, the *Ecbatana*, and two other ships, five miles above Mohammerah, which at that time was untouched by the enemy. The Arabs were said to be deserting the Turks, and crossing to the Persian side of the river, giving up their rifles and valuables in return for safe passage.

Being cooped up on board soon became monotonous, and we landed at the camp to inspect our trenches. One was built up of household utensils, carpets, and goat-skins embedded in the wall. I found several articles, including some Turkish cartridges with all *lead* bullets, and a set of company cooking pots of the —th Infantry, which we took back on board. We also managed to get about seven maunds of dates in baskets for the men and crew.

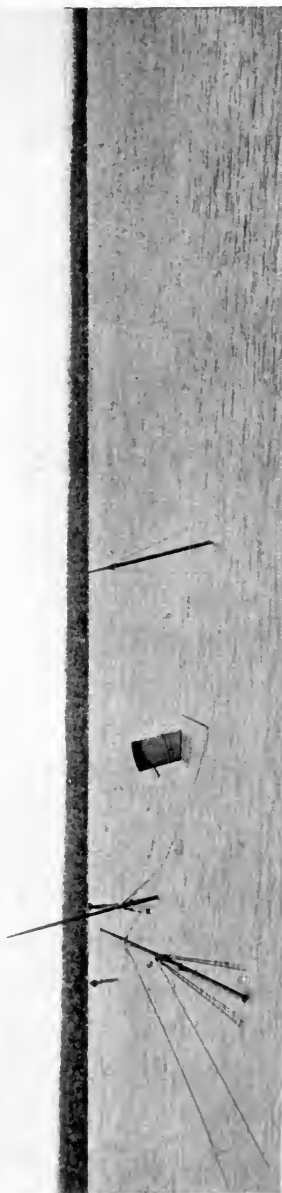
For several days we had no news as to when our ships were to proceed up stream. It began to look as if things would get tied up, as the General Hospital was in four different ships, and the whole of it would







A part of the English Fleet at Basra.



The S.S. "Ecbatana," sunk by the Turks at Mohammerah.

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soon be urgently required. My corps was in three ships, supply units and supplies having been split up amongst different ships, which meant a lot of sorting. It was also rumoured that the three last ships contained an infantry brigade, which was badly wanted. When will England learn not to start every campaign with a conglomeration of chaos, out of which order has to be evolved by those who have other work to do ?

We visited the villages on the Turkish side daily, and brought away a lot of lucerne grass for the horses ; they simply revelled in it. Flies and fleas were awful. The whole ship's crew, officers and men, armed themselves with fly flaps, and hunted the fly all day. Fleas we must have caught out of the Turks' houses ; my clothes were full of them. However, they afforded excellent occupation for Solomon, my old Madras cook, in his spare time. There were also lots of mosquitoes at night, and I wished I had brought my mosquito net.

Rumour had it that we were going to Baghdad, and might arrive there before the Russians ; also, that the Arabs had deserted the Turks and joined us. This probably was the result of the Turkish defeat, which by

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that time had been announced as severe, the enemy having withdrawn several miles to the north-west, under heavy shell fire, and leaving behind over seventy prisoners, who were removed by our boats.

There were a good many casualties in disembarking, and moving was very difficult. The river being tidal, the stream runs down like a mill-race; it is impossible to row or sail against it, and the only time one can get away is when the tide is fully up or fully down, and the water, which is more like pea-soup than anything else, is still. Everything had to be loaded from the ships into native dhows, and then towed by launch ashore; and dead men, mules and innumerable bundles of hay and fodder floated by daily. On one occasion they lost a boat of wounded, but managed to find it again, although it got loose at midnight.

On November 21st we heard of trouble in Basra, and a part of the force was sent to stop it, the remainder doing a night march with the same object. I am told that when our troops occupied Basra, they found the old Turkish Custom House, which was full of piece goods and glass, in

flames. The fire was eventually put out, and the large customs warehouses were saved, and were used as supply store-rooms, and afterwards as a hospital. No trouble was experienced during the occupation. The German Consul surrendered on their arrival, and the German Consulate became the residence of the British Governor of Basra, the Union Jack replacing the German Eagle amid great enthusiasm of the cosmopolitan crowd.

## CHAPTER II

ON Thursday, November 26th, *Malamir* came alongside us, and told us we were to move off in the morning.

We got the animals off the ship by 9 a.m., and after meandering in the usual aimless way up and down the river, collected kit off ships that had not been warned, finally arrived at the H. T. "Elephanta" at 6 p.m., where we stayed the night.

We arrived at Basra on the 28th at 10.30 a.m., and heard that a detachment of the corps had accompanied the troops in the famous forty-mile march to the capture of Basra. We encamped in a palm grove, and I was not much impressed with our surroundings, although the approach to Basra was delightful, the magnificent river with its green banks lined with palms being quite striking and beautiful.

N.B.—We paid for captured German stores

and beer at an enhanced rate! I wonder why?

For the next few days we were very busy making some sort of show of the camp, and it soon began to look very nice, quite a charming spot, nestling among the date-palms. The men were very keen on it, each troop vying with the next to have the best standings.

A party of five of us went round Basra on the 30th, for the first time. It is a most peculiar place, with covered-in bazaars, the majority of which were closed. The people are of all countries, from the blackest of the black negro to the fair Circassian, Belgian and Italian. The children are quite fair, as are also many of the women—Circassian, I should say. We saw a lot of wounded Turks, among whom were two naval officers, who spoke English. One had lost his leg and the other his foot, and they told us that they looked upon Turkey's action as "a great mistake." On Thursday, December 3rd, I sent one hundred and fifty-six mules to Shaiba with a cavalry regiment; we had to get them thrown off the dhow and make them swim ashore. On the same day a force went up the river to attack the Turks at Kurna,

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whose strength was apparently unknown, but it was rumoured that two regiments had reinforced them from Baghdad.

The following day news came of a stiff fight up river, and further reinforcements were sent there. For four days we heard no details about the fight except that the Turks had a 9-inch gun, which we did not believe, and that two guns captured from them were Krupp guns. On the 8th I saw a number of Turkish prisoners at the wharf, and talked to three officers captured, one a major of gendarmerie, one a captain-instructor in gunnery, the third a captain of engineers. They said that they had had a bad hammering, losing over a thousand men in casualties and all their guns. They had no idea we were so strong. Their casualties were caused chiefly, they said, by gun-fire. They cursed Germany and Enver Bey for being the cause of their woes, the general opinion being that they ought never to have gone to war with England.

Soon afterwards news came in of the absolute and unconditional surrender of the whole Turkish force, five hundred Turks, a lot of officers, and about a thousand Arabs. The



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remainder of the Arabs, who are only local levies, fled. D—, of the R. A., told me that his gun, which was mounted on a paddle-boat, did great damage. He said he could see the Turks falling like ninepins, and they must have suffered great losses. This corroborates the statement of the Turkish officer that half the Turkish force had been wiped out.

Kurna, from which the battle takes its name, is a small water-logged town on the point of land at the junction of the river Tigris and the old Euphrates mouth. It lies for the most part along the Tigris front, occupying perhaps a mile of the river bank. On the desert side, and joining the Tigris to the Euphrates, is a wall built in the shape of an L, with towers at the two ends and middle, whilst the Euphrates side is taken up with a few huts, boats, marsh and date-palms. Opposite the Tigris front and on the left bank of the river is a patch of date-palms, nearly two miles wide. Beyond the palms, in the open desert, lies the large village of Mazeera, built for the most part of mud and reeds. On the opposite side of the Euphrates is the great marsh of Khor Jezair, reaching from

Sukesh Sheyukh to Margil, a distance of nearly a hundred miles. Some nine miles below the junction of the two rivers there flows into the Shatt el Arab from the north a small stream, called the Shwaib river.

The Turkish force occupied the village of Kurna and the date-palms on the Mazeera side, also the village of Mazeera. The latter position was well chosen, as it gave them invisibility and a certain amount of protection among the palm trees and irregular channels. Our force, which was called Frazer's column after the officer commanding it, landed near the junction of the Shwaib and Shatt el Arab, and attacked the village of Mazeera. Having driven the Turks out of the village, they chased them into the open desert beyond, and swung round to clear the date-palms on their left, driving the Turks before them. On reaching the banks of the Tigris opposite Kurna, they came under a heavy fire from the Turks occupying the village across the river, and it was here that the 104th Rifles lost their Subedar Major, whose tomb now forms a conspicuous object on the river bank.

Meanwhile the Turks had retired northwards, and many had crossed the river on

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An old Street in Basra.

[To face p. 16.

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A Bellum under full sail on the Tigris.



Native Craft on a windy day.

to the Kurna side. Our force was then considered insufficient to continue the action, and reinforcements were asked for, and duly sent up under General Fry.

The action was then taken up at practically the point at which it had broken off. Supported by the river gunboats, the British pressed the Turks, who continued their retirement northwards on the left bank of the river, leaving half their force in the village of Kurna, on the right bank. The only obstacle to our cutting off this lot of Turks, including their commander, who was in Kurna, was the difficulty in crossing the river Tigris. But this was overcome by an Indian Sepoy of the Sappers and Miners, who swam across the swirling current, carrying a light line to which was attached a stout rope and a wire cable. An R. E. officer soon followed him, and eventually a small flying bridge was rigged up, on which our troops crossed to the Kurna side. Meanwhile the Turkish commander appears to have been ignorant of what was happening four miles upstream, and, on hearing of the arrival of British troops between him and his only line of retreat, laid down his arms unconditionally. The re-

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mainder of the Turks who had fled north reached Amara; but finding that they were not followed, they returned and took up their position at the Ratta Creek, where, after receiving reinforcements, they dug in. In this position they stuck for several months, until expelled by the Division under General Townshend in June, 1915, and driven as far as Ctesiphon.

The Turks having fled and left us master of the situation, the question which chiefly interested us all in those days was how soon we should be able to follow them. We were all very keen to make a move to Baghdad, but as that would have required a much larger force than we could muster there, it seemed doubtful when, if ever, we should be allowed to go. A more likely but much less pleasing prospect was the occupation for an indefinite period of the district already held by our troops. None of us relished the idea of two years or so in that benighted spot, and we hoped that if Baghdad was an impossible dream, at least we should be sent to France.

Our ships were still lying in the river at a cost of £150 or so per diem, so that the expedition was quite an expensive item in the

budget ; moreover, they were running out of provisions, as they never expected to be away from Bombay for so long. Up country supplies were urgently wanted, so urgently, in fact, that some General—so the story goes—sent a wireless message one night (2 a.m.) for a pound and a half of candles. Needless to say, he did not get them.

From all the news we had the war seemed to be like a snowball on the roll downhill ! When and where would it stop ? We were still fighting in Belgium in exactly the same spot as two months ago ; “ Ypres ” was mentioned in almost every Reuter ; also “ Ar-gonne ” and “ Rheims.” The Russians, however, appeared to have got a move on, which was something to be thankful for ; and we heard that the British officers had a pack of hounds in Belgium, so they were not apparently “ downhearted ” up to date, although from a distance the affair looked like stale-mate.

I kept very fit, so did the horses. I had a lovely mattress made of packing canvas, and stuffed with *bhusa* (broken straw), and a pillow of the same under the small feather one I took on service, so that I managed to

make myself very comfortable. But—we were still sitting doing nothing

The mails were very erratic, more so than any *females* ever were! We had only about one mail in a month, and got practically no news of the outer world beyond the small paragraphs in the *Basra Times*. There were no books to read, and time hung heavy on our hands.

The authorities re-named the principal—in fact, the only—street in Basra “The Strand,” and forbade people to exercise animals on it, with the result that many animals were confined entirely to their stables. “The Strand,” I must add, ran along the dirtiest creek imaginable, and was more like a ploughed field as regards surface than anything else, no metalling, of course. They might have left the old name of “Asshur Creek Road,” instead of insulting London by calling that filthy lane by such a misnomer as “The Strand.”

One evening I went to a *soirée* given by two French friends; it was decidedly boring, but funny in a way, and it gave one an insight into “Basra high life.” The chief amusements were a gramophone, a distinctly good



one, in fact the best I have ever heard, and the singing of Arab songs by Arab Christian girls, whose morals were obviously not what they should be—in fact, they had none! The third entertainment was eating, and this was really amusing. The host went round the festive circle after every song or gramophone item, and shovelled slabs of cold fish or chicken, or some other dish, into the mouths of his guests, all with one fork. I have never seen anything quite like it! We all sat round the room, backs against the wall, mouths open, and the food was pushed in. I had only one piece of chicken, six inches or more long, out of politeness. I also spoke French, English, Hindustani, mixed into a perfect *mélange*, to my French host, who appeared pleased with my attempts at murdering his language. The show started at 9 p.m., and we got back at 11.30, by which time I had managed to collect quite a lot of interesting information from my host regarding the adventures of the townspeople prior to the advent of the British force.

‘ I gathered that there had been a good deal of anti-Christian demonstration on the part of the inhabitants of Basra—in fact, no Christian

had dared to venture from his house ; they were, to all intents and purposes, suffering a passive siege. The Turkish soldiery appear to have prevented unlimited looting and murder, but they spread the most astonishing tales—principally of the defeat of huge numbers of British troops by handfuls of Turks (so very Oriental !), of the escape of the British commander in a motor-car (I suppose to sea), and of our attack on the Turkish force with large numbers of armoured cars, all of which were captured. Meanwhile the advent of Turkish wounded at Basra in the ramshackle local victorias, and the hasty arrangements for evident evacuation, had reassured the besieged. Eventually the town was deserted by the Turkish soldiery, and from that moment until the arrival of our troops terror reigned, not only amongst the Christian inhabitants, but amongst all the citizens.

On Christmas Day we proposed having a great dinner, followed by a bonfire dance given by my corps. For the practice beforehand we had no tom-tom, but a kerosene tin and a bucket made an excellent kettledrum, the tin being the tenor note and the bucket a most efficient bass. We made many elaborate

preparations for the festive occasion, and when the day came round everything was ready to celebrate it in style. Solomon, my old cook, fixed up quite a good dinner; the menu, in his own words, was as follows :

Soup *clean*.  
*Poison* à la Basra.  
Kromeshky Russe.  
Oie spéciale rôti Ashar.  
Pailles de fromage.  
Plum pudding, sauce Solomon.  
*Desert, Café.*

The plum pudding, a ten-pound one, was one of the Christmas gifts sent by Indian ladies to the troops, and really was first-rate. After dinner we had the *tamasha* (entertainment), and many officers came to see it. It was very funny, indeed, although quite the most immoral thing I have ever witnessed; still everyone laughed, and as there were no ladies present it did no harm.

The next day we started to make a course in front of my lines for our New Year's Day sports—sky races and other events on mules. The place was more like a snipe *jheel* than a race-course; still, we hoped with much labour and patience to get a quarter-mile track

with water jumps ready by the First. I had over a hundred men working at it, all voluntary diggers, very keen on their promised *tamasha*.

At last everything was ready, and the programme written out. The events were :

1. Jumping for ponies.
2. Jumping for mules.
3. Steeplechase for ponies.
4. Steeplechase for mules.
5. Tug-of-war, mounted.
6. Tug-of-war, dismounted.
7. Wrestling on barebacked mules.
8. Hurry-scurry race. (Man runs to his kit, dresses, and runs to his mule (mules tethered in a row), mounts and rides the remainder of the course.)

All events were barebacked.

The course was distinctly sporting, being an oval not quite four hundred yards round, with innumerable water dikes to break the monotony ; it happened to be high tide also, so that all the dikes became formidable water jumps.

The fun started at dawn, when many competitors came to try over the course, one smart N.C.O. on a beautiful jumping mule creating a perfect furore. He was dressed in his best, and having mounted in state, proceeded to try the water jumps. At the very first jump he succumbed—the mule put his nose down to have a look at the water, and the rider, describing a perfect curve, landed head first right in the middle of the ditch. The bottom of the ditch was not gravel, but very soft black Mesopotamian mud, and he stuck head first in it and could not get out. He would have been drowned had not two stalwart lads who had helped him mount run up in time. They seized him, one man one leg, and forcibly extracted him, his head making that famous noise of the cow drawing its foot out of mire. It took them an hour to make him presentable, and all his clothes had to be washed. His *pagri* was lost, in spite of a voluntary search party, who made perfect sights of themselves looking for it in the mud.

We started serious business soon after breakfast, and were hard at it all day. The jumping for ponies was unexpectedly good, but, strange to say, the best jumper on the

course was a chestnut mule. The steeplechases both for ponies and mules had big entries, and caused immense merriment, only two ponies and one mule finishing the course with their riders; the remaining jockeys were left floundering in the many ditches. The wrestling was interesting, but was an old and tried form of sport, as was also the dismounted tug-of-war. The tug-of-war mounted, however, was quite one of the funniest events. The competing teams faced away from one another, and on the word "Walk, march," they kicked their mounts and the mounts walked. There is something in seeing a man pulled backwards over a mule's tail which always raises a laugh; but when it comes to whole teams of men suddenly sitting plump on the ground over their animals' tails on the word, "Walk, march," it becomes a perfect pantomime. The crowds fairly shrieked with delight, and I think it was the most successful event of all. The hurry-scurry race was not nearly so amusing as we expected, and was won hands down by one of the competitors without any strikingly funny episodes of the usual kind.

After the sports I was informed that I had

made a place eminently suitable for camel lines, and so it was taken over. Still, we had had our fun, and except for a playground, the course was not necessary to us; besides, the river had only to rise a few more inches to put that particular piece of land entirely under water!

We were told that the whole place would be under water later on, and that there would be no room for the mules—a prophecy that was certainly fulfilled. The mud in Mesopotamia is the worst I have met. It is as slippery as ice and as tenacious as “tanglefoot”; the slightest drop of rain makes the place dreadful, and after a small shower it is almost impossible to walk. Our troops fought their first battle after a shower of rain, and when ordered to double, the pace, as one can imagine, quickened to a slow and stately march, each man having about ten pounds of mud on each boot. Water, however, was not so bad as we expected, and the men kept fit in spite of drinking it raw. We got fresh milk from a cow I purchased, also bread, ham, bacon, jams of all sorts, excellent meat, whisky, beer and German champagne (I drank a lot on Christmas night). There were large stores,

Belgian, Russian and Italian, hair-dresser's shops, cafés and hotels (of sorts), in addition to huge covered-in bazaars, where you could get anything from a toothpick to an elephant, although china and glass shops were easily in the majority.

The fruit and vegetable bazaar was quite nice, more like East End vegetable stalls than an Eastern market, except that they were more picturesque. Although the filth in the streets and round about the town was something awful, the bazaars were comparatively sweet and clean, more like proper markets, and different from anything one sees in India. The reason is that the owners do not live in their shops; every arcade has a barred iron gate at each end which is closed at night.

After the New Year festivities we had rather a jumpy time with snipers at night; in fact, for a week I did not take off my clothes. One night there was a regular fusillade about two hundred yards off, and T— and I both got up and out of our tents, expecting the alarm to go, in which event we and the animals were to cross a snipe *jheel* and take cover behind a lot of grain, flour,



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*bhusa* and other stacks. For days we had practised this movement, and we felt that the special parade was about due. But nothing happened, and we went back and spent the rest of the night in peace.

### CHAPTER III

ON January 9th I was directed to proceed to Kurna to join the rest of my corps, and in due course arrived at the spot where they had had the big fight a month previously. We were deeply entrenched, as there was a lot of sniping at night, but we expected to have to clear out at any moment on account of the floods. The water rose fifteen inches in ten days; another fifteen inches and we should have to start packing. My tent was a masterpiece; it was dug out in the centre about two feet deep, and the earth piled all round the outside; on the top of the earth was a row of sandbags. The inside was walled up with planks to keep the earth from falling in; grass was laid on the floor, and the whole lined with gunny (sacking). On top of the gunny was a waterproof sheet, then my mattress and valise, and, once tucked in for the night, I was as cosy as a bug in a rug.

I was rather worried the first night by

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rats; the men had dug through their holes, and the rats came out to see what was up, throwing mud on to my face; but I had some planking put up, and that settled them.

Old B— Ram, one of my Indian officers, told me that after the last battle he was given charge of a prisoner of some standing, and ordered to take him to some officer or other. On arrival the officer said, "Look after him yourself," so B— Ram marched him off to his own tent, and sat on him all night for fear of losing him. The next morning he got a boat and took him off to the General. The prisoner was someone of rank, as he was permitted to keep his sword. Ram's account was very interesting, and, of course, quite funny, especially when he said: "The *admi* (man) was some *barra sahib* (high personage), so I sat on him, not knowing what else to do."

I heard, too, that the general opinion was that the transport there had done wonders, and had actually carried up the ammunition for the guns, a thing which has never been done before by mules. On one occasion they were on their way to a certain place, when some shrapnel burst over them; the baggage

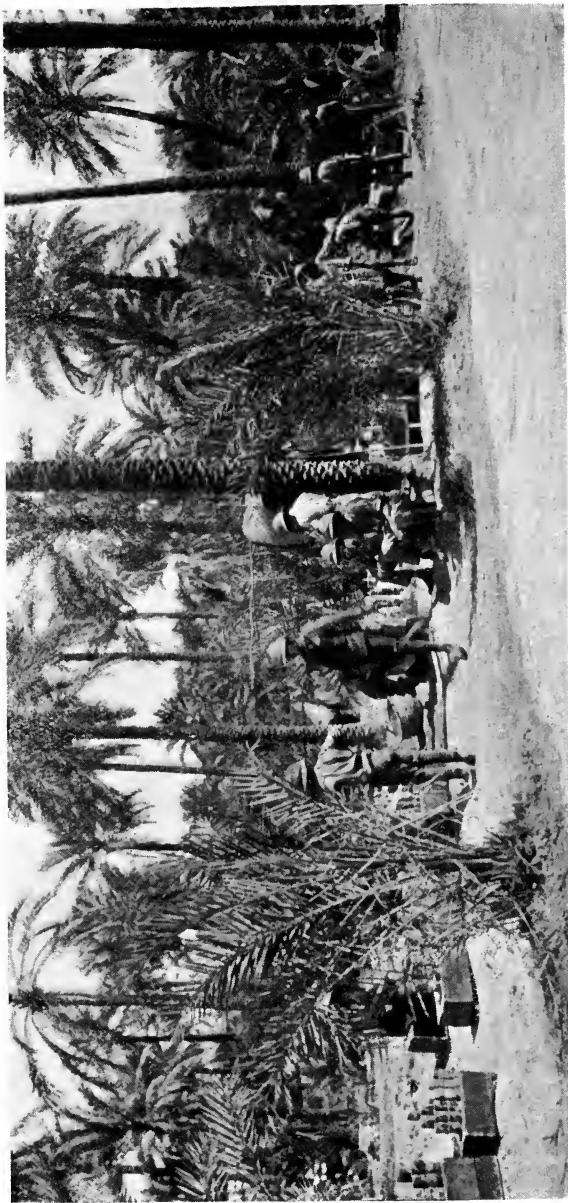
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guard disappeared, but, undismayed, the transport marched on alone. Shortly afterwards they were asked: "Where was the guard?" They replied: "*Pichhe hut gaya*" ("Taking cover behind"). So they were given another guard, and continued their victorious career, capturing many rifles and twelve ponies, all of which turned out to be useless; but, at any rate, they were three rifles and a Turkish saddle to the good.

On January 21st there was a small battle near Kurna, to which I went as an interested spectator. The enemy must have lost a lot of men, they were pounded by our guns for four hours; the noise of the guns and whistling of the shells was rather fascinating (from behind). We had only about twelve casualties, and the affair was probably not in the papers, as it was really a reconnaissance in force.

In the absence of news we lived principally on rumour. One, that the Viceroy of India would arrive here on February 6th, to make a Proclamation, announcing this as part of the British Empire. This, it transpired, was actually founded on fact, and the Viceroy really did turn up on the date given. Next rumour, rather wild, the Aleppo Army Corps of



A Camp Bazaar in Basra.

THE GREAT  
WORLD WAR  
1914-1918



An obstreperous Mule laden with Bhusa Bales.



An Arab Sniper taken prisoner by Indian Troops.

[To face p. 33.]

the Turks had been lost by the Intelligence Branch. It was not marching on Port Said, nor had it been captured by Russia; Arabs had seen it marching our way, a distance of seven hundred and fifty miles, and it was expected at Basra at any moment! They had lots of guns with them, some as long and as big as full-grown palm trees! Next rumour, wilder still, thirty thousand more men were said to be sailing from Bombay to reinforce our Division—probably coming as escort to the Viceroy. Next rumour, there was to be a simultaneous attack made by the Turks on Basra and Kurna—not an unlikely event, though how the Turks, sitting across the river, were going to attack us was a mystery. We had tried twice to reach them and failed, on account of the rivers and marshes, and they certainly could not cross in any force. We were in a position of stalemate, separated by eight miles, which included a river, a creek, a marsh, and seven and a half miles of mud desert; and there we were likely to remain till we got monitors drawing three feet of water and mounting heavy guns to shell them out of their position. An aeroplane or two would have been very useful, and rumour

said that some had been ordered and were on their way out.

Tents were undoubtedly ordered, which sounded very like hot weather in Mesopotamia, and the most we could hope was that we should all be flooded out before we could use them. Those who knew the river said that it usually floods the land we were on, and that in abnormal years the water is three or four feet deep on the site of our camp, so we prayed for an abnormal year! It would, we thought, be the best thing for the Division, seeing that the climate was likely to make great ravages on the health of the troops if they were obliged to stop there indefinitely.

To hark back to rumour, the Aleppo Army Corps had walked seven hundred and fifty miles, and had arrived at Sukesh-Sheyukh (impossible to pronounce even in one's most sober moments, and a regular monkey-puzzler for the toper), and were said to be about to foot-slog again as far as Basra. In the meantime we watched the Turkish force near Kurna, who were going to attack us when the Turkish Aleppo Corps got to Basra. In fact, we quite looked forward to seeing them cross the marsh and the river, without boats or



bridges and under fire from our gunboats, for it is as broad as the Thames at London Bridge. After achieving that they had a final advance over country as flat as a billiard-table, and as destitute of verdure as an Oxford Street pavement; a rabbit could not find a hiding-place, and if you dig you get water at a depth of six inches or so!

The little reconnoissance of January 20th was up as far as the Ratta creek; we did the Turks some damage, and suffered about a dozen killed and fifty wounded ourselves. The guns fired a large amount of ammunition, and we returned—for tiffin.

Of creature comfort there was little, but we were as comfortable as circumstances would permit; we had tents, and quite a nice mess made out of an eighty-pound tent, some *bhusa* bales and a couple of paulins. Solomon had a lovely corrugated iron cookhouse (charming in the hot weather), and our food was excellent. We usually had porridge, fish or bacon and eggs for breakfast, with either tea or coffee; the coffee was local, and almost as good as the best grown—in fact, it was Mocha coffee, roasted and ground on the spot. Cocoa usually for *chota hazri*, and fresh milk from

our own cow, the only cow in the camp. Lunch was the same as usual, with rice pudding or some other luxury. Tea was our *forte*. Solomon made the best drop scones I have ever struck, and the meal consisted of hot drop scones, queen cakes, and lots of bread-and-butter and tea. For dinner we had soup, fish, joint and savoury ; our cuisine really left nothing to be desired.

The weather began to get very bad. Day after day there was a fine drizzle, which reduced the camp to such a state that it was almost impossible to get about. To reach a necessary quarter we had daily peregrinations, which included three bridges :

No. 1. A single plank, fourteen feet long.

No. 2. A double palm tree, over a water *nullah* (ditch).

No. 3. A greasy pole, over a huge water-way, about seven feet deep.

This was locally known as "The Blondin performance in three acts." How I managed to escape sliding in I don't know. I will own that I went very gently at it, usually sideways, six inches at a time, until I arrived safely at the other side.

Something really funny happened one day.

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T— was doing the Blondin act, and he slid off the first plank bridge, which was fearfully slippery after heavy rain, into the water channel, seven feet deep. The little man was in his best, with his coat, warm, British on, and he came out like a drowned rat.

We had a few excitements at night sometimes. On one occasion a *budmash* (rogue) got through, in spite of all the sentries, and stole a forty-pound tent belonging to a native officer. I can't think how the thief got over all the obstacles, water-ways, wire entanglements, and the perimeter wall, which is about six feet high, with a guard on the inside; but they are like jackals.

I wonder if people at home noticed once or twice in Turkish reports: "We captured an enemy flag"?

Flags are, of course, never taken on service nowadays, but what happens is this: every latrine has a yellow flag out day and night, and the Arabs love these, and often take them as mementoes; so we had to start mining these flags. A chap tried to capture a latrine flag one night; I do not think he ever knew what happened—nothing either of him or the flag was left.

Sniping continued every night, causing more annoyance than damage ; as a matter of fact, I slept through most of it unless our people close to my tent started popping off, a useless proceeding, as it is impossible to aim in the dark. The performance invariably began punctually at 8 p.m., and was always greeted by Tommy Atkins with the words, "Good-night all," as the lights were put out. We had one sporting sniper, nicknamed Blunderbuss Bill from the noise his gun made. I don't know what sort of a weapon it was, but from the report it must have been a regular young cannon with a bullet, judging from the deep boom it made as it fluttered gracefully over the date-palms, about the size and shape of a Bryant and May's match-box. I am sure the owner did more damage to himself than to anyone else ; but there are few who were at Mazeera who will not remember Blunderbuss Bill, and the plip-plop, plip-plop, bang ! of him and his brother snipers, amusing themselves on a dark night at our expense.

One particular night, however, quite a lot of damage was done, especially to horses. A strong Turkish patrol party lost its way

whilst reconnoitring our position. The commander was captured next morning, lying wounded in a hole some two hundred yards from our perimeter. He informed me that he had lost his direction, and by mistake had crawled in between our redoubts, and found himself up against our perimeter wall. His men, who were Redif from Nineveh, lost their heads, and blazed off at the sentries. Then started a tremendous fusillade lasting half an hour or more. The Turks withdrew past our redoubts, who mistook them for our own men; and, except for one who got hung up on barbed wire and was bayoneted, they got away, leaving a few killed and wounded on the ground, who were picked up in the early morning. Two other men who had lagged behind in the retirement were captured by a cavalry patrol in the early morning, and brought into camp. They were fine specimens of men, Ninevites from Mosul. I suppose the old Assyrians of Nineveh were much the same type as these men, big and powerful, with dark beards, standing nearly six feet, and with tremendous development in the calf of the leg. It is curious that all old Assyrian bas-reliefs and sculptures should show an

exaggerated development of these muscles. Were they a peculiarity of the breed ?

As time went on and we received no orders to move, we began to realize that those in authority intended to keep the force there during the hot weather, although it was doubtful whether we should not be driven out by the floods. At any rate, it was necessary to make preparations for May and June, and we started building new quarters for ourselves. My house was a mud stable, ten feet square and seven feet high, with walls three feet thick, designed equally to keep out the heat and Arab bullets, which can only penetrate two feet of earth. We put up a new mess, which was greatly admired ; we sank a well and fitted up a nice pump, and with these luxuries and our one and only cow we were really quite passably comfortable, much more so than anyone in the place, except the G.O.C. Division.

My house, when it was finished, was the first house in Mazeera, and was called "Mazeera Mansions." I think they ought to have given me at least a K.C.B., for the extraordinarily efficient way in which I looked after myself ! We had all sorts of "jims" for

comfort in the mess : a lovely *dooly* for the milk, fly-proof net things for hanging meat, a sideboard and cupboard combined to hold our stores ; and " Solomon in all his glory " cooked for us inimitable drop scones and cakes on a fireplace made of a kerosene oil tin, cut in half, with bars across the top, set in a coating of Mesopotamian mud.

## CHAPTER IV

**O**N February 2nd the Turks had a great parade. The district is rather difficult to imagine if one is not acquainted with it ; but picture a flat plain like a billiard-table, with a river in the middle ; and in the distance, say, five thousand yards or more, a row of low sand dunes extending right across the front. On the left of the river a bog in your immediate front, and on your right, three miles away, another bog. In the river itself, which is as wide as the Thames at London Bridge, a three-masted gunboat and an armed launch. The Turks, accompanied by a large number of red and green banners (we counted fifty), marched solemnly across our front at the top of the dunes, and we, of course, shelled them hard. They then stuck the flags in the ground and retired. After riding for a while they paraded again, whereupon the armed launch scuttled up stream and gave them a tremendous pounding



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at quite close range. The performance lasted from about 3.30 p.m. until about 5.30, when it got dark. Hundreds of officers and men were standing on our forts and parapets watching the effect of the shells with glasses; it really was quite an exhilarating spectacle.

Soon after this, and without any warning, a fresh regiment arrived, not before it was wanted! We were very glad to see them, but it was hard work for the corps to keep supplies going; we were short of carts, and our own troops had to go without firewood that day. I had the greatest difficulty to get the whole of my corps up, as they said there was not room for them in camp. The remarks they made when I asked for another whole corps to be sent to augment the transport I fortunately did not hear!

On the 16th the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge of Penshurst, arrived. He visited all our earthworks, and even went into Fort Snipe. Fort Snipe was our Farthest North, and was built after the battle of Kurna, on the Tigris river bank, about a mile above the last house in Kurna. Its name originated in the cause of its construction, for until mud walls were built, the small force holding Kurna had

contented itself with a few trenches in case of attack. Sniping having caused the little fort to be built, and necessity being the mother of invention, they called it after its mother—the name has nothing to do with the bird, although several were shot thereabouts.

Of course, the Viceroy's visit was the occasion for a little more than the usual routine. We lined the roads when he came through the camp, and named a wooden landing-stage "Viceroy's Pier" in his honour. We also had a parade service at Kurna the following day—Sunday—at which there was an unusually large attendance. I remember the lesson for the day was the second chapter of Genesis—all about the Garden of Eden. It was only natural that the clergyman, the Rev. K—, should have given us a sermon on the subject, seeing that we were holding a service on the traditional site of the much-discussed Garden, whilst the descendant of the famous tree was within a stone's throw.

The Viceroy left on Sunday after church, and proceeded to Basra, and thence back to India. I presume that his visit was connected both with the future of the country

and with its needs as regards troops. We certainly wanted more, and we hoped that after he had seen our necessity he would decide to send them over. We heard that some had been sent to defend the Persian oilfields at Abadan, and rumours reached us of a fight at Ahwaz, on the old pipe-line, and another at Shaiba, near Basra.

We ourselves seemed to be mainly concerned with our own defences. We put up over a hundred miles of barbed wire round the place, and, I believe, were at that time far the strongest force in the country; but we could not move north, south, east or west on account of the swamps and water.

One Sunday evening we did quite good practice; the guns galloped out unexpectedly, and fairly biffed the Turks in front of a crowd of interested spectators lining the ramparts of the redoubts. The result, as far as we were concerned, was the issue of an order that "the defences are not to be used as a grand-stand by officers and others for the purpose of viewing the effect of our shell fire on the enemy." So we had to find another place from which to admire the view.

On a certain day our chief sent word that

he was coming to have a look round, and would arrive the following morning at 7 a.m. That very night some web-footed Arabs cut the river *bund* (dam) about three miles up, and let the water in on us, and when I went down the road at 7 a.m.—I was the first bit of traffic—the water was coming over one of our only two ways of escape. I duly brought the chief over, gave him an excellent breakfast, took him round my lines, and then round the fortifications and inundations, and he left much impressed. When the others discovered the water was over one of their only two roads, there was a tremendous hulla-baloo; all fortifications were dropped, and every man was put on to keeping the water out. The roads were heightened by three feet, an enormous task where there is no mud, and the corps had to cart the whole blessed lot of material required. Some of the mounted people were sent away to Basra or somewhere, and the camp was made smaller. We expected shortly to be an oasis in a pond, and had visions of the Tommies and Sepoys sitting on the mud walls of our perimeter catching fish, and wondering when the water would eat up the wall and swamp

us out. Sooner or later, we were bound to move; nothing but rock and cement would stop the Tigris in flood. A huge host of Arab coolies had been employed at very high wages to help to heighten the river *bund* and make roads leading out of the camp area to the two landing-stages, but all our labours had been, to all intents and purposes, swept away in a single night. The only portion remaining to be made at the moment of the debacle was a small part between the end of the *bund* and the river, a difficult piece of work, as the date-palms were intersected with deep-water channels. Moreover, the whole was partly flooded already and the water steadily rising. Large numbers of Arabs had been set to work two or three days previously on this particular spot, and they had almost completed the task when some kind web-foot cut the river *bund* higher up stream during the night, with the result that the water rushed through an immense gap and commenced flooding the camp area within the existing village *bund* and the river *bund*, which had been heightened. All hands were set to work to fill the breach, and the sight of the Oxford and Bucks filling sandbags

with mud, and wading out to place them in position, will long be remembered by me ; and I feel sure that all of them who had to perform this unpleasant task in icy water will not forget it either. But in spite of the willing workers the water won, and it was decided that the attempt was hopeless.

The Euphrates valley is dead level, and when the river rises it spreads over the whole country for miles on every side. The natives live in reed huts, and take to their boats during flood-time. There are a few places above flood level—*e.g.*, Basra (in parts)—but these places, or rather parts of places, have been selected by the richer inhabitants, who have erected stone houses on them, two stories high, perhaps in case the lower story should flood. We knew, therefore, that there would be no dry spot for us, and that the only solution of the water problem was the end of the war, or the building of a *pucca bund* by Sir William Willcocks.

Meantime we managed as best we could in the gradually deepening mud, and we had the satisfaction of knowing that our efforts were appreciated in high quarters. Particularly encouraging was the remark made in





Consolidating our Position.



The Mule Lines flocked out at Basra.



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Lord Kitchener's speech which reached us over the cable :

“The forces in Mesopotamia, having brilliantly defeated the enemy, are now busily employed in consolidating their position.”

K. of K. was perfectly right, of course—we *were* consolidating our position, but only very gradually ; for as fast as we put the earth on one side of the *bund* the water washed it away from the other side. Had he been in one of our forts on one occasion, he would have seen officers and men holding up the mud parapet with their hands to prevent it liquefying too fast, while hundreds of other men threw mud on the other side to keep the water out. Truly, we were consolidating our position in Mesopotamia !

The place abounded in reminiscences of the past ; all the streets and dirty alleys were re-named, undergoing the same process as Basra had done, and we spoke of Eden Gardens, Eve's Walk, Temptation Square and Serpent Lane. We also had a fig-tree which we decided was the offspring of the famous tree from which Eve got her first garment, and I pressed a leaf in the hope that it might prove of interest to archæologists.

Day after day passed and nothing of importance happened. We heard that an assistant surgeon and some dhoolie bearers, who were with a convoy going to some place, got cut off and were slain by the Turks. The poor fools probably sat down for a bit of *roti khana* (literally, bread food) by the roadside, thinking they would catch up the convoy later, when up came the enemy and successfully cooked their *roti* for them.

There were rumours of large forces gathering in impossible places, where, if proper plans were made on our part, nothing could save them from complete annihilation, and we daily expected orders to move. The roads became doubtfully secure, but one still remained high and dry, and it was along this that we eventually trekked out of the town, leaving one regiment behind to cope with the floods until General Townshend's advance on Baghdad. As a matter of fact, we only just escaped in time, as the water flooded the camp the evening after we left it.

## CHAPTER V

**B**Y the beginning of March I was back again in Basra, the same town from which I started, but in a different camp, as the old one was under water. On our arrival we were told off to convoy duty, as certain preparations were being made for certain events. (I am determined not to give away any official secrets!) I have met bad roads, heard of floods, both in England and in Belgium, but the road we went beats everything!

We went through eight miles of water up to our girths, and the ground under the water was full of mud-holes, which were, of course, invisible. Captain W—, riding a big horse, went into a hole, horse and man, right over his head. I don't know how he got out, as the stuff is so sticky it is like falling into a pot of treacle. I had to take out a regiment which was perfectly *lar-char* (without resource), and never gave a bit of help. If a

load fell off, they said "*Fikr nay*" ("Let it be; we can't be bothered"). It made me so furious, for my poor mules were getting bogged; in some places three at a time were lying helpless, until their loads were removed and they were hoisted up. I now understand how a mule can be drowned in a foot of water. In addition to other difficulties we had no proper guide, and from the directions given us took the wrong road. It sounds ridiculous to talk of a road over a lake, but there was a telegraph line running the whole way, and we were told simply to follow the posts, keeping 100 feet away from them. They omitted to say on which side, and we kept 100 feet to the right when we ought to have been on the left, and it made all the difference! Well, it was an experience worth having, and even those of us who had been in China or Tibet admitted that the transport in Mesopotamia easily beat all records. People talk about water in Belgium—they don't know what it is! Where we were it was all water, miles and miles and miles of it, certainly extending northwards for a hundred miles; practically there was no land at all for the greater part of the season. It was

like looking out to sea, and if anyone had wanted to drink it, which they did not, it would have tasted like the sea also, as it was quite salt.

For some days after our arrival in Basra we had no news, as some kind soul had cut the cable, but we had rumours of happenings in India, and of a place not far from us, where there had been a battle. We heard that our casualties were very small, two killed and three wounded, while the Turks, caught by our guns in close order, lost heavily. When we got into touch with the world again, we learned that there had been something like a lucky escape from disaster at Ahwaz, up the Kurna river. Whilst we were at Mazeera the nightly patrol reports used almost invariably to contain some reference to a few men having been seen crossing the Shwaib river; it was concluded that these were Arabs returning to a village situated thereabouts, and not much notice was taken. It would seem from what followed that these were Turks and Arabs of the Turkish force going across the Shwaib river in small parties, and making for the country near Ahwaz, across the desert north of Hawizeh, the Sheikh

of this territory not being particularly friendly at the time. Another large body of Turks must have moved across the desert from Amara to Shush, where there is a route fit for troops, passed through the territory of Guzban, an Arab chief and Sheikh of the Beni Turuf, crossed the river Kerkeh somewhere near St. Mozan, and approached the hills northwest of Ahwaz. Intelligence was received in Ahwaz that a very large force of Turks and irregular Arab cavalry were in these hills, and a reconnoissance in force was determined upon. So, leaving a double company in Ahwaz camp as garrison, the remainder of the troops issued forth to reconnoitre.

The stories of eye-witnesses differ in many particulars, but it appears that having gone about eight miles, our troops found themselves most unexpectedly up against a large Turkish force with guns, and a large body of Arab cavalry who were hanging about on our right flank. A retirement was decided upon, and while this was in progress a mountain gun and another gun got into difficulties, and had to be abandoned. The retirement became distinctly hurried in places, and a disaster was averted partly by the coolness of some

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men of the Dorsets, but principally by the Turks shelling the Arab cavalry by mistake! The story goes that this Arab cavalry was evidently intended to cut in between our men, who were retreating, and their camp. Just as our troops had reached their position to accomplish this, the Turkish guns opened on them; but the range was faulty, and they shelled the Arabs, who fled and let us into our entrenched camp.

The following days were fraught with anxiety, for the Turks took up positions to besiege the camp and blockade the river. Guns were placed on what was known as Cavalry Mound, evidently the remains of some ancient town, which lay on the river bank, about three miles south of Ahwaz. This position became rather too hot for them, and they eventually had to remove their guns, though in doing so they lost a good number both of men and of horses. Included in the number killed was a Turkish officer of some standing, judging by the size of the grave and the manner in which he was buried.

Another gun position was north of Ahwaz, and it was with this gun that the *Comet* had an exciting little scrap when the river way

was clear. It is a wonder that the Turks did not take advantage of their position to bombard Nasrie on the opposite bank of the river, the head-quarters of the oil works, and the spot where the Russian and British vice-consulates are situated. The day has been known ever since as the 3rd of March, and any reference to what happened on that date means the Ahwaz escape.

At the same time there was yet another 3rd of March affair, out Shaiba way, and this also, curiously enough, was a reconnaissance in force, but this time by the cavalry. We lost several cavalry officers, and again, it is said, escaped disaster by a miracle. The story was told me by one who was there, and it was so very descriptive that I will endeavour to give it in his own words :

“ We had knowledge of a force of Turks collecting at Naikhala, some nineteen miles from Shaiba, along the Euphrates, and had for some time been reconnoitring daily in that direction, but could get no information as to strength or where the Turkish position actually lay. It was therefore decided to do a cavalry reconnaissance in force on the 3rd of March towards Naikhala, and at daybreak



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we were well on our way across the desert in echelon of squadrons.

“We constantly caught sight of small groups of Arab horsemen in the far distance, and parties were sent out to see what they were; but the Arabs immediately disappeared into the mirage as if the ground had opened and swallowed them up. No sooner had a group vanished on our right, than another would appear like a cinema picture on our left, also to vanish and have its place taken by another elusive spectre, perhaps straight ahead.

“So, chasing phantoms, we continued towards our destination. Suddenly we realized that we were being led on, perhaps into a trap, perhaps straight on to entrenched Turkish infantry. We had certainly ridden fifteen miles, when—Hullo! what is that? What a moment before had been the desert horizon, swimming in mirage, was now a galloping whirlwind of Arab horsemen, thousands of them apparently; they filled the whole horizon, and as we halted and faced them, their wings were coming round our right and left fronts at about two thousand yards distance. A retirement was ordered, and we

began to make our way slowly towards Shaiba, alternate squadrons halting occasionally to fire on the advancing host. The order to trot was given, the trot was changed to a canter, and while at the commencement of our retirement the horns of the Arab cavalry had reached round to our right and left rear, they had by now advanced at such a pace, that the horns as we retired were on our right and left fronts. It seemed evident that their plan was to surround us, and—we were running short of ammunition.

“Suddenly, without any warning, a squadron of cavalry on my right came tearing across my front, out of its direction, followed by a swarm of Arabs. They swept half my squadron away, and before I could gather my senses together, I found myself engaged in a life-and-death struggle with half a dozen Arabs. One cut at me, but missed my head and cut the cantle of my saddle, but I blazed at him with my revolver. Just then there was an unmistakable rattle of infantry fire from somewhere close at hand, and the Arabs turned and fled, leaving us all very astonished, for we had no idea that anyone was supporting us. What actually happened was that the

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squadron which left its position in the echelon had jumped over a double company of infantry, who opened fire on the pursuers. Several officers had narrow escapes, none nearer than X. perhaps, whose horse was shot and he himself pinned underneath it, while several Arabs took pot shots at him at ten yards with Mauser and Browning pistols, missing him every time. The appearance of British infantry scared the Arabs, and a section of guns also had some interesting practice at retreating cavalry."

I don't think anyone knows why the infantry and guns put in their appearance at this particular spot at this critical moment. None of the junior officers knew of their existence, though it is probable that the seniors did. One cannot help feeling that it would have given just as much confidence to the juniors to know that they were supported, as it may have given satisfaction to the seniors to know that they had not given the secret away. At any rate, the guns and infantry appeared in the nick of time, and I have heard that it was a pure accident, as one of their guns stuck in the mud and they were obliged to halt and take up a position. The

affair was afterwards mentioned in the papers, and we learned that the day was just saved by twenty-five British Tommies.

Beyond these occasional glimpses we had very little news; people in London probably knew a great deal better than we ourselves what was going on in different parts of the country. As far as we could make out, our forces seemed to be holding their own, a little success here and there making the sum total quite considerable. Nevertheless, one got awfully tired of life in a 40-lb. tent, so low that one could never stand upright in it, with the sun blazing all day and no shelter other than the said tent; and it was a distinct relief when we were able to move from the open desert to a new camping-ground in a lovely palm grove. Our new quarters were like a thick date-palm garden, intersected, bisected and cut about as usual in every way by water channels, whilst all along the channels were fruit trees of every description—fig trees, mulberry trees, apricots, peaches, nectarines, pomegranates, almonds, roses, and hundreds of vines growing from one date-palm to another. There were also melons and tomatoes in great quantities, so we expected

to be well provided for the future in the way of fruit and vegetables. The grove was at least a square mile in extent, probably more than two square miles, and as my camp only took up a small bit of it, about a hundred and fifty square yards, I felt a sort of "monarch of all I survey." It was nice and cool there in the shade of the trees; I slept under three blankets, and in the evenings sometimes wore a sweater and a great-coat to keep myself warm. The days were hot and the sun particularly scorching, it fairly blistered one's face and hands, but as soon as the sun went down it was cold; the evenings would have been beautiful except for the mosquitoes.

We built a new and improved mess, which we nicknamed "The Meat-Safe," fifteen feet long, ten feet broad and ten feet high. The roof was of matting, the top half of the sides was fly-proof wire gauze purchased at the Army and Navy Stores for a shilling a foot, and the bottom half of *gunny* (sacking); while the doors, one at each end, were *gunny* curtains weighted at the ends to make them close immediately. The result was a fly-proof, mosquito-proof house, fairly cool and with

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lots of air. When we added a verandah all round and thickened the roof it was really very nice indeed.

Of course, we had our little grumbles! They promoted N.C.O.'s to commissions wholesale in regiments, and also promoted N.C.O.'s from other regiments, chauffeurs, bank clerks, etc., to commissions in the S. and T. Corps, but they entirely and absolutely ignored our own warrant officers and N.C.O.'s. And we thought it rather too bad that they should be overlooked. We heard that one corporal of a regiment got a commission as an S. and T. officer, and became the boss of a warrant officer who was his own boss a year previously! We had a few other grievances, too.

Reinforcements continued to arrive, amongst them some "Terriers," the first I had seen. The men looked just like ordinary Tommies, but the officers rather puzzled one. They had a major of perhaps thirty, a second-lieutenant of forty-five, and the Q.M.S. was the owner of a large brewery. Anyhow, we all thought it most sporting of them to have volunteered for service abroad, and we wished them the best of luck.

Here is a bit of poetry out of the local

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rag ; it expressed our ideas exactly about the country :

“ When we were children years ago,  
We sat as quiet as mice  
Upon our loving parents' knees,  
Hearing tales of Paradise.

“ Of Adam and Eve in Eden,  
The Serpent and Apple-tree,  
And longed in imagination,  
Those wondrous sights to see.

“ Then suddenly—the “ call to Arms,”  
Our hopes were realized !  
But what becomes of our ideas,  
Those tales so dearly prized ?

“ Is this the land of dear old Adam,  
And beautiful Mother Eve ?  
If so, dear reader, small blame to them  
For sinning and having to leave !

“ I've tried to solve a riddle,  
You wish to know it ? Well,  
If Kurna's the Garden of Eden,  
Then where the Dickens is—— ? ”

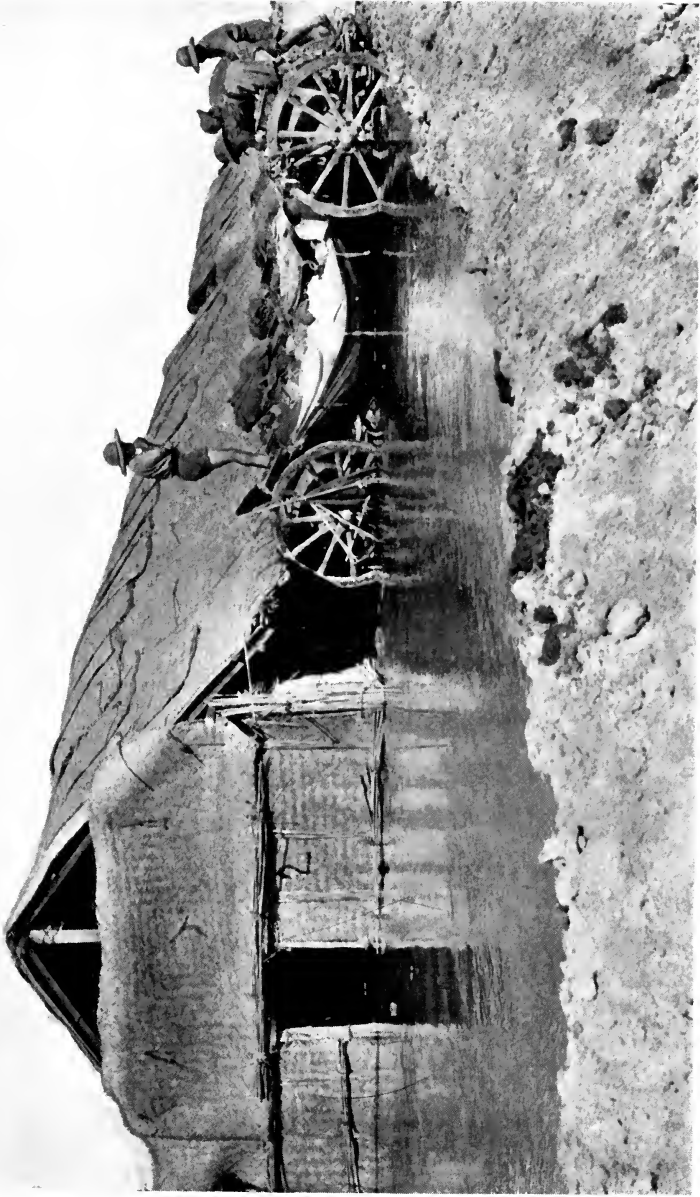
## CHAPTER VI

**E**ARLY in April we began to get very busy, for certain preparations were being made which threw a great deal of work on my corps. To make clear what follows, I must explain that the Turks were gathered in force behind some low hills to the east and south of Shaiba, about ten or fifteen miles from Basra. Between us was a stretch of bog, which in places was deep enough for the flat-bottomed *bellums* to sail from one side to the other. Across this bog my convoy had to go: one day there and the next day back. Saturdays we rested and cleaned the gear; it needed cleaning, too!

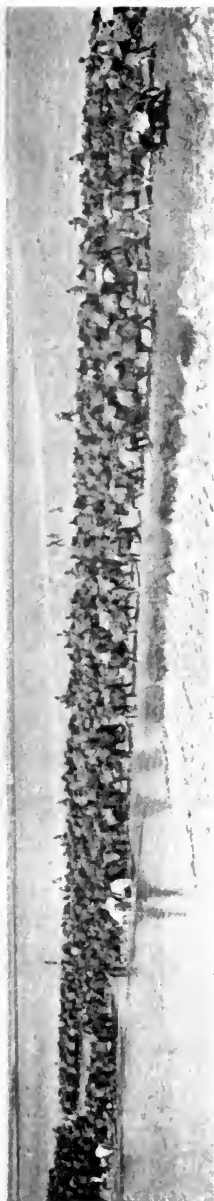
The continuous work began to tell on the mules and also on the men, although the harness perhaps suffered most owing to its being always wet. My boots were almost falling to pieces, and, as if this were not enough, I tore my only decent pair of bags!

Crossing the Shaiba pond, my pony got





Salvage Work in a Territorial Camp during a Flood.



The Convoy held up by the Floods at Basra.



Turkish Prisoners escorted by Gurkhas after the Shaiba Battle.

bogged in the hinder portions and sat down in the mud with me ; my sword touched the ground and was pushed up, so that in dismounting my leg caught in the hilt and rip went my cherished bags ! Unluckily it was on the way out, so I had to wear them as they were, sleep in them and return in them. Solomon, however, patched them up and made them look more or less presentable.

At last our preparations were complete and the battle started on Sunday, April 11th, at 3 p.m. ; I had just come in from Shaiba when I heard the guns firing. There was a small action that afternoon, the Turks' advance guard attacking our position and then entrenching themselves. During the same night we managed to send one regiment, the Punjabis, across the water direct to Shaiba in *bellums* poled by another Punjabi regiment. It was unfortunate that these *bellums* had not been previously commandeered for military purposes ; perhaps this was owing to the idea that the mule convoy *must* continue, whatever happened. In any case, whatever the reason, when *bellums* were urgently required, there were no *bellumchis* ; hence a regiment unaccustomed to the work had to punt the

boats; also, what might have been more serious, only a minimum of *bellums* was to be found at a moment's notice.

On Monday, the 12th, further reinforcements sent by boat were attacked in the water by Turkish *bellums*, and had to return. Hurried preparations were then made for Tuesday, on which day the famous aquatic battle took place on the Shaiba road. During the previous afternoon and night we had joined boats together with platforms, on which were mounted machine guns and mountain guns covered with straw; and early on Tuesday morning a small force issued from Basra, with the intention, not of reinforcing Shaiba, but of clearing our watery lines of communication of the Turkish *bellums* met with on the previous day. On nearing Shaiba, the Turks, as on the day before, came out to attack what they perhaps thought was reinforcing infantry. I think they got the surprise of their lives! There was about two feet of water and one foot of mud, and the battle was fought in boats on what is usually the Basra-Zobeir cart road.

Orders had been issued that the daily convoy of fifteen hundred mules would continue

to proceed across the Shaiba water until the "crack of doom," and this apparently, and most fortunately, sounded on the 11th. On that morning reinforcements of troops had been massed at the Zobeir Gate, Basra, to proceed to Shaiba, both as escort to the convoy and as reinforcements to the garrison there. Obviously no Staff officer present knew the road, as a transport officer was asked to lead the column. The brigade which had previously marched to Shaiba had taken some twelve hours to perform the journey—in fact, its last platoons did not arrive at their destination until nearly midnight, having started at 8 a.m. It was, therefore, reasonable to suppose that a second brigade moving along the same route, with even deeper water on it and more mud, would take a good deal longer to perform the same march, especially as they would probably be under fire during the latter portion of the journey, and somewhat astonishing that valuable time should have been wasted in a futile endeavour to achieve the impossible. However, the brigade did make the attempt, guided, as already stated, by a transport officer, but having gone about three miles, the G.O.C. recognized the

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utter hopelessness of the proceedings and returned to camp. I often wonder if his Staff got the benefit of his opinion on his arrival !

The final fight took place in the Barjasiyeh woods, some five miles in a south-westerly direction from Shaiba. The Turks had occupied the first day in shelling our camp, keeping up a furious rifle fire all night, whilst sapping towards our entanglements and trenches. The second day they gave us shell fire, followed by an attempt to force their way in, which was repulsed with such heavy loss that the Turkish commander, according to Turkish officers taken prisoners, determined to employ a ruse and make us believe that he had retired. Hence he withdrew early in the morning to positions prepared by him in Barjasiyeh wood, expecting that we should follow him. We fitted nicely into his schemes and did exactly as we were wanted to ; but, as the Turks said, we followed no known law of attack. We advanced when we ought to have halted and dug in. We got to within two hundred yards, when we ought to have halted at a thousand yards ; and we charged their trenches when we ought to have sat down

opposite them for a week and been beaten by them. Truly, from the configuration of the ground, we ought to have been wiped out long before we reached their trenches. The distance from Shaiba to Barjasiyeh was about five miles; for roughly half of this distance the ground rises very gradually, and then slopes almost imperceptibly downwards to the Turkish trenches. Standing in the 'Turks' trenches, one commands a magnificent view of every living thing, whether coming over the sky-line or occupying any spot on the bare slope beneath. It was undoubtedly a chosen position, and with everything in favour of the defenders of the trenches, hidden as they were, not only by the nature of the ground, but by the feathery growth of a large number of tamarisk bushes forming the Barjasiyeh wood. The Turks alone had a force superior in numbers to the British, and they had also a large number—estimated at about fifteen thousand—of irregular Arab horsemen. These latter could have helped to win the day, but they never moved a finger; altogether they were more of a nuisance than a help to the Turks during the operations, and a horrible affliction when the

day went against them, for they harried their former allies for nearly a hundred miles. To return to the battle, and the reason why the Turks were driven out when by all laws of war they ought not to have been, I have heard it whispered that we unintentionally took the wrong direction, and arrived much too near to one flank. Then followed a re-shuffling, during which our guns were giving the Turks a tremendous hammering. And then, just as everyone was wondering what was to be done, the Jaipur transport carts appeared over the horizon, under orders to pick up the wounded preparatory to retirement. The Turks saw them, thought they were more guns, and wavered, whereupon the order to charge was given. The cavalry brigade went right through them, and they fled precipitately. Our troops had had a hard fight, and could not follow up their advantage, but the Arabs did this most effectually, whilst our men returned to their camp at Shaiba, reaching there about 8 p.m., very pleased with the success of their first big fight against heavy odds.

The following day the cavalry were sent out and got as far as the Turkish camp at



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Naikhala, which they found evacuated and looted by the Arabs; but at Barjasiyeh they found the Turkish camp still standing almost untouched, with the men's kits laid out as for kit inspection.

I am afraid that in this battle our casualties were heavy, I believe about eight hundred, including eleven officers killed and fifty wounded. The Turks must have lost a large number in killed and wounded, besides about a thousand prisoners, some of whom came in afterwards and were photographed en route by me.

Meanwhile the enemy's lines of communication along the river Euphrates had been harried by a force of river gunboats manned by men of the Navy and of the Royal Artillery. Owing to the nature of the river these operations were exceedingly difficult, but were most successful, many barges and *mehelas* full of grain and stores being both sunk and captured. The commander of the Turks, Suliman Askeri, is said to have shot himself at Naikhala after this, for him, disastrous encounter.

At the same time that the Turks delivered their determined but unsuccessful attack on

Shaiba, culminating in their defeat at Barjasiyeh, they delivered simultaneous but weak and half-hearted attacks on both Kurna and Ahwaz. Knowing of the existence of Turkish forces at these places, we had no choice but to advance against them; as, in addition to the standing menace of enemy forces perhaps receiving reinforcements so close to the key of the Shatt-el-Arab on the one hand, and the oil pipe-line on the other, there was the further danger of the many Arab tribes who were still sitting on the fence joining in with the Turks, and so becoming a formidable enemy. It is a well-known trait of Semitic nations that they believe most sincerely in the power of the mailed fist. Hence, if one power makes a show of force which is unresisted by its opponent, the Arab mind jumps to the not always correct conclusion that the non-opposition is caused primarily by fear of the result. Consequently a force of Turks not opposed would, in all probability, have gathered to itself a multitude of desert Arabs expectant of loot, but always ready to turn on their temporary allies should they be defeated. It was, therefore, to our advantage to strike quickly and

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strike as hard as possible at these two forces after the rout of the Turks at Shaiba, and General Townshend organized a force to attack Kurna, whilst General Gorringe began to march against the Turks operating near Ahwaz.

The Turkish troops who retreated from Shaiba were said to have reached Nasriyeh, where they were probably reorganizing; but they would not be available for reinforcing the army in front of Kurna for some time, partly owing to disorganization following on a rout, and partly on account of the flooded nature of the country, which would have necessitated either a large number of boats and a command of the river which they had not got; or a long march via the Shatt-el-Hai and Amara. Even this route meant the crossing of the Euphrates, the navigation of the Hai, and the carrying of supplies in boats; all of which were practically impossible for a force of any size. It also meant the surrendering of the Euphrates line by the Turks, which was unthinkable, considering the richness of the country, the possibility of our advance on Baghdad along this route—it is the line chosen for the Baghdad railway—and the political effect on the Arabs by the

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Turks' desertion of the holy places Kerbela, Babylon, etc.

After the battle my corps had a pretty stiff time for a few days clearing up things and moving people about, and the whole transport was nearly worked off its legs. A steady rain for two days did nothing to lessen our difficulties; the roads became simply awful, and some of the camels had a very bad time, slithering about all over the place and doing about a quarter of a mile in three hours. At last we had to push them into odd places on the side of the road, to wait till the rain stopped and the mud dried up a little. One evening I was nearly four hours fixing them up. Two fell down and so injured themselves that I was obliged to shoot them (their legs fly apart in the slippery mud, and the poor creatures literally split in half). After shooting them, we had to get them out of the way, as they blocked up the path; and I have most unpleasant recollections of a crush of troops, infantry, cavalry, artillery, animals and everything else, trying to struggle along a slippery ten-foot road, everybody and everything sliding and no lights! Really it was a Bedlam.

## CHAPTER VII

**T**HE rain cleared off, and up till the end of April it was, comparatively speaking, cool, very different from the end of April in India. At Basra it was certainly uncomfortable at midday, but the nights, especially if there happened to be a breeze, were perfectly delightful. We were told that May would be H-O-T-warm, but that June and July are always cool, owing to the Shumai, or north-west wind, which is so refreshing that the Arabs call it "The Blessing."

General Barrett went sick and left for home, and General Nixon took over the command with a brand new outfit of Generals and Staff. The number of frogs was extraordinary, and the ground was simply crawling with crabs, the little green sort found at the seaside, looking awfully like scorpions as they ran over the road.

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We had also lots of flies, mosquitoes, wasps and hornets, but very few birds, and, curiously enough, no vultures, which one always associates with the desert.

We spent our days mostly in fishing, generally with mulberries; and I must say it was very like Kashmir, both in climate and in the amount of water about, though in the latter respect it beat Kashmir hollow. The Turk or Arab in Mesopotamia is centuries ahead of India in many ways; for instance, he does not sit on his hunkers like a monkey to sew or do anything else. His shoe-making is done in an ordinary chair at a proper shoe-maker's table, in a proper shoe-maker's shop, with the usual shoe-maker's tools, and amidst the usual shoe-maker's surroundings of lasts, boots, trees, etc., hanging on the walls, as one sees in England. There are no travelling barbers there either, but barbers' shops like one meets on the Continent. Instead of mud hovels, the people live in two-story houses, with the exception of the Swamp Arabs, who do not live in the city, but on the outskirts and in the swamps. They have matting or mud houses, much of the same type as the Indian houses, but better made and bigger.

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The Bedouins, of course, live in black tents on the desert.

On May 7th we had an alarm at midnight, and H. and myself strolled out in our pyjamas to the *maidan* across the creek, and found that the river had risen and broken the *bund*, and that all the troops were flooded out of their barracks and tents. They were up all the night, fighting water in the dark, and building new *bunds* without lights; they had a truly glorious time! I went up the next morning to see how they were getting on, and found them salving ammunition and swimming tents to shore. The Territorial gunners camped on top of their guns amused me immensely. The aerodrome, which the sappers took such trouble to build, was under two feet of water, and the irony of the thing was that the aeroplanes were expected on the following day! It was too unfortunate; we had waited for, and wanted, those planes for months, and the very day they were to arrive, bang went the *bund*, and we had not a dry spot to put the things in, unless we tried the housetops!

Some of the Irrawaddy steamers also came up. They were expected when we first

arrived in November, and when we actually saw them in the river, we felt that in spite of floods we were progressing quite favourably.

I am no longer incredulous about the Ark! In fact, during the days that followed our flood I myself followed Noah's most excellent example, and raised my house six inches from the ground, in the pious hope that if matters became worse it would float in safety and ease. It would probably pitch up against a palm tree before going many yards, in which case history would repeat itself and the tree would become Mount Ararat.

Just about that time we had news of the death of three officers of the 33rd Cavalry near Ahwaz. There was, I heard, a squadron present, and it was extricated by a second lieutenant of the I. A. Reserve. In those days there was only one topic of conversation, and bets were freely laid as to when we should make a move on Baghdad. In comparison with the quarters we then occupied, it sounded a cool and healthy spot, and although we could not really grouse at the climate up to that time, we were quite ready for a change. Troops were said to be on the way, and we expected at any moment to



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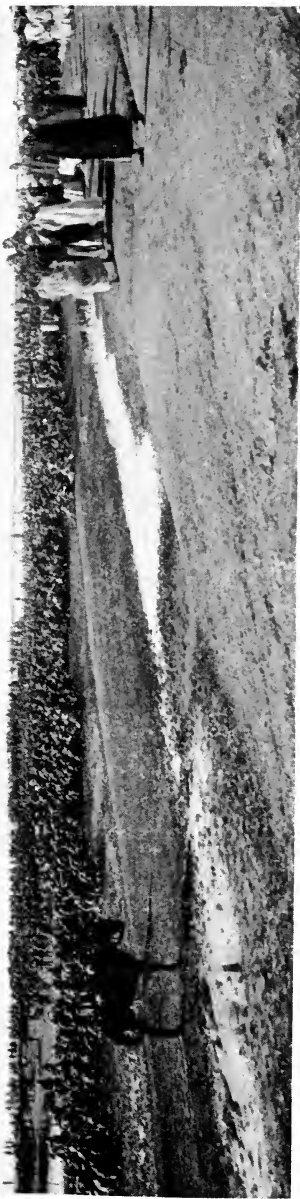
hear that orders had been given for a general advance.

I must not leave out another item of great interest at the time. H. had a cable one day to say that he was the proud papa of number three—a daughter. This makes one son and two daughters, against my two sons and two daughters. I think our mess has done its duty to its country most nobly. We have increased from the three original bachelors of years ago, to three men—three women—three sons—eight daughters—a total increase from three to seventeen. Pity everyone hasn't done the same in these trying times, although daughters are rather a predominant feature.

Basra was becoming quite a fashionable spot. Whiteaway and Laidlaw came up, and Leach and Weborny opened a shop in the Strand; we expected to have all sorts of shops there before long. Society, too, was on the up grade. One night we had a *tamasha* (entertainment) in the lines, got up by Solomon, my old servant. It was a native play of sorts, and they built a stage and had a drop curtain and all sorts of things. I have no idea what it was all about, and I don't think the actors knew either, but Solomon

appeared to me to represent Hanuman, the Hindu Monkey god. He was wound all over with khaki puttees, all up his arms and legs and round his tummy and his chest, till he looked like a sort of large Teddy bear. He had a tall red clown's hat with bells on it, bells round his ankles, and a wand in his hand, and with large coloured-glass balls hung in his ears; he looked quite funny, as he is about sixty years old, and really much too ancient to make such a buffoon of himself. Still, he bounced and danced about like a two-year-old, and the more he danced the more one had to laugh, as the puttees would keep unwinding and coming off; it looked as if his skin were peeling. Then a crowd of dressers would rush at him and pin him up again, until finally he had to stop the show to go and fit himself up again completely. I threatened to tell his wife Rosie of his antics.

Quite suddenly it got hot; it jumped from  $90^{\circ}.5$  on a Saturday to  $103^{\circ}.5$  on the Sunday,  $111^{\circ}$  on Monday and  $110^{\circ}$  on Tuesday. After that the authorities kept the temperature to themselves, as regards height only. I wish they had kept the effects as well! Spectators would have laughed at H. and myself one



Reinforcements unable to start for the Shaiba Battle owing to Floods.



The Convoy on the way to Shaiba.

[To face p. 80.



day. It really was damnably hot, and we had been lying full length on the floor of my hut, gasping, until we couldn't stick it any longer, so determined to go for a walk. Off we went in shorts, puttees, boots, and thin shirts without collars; it was so hot that we pulled the shirts outside our shorts native fashion, which kept us a bit cooler. Then H. refused to do anything but swim the river, which he did; of course, his wet clothes acted like a *khus-khus tatty*, and kept him fairly cool, but he looked like a scarecrow walking into the lines later.

The force which went Ahwaz way seemed to have done well, but they had a perfectly dreadful time with the heat. Ahwaz is much hotter than Basra, and they were fairly boiled, a nice experience for the Terriers who formed part of the force. We had more rumours of people coming, one being that anything between fifty thousand and two hundred thousand Turks were on their way from Baghdad. We supposed they intended to swim down, as they could not walk; dry ground was getting very scarce indeed, and they had no boats. The floods were quite abnormal; even the hospitals were under

water. They built grass barracks for the patients; in one half were the malaria sick and in the other, the lower half, was a mosquito pond. They said it was a good thing to keep diseases within bounds; but I think this is the first time that anyone has tried breeding mosquitoes in one half of a room and putting the patients in the other half! I ought to add that the mosquito ponds were quite unintentional on the doctor's part, but they could not get the water away.

Another rumour which reached us referred to the way the Germans are treating our wounded prisoners. We heard that wounded were being shot, prisoners being burnt alive, etc. If this rumour was true, all I can say is that it is time that the Allies took off the gloves. It is not fair to the nation to make them fight with gloves on against people who are using knuckle-dusters. In other words, fight the German with his own methods—give him gas, and plenty of it—let him have a taste of cholera germs and plague; wipe out his cities when we can, and give him generally the hell he has tried his best to give us. We are much too soft, both in our methods of fighting and in our treatment of prisoners and

captured places. The same remarks apply with almost equal force to the Arabs.

To us, tired of waiting for a move, it began to look as if we should have to spend the rest of our lives in the land of the Chaldees. By the way, Ur of the Chaldees, mentioned in the thirty-first verse of the eleventh chapter of Genesis, is close to Nasriyeh ; just south of it there was once, they say, a seaport. Old Bible history and prophecies were very popular in Mesopotamia in those days, as is natural ; one prophecy in particular caused us a lot of thinking—Rev. xiii. v. 18 (the number of the beast).

Shortly after the battle of Shaiba we had news of an Arab rising at Kerbela against the Turks, who were said to be looting the holy places in the district and at Meshed Ali. Whether this rising was a direct result of the battle of Shaiba, or arose from differences in religious beliefs, I am unable to say ; but it may be of use to those interested in the latter subject and its effects on the Eastern question to set down a few notes on the Mohammedan religion, its particular sects, and their distribution over India and the near East.

Mohammedanism is roughly divided into

two great clans—the Sunnis and the Shiahhs. The Sunnis are those who believe that Abu Bekr, Omar and Othman, the three first Caliphs, are the legitimate successors of the Prophet. The Shiahhs, on the other hand, look upon Ali as the divinely commissioned and therefore correct successor of Mohammed, whilst at the same time considering the three Caliphs of the Sunnis as usurpers. It follows that there is continual friction between the two sects.

Now the Turks, also almost the whole of the desert Arabs of Arabia, the inhabitants of Afghanistan, and the very great majority of Mussulmans in India are Sunnis. The whole of Persia, a few of the tribes north of Peshawar, all Cashmiris, and the vast majority of the inhabitants of the valleys of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers are Shiahhs. Mecca and Medina are the holy places of the Turks and all Sunnis; whilst Kerbela and Meshed Ali, the burial place of Ali, also Meshed Hussain, near Hillah, the burial place of Hussain, eldest son of Ali, are the holy places of pilgrimage for Shiahhs.

It is not to be wondered, therefore, that the appearance of Sunni Turkish soldiers, never



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very popular in Mesopotamia, at the Holy of Holies of the Shiah sect should result in an outburst of fanaticism ending in bloodshed.

To add to the religious tangle at Meshed Ali, where Sunni and Shiah meet daily, there exists a peculiar sect of Mussulman known as the Wahabites. These have sprung up within comparatively recent times, and are followers of one Abd-el-Wahab, a teacher and Mussulman reformer, who was native of the town of Nejd about a hundred and fifty years ago. His mission in life he considered was to cleanse the religion of Mahomet of the many abuses and impurities that had crept into it, and bring his followers back into the true paths. The religion being one of the sword, it is not surprising that this reformer set forth to enforce his belief by power of arms. He took Mecca and Medina, which subsequently succumbed again to the old creed, whilst in the beginning of last century his followers also wrecked and devastated Meshed Hussain, north-west of Hillah, pillaged the temples there, burnt the city, and converted its site into a desert, killing all the inhabitants, men, women and children, without mercy.

The Wahabites at present occupy the

central portion of Arabia, over which they have despotic government. Between them and the Euphrates are the Shammar Arabs, whilst in times of failure of the crop in the interior, Kerbela and Meshed Ali are the granaries both of Nejd and Shammar.

Who knows but that there was scarcity in Nejd, resulting in Wahabites, Sunnis and Shiahs being all present at Kerbela after the Shaiba fight? If so, there was every probability of a fight to a finish among the three sects.

Having mentioned Nejd, it may be of interest to some to know that the most valuable of all Arab horses come from that place. Moreover, the strain of Nejd is considered the purest, and is a *sine qua non* in any Arab horses of blood stock. Shammar is equally noted for its horses, but the export of them from either place is small, and usually via Kerbela or Basra.

## CHAPTER VIII

**A**T the end of May, 1915, I was off again, this time to Ahwaz. I was told that it was even warmer there than in Basra—in fact, *quite* hot. I found that the average temperature in the day, however, only reached 121° in the shade, and that the next month and July are considered the hot months! In Mesopotamia anything under 130° in the shade is evidently only a moderate temperature.

The worst of it was that there was no shade at all, no trees of any kind, not even palms, nothing but desert sand. The nights were, however, cooler than at Basra, which was something to be thankful for. The prevalent disease in that salubrious spot was, I very soon realized, one peculiar to such conditions, and went by the name of “—itis,” the symptoms in man being a general depression, homesickness and “fedupedness”; whilst animals suffer more physically than mentally,

their outward signs being girth-galls, sore backs, debility and the like.

In Ahwaz I saw my first aeroplane, and it really did look nice. I rather envied the men in the machine, up in the cool air, getting a lovely breeze, and sailing along like a gigantic bird. Aeroplanes frighten the Arabs, and we expected to have quite a number out before long.

A more uninviting place than Ahwaz I have never seen. There was no pretence as to shade; there were no trees or bushes, nor even a blade of grass. I passed my days in a hut built of *bhusa* bales, seven feet by ten feet, and six feet high, with a tarpaulin over the top, in a temperature of about 120°. Still, one managed to carry on, though a lot of men went down with heat, including Generals, Colonels, all sorts and types of officers and lots of Tommies. The next boat-load down after my arrival was a big one of sick, which brought the total up to about eighteen hundred from that small bit of the force, a figure which describes the spot more vividly than I am able to do. The water there was like peasoup, and the sand in it was the cause of quite a lot of inside com-

plaints, particularly dysentery. Personally, I kept unusually fit, and looked quite rosy, as if I had been at the seaside for a holiday—still, I did not like the climate a bit. We had twelve hours good, 6 p.m. to 6 a.m.; one could almost stand a blanket. From 6 a.m. to 9 a.m. it was hot. From 9 a.m. to 12 damned hot. From 12 to 5.30 much too damned hot. From 5.30 to 6 p.m. one could venture out; it was the half-hour for pulling oneself together before dinner. In the afternoon, from 3.30 to 5.30, there was usually a hot dry wind and a sandstorm blowing, and one could not see more than five yards. It was really terribly trying, and there was no way of getting away from it; the only thing to do was to lie on one's bed and drink lots of water and sweat. This made one's body into a sort of *khus-khus tatty*, and the evaporation kept one cool.

From June 1st to 5th I suffered from chronic convoy, marching every night twenty miles, and during the day either looking after mules, or swimming mules, or feeding mules, at Illah, or loading convoy for Illah at Ahwaz. I cannot think how the men stood it. Personally, I was utterly beat at the end of the fifth

day, although I did no manual labour of loading carts or tying up pack animals, and invariably rode the distance. The wretched mule drivers, however, performed this journey many more times than myself; they did all the loading of carts and tying of pack loads, and many of them had to walk the twenty miles nightly; all had to groom, water and feed their animals at the end of each march.

(I can only add that the troops were amazed at the endurance and marching power of the mule drivers, which, beyond much eulogy, received no official recognition. Was this because their work was beyond all praise?)

On June 9th I arrived at the exalted position of —, as all the others who held that post had gone sick, principally from that same "itis" I mentioned overleaf. I am not surprised, either. Our corps organization, built up by years of work and experience, was entirely washed out in Mesopotamia; all professional knowledge of our officers was eliminated, and amateurs dabbled in matters they did not understand. The result was chaos, as might have been expected. As for my corps, they were here, there and every-

where. I certainly did not know where they were, either men or animals, nor did I know how many of either I possessed; however, I could only hope that we should be a corps again some day, when the upheaval had subsided to normal.

The principal memory I have of Ahwaz is of heat most excessive—in fact, so excessive that we had to dig caves about eight feet long, and just high enough to crawl into, in the face of the river bank, to live in during the heat of the day. They were cool, but rather damp and earth-smelly; still, anything was better than being roasted alive. The temperature most days was well over 120° in the shade, and one fairly melted.

The sending off of Dunlop's column occupied all minds and hands for several days. Not only had the supplies and transport for this force to be got across a wide, swift and dangerous river to the west bank on two small and far from substantial flying bridges; but all the artillery, cavalry and infantry, not required for the column, who had been operating around Bisaitin and Kafajiyeh, had to return to the east bank. To add to the many difficulties, the strength of the column

and the number of days' supplies it carried seemed to fluctuate astonishingly.

The force actually pushed off from Bisaitin, two marches west of Illah, or roughly forty miles west by north of Ahwaz. Their destination was Amara. The country was unknown, partly flooded; the inhabitants were hostile; the heat was intolerable, and they carried ten days' supplies. The general idea appeared to be to clear any Turkish forces from the intervening country, and join up with General Townshend's force operating up the Tigris.

(We heard later that the column got through in about eleven days (they had not this number of days' rations!), having endured unexpected hardships owing to swamps over which the guns had practically to be carried. The retreating Turks were pushed into Townshend's force, and laid down their arms. This successful march was the grand finale of the operations from Ahwaz.)

One day, when at Illah, about twenty miles out of Ahwaz, I apparently got a touch of the sun, and I spent the day in the hospital tent lying full length on a stretcher, in a temperature of 122° in the shade. The tent was,



as most hospitals were out there, just a tent, and nothing more ; no chinks (reed blinds to keep out flies and glare), no furniture, no chairs, tables, beds, or anything—just a tent. I lay on a stretcher like a log in the heat, which was really bad. In the evening I was sent into Ahwaz in the ambulance motor.

The hospital there was in the only house, bare of anything ; and we would, I think, have starved unless we had got food for ourselves. Those at home would be furious if they knew how the sick were cared for in that benighted land. To add to everything, a personage, the “ itis ” man, arrived, and tried to turn all the sick out of the house into tents, as he wanted it for himself. The doctors protested strongly, however, and we were bundled into two small rooms, these also devoid of chairs, tables, beds, matting, or anything whatever in the way of furniture, not even a punkah ; whilst his majesty, the “ itis,” fitted up the other rooms of the house for himself, had them matted and hung with punkahs, and chairs and tables placed in them.

I must not forget to mention one of the most tragic things that happened : in addition

to several of our men drowned in swimming horses across the river, four died of thirst. We had gone on a march of destruction, and one regiment ran out of water, got done up, and although only one mile from the river, could go no further. They had to halt and call for volunteers to go on for water; so all the biggest and strongest men were loaded with as many water-bottles as they could carry and went on to the river. There they drank their fill, and returned with full bottles for the rest; but before they could get back four of them were dead. The regiment managed to reach the water after they had drunk, and the whole lot went straight into the river and wallowed in it. There is also a story told of a *bhisti* who was ordered to go in search of water, and was never seen alive again. I wonder if a dried-up mummy was ever discovered on the desert with an empty water skin beside it!

Truly, we had the dregs of the war out there—heat such as one never dreamt of, and no comforts for the sick whatever. By Jove! if the Kaiser wants a place in the sun, why don't they let him go and live at Gardia, half-way between Ahwaz and Illah? He

would wish within ten days that he had never seen the sun.

We thought of volunteering to fit out an expedition to find any pole anyone could suggest, provided that there was ice there, and we were allowed to absent ourselves from that blasted (literally) country for a few months. One's thoughts kept turning to the Garden of Eden! It was most extraordinary, but almost every periodical one came across had something about Eden in it. I once picked one up, and in it was an article by a man who appeared to have travelled via Bushire, Shushtar and the Karun river to Abadan, the head of the oil works. He stated several interesting facts about the country, but the two that struck me most were that the average temperature during August is  $126^{\circ}$  to  $128^{\circ}$ , and that Abadan was once the Garden of Eden. This is the third distinct place I have seen mentioned as its site :

No. 1. Kurna.

No. 2. Near Babylon, which I think is more correct from historical and archæological proofs.

No. 3. Abadan, which is of course piffle, as Mohammerah, forty miles up stream, was

on the sea in the time of Alexander, and, therefore, Abadan was under water even then.

I may appear to be meandering to no purpose, but the point is this: If Abadan was the Garden of Eden, no wonder Adam and Eve had to go, for the fiery sword that drove them out must have been the heat of the sun in a shadeless desert; it puts a new aspect on affairs of those times, and entirely exonerates our maligned ancestors.

Looking back, it amuses me to think how we spent those weary days speculating about the various phases of the war. I had a bet on with a man about the date on which America would be in—the stake was a tin of golden plums; we were frightfully greedy and never had anything nice to eat! We arranged to our entire satisfaction a programme which would absolutely knock the Germans before they had time to retire to the impregnable lines of the Rhine fortifications. We saw in the retention of our own line in France and Flanders merely a strategical halt until we had enough ammunition to pound them to pieces; we could beat them any moment we liked once we had the men

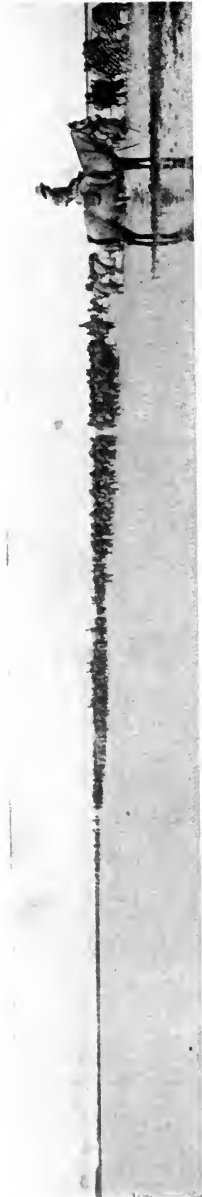


A sorry Group of Turkish Prisoners at Shaiba.



A Procession of Turkish Prisoners taken after the Shaiba Battle.

[To face p. 96.]



Reinforcements on the way to Shaiba.



A Bird's-eye View of Amara.



A View of Kurna, near Fort Snipe.

and the shells. The war would be over sooner than any of us expected! Anyhow, if hope had not sprung eternal in our breasts we should have bust in that damned hole. As a finale to our sufferings, the hospital ice-box and all the ice was lost, and we had none for two sweltering days.

I say "finale," as there was a general exodus of infantry en route for "somewhere in Mesopotamia." The cavalry, however, stayed for the summer, the swampy nature of the ground rendering them useless when the floods were out. One cavalry regiment which arrived had quite a lot of difficulty in landing near Mohammerah among the swamps; their transport consisted of the only camels then in the country. These poor "oonts" were afterwards segregated for Surra, a disease very prevalent among camels in India, and several were shot, as they constituted a menace to the health of the other animals.

The history of the camels with our force is somewhat interesting. Several shiploads of them came up the river with us, having been dispatched from Karachi with the greatest possible speed. Arrived at Basra, there was a great discussion as to whether they could or

could not be utilized. Meanwhile the camels remained on board. It was eventually decided to land some three hundred odd as a trial trip, and the rest were returned to Karachi, having spent some six weeks *en voyage*. The three hundred which were landed were employed at Shaiba and Basra until the Shaiba pond started; they then concentrated at Basra on any bit of dry ground obtainable until it was found that Ahwaz was above high-water mark and had good camel grazing, so necessary for the prehistoric quadrupeds.

The grazing consists, of course, of small thorn bushes which grow in profusion in the old watercourses or low-lying ground. It is unfortunate that they did not arrive in time to take some of the convoy work between Ahwaz and Illah off the hard-worked mules, which were doing the work of both First Line and Second Line transport.

It was a glad day when the news came in that General Townshend had captured Amara. I had seen many curious preparations for amphibious warfare before leaving Basra, hundreds of *bellums* being towed up stream, all having been arranged to carry either men



or machine-guns or mountain guns. They were there singly or in twins or triplets, boarded and unboarded; and it was perfectly evident to those who had eyes to see that the Aquatic Sports Committee (as the reverent called them) had had a busy time fitting out this multitude of boats. But it was time well spent, as they were chiefly responsible for the victories of Kurna and Amara.

The bombardment of the Turkish position (formerly described as a row of sandhills, but now owing to the floods a chain of islands) commenced on May 31st, and under cover of this the flotilla advanced to the attack. Was there ever such astonishing warfare—attacking trenches in boats! Norfolk Hill (named after the battle of Kurna in December, 1914) was first taken in a frontal attack, followed by the capture of the remainder of the front line of trenches soon after noon on May 31st. The attack on the main position was, however, postponed, and it was discovered early on June 1st that the enemy had evacuated the whole position, and was in full retreat towards Amara, ninety miles up stream from Kurna. Then followed a pursuit

by road and river, led by General Townshend in the *Comet*, with H.M.S. *Espiègle* and a large flotilla of boats and barges crawling slowly up behind. The *Espiègle* and all deep-draft ships were held up on account of the shallowness of the river, with the result that the *Comet* arrived at Amara with only three armed launches, on board of which was a very small British force. They found Amara still occupied by the rearguard of the Turkish force, who laid down their arms on General Townshend's arrival. The Turks could not have been aware of the size of General Townshend's force immediately available, nor that his reinforcements were nearly a day's journey behind him down stream. The arrival of the Norfolks the following morning was most welcome, for during the night the Turks had begun to regret their hasty surrender to a far inferior force.

Meanwhile Dunlop's column was wending its weary way, in a temperature knowing no limit, across the eighty odd miles between Bisaitin and Amara, driving the opposing Turkish forces in front of them. These forces had crossed the river some days in advance of ourselves, as we were held up on account

of a sudden rise in that erratic stream; and their main body appears to have passed through Amara before General Townshend's arrival at that place. The Turkish rearguard, however, which was opposing Dunlop's column, was cut off, and after a slight engagement with General Townshend's force near Amara the majority were captured.

The total bag at Amara was about two thousand prisoners, including three Germans and nineteen guns. Also, several river-craft had been sunk, including the Turkish gunboat *Marmorice*, which was sunk near Ezra's Tomb. We heard that included in the two thousand prisoners were the remains of two Constantinople firemen regiments, who were marching in as we arrived, and laid down their arms to General Townshend and a corporal's guard. We also heard that one of the Turkish officers was permitted to send the following telegram to his wife: "Safely captured," which has a touch of the comic in it and is almost too good to be true.

I heard there had been a lot of deaths from heat among the Terriers at Basra, where they had it up to 126° in the shade, and a damp heat with no breeze. All the (so-called)

hospitals were full of heat-stroke cases, and I should say they are likely to remain so; it is a truly dreadful country, and no wonder that Abraham cleared out of it, and Noah built an ark!

## CHAPTER IX

**T**OWARDS the end of June it became apparent that a further advance was contemplated up the Euphrates, in the direction of Nasriyeh. If this point had been struck a few months earlier we should probably never have had the battle of Shaiba. There were, of course, immense difficulties in the way: a shortage of suitable river transport and an unknown river channel; but all these were afterwards partially rectified, and, as a matter of fact, should never have been allowed to exist at all. Preparations were being made with great activity, all launches were taken from Ahwaz, and we had no boats there for goodness knows how long.

I could imagine the terrible time our poor chaps were having, marching and fighting in the appalling heat; it is a wonder they all did not die of heat-stroke. Force D. has throughout had the very worst of climatic

conditions to work in. In Mesopotamia one can walk in the cool, but in the heat one runs the chance of being dried up and mummified if one is not careful. This sounds rot, but it is a positive fact. I was told by residents that no force could march ten miles in the daytime without being dried up by the sun, and, if killed, frizzled and turned to pemmican by evening. Jolly spot is Mesopotamia!

Having mentioned Nasriyeh, I must not forget to describe a curious tribe who live near there at Shuk-esh-sheyukh. According to the *Gazetteer* they are called Sabaens, and number about three thousand families. They speak Arabic, but their mother tongue is supposed to be ancient Syrian, whilst their religion is the most peculiar conglomeration of Paganism, Mohammedanism and Christianity. They call themselves followers of John the Baptist, and have manuscript books of their own religion, the pages of which are divided into two halves, each written in an opposite way, so that the book can be read by two priests sitting on opposite sides of running water. This running water business may have something to do with St. John the Baptist and Jordan; but it is such a strict

tenet of their religion, that the Turks, who are loath to interfere with the religion of "those of the Book," have had to let them off military service, owing to the difficulty of providing sufficient running water. One of their customs, related in the said *Gazetteer*, is distinctly humorous. At one certain yearly festival, all the ladies and gentlemen, having assembled in the largest possible room at dark, have a tremendous feast, after which the gentlemen leave the room temporarily; the lights are put out, and the ladies, who are of course dressed in their best, divest themselves of certain garments which they hang on pegs round the room. When everything is ready, the lights are re-lit, and the gentlemen return to choose which garments they fancy. The owners of the chosen garments have then to declare themselves, and the owner and the finder become man and wife, it is said, until the next yearly festival. The ladies are never allowed to wear blue, and no one is allowed to wear sombre clothes.

The tribe is a particularly handsome one, but the men, like the Nazarenes of old, never cut their hair. They are clever craftsmen, and are for the most part gold and silversmiths,

their own particular secret being the inlaying of silver with antimony. There was a man at Amara who did this work, and who had such a heap of orders on hand, all at very much enhanced rates, that he must have made a small fortune.

The Nasriyeh news, when it arrived, was quite good. It appeared that a force under General Gorringe had assembled at Kurna during the latter portion of the month of June. During the first week in July they had forced their way up the Euphrates, overcoming not only the enemy resistance, but innumerable obstacles, chiefly of a watery nature, until they drove the Turks to entrench themselves in a strong position astride the river with their flanks resting on impenetrable marshes.

This position was finally taken on July 24th after an obstinate resistance, and Nasriyeh was occupied on July 25th, our total captures being about a thousand prisoners and seventeen guns, whilst our losses were between five and six hundred only. The Turks are said to have lost over this number in killed alone.

Beyond the above facts only rumour reached



us, one being that the Punjabis, who were ferried across the Shaiba lake just in time to partake in, and probably to save the day at, the battle of Shaiba, bore the brunt of Nasriyeh. Rumours of all sorts and kinds came down the river in incredibly short time, and every rumour had its element of truth. There seems to be very little doubt that this regiment was directed to attack a small mound said to be held by a few Turks, and were to have passed through a friendly Arab village, which they had to reach in boats, and thence to the attack of the Turkish position over ground supposed to be flooded only to the depth of a few inches. This marsh proved to be waist deep or more, the Turkish force was far greater than was expected, and the Punjabis were caught in a most disadvantageous position half-way across. They were obliged to retire under conditions which to the wounded meant death by drowning. The Arab village during the retirement proved the reverse of friendly, and the regiment lost heavily both in officers and men; but the proverbial luck of its C.O. held good, and he returned with his junior subaltern and the remainder of his men.

Owing to these successes our position in Mesopotamia was established on a sounder strategic basis than formerly when we held Kurna, Shaiba and Ahwaz. Kurna was merely the key to the Shatt-el-Arab, and did not prevent a force moving either via Nasriyeh on Basra, or via Amara and Shush on Ahwaz, both of which events took place. As outposts to protect Basra on the one hand and the pipe-line at Nasrie on the other, whilst being a deterrent on the inhabitants of the Persian hills near the oil-fields, they were locally necessary. By the end of July we had seized Nasriyeh on the Euphrates, thus holding that line of advance against Basra; we held Kurna, the key to the trade route of both rivers, and we had captured Amara, which would prevent the Turks meandering across the desert towards the oil-fields. As against this, we had stretched out long lines of communications which would have to be guarded.

The one fly in the ointment was that inter-communication along the Shatt-el-Hai between the Tigris and the Euphrates was not denied the enemy, and it became necessary to establish a sounder line consisting of Nasriyeh,

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the Shatt-el-Hai and Kut-el-Amara, with Kurna and Ahwaz held as formerly. In any case, strong Turkish forces were said to be collecting at Kut, and, as it is always a doubtful policy in the East to permit an accumulation of force by the enemy without attacking it, there was every possibility of an advance on Kut in the near future.

It seemed to us in hospital very hard lines that, having borne the heat and burden of the day for so long, we should be denied our part in what was then considered the first stage on the road to Baghdad. This romantic city had become the Mecca of our dreams, and many were the hours we spent in heated argument as to the best way of reaching it, and the plans we laid for the advance. However, as most of us were at that time under the influence of varying degrees of high temperature, it is possible that our schemes were not so practical as they then appeared to be. We could only hope that by the time all preparations had been made, we should be well enough to join our units, and we devoted all our energies to making our spell of inaction as bearable as possible under the circumstances. But one must admit that our spirits did not

always rise to the occasion, and that our endurance was often pushed almost to the breaking point.

There were no comforts of any sort, and food was far from what we should have liked, both as regards quality and quantity. For two months we had no green food at all, and when the potatoes failed, the only obtainable vegetable was onions. One got so sick of them, but one had to eat the onions or get scurvy, and most of us chose onions.

I used to see the photos of sick and wounded in other hospitals, both in France and England, and then gaze round at our own in despair. We were all crowded together—sunstroke, peritonitis, pneumonia, dysentery, malaria, enteric and one lunatic—all mixed up in a tiny house of six rooms and a basement. Altogether there were about sixty officers and men there, all lying on the floor without any space at all between their beds; the misery and discomfort were too pitiable. I often wished that people at home could only know what sort of a “Cook’s Tour” we were having. *Truth* actually called our campaign a “Cook’s Tour in Mesopotamia”! I should just like the man who made that remark to

be sent out there and spend a hot weather there under Indian Service conditions.

It may not be generally known, but our little show in Mesopotamia has done as much to save the Empire as any other. Had we not invaded the place, or had we been pushed out, there would have been a devil of a war out there. As it happened, we forced in a strong wedge between Turkish aggression and certain other intrigue, and nipped the "*bundo bust*" (plot) in the bud, so that it was "bound to bust." (Couldn't resist it !)

However, the home papers, as a rule, were good reading, and, in fact, the only reading we had. We particularly liked the little bits which told us what people there were saying and doing. Some of the stories were delightful, especially the one about Lord Kitchener and the taxicabs, which, whether true or not, pleased us extremely.

Someone suggested putting an advertisement in *Country Life* about our hospital—something after this style :

FOR SALE or TO LET in MESOPOTAMIA.—Charming country residence—eight rooms and usual offices—faces the river. Fishing, shooting, and boats to all parts—hot and cold water (first, out of the river ; second, in the river), " wall " garden (the only garden

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is the remains of an old mud wall). A charming sunny spot, and a regular (ill) health resort—14 acres—more could be arranged for, if required, up to any limit, not exceeding 100 square miles.

We used to read and hear a great deal about submarines and the gentle art of catching them, also about aircraft in France and elsewhere, but for information about our aeroplanes we had to rely on local sources. It was said that two machines were condemned in France as useless, purchased by a native prince, and sent to Mesopotamia—where they remained still useless! The men who went up in them risked their lives every time. One machine invariably came down in the wrong place—engine trouble—and twice put his pilot in a precarious position, once in the desert. He was luckily missed by the other machine, who went to look for him, found him, and returned to get one of the few spares they had, with which they mended the thing and got back. The second time he came down in the water near Nasriyeh, but was again luckily spotted by a boat.

This sort of thing ought to have been impossible after nearly a year of war! Aeroplanes are now as much an integral part of a

force as boots are part of one's uniform ; but it seemed almost as if everything was done on the cheap and nasty or the charity system out there. Hospitals eventually got electric fans, also a fleet of motor-boats for Red Cross purposes (without spares, so they lay a long time in a creek awaiting necessary parts) ; all these were charity.

Of actual war news there was very little at that time. We heard of an outbreak at Bushire and the death of two officers. The rising was apparently engineered by Wassmuss, the German Consul there, and carried out with the aid of German gold.

It was the same man, Wassmuss, who had planned the murder there, some months before, of all English men, women and children, and who escaped, after capture, an adventure which reads like fable. He seems to have got clear of his guards somewhere about midnight, and then made off for Shiraz on foot. He had gone fifty miles before he got a mount, and actually kept ahead of a pursuing party consisting of a political officer and a few Indian Sowars, who started at daybreak on his track. The German made for his own consulate at Shiraz whilst the

Britisher went to the post-office, arriving there only a very short time after the fugitive. The two, pursuer and pursued, glared at one another across the road, until the German commenced to raise a hue and cry after the political officer, who had to beat a hasty retreat, as the German following in Shiraz is in a large majority.

At last I was able to get about again, but going out was a doubtful pleasure. The wind was perfectly appalling; people in England cannot imagine what it was like. It blew half a hurricane all day, and walking a hundred yards in it was quite a painful process. The air was so hot that it seemed to shrivel one's flesh off one's bones; it was quite as hot as putting one's face six inches from the bars of a good kitchen fire with the grate open, and I believe one could have made toast in the sun! While I was waiting for a boat I made a cool dug-out, a hole in the ground, seven feet deep, eight feet wide, and fifteen feet long. It was roofed over and had lots of mud on the top, and steps down to it. The temperature inside was not much over 109°, whilst in the shade of a tent it was about twenty degrees hotter. I managed to get it below a hundred



with the aid of a *tatty* arrangement I fixed up, plus a *punkah* with a wet towel in it ; still, one perspired most exceedingly.

I arrived at Basra on July 23rd. It was really too hot to do anything. I could never have believed a place could be so abominable ! For several days we had a temperature of 117° in the shade and a wet bulb of 98°, *i.e.*, almost complete saturation. Everyone was simply gasping, even under an electric fan. Playing bridge after dinner, the sweat ran off my bare elbows to the floor. I was wearing shorts, a thin pugri cloth shirt, sleeves turned up, and no collar, and my shirt and trousers were dark with wet, which soaked through everything, including the chair.

I found the place chock-a-block with sick, and no transport ship to take them back to India. The service was totally inadequate, and the Government evidently considered it too expensive to hire more boats. So the sick had to wait for the *Madras* to go to Bombay and return. As she only carried five hundred, and took at least fifteen days there and back, and as the sick were then coming in at the rate of about five hundred a day, one can perhaps imagine the state of the hospital !

The desert hospital was another sweet touch. Quite early in the campaign it was pointed out that if troops were to be put there, there must be a water supply. "Oh, dear no, *much* too expensive; fetch the water from the creek near by!" This, in spite of previous orders to the effect that anyone drinking this particular water was to be severely punished! Sick men were pushed out there with no water laid on, and it was called "the little hot house in the heat." It was, indeed, perfectly marvellous how we managed to live as we did from hand to mouth. If the British public had only known what the poor devils out there were going through! Hospitals crowded (Indian Government suggested putting twenty in each E. P. tent; much too expensive to build huts); temperature a perfect dream, little or no ice (in field hospitals *no* ice), few medicines, no filtering arrangements, no water laid on, no hospital diet—in fact, compared with France, absolutely damnable!

The dates were nearly ripe, and the palms quite a sight with their burden of fruit. They really are wonderful producers; about two maunds (160 lbs.) a tree is the average, I

should think, and there are thousands and thousands of them. The revenue from dates should be enormous in future years, if properly managed, and taken over by the Colonial Office; parsimonious ways of doing things might ruin everything.

There were men at Basra who had not long been out from home, and one gathered that people were particularly optimistic about the length of the war. The great question seemed to be that of shells. The Dardanelles were still a hard nut, and there again it was a matter of ammunition; we heard that gun fire was restricted to six rounds per gun per day to accumulate stores for future use. An officer just returned from France told us that there was a great dearth of the man of thirty to thirty-five years of age, who is so frightfully important to the Service. He said there were only youths and old men there, so we supposed that the country was working up for conscription in some form; not before time! He also told us of the latest form of German enterprise—asphyxiating bombs and shells, and we hoped that at last reprisals were to be taken. Russia seemed to be in certain difficulties, but was wiping a good number

of Germans out, although probably hindered as we were by lack of ammunition. The Japanese artillery were said to be fighting with her armies, and they had also sent over a large number of artillery instructors to Russia to teach gunnery to the Russians.

There was trouble again in Bushire, and I heard that we were almost certain to be going to Baghdad in the cold weather, and that river gunboats and further reinforcements were on the way out.

There was just a chance that I should still be in it, and I applied for, and got, a month's leave to India, in the hope that the voyage would put me right again; I had to get some kit, but *anything* was a small price to pay to get out of that "place in the sun"; it was too hot even to invent a Hymn of Hate to it!

## CHAPTER X

**B**Y the beginning of August I was back again in Bombay, and very glad to escape from Mesopotamian discomforts for a breathing space. We had dreadful weather going over; the ship was ten feet out of water—*i.e.*, above its proper level—as we were in ballast, and we rolled and rolled. Our record roll was  $30^{\circ}$  one side and  $25^{\circ}$  the other— $55^{\circ}$  in full. I don't think she could have stood many more degrees without turning turtle altogether. We endured this, plus terrific heat, from July 26th to July 29th in the Persian Gulf, boiled alive, and were rolled to bits from that onwards to August 3rd.

On my arrival I heard that the Indian Transport had gained a splendid reputation at Cape Hellas, particularly the — M. C., who had received six Indian Distinguished Service Orders. I fear that the Indian Government will not be so lavish with their decorations and honours for the Persian Gulf,

as every I.D.S.O. given means five rupees per annum (six-and-eightpence), and it might mount to quite a considerable sum, and be an extra expense to the State. (See *Pall Mall Gazette*, November 24th, 1916.)

I spent a very jolly three weeks in India, most of it up in the hills, and ran across a good many old friends, including several who had been out in Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf. The country seemed to be keeping up its reputation in the way of sickness, and I heard that even General G—— had gone sick, much to his chagrin, as he is considered the hardest man in the Service, and had never been sick in his life before. I was also told that the Mahrattas in the Persian Gulf had done better than most native regiments. If a fatigue party was wanted, they were always the men for the job, and did so extraordinarily well in the field, that even Tommy Atkins had nothing to grouse about, and patted them on the back in gratified astonishment. On reaching Bombay again I found Colonel T—— there, about whom an amusing story was told me.

It appears that he and three other colonels were ordered to return to India over a sort

of tragic comedy. They were ordered to attack a place, and sent the reply back that the men couldn't do it, as they were "cooked" (they had been marching over sand for most of the day and were done up). The answer was: "It is inconceivable that the cooking arrangements of Indians should be allowed to interfere with military operations." One can only think that the Staff must have read the signal as "men cooking," instead of "men cooked."

In September I was back again at Basra, and was immediately ordered to proceed to Ahwaz! I was frightfully disappointed, as the order had been issued for nearly everything to move Baghdadwards. However, I consoled myself with the thought that it would be cool there, and that in one's spare moments one would be able to get good fishing and a certain amount of shooting. I took my gun and rods along, so that I should have some consolation whilst all the rest were trekking off to Baghdad. Someone had to be left there, and I happened to be that someone; still, I felt that the only suitable word begun with either a "b" or "d."

We had a long tiring journey, taking five

days, one of which was spent stuck on a sandbank. The weather was not so hot as it had been when I left there in July; still, crowded as we were on an iron barge, hemmed in on all sides by sepoys, it was about the most uncomfortable type of journey I have ever performed.

Life on a barge is not conducive to high spirits or much talk; still, we saw some duck, and I shot two and caught four fish at one of the halts. I was told that shark fishing was the chief pastime there, and that young shark fried is excellent eating. I was under the impression that sharks preferred something savoury, but it appears that they go for small fish alive or dead or spun as for Mahseer.

I arrived in Ahwaz just in time to see the Cavalry Brigade march out; we saw them en route across the desert, bound for Basra and the Tigris column. Their exit from Ahwaz reduced the size of the garrison there considerably, of course, and cleared out nearly all the mule transport. The *grand finale* of the camels who took one regiment to Ahwaz was somewhat sad. They were taken out in batches to a distance of six or eight miles from camp and destroyed. Ahwaz was



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then encircled by a strong line of outer defences in the shape of dead camels. They provided food for many jackals and wolves, and their remains were afterwards dried up and mummified by the heat of the sun.

I found that, as I expected, the arrangements for a further advance against the Turks concentrating at Kut had been commenced immediately after the battle of Nasriyeh. A force, under General Townshend, moved up from Amara to Ali-al-Gharbi during August and the beginning of September. Owing to the state of the river, which at this season of the year is at its lowest, the passage of troops and supplies up stream was necessarily slow ; but in spite of this and the almost unbearable heat, the Division was concentrated about September 10th. On September 12th the force commenced to move from Ali-al-Gharbi towards Kut, distant approximately seventy miles ; where the Turkish force under Nur-ed-Din Pasha was known to have been collecting and reorganizing for the past two months, and was believed to be numerically about twice as strong as the British force marching to attack it.

Kut is a small town at the southern end of

a loop in the Tigris river, about two hundred and fifty miles from Baghdad by river and ninety miles by road. From Amara it is about a hundred and forty miles by river, so that Ali-al-Gharbi is roughly half-way. From Baghdad the direction of the river Tigris, as far as Kut, is south-east; at Kut the Shatt-el-Hai takes off, running south for about a hundred and twenty miles, where it joins the Euphrates near Nasriyeh. The existence of this ancient canal is probably the cause of the loop in the river at Kut, for the river itself changes direction to the north-east for some twenty-five miles as the crow flies as far as Orah, whence it resumes its former direction, viz., south-east as far as Ali-al-Gharbi. The loop of Kut is thus on a north and south line, being nearly two miles deep and about half as wide at its northern or open end.

General Townshend found the Turks entrenched astride the Tigris on September 26th. They apparently had one division on either bank of the river, reserves behind, and a bridge communicating with either bank close in rear of their main position. The extent of the Turkish trenches was about eight miles,

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principally on the northern bank and about five miles east of Kut.

The position was naturally strong, being along the only rising ground in the vicinity (later known as Dujaila and the Es Sim position). The portion south of the river lay along the raised banks of an ancient canal, which standing out of the flat desert appeared like a high sand-ridge, or natural fortification. The northern portion across the river rested between river and marsh, having near the river many natural mounds which were occupied and elaborately entrenched by the Turkish forces; further, the whole was protected by barbed-wire entanglements and other ingenious devices. Viewing the position either in nature or on a map, one would have concluded that the position might possibly be turned from the south, but that the existence of the marsh on the north rendered the Turkish left safe from an enveloping movement.

We may never know whether Nur-ed-Din, the Turkish commander, had also arrived at a similar conclusion, but it is probable from the plan of attack of the British force that the General in command expected him to do so.

On September 27th the British advanced along both banks of the river, their main force being on the south bank. To deceive the enemy, it was made to appear that an attack in earnest was to be launched on this bank, to meet which the Turks transferred troops across the river from north to south.

Meanwhile those on the northern bank had approached as near as possible to the enemy, and had eventually entrenched themselves about a mile and a half from his position.

During the night of September 27th-28th, the main body of the British force, consisting of two brigades, was transferred across the river on a hastily and secretly constructed bridge to the northern bank, where, making a wide *détour* and marching through the night, they fell upon the enemy's left flank on the morning of September 28th. The troops left on the south bank and the original force on the northern bank meanwhile endeavoured to pin the Turks in front of them to their position.

The attack on the Turkish left was completely successful, and shortly after noon the left of the Turkish position was in our hands. Turkish reserves were soon afterwards sighted

coming from the direction of the Turkish bridge at Magasis. In spite of the long fatiguing night march, the want of water, the dust, and the terrible heat of the day through which the battle had been fought, the troops of General Delamain's Brigade made a brilliant attack against the newcomers and completely routed them. Only the dusk, followed shortly by darkness, saved the enemy from annihilation. During the night the Turks evacuated the whole of their positions on both banks and retreated up stream, leaving over a thousand prisoners and fourteen guns in our hands. Our losses in killed and wounded amounted to twelve hundred and thirty-three of all ranks, whilst inclusive of prisoners the Turks lost over four thousand men.

I must add that the Army throughout these operations was most nobly and ably supported by the Navy; the attempt of the *Comet* to force the boom under a terrific fire ending in the death of its gallant commander.

Shortly after my arrival in Ahwaz some refugees came in from Ispahan, among them a Rissaldar who belonged to the same clan as my native adjutant. He had just been

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given the Order of Merit for his work in Ispahan, and he informed me that there were hundreds of Germans in Persia trying to stir up the Persians; and that two caravans of them had recently gone into Afghanistan, where they were promptly interned by the Amir. (*Vide* article in the *Morning Post*, November 30th, 1916.)

The refugees told us that Ispahan is no hotter than England, that there is very little rain, and that the fruit is wonderful—peaches, plums, nectarines, grapes, oranges, melons, apples, pears and every sort of fruit in great quantities following one after the other throughout the year. They found Ahwaz very hot, even while we were congratulating ourselves on the nice cool weather.

I was thankful that I had taken my rod and guns with me, as I was often able to get a few birds, enough to keep myself supplied and send some to other messes; we were only fifteen white men in camp, of whom three were not officers. I usually went out with — Shah quite early on horseback, and got back about 11.30. After reaching home, if there was nothing else to do, I retired in pyjamas to my bedroom dug-out and



The Hospital Ship "Erinpura."

[To face p. 128.]



Shipping on the Tigris at Kurna.



Hospital Barges at Basra.



A Hospital Ship on the Tigris.



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read under the punkah until 2 p.m., when Solomon brought me a cup of soup and a milk pudding as tiffin. At four I bathed, had tea, and went out fishing till dark. I hardly ever caught anything; still, it passed the time. One morning I fished instead of shooting, and caught a fifteen-pound shark, a real man-eating one, and he gave me quite a lot of fun on my big rod. I dined at eight and went to bed at nine or before. Next day same routine all over again.

I hope if I have ever to spend another hot weather in that country it may be somewhere other than at Ahwaz! I could see miles and miles of mud from the hut door, not a bit of green or a tree anywhere, and the same old gale blowing all the time, filling the atmosphere with dry gritty sand, which smothered everything.

Amara would have been preferable; there it was hot, but quite a nice place, and fairly cool compared with Ahwaz. By the way, "Amara" means the "Garden of tears," and is supposed to be the place where Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden. Eve wept copiously as she went, and the tears grew into a tree with hard berries on it; the berries

are now known as "Eve's tears." I don't vouch for this statement, and I should say that you could get "Eve's tears" in a good many parts of the country. Anyhow, it is no place for Eves, and she ought to have been pleased to get away.

I had very little work to do and the days sometimes dragged terribly. We seemed to have been side-tracked with a vengeance; we knew nothing, saw nothing and did nothing all day and every day, and if it had gone on for very long I think we should have all become raving lunatics. Even the postal authorities seemed to have forgotten us, although we heard that they were trying to give us a regular post once a week, and had purchased a sixty-horse-power motor-boat for the purpose. But it could not start running, as there was no postmaster to take over the job our end. We supposed that he would be sent from India—some day.

Letters and papers were such a boon, too, even in the erratic way in which they fetched up there, and I don't know what we should have done without them. I say "we," as our papers went all round the camp; we were badly in want of literature, and read any

blessed thing that came along. We tried to pass away the time with *shikar* (sport) of sorts, and as we were running out of cartridges, we joined all the horse-nets (which I had sent out from India to keep flies off the ponies) together, and made a huge net to catch sandgrouse, but he is a very difficult bird to fool and more often than not he had the laugh of us.

Another type of *shikhar* was *houbara*, a bustard of sorts, which is called wild turkey locally, and even in some gazetteers I have seen; it is very good eating. There were hundreds of them there, but they always got up three or four hundred yards away from one, so we decided to try falconry. We had no falcons, but there were a lot about; and as my Jemadar Adjutant was a falconer, and we had also a man who could make nets, we issued orders for a fine net to be made out of thread, and looked forward to catching hawks and falcons, and training them for *shikar* fater *houbara* and duck, and perhaps geese. Duck and geese came over the camp in thousands, but always too high for a shot, and they settled miles and miles away; *houbara* were found all round the camp.

The place rather reminded me of Cutch Bhuj in the multitude of game, the want of trees, and the general desolation ; but there we had a river, whilst Cutch is waterless, and Ahwaz is far hotter in summer and much colder in winter. The sand desert all round causes an extraordinary drop in temperature at night, about fifty degrees in summer and forty in winter, and it is to this, among other things, that men have to become acclimatized. One can well understand that such exaggerated climatic conditions as obtain in Mesopotamia make it essentially a land where the "survival of the fittest" is Nature's law.

## CHAPTER XI

**E**ARLY in November I began to build a hot-weather house, in case we should have to spend another summer in Ahwaz. Really, I do not know how any of us had lived through the previous one. I had tried to exist in a forty-pound tent, and, when that failed, in a rabbit hole so low that I could not even stand upright. We had crawled into the most appalling places for shelter, yet it was so hot that one had not the energy to build anything better; we just managed with what there was. But I was determined that if it was not to be my luck to move with the others to Baghdad, I would at least make myself as comfortable as possible under the circumstances; and as I am a fairly old hand at fixing up a camp, I decided to start preparations before the weather made work impossible. However, I was prepared to lay odds that I should be moved as soon as ever my palace was built!

My hawking idea had caught on, and most of us went netting and hawking crazy; we made nets all day and tried to learn the gentle art of catching things. Our first effort resulted in a noble bag of one merlin and two pigeons belonging to the Sheikh of Ahwaz, which had flown over from the other side of the river after our grain. They were put in a box to be used as bait on another occasion, and the little hawk began his training at once, hoping to be a good and useful bird in about a month. After this we netted some nearly every day, and our flock grew apace. I had two *troomptas*, or merlins, and one *baasha*. The former are lovely birds—light blue heads and tails, big brown eyes, reddish dove-colour on back and wings, with a few dark spots here and there, black tips to the wings, and a black bar across the end of the tail; under the wings snow-leopard colour with spots. The *baasha* is all over dark brown, with black spots, a black bar on the tail, and black tips to his wings—a very handsome bird. The *troompta* was a bit hare-brained, but the *baasha* was a good hawk, and was considered one of our best. They were both small, about the size of a dove,

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and two feet three inches across the wings. I daily hoped to catch a peregrine, as I had seen one or two; they, of course, are the *crème de la crème*.

Before the end of the month I had collected five hawks, which kept me fairly occupied. The first bird trained quite well, and soon began to come to me when I called him and showed him a piece of meat, but he seemed unable to grasp the idea that when he was thrown off the hand he was expected to catch something. He seemed to feel that his job consisted of performing a few evolutions in the air, waiting till he was called back and then returning to be fed again. It was all very interesting and quite pretty to watch them at work, and it seemed strange to me that a wild hawk could be trained in a fortnight, while it is practically impossible to tame a common or garden small bird. I think it proves that the hawk has more brains than most other birds. Ours were certainly most extraordinarily intelligent; they would spot a piece of meat in our hands from quite a long distance, and, what is more, would almost from the first come and fetch it if it was held out to them.

We managed to pass the time fairly well, but envied those in France; anyhow, they were in a civilized country! Still, it was no use wishing; we had to stay and stick it out, and I am a great believer in making oneself as comfortable as circumstances will permit and accommodating oneself to one's surroundings. I also believe in thoroughly occupying one's mind somehow or other, to take one's thoughts off present discomforts.

On the whole we kept pretty fit, and I am thankful to say that my old native cook Solomon kept fit too; what I should have done without him I don't know. He and my orderly went to India and back with me, and I also brought back a *syce* (groom), who turned out very well in spite of a bad beginning, having got drunk the first day out of Bombay. In Ahwaz he could get nothing to drink, and as he had no other means of spending his money and no relations in India to send it to, I insisted on his saving it; he got quite keen on the idea, and looked forward to a tremendous bust when he should be back home again.

I asked the Colonel of the — to tea one day, and we had queen cakes (most excel-



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lently made by Solomon), scones all hot and buttered, anchovy egg *sandbeefs*, as the native servants call them, a few biscuits, tea, milk and sugar. The colonel was surprised at the excellence of the tea and at the smartness of the crockery, purchased in the local bazaars for four annas a plate, and, needless to say, German ware !

The weather kept moderately cool, but the flies were simply awful. I can describe mud and water and climate, but the flies fairly beat me ; they don't do what they are supposed to do, either. I read a medical article on flies which said : " They will not go into the shade or into dark places ; they like the sun." Now the Mesopotamian fly invades the shady places in summer, because the sun is too hot, and enters dark and cosy corners in winter, because the wind is too cold ; and, to add to both these insults, he bites and injures.

The mails, few and scanty as they were, were our only consolation, and every paper was carefully read, I think twice over, by each of us. We should have been glad, however, to know a great many things that were not published : amongst others, the exact meaning

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of Lord Kitchener's mission to Greece, and what our old friend Winston Churchill was doing. I fancy he is the only Cabinet Minister that has ever fired a shot from a trench at an enemy ; also, he is the first Cabinet Minister to go direct from the Cabinet to his regiment, and take up his duties in the field. More than that, he is the first Boss of the Navy that has belonged to the Army ; we wondered what the next phase would be.

When the Mesopotamian honours came out, we discovered that poor V—, who had been killed some time before, had been given the Military Cross for Shaiba. I believe he did excellently and fully deserved it. He was a peculiar chap, and his peculiarity seemed to have bred a personal callousness quite unusual. He apparently did not know either what danger or fear was, and I have heard stories of his going into a cave after a wounded bear, armed only with a hog spear.

I also saw in the illustrated papers a photograph of Lieut.-Colonel L—, who had been killed. He was in my term and in my company at Sandhurst, and had evidently soared above me ; still, I was kicking and he was not, and I did not feel I wanted to change

places with him. Sometimes the mails brought one paper only, on which we had to exist for a week; and occasionally a ship went down and we had nothing at all for a fortnight. But there were other mails that fully compensated us, and I shall ever remember the glad day when my new breeches arrived from home. I had been reduced to the last extremity, and opened the parcel trembling with joyous expectation, and lost no time in trying them on. How to describe them I hardly know. They were nice and warm, but no one would ever accuse them of being riding breeches made to order. I never made out exactly where the knee was supposed to be; they were the same size from three inches above the knee-place down to the ends. The front brace buttons were almost round to my back, the buckle behind came at the end of my spine, and I sat on the hip (so-called) pocket. The front pockets were down the sides, and the side seams ran almost down the back of my leg. I had not a pair of braces long enough to reach the buttons, and there was no place for a belt. Altogether they were not what one would call a complete success, and I doubt whether I could have

ridden a mile in them without having to retire to hospital with sore knees. A sad disappointment!

There was also a war gift box for the men, and I was able to divide amongst my three hundred transport drivers, etc., thirty shirts, thirty pairs of socks, ten pyjama suits, a few blocks of writing paper, and some tins of (useless) dubbing. I do not believe people at home have any idea as to what constitutes a mule corps.

One Sunday I had a picnic party on the other side of the river in the old ruins. There were three of us; we each took two or three men with spades and picks, and Solomon provided breakfast. We started at 8 a.m.; it was too *wosty* for words, in spite of the brilliant sun. We crossed the river and walked the mile to the ruins, arriving at about 9.30, and there we dug till about 4 p.m., and found nothing worth mentioning; still, the place in itself is interesting, and was well worth the visit. It is about four or five miles round, and is exactly like a sponge from the holes dug by Arabs in search of stone. Its name is unknown even to old residents.

Imagine, then, a huge sponge set down in a desert, the height of the highest portion above the level being about seventy feet, and the whole mound representing the building and destruction, and rebuilding and again destruction, of numbers of towns. One climbs the "sponge," and takes one's choice of holes, and then starts to dig. The hole may go anything from six to forty feet down, and the dust one digs in is like tobacco ash. I was simply smothered. How old the place is I should hardly like to say, but one can see layer on layer of débris going down to any depth. The biggest hole was about fifty feet deep and thirty feet across, and there were huge blocks of cut stone at the bottom, whilst the sides showed layers and layers of stone and broken pottery! The amount of the latter is perfectly astounding! Below it are bricks, below the bricks more pottery, below this again more stone. The Arabs have dug out sufficient stone to build Nasrie and Ahwaz, and there is still any amount left. The question arises—how big was the old town? It must have been about one mile wide on the bank of the river, and about three or four miles long; but, from other mounds around,

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it had suburbs extending out four or five miles from the central city. It had a fine dam across the river, and canals in all directions.

Regarding the size of the stones, most appeared to be two feet long, and six inches square at the ends; but there were huge pillars of stone, built of pieces about the size of a mill-stone—say, three feet across and one foot thick. These are taken in dozens by the Arabs for use as grindstones, I suppose, although they are for the most part made of limestone. In one place we dug we came across the walls of a house twenty feet underground, composed of stones on the inside, with a three-inch plaster of mortar on the outside, just like a modern house. We dug up heaps of bits of glass, and I got three-quarters of an ordinary saucer-lamp of blue-glazed earthenware. The china we found is pure white, very finely glazed, and almost eggshell, whilst the ordinary pottery work was mostly glazed and pictured and patterned. We could not, however, find a whole piece, in spite of the enormous amount of débris. It almost seems as if some giant had gathered together all the pottery in the world, smashed it all up, carried it up to the clouds

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in a balloon, and poured it on the desert from a height of ten thousand feet; then to make sure that everything was thoroughly smashed, he threw a town about the size of Westgate on the top of the lot, and covered it with ashes from a Burma cheroot, which he was smoking at the time. The latter was done on purpose to prevent people from digging, as the ash gets up the nose, fills the eyes and ears, and almost prevents people from breathing.

The following Sunday I made another pilgrimage to the buried city to look at the ancient tombs. It is evident that the place is of immense antiquity, not only from the tombs and the state they are in, but from the quantities of black pottery, bits and pieces, which is the first type of earthenware ever made, and dates from about 10,000 B.C.

The tombs are all rock-hewn, some of them a coffin-shaped cavity, over which a stone was placed; others are caves, inverted-saucer shaped, with a rectangular entrance-hole. Round the entrance-hole are marks of the chiselling of a bevel, into which the sealing stone was cemented. After seeing these tombs, it is easy to understand the "sealing" and

“rolling away” of the sepulchre stone mentioned in the Bible.

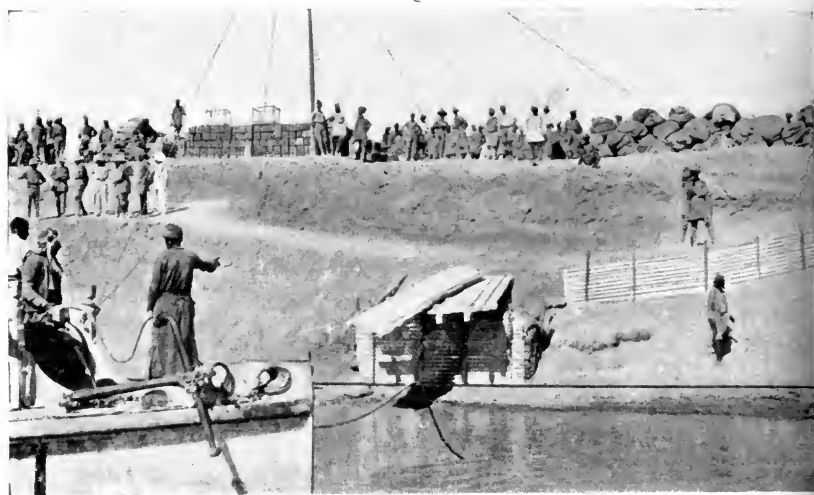
This method of burial is very ancient, and was the mode generally adopted by the Syrians. The “saucer-shape” of the tombs is rather interesting, seeing that the old superstition of the country (3,000 B.C.) regarding the next world was that it was dark and shaped like an inverted saucer. The age of these graves can only be widely guessed at. There is a range of sandstone rock which at some remote period must have been pushed up by an earthquake, but must have been at one time larger and less steep on the right-hand side, as the tombs are dug all along it. Most of them have broken away from the main hill through erosion, and bits of the monuments, rock tombs and débris lie at the foot of it. The left side of the main hill had carved steps leading to the lines of sepulchres cut in the rock.

I went over several times afterwards with my spade and bucket to have a dig among the tombstones; but as all the tombs have been rifled by Arabs for many centuries, I never found anything of value or importance, although things have been found, such as

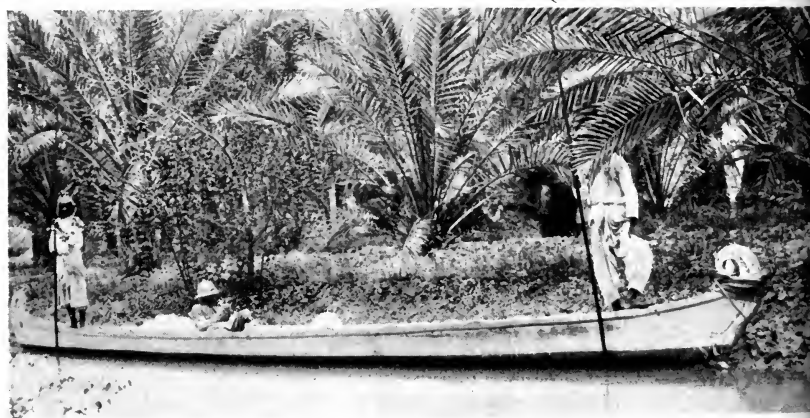




Taking the Sick and Wounded on board at Amara.



A Boat arriving at Ahwaz.



Under the Shade of the Palms.

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coins, signet rings, bits of pottery, etc., and I might have been lucky.

It was the custom of these ancient people to send their dead off ready provided for the next world ; they had to have food, money, weapons, and, if rich, slaves and horses to set them up in their next life ; all live things required by the dead man were buried alive with him. The Arabs knew these customs and dug for hidden treasure, which they usually found, melting down the gold for their own use. Nowadays they are wiser, and any gold coins found are brought to the white man, who pays about ten times the intrinsic value of the metal for them. I believe that the French have all the archæological concessions in the country.

Week after week passed by ; the temperature began to rise, and it looked as if, after all, we were to swelter there during the hot weather. We had very little news of what was going on around us ; plenty of rumours, but nothing definite, and it was extremely tedious, not to say utterly boring, waiting there day after day with nothing to do and nothing to think about. My house was a hobby, and the furnishing of it occupied me

for many cheery hours. With a little ingenuity and a stack of old boxes from the depot I expected to make it very comfortable in time. But I felt, as we all did, that killing time was a poor way to get on with our job in Mesopotamia; the road to Baghdad was still open, and we positively yearned to join up with the forces who were on the way to that city of blessed memory. However, it was no use grouching; our part was to stay where we were put and wait till we were wanted. We could certainly feel that we had done a fair share of the preparations necessary for the advance; no transport ever worked harder than we had done for over a year, and if there were no reinforcements to take along at that time, it was not (I am thankful to say it) due to any fault of ours.

As the weather grew hotter, we discovered yet another Mesopotamian evil—the sand-fly. In India he gives you *dengue* fever, but there he puts his nose into you and, the doctors say, lays his eggs.

“Walk up, gentlemen, walk up, and see the wunnerful beast wot produces eggs out of ’is trunk!”

Anyhow, where he bites he leaves his mark,

and nothing seems to cure it. Antiseptics and iodine only irritate and make it worse; the microbes or eggs bore down deeper, and nothing seems to kill them.

The mark is about the size of a mosquito bite, but pink-coloured, with a scab on it. Inside the pink spot are microbes, and if you put on *the* thing, viz., an oiled silk compress of salt and water, it removes the scab, and you find you have a hole about as big as half a split pea, circular and saucer-shaped; the size of it depends on how much of you the eggs have eaten.

I had three on my forehead, just by my hat-band, and three on my cheek; the former were kept open by my hat-band, and the latter I shaved off daily! The great point is to keep them open, as the microbe only eats you when the scab forms; I suppose all his other energies are occupied in scabbing. I also had one on my wrist and three on my shin, but I put them under salt and water, and soon got rid of them. The sores are a sort of first cousin to Baghdad boils, date boils and Frontier sores, and some of the officers and men were pretty bad with them. One officer could not wear a boot even after

three months' treatment, and one of my men had a dreadful hand and arm ; from elbow to knuckles it looked as if someone had taken some peculiar instrument and systematically bored round saucer-shaped holes an eighth of an inch deep, wherever he could find room.

## CHAPTER XII

**A**S to what was meantime happening up the river, the success or failure of General Townshend's expedition and the doings of our forces, we had only a very vague idea. Our first authentic news came from the *Pioneer*, in which we read that a battle had taken place near Ctesiphon. It seemed to us almost incredible that the advance force, with its limited transport arrangements, could have reached so far that it was really within thirty miles of Baghdad; but as more news gradually filtered through, the *Pioneer* was proved to be right.

The account of the battle as published was somewhat puzzling. First we had the announcement by Mr. Asquith in the House on November 2nd: "The force in Mesopotamia is within measurable distance of Baghdad." This announcement and the eulogy contained in the words, "I do not think that in the whole course of the war

there has been a series of operations more carefully contrived, more brilliantly conducted, and with better prospect of final success," were received by all with the deepest satisfaction. It was good to know that Baghdad had at last been officially stated to be our goal, although rumour had pronounced it to be such for nearly a year. Pride in our own little force, which had achieved so much that had been ignored in the English papers, and a feeling of gratitude to the Prime Minister that he had at last caused our labours and trials to be acknowledged to the world, found expression everywhere.

Following this most pleasing announcement came the memorable telegram that the British had won a brilliant victory over the Turks at Ctesiphon, capturing sixteen hundred prisoners and several guns. This was, however, quickly succeeded by another telegram, informing us all that owing to want of water, etc., the troops were unable to hold the position captured; also, that our casualties were heavy, and that General Townshend had withdrawn his force to a position lower down the river. Of course, it was easy to read between the lines, and no one was deceived into believing



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anything but that we had what is commonly termed "taken it in the neck," and were retiring as fast as our limited transport would permit.

Before describing the battle and the events which quickly followed it, I will endeavour to give some idea of the place and its surroundings, so that the position may be more clearly understood.

Ctesiphon, although not of great antiquity, has had a glorious past. It stands opposite the ruins of the historically more interesting town of Seleucia, which was founded by the Greeks and was the capital of the Tigris colony in the time of Alexander the Great. This immense city, built by Seleucius Nicator, had already captured the whole of the local commerce before Ctesiphon was built, and is generally considered to have caused the downfall of Babylon.

The city of Ctesiphon owed its foundation to Varanes, but the palace and great hall were built by Chosroes. They used to be known as the Takht-i-Khesra (throne of Chosroes), but the local name is now Suliman Pak, as it is the burial-place of this celebrity, once the barber of Mohammed.

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The glory of the place was the great hall, eighty-five feet high and seventy-two feet wide, the roof of which was decorated by the signs of the Zodiac in golden stars, whilst the entrance to the palace was ornamented by twelve wonderful marble pillars.

At the commencement of the Mohammedan era, when the Jihad was proclaimed and Arab hordes under Sa'ad marched forth to spread Islam by means of the sword, Ctesiphon and Seleucia were among the first places to which the fanatics turned their attention. Seleucia resisted their onslaughts for many months, but had to be abandoned on account of want of provisions, the Persian garrison crossing the river to Ctesiphon and taking with them all their boats and coracles. As the Arabs had no boats, and the river was swift and deep, the Persians thought they were safe, but that ever-present villain of the East, the traitor, led the Arabs across a ford. The Persians, surprised and terrified, fled, leaving the two cities and much wealth in the hands of the Arabs. Ctesiphon having been the king's palace and capital of the Persian Empire, the whole of the royal jewels were lost. This was compensated for in later years

by the looting of the Peacock Throne at Delhi by Nadir Shah. The great hall was turned into a mosque by the conquerors, and remained so for about a hundred years, whilst the palace became the seat of the Khalifate.

Ctesiphon, owing to its position on the river, had never prospered; it was originally intended by the Persian conquerors to take the place of the old Greek city Seleucia, but in this it failed, as people would not live there. The city's history, in fact, suggests the story of Fatehpur Sikri nearly a thousand years later. The Arab victors launched it on another career under the most favourable auspices; but again Destiny was against it, for within a hundred years of its conversion into a mosque Baghdad was chosen as a better site for the capital of Islam. Ctesiphon fell into decay, and its stones were transported to build the new city. The arch itself was found to be impossible to destroy and still remains a monument to its own imperial greatness. It will thus be seen how much Baghdad and Ctesiphon have in common, and what traditions the place held for the defenders.

We must not forget also that it was near here, in about 400 B.C., that Cyrus, the

Persian King, fought his great battle against Artaxerxes (Memnon) for the throne of Babylon. Cyrus was killed, his Persian and other followers either fled or deserted, leaving that historical hero Xenophon and ten thousand Greek soldiers who were in the pay of Cyrus, to fight their way back to Macedonia. The march of the Ten Thousand, commencing near Ctesiphon and ending in the vicinity of Trebizond on the Black Sea, has always been considered one of the most marvellous feats of arms the world has ever known; but, glorious as their march undoubtedly was, yet we must remember that this was probably the first recorded result of a conflict of West versus East in the Tigris Valley in which the West had not been victorious.

To resume the story of our advance and the final retirement to Kut: Almost immediately after the capture of Kut-el-Amara, on September 28th, 1915, it was decided to push on to Baghdad, ninety miles by road, and on the 21st of November the British force arrived at Lajj, on the left bank of the Tigris, about ten miles south-east of Ctesiphon and thirty miles from Baghdad. The troops had marched up both banks of the river,

followed by a slow-moving flotilla of armed launches, monitors, paddle-boats, barges and *mahelas*, which, proceeding up stream, could only creep at a snail's pace round the long curves of the river's course, the journey by river being nearly three times as long as that by road.

At Lajj it was found that the Turks had again taken up their position astride the river, almost exactly as at Kut, with the greater part of their force on the north bank. Nur-ed-Din was again in command, and information was to the effect that he had thirteen thousand regulars, thirty-eight guns, a large mass of Arabs, and was expecting heavy reinforcements shortly. It was obviously important that this force should be defeated before the arrival of reinforcements, and with this end in view General Townshend attacked the Turkish trenches in the early morning of November 22nd. As stated, these trenches were astride the river, the first position being about two miles east of the arch of Chosroes' palace and the second position parallel to it about three miles west of the ruins. The trenches faced at right angles to the river's course, approximately south-

east, and were each about nine miles in extent!

The auspices, therefore, under which the battle of Ctesiphon was fought were not favourable. On the 22nd of November, 1915, General Townshend attacked the Turkish left on very much the same plan as was followed by him at the battle of Kut-el-Amara, with the exception that his own right flank was protected by a Cavalry Brigade flung far out. The front line of Turkish trenches was quickly taken, the Turkish division holding that particular portion of trench being almost wiped out or captured. Our troops pushed across the interval between the first and second line trenches under a heavy fire from the Turkish guns and rifles, and here a fierce struggle ensued, ending in the capture of a portion of the Turkish second line. The enemy, however, brought up reinforcements, and delivered several determined counter-attacks, which our men, in spite of indomitable courage, were unable to withstand. Several Turkish guns had been captured at the first onslaught on the second line, and these changed owners many times, finally remaining in the hands of the Turks when at nightfall,

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owing to shortage of ammunition and water, we were obliged to retire to the line of trenches we had first taken. During the night the Turks showed great activity. The second day, November 23rd, was occupied by us in removing wounded and prisoners, and in consolidating the position won. The following night was spent by the Turks in fruitless attempts to turn us out of our position, each attempt costing them heavy casualties, as they attacked in mass.

The day and night of November 24th, the third day of the battle, our troops were too exhausted by want of rest and heavy fighting to do anything more than continue to remove their prisoners and wounded. Thus matters stood until the afternoon of the fourth day, November 25th, when further large reinforcements of Turkish regulars (probably from the Dardanelles), amounting, it appeared, to four divisions with cavalry, were seen to be moving down, threatening to envelop both our flanks.

With prisoners numbering over sixteen hundred and some three thousand wounded, the position for the British commander was a dangerous one. Accordingly, on the night

of the fourth day, November 25th, the Turkish trenches were evacuated, and the British force retired to its camp at Lajj, where it remained during the fifth day, November 26th, and the same night. It was obviously impossible to hold Lajj, as no reinforcements were near ; moreover, the line of communications was lengthy and most vulnerable. Therefore, on the sixth day, November 27th, the inevitable retirement began, and the force reached Umm-el-Tubal, about half-way to Kut, on November 30th.

The retirement had not been without incident, for on the 28th the *Sheitan* grounded near Aziziyeh, and on the 29th a halt was called owing to some of the other shipping having got into difficulties. The *Sheitan* I knew quite well ; she had done most excellent work in the past, but here her career ended, and her guns were transferred to the *Shusan* and *Firefly*, one a stern-wheeler and the other a small monitor.

This attempt to re-float the shipping occupied up to the evening of the 30th, during the night of which the main Turkish force came in touch with our tired troops. The following day (the eleventh day, December 1st)



the Turks attacked, but, lost so heavily that General Townshend was able to break off the action and continue his retreat.

Meanwhile the flotilla on the river was having serious trouble with the numerous sandbanks and shoals caused by the very low state of the water. The *Firefly* and the *Comet* both grounded and had to be abandoned. All ranks must have regretted the *Comet*, which had been foremost in every action that had taken place since the commencement of the campaign.

Continuing the retirement throughout the 2nd of December, the forces reached Kut on December 3rd, the thirteenth day from the beginning of the battle of Ctesiphon. Their losses had been over four thousand five hundred men, also the *Firefly*, *Comet* and *Sheitan*. The Turkish losses were presumed to have been far heavier, sixteen hundred and fifty prisoners alone having been taken into Kut by our troops.

The days between December 3rd and 6th were occupied in sending off wounded and prisoners; the cavalry were dispatched to Ali-al-Gharbi, and all boats and vessels that were not absolutely necessary were sent down

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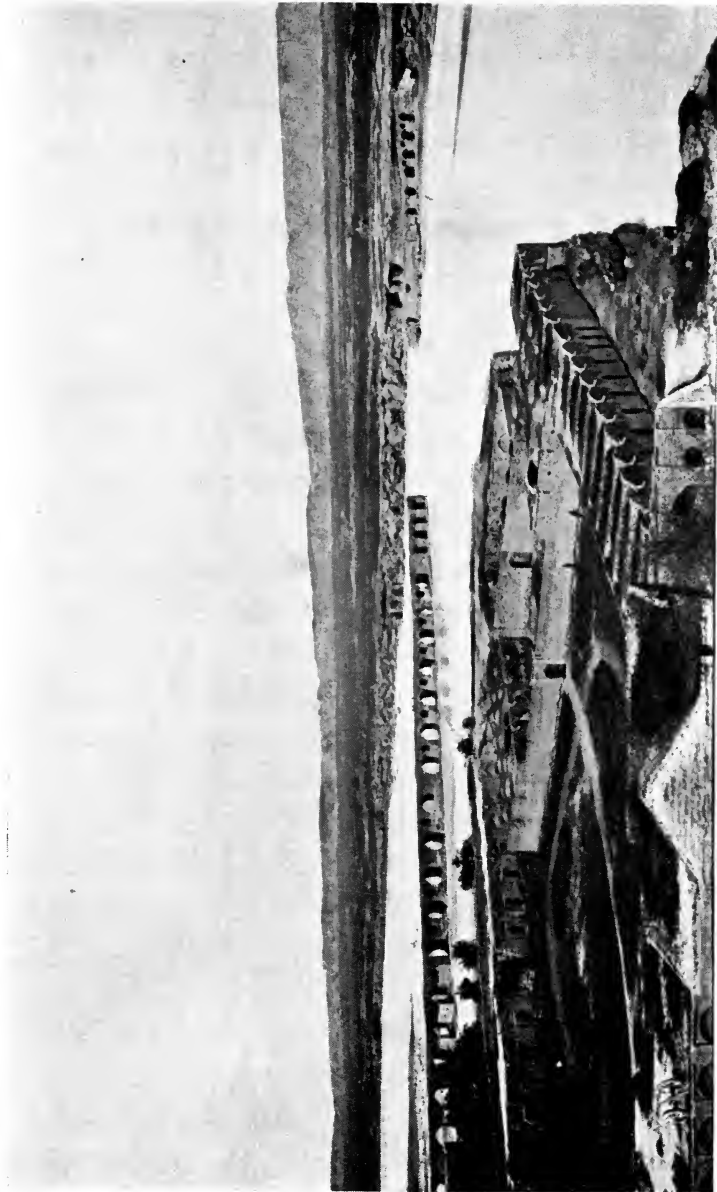
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stream. During this period General Nixon himself and his staff narrowly escaped capture by Arabs, he having been at Kut during the retirement.

On the evening of December 6th Kut was completely invested by the Turkish forces.

This, then, was the news for which we had waited so long and so anxiously! The expedition to Baghdad is typical of English methods in warfare; it seems to be one of the national characteristics to believe that an empire can be taken by a corporal's guard. I wonder how it was proposed to hold Baghdad if taken! Still, the attempt shows the right spirit, and the troops proved themselves magnificent. But in what campaign in history should we find a small force launched nearly five hundred miles from its base with practically no troops whatever to support it? One would have expected that in Kut at least they would have had large reinforcements available in case of a reverse, and, if not at Kut, most assuredly at Amara.

There were rumours that several divisions were then on their way, but they arrived, unfortunately, too late for the critical moment. The time was fast approaching when the



Shushitar : The Broken Bridge and the River through which the Mules had to swim.



Four Khans of Shushtar.



The Road to Shushtar.



Ajam Khan Bakhtiari, our Guardian at Shushtar.

[To face p. 16]

whole of the Euphrates and Tigris valley would be under water, and Kut would, on that account, be difficult to relieve. Those of us who had already been through a rainy season realized that troublous times were ahead for everyone; and, knowing the obstacles to be encountered when endeavouring to accumulate stores at any great distance from the base, we could not help wondering how many days' supplies had been collected in Kut prior to its investment!

## CHAPTER XIII

**C**HRISTMAS week came and went; we had quite a gay time, for Ahwaz, but somehow it was without the zest of the previous year. I received an officer's gift bag, from the Bombay ladies. It contained :

One toothbrush (most acceptable; mine was quite worn out).

A suit of flannel pyjamas.

A pair of khaki shorts (children's size; I am six feet two inches).

One flannel shirt (short-tailed, native type).

Two best Cawnpore lavatory towels.

One sheet of writing-paper.

One housewife, with needles, cotton, etc.

Khaki pillow-case.

One pair of short linen drawers (almost gents' size).

Two khaki handkerchiefs (ladies' size), and

A box of fifty "Three Castles" cigarettes.

Quite a nice present, really, and the pyjamas were most useful when the cold weather arrived.

Thursday was our opening day; we had just completed a tennis court, so had a tennis "At Home."

Friday we all proceeded across the river to the racecourse at 1.45, and there was a Poggie Gymkhana. All the Scotch Canadians on the oil pipe-line were in for the day. They are a fine lot of men and a pretty tough crowd; they started their merry Christmas at midday on the 24th, and were in their stride by 5 p.m. that evening. They kept going all night and were quite happy by midday on the 25th. But they didn't stay at that, for they only completed their "happy" by 9 a.m. on Sunday, when they were absolutely *hors de combat*. By Monday they were as fit as fiddles again, and out in the district—most of them alone in the desert, carrying their lives in one hand and a revolver in the other.

On Monday morning I was informed that a lot of thieves had tried to get into the camp during the night. I had heard a shot fired at 11 p.m., but nothing further. Shah, my

native adjutant, then told me that the tracks were plain for half a mile, but disappeared on the hard desert beyond. However, I determined to do a bit of tracking, and suggested going out with three or four of my men to see where the thieves had gone to. It struck me that it would be a good idea to get a few sowars (troopers) as well, so off I went to the O. C. camp. En route I met another O. C., who also was full of a tracking expedition, the thieves having made a circle round the front of the camp; so I asked him for four men to make an extended hunt. He gave them at once, the O. C. camp gave me four sowars, and off we started.

We lost the track half a mile from camp, as the thieves had separated. However, I went half a mile further, made a wide circle, and struck the trail again, a perfectly red-hot scent, and away we went. The trail was presently joined by others coming in, the concentration after the separation, and finally we were on the track of five or six men and three donkeys.

The tracks led to the east of a big mound near the river, and as we approached this mound, I saw a robber jump up and clear off



towards the desert. I galloped on to the mound, and saw that he was being followed by five others, and that there were several donkeys there as well. So I sent off two sowars to round up the six robbers, and then circled the donkeys for tracks. There were none; my trail disappeared into the donkey herd, and did not come out the other side. The obvious conclusion was that the makers of the trail were among the donkeys. So off I marched my six prisoners, and amid great rejoicings we fitted their feet into the tracks they had made. One man gave the whole show away by his feet; in fact, I might have let them go, when captured, but for this man's feet. We had noticed on two occasions previously, when thieves had robbed my men's tents and that of an officer of the —nd, taking his coat, revolver, belts, etc., that one man had a perfectly gigantic foot; it was nearly fifteen inches long, and a bare foot fifteen inches long is not usually met with.

When I cast my eagle eye on this man's tootsies, I got quite a palpitation! No two men even in Asia could have feet like that—they were huge, enormous, almost like

two sirloins of beef fitted on to heavy strong legs. He was a big, powerful man, the sort who could have broken a man's neck with his bare hands. Well, those feet decided me, and the men were taken into camp to await sentence.

That's the story of my thief-catching expedition. Now about the house. It was finished just in time for me to get in on Christmas Day, and I was most frightfully comfortable. One big room, twenty-two by sixteen, three windows, two doors, a stove, tables, carpets, matting—all that I could desire, and I prepared to settle down to a life of comparative luxury while I had the chance. It was christened the "Muttu (mud) Palace," on account both of its intrinsic beauty and the material of which it was made.

And then the bombshell came! I knew it! I would have laid any odds that I should be moved directly the place was finished. No sooner had I got nicely in than I received orders to go to Persia. I was to depart expeditiously, forthwith, as soon as possible, and report having done so—to an unknown land amongst doubtful friends, to procure an unknown number of those dear long-eared

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animals commonly called mules, which are so useful to armies. The really amusing point is that the duration of voyage was entirely unknown; ten days was suggested as a limit, but, on the other hand, hints were dropped that I might be away for three or four months. This made all the difference as to outfit. I was certainly not going to act on suggestion number one, and be caught a month afterwards, marooned in the desert with only a toothbrush and a bit of soap as baggage.

It really is rather a peculiar trait in the English character, this firing a person off into the blue, on an errand of unknown duration. I have known it happen many times, and my advice to all is: "Invariably go on a probable ten-days' tour provided with a kit sufficient for a possible three months' hard trek."

So I started to pack up my kit and make ready for another move. The hawks were allowed to fly away; I was sorry to lose them after having taken so much trouble to train them, but, on the whole, I rejoiced to think that they were free again to roam at will, lords of the air. For myself, in spite of the wrench it was to leave my cherished

house, I was delighted. There was evidently no prospect of my joining the advance on Baghdad; that part of the expedition would undoubtedly be hung up for an indefinite period, and I asked for nothing better than to adventure forth into Persia for the purchase of mules. We had several times heard that the country was very unsettled, but the British Vice-Consul, who returned from Dizful (one of the places to be visited in my search for mules), told me that it was a delightful spot, full of game, and close to 'Susa,' the oldest city known to archæology. So that with the prospect of an interesting journey and a possible scrap with the natives, I set out for an unknown country to purchase an unknown number of mules at an unknown price, from people who did not know that anyone wanted to buy.

Our caravan consisted of :

Self and another officer, Major V— and Rissaldar—Cavalry, with two horses each.

6 mules of my own corps.

24 mules of another corps.

10 Sowars—Cavalry.

15 men of my own corps.

9 men of another corps.

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A miscellaneous assortment of drivers, guards, baggage, grain, *bhusa*, tents, stores, etc., to say nothing of about a ton of money in small silver coins for the aforesaid transactions.

We left Ahwaz on Jan. 1st, 1916, at 2 p.m., and rode twenty-two miles north-west to a big *jheel* (lake) in the desert, arriving at 6 p.m., very tired and very cold. There were four of us out for a duck shoot, as a start off for the pilgrimage. That night we slept under the care of desert Arabs, who yahooped and whistled and fired off guns round our tents all night, with the result that I slept very little. The next morning we packed everything, and sent our caravan of eighteen mules due east to Bandi Qir (where we had a force), whilst we shot the *jheel*.

We had, of course, hired Arabs to pick up birds, but one must not expect an Arab to do what he does not feel inclined to. Unless he wants to pick up a bird, he will let it lie; and if you tell him to go and fetch it, he will certainly reply :

“Go yourself; it is too far for me.”

They appeared to think that they were paid to stand by, with their friends, and make

loud remarks about the shooting. I fancy that there was a certain amount of mild betting as well. The duck had been driven into one of the legs of a centipede-shaped *jheel*, and eventually they flighted back overhead into the body of the *jheel*, giving excellent shooting, each hit being welcomed by loud shouts and acclamations from the Arab onlookers.

There were swarms of duck and snipe, and we bagged sixty-five head of game by ten o'clock, when we came to the rendezvous for our cold lunch, which was to have been left there for us. Horrid surprise! Solomon had gone off with the lunch, plus a bottle of whisky belonging to one of the two others who were going back to Ahwaz. However, there were a few bottles of beer, which we drank out of the bottles, after which we said "Good-bye" to the other two, who rode off to Ahwaz, and made our way to Bandi Qir. Here we arrived at dusk after a hard ride across the desert, accompanied by a cavalcade of wild Arabs, all armed to the teeth.

Bandi Qir is at the junction of three rivers, two of which we had to cross, and it took an

hour to do so. I found on arrival that my pony, Shamrock, was standing there, shivering with cold and very wet. They had twice tried to swim her across and twice had failed; and, like the brilliant idiots some natives are, they had sent her *jhoods* (rugs) across first instead of waiting to see her over. To improve matters, they had lighted a tiny fire behind her to warm her—with a young gale blowing icy cold off the desert! However, I soon got her *jhoods* back, and set some men to rub her down with straw, and she was none the worse for her adventure. I got her across dry-shod, in a boat, next day.

That night we dined with the — Cavalry, and slept under a big tarpaulin, with a naked fire burning in the middle of the floor. I never was so nearly gassed in my life as that night by the smoke from that fire. I was asked if I would like a bath, and was shown the bath-room, a place screened off at one end of the shelter. I stripped and unsuspectingly went round the corner, stark naked, to find that I had to have my bath in the open! I had it all the same, in spite of the onlookers and the cold.

Next day off again, sixteen miles, to a place

of ill-repute in No Man's Land, called Sheikh Abbas Dowd. Here we took in quite a lot of Arab guards, and settled down for the night. Then it began to rain, and our trouble began with the rain, as the Arab, when he cannot till the land, goes off at once with a rifle on the hunt. So the rain delighted our guards, and they started a fusillade and kept it up all night, yelling and singing and shouting. One man would start gently singing, then *crescendo* gradually to a wild yell, finishing, after perhaps a quarter of an hour, by a loud "*Hamoosh!*" ("Silence!"), as if anyone but himself had made the noise. — and I slept in the same tent, with four Arab guards round it and lots of others round the camp. Unluckily the wind was from the side — was on; hence only one Arab remained his side and three came my side, and the blighters sat propped up against my bed, only a strip of cloth separating us. I was sincerely glad when morning came.

We had a breakfast of cold chicken—the lunch Solomon got away with two days previously—and during a few minutes' spell of fine weather, I photographed the sheikh of the village and his following. Then we



trekked for Shushtar, sixteen miles, and it rained the whole way, making the road so slippery that we had to go at a snail's pace. Needless to say, we were soaked when we arrived at the house of Mohammed Khan Mustapha, a Persian gentleman, with whom we took up our quarters.

His house is considered the second best in Shushtar, and is built, as all Persian houses are, primarily as a stronghold against thieves or worse, secondly for the seclusion of the harem. It occupies a favourable site on the edge of the river Shatait, close to what was once a bridge, and one enters through a strong studded door set in an arch of solid stone. A few strides through a stone fortress-like corridor, and then a sharp turn to the left, after passing a second strong gate, bring one into a stone-flagged courtyard. Facing one on the far side of the quadrangle, which is about twenty yards square, is a raised terrace, beyond which is a drop into the river-bed, protected by strong railings about ten feet high. To the right are a few rooms for hangers-on; to the left the main building for men, consisting of cook-house, a combined dining-room and drawing-room, a suite of

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bedrooms, dressing-room and the guest-chamber, which was given to us.

Beyond this block again, reached either from the outside through another strong gateway or by a corridor through the main building, are the stables and *serai*, the stables being covered horse-boxes with stabling for perhaps a dozen horses, whilst the *serai* is a quadrangular enclosure with mangers all round for baggage animals.

Beyond this *serai* is a large square block of buildings, the harem or women's apartments. Each block has two stories, beneath each of which there is the *sardab*, or cool underground room for the owners to sit in during the hot weather.

The guest-chamber was fairly comfortable, but three of us had to share it; and as we heard that two more visitors were to arrive the following day, we expected to be somewhat crowded; the room was only twenty by ten.

The town of Shushtar is of considerable antiquity and stands at the foot of the Bakhtiari hills. It has now a population of about thirty thousand, but formerly it was much above that figure; the plague of about fifty

years ago decimated the city, and it has never recovered.

The river Shatait, flowing from the north, splits into two branches at Shushtar, that to the west being the river proper, that to the east being artificial. It was known formerly as the Nahri Masrukan, and is now called the river Gargar. South of the town is another canal joining the two rivers; thus Shushtar is surrounded by water.

Almost at the point where the rivers divide, on a high rocky eminence overlooking the town, is the old Bakhtiari fort enclosing the Governor's Palace. The fort has now fallen into complete decay, although when built it must have been capable of holding several thousands of men and horses, as its walls are nearly a mile round. Running underneath the fort is a rock-hewn subterranean canal, which brings the water of the Shatait through to the town. Wells have been bored from above to reach this water, so that the garrison, at any rate, would not die of thirst. The Governor's Palace is a dreadful rabbit-warren, much in want of repair, built in terraces, the actual residence of the governor occupying the highest point, with a drop of about a

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hundred and fifty feet straight into the river.

The town of Shushtar possesses two very old bridges: One over the Shatait, broken in the middle, thus compelling all travellers on that road to swim the river, as there are no boats; and another, spanning the canal south of the town, which is still serviceable but is built uphill, so that the road passing over it forms quite a stiff gradient. The whole town is surrounded by mounds which an archæologist at a distance might take for buried cities or temples, but which, on close inspection, he would find were composed of mere filth. In fact, Shushtar is noted as being one of the most filthy of all the filthy cities of the East.

Like most Eastern towns, it looks as if it were in an advanced state of decay; no building looks entire, and the débris remains where it falls. The streets are from six to ten feet wide, and all refuse is thrown into the street; their only idea of sanitation is to empty everything in this manner, careless as to the passers-by underneath!

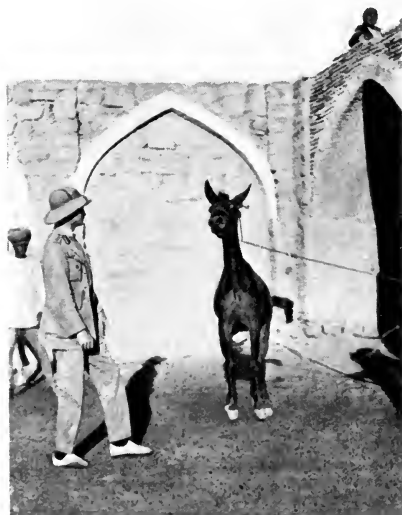
The mules there were fairly good, some excellent, but we had more trouble than I can



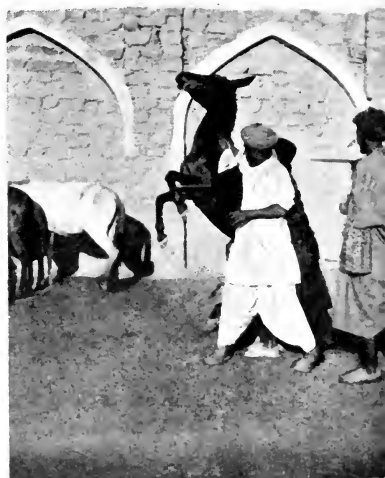
Buying Mules at Shushtar: An Owner kicking his Beast into activity.



A Mule showing his Paces.



A Passive Resister



A Conscientious Objector.

[To face p. 177.]

tell over the hired establishment. Shah and two men whom I luckily took with me had one night to feed two hundred animals, after which the whole lot broke loose, and they gave it up in despair. What could three men do against such odds?

## CHAPTER XIV

**W**E spent about a week in Shushtar, and had, on the whole, rather an enjoyable time ; at any rate it was much better than vegetating in the camp at Ahwaz. As regards news, we were not badly off, as we had a portable telephone which we could stick on to the telegraph wire. There was little to be learned about our forces in Mesopotamia, but we heard of the evacuation of the Dardanelles. To my mind, that was the only solution of the problem ; I never was much in love with the scheme of landing on a narrow peninsula known to be powerfully fortified and armed—in fact, I hardly believed it could be done until it became a fact. One had hoped that the original plan of landing on the Asiatic shore was going to be carried through, with the help of a Russian force from the north landed at Ereğli. This landing was referred to in the papers at the time, and it certainly looked as if a combined movement



were to be made. I fancy it would have got nearer to opening the Dardanelles than the ill-fated Gallipoli campaign, which is now a thing of the past. And what a difference it would have made had we succeeded in establishing a large force in occupation of Enos, with every facility for landing stores and men, and within fifty miles of the railway from Belgrade to Constantinople and Adrianople!

There were a good many things to arrange before we were actually ready to start for the wilds of the Bakhtiari hills. I had added to our caravan a large number of mules, drivers and guards, and we had to provide in all for a total of about 400 animals and 170 men. The water question was the greatest difficulty, as we should have to make a long march over a waterless desert. In talking the matter over a bright idea occurred to us, and I will here present it gratis to anyone interested in advertisements for thirst tabloids. It was nothing less than a scheme for training mules to feed on condensed and compressed food while on Field Service. I can see in my mind's eye a striking picture of neat lines of grateful and well-behaved mules about to absorb their evening meal; underneath the

picture would be the legend: "Watering mules on thirst tabloids before feeding them on malted milk tablets." What a boon it would be to the Transport! Before we left the town we managed to see something of the surrounding district, and I got some quite good photographs; some of the natives were most original. One day, as we were returning from mule inspection, we met a bevy of Persian girls with black *sarees* over their heads and long white Turkish trousers on; they looked very picturesque, and we asked them to stop and be photographed, but they would not allow us to "snap" them. The conversation was interrupted by the sudden appearance of an old woman on a house-top, waving a red shirt at us, and telling the young ladies to move on; she was surprised afterwards to hear that we only wanted to photograph them! I was rather anxious to procure a photo or two of the ladies about there; they were so pretty and their dress quite picturesque, much superior to the Arabs in Basra; but they were dreadfully shy of a white man with a camera.

On the day that we intended departing for Dizful and Susa we were stopped just

as we were starting by a wire to say that as the Arab tribes between Susa and Amara were carrying on an inter-tribal warfare, it might be dangerous to take a caravan across the desert, as we should run the risk of getting mixed up in an Arab *mêlée*. So we wired back for further instructions, and having at last been given permission to proceed, we made ready, leaving Shushtar on the afternoon of January 14th. The making ready consisted principally of engaging Persian *charwardars* for the journey; it was rather a trial of patience, but we eventually succeeded in getting sufficient men to accompany us as far as Dizful.

On the morning of the 15th we commenced crossing to the opposite side of the river Shatait, which was still somewhat swollen with the recent rain. We had purchased every bit of mule gear, picketing ropes, *jhools*, *tanafs* and *ausars* procurable in Shushtar, with a view to the outfitting of possible purchases in Dizful, so that we had loads for nearly every mule of our caravan. All this, plus our own personal kit, the whole forming a considerable pile of equipage, was taken to the nearest point of the river and ferried

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across on *killicks*—a *killick* being a raft made of inflated goat-skins, four or six skins broad and about fifteen long.

Meanwhile, all animals had to go about four miles down stream to a ford, the depth of the ford being up to our horses' shoulders.

By 2 p.m. we were all over the other side with our kit, endeavouring to settle ourselves comfortably in a most astonishing type of camping-ground close to the head of the old bridge mentioned in the previous chapter. It must be nearly a thousand years old and is, as I explained, broken in the middle. On the Shushtar side there was nothing remarkable, but on the far side the bridge takes off from a cliff of sandstone rock about fifty feet high. This cliff is hollowed out on the river beach into innumerable caves and grottos; one grotto, supported by pillars of stone left in the cutting-out process, can contain a hundred and fifty animals easily. I was told that these caves were formed for two purposes: firstly, to provide stone for the bridge; secondly, to provide shelter for the workers. Some of the excavations take the form of long underground tunnels, ten feet high, and ten feet across. In one of these we stabled about

a hundred and twenty animals, Shamrock, my pony, included. These tunnels are evidently the remains of waterways once used for turning mills, as in one or two places the remains of mills are visible. Between all the above, which represent the cliff, and the river, there is about a hundred yards of sand, and on that we camped our caravan for the night.

Then the rain started, which was a bad look-out for the morrow's march of thirty-two miles ; we had settled to try and push on to Dizful in one march instead of two. However, when the sun rose we determined to risk it, and, after many delays, eventually got away about 8 a.m., Solomon bringing up the rear of the procession.

The rain held off, but we were obliged to halt at Konak, eighteen miles from Shushtar, which we reached at 2.30. Here we camped for the night, and I went out with Major V— to have a look for something for the pot ; we managed to get three black partridge and a *sisi*. The former are bigger than the English partridge, and twice the size of the Indian variety ; they are simply glorious birds, both to look at and to eat. We got

back at dark, when the rain started again and wet all our tents. This was a nuisance, as it made all the loads considerably heavier, whilst the road was not improved either by the rain.

Next morning we again left camp at 8 a.m. for Dizful, sixteen miles off. We did a bit of shooting on the way, principally at geese, which were sitting on the fields in hundreds eating the young wheat. I have never seen so many geese, but they are not easy to get; in spite of four guns and two rifles we only succeeded in bagging one! Then the rain commenced, and we did the last four miles in a downpour, arriving at Dizful very wet and covered with mud.

The country between Shushtar and Dizful is mostly rolling downs; the road rises from Shushtar for the first two miles over shingle, up and over a small ridge, and then to Konak across the downs, which were green after the recent rain. At Konak there is a shingle water-course about a mile across, which is a torrent during wet weather, but was dry when we crossed. From Konak onwards to two miles from Dizful there are more downs, of which the part near Dizful is cultivated, while

that to the left has a belt of trees extending from Dizful for about eight miles ; these are the famous orange groves of Dizful. For the last two miles the road crosses the most extraordinary formation, exactly like asphalt, but quite natural, ten feet thick or more, and quite as hard if not harder than asphalt. Dizful is built of this material, and it forms the banks of the river Diz, being unaffected by water.

When we entered the town we had to do a pilgrimage right through to the other side to reach our bungalow. It was awful ! I can only liken it to a march through a main sewer, with this difference : that those streets had the filth of ages in them, whilst the sewer would have had that of one day at most ! It was one long swoon, and I was gassed at least five times. Shushtar streets are palatial compared with Dizful streets in the rain !

We reached the house at length, and found ourselves in a Persian bungalow perched two hundred feet above the river Diz. On arrival we were greeted by several Persians, regaled with tea, and then a wonderful meal was set before us. It was the first of the type that I had tackled ; lots of plates and dishes of

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unknown Persian food, no plates to eat off, no knives, forks or spoons, but a large Persian *chupattie* about two feet across for each of us to eat off and with. Well, we set to with hands and teeth, and I rather enjoyed the meal, which was finished off with Devonshire cream and honey; each was full of foreign matter, but that didn't prevent us doing them full justice.

The remainder of the day was taken up by visitors coming to see us, one being the Governor of the place, who hails from Teheran; his name was "The Pillar of State." The principal topic of conversation was the route to Amara. Many guides were brought in to be interviewed, some Arab, some Sagwand, or Lurs; but not one of them seemed to have any definite knowledge of the route, except that it was through Guzban's territory.

For some time after our arrival it rained solidly, and I was not able to do much buying. I got thirty-eight nice animals, but that was a mere drop in the ocean, as I had orders to buy over  $x$  more than I had already got. This meant about three months' more work.

My instructions were that as soon as a certain number had been collected they were



to be sent back under guard to Amara, by a route about which we could gain very little information. No white man had ever crossed this part of the desert, and very few Persians. It was Arab country, peopled with wild and unfriendly tribes, and it certainly looked rather like an escapade for —, who was to be in charge of the caravan. However, he started off with his cavalcade on the 20th, hoping to do the journey in three long marches and return in about ten days to take my next batch of animals. I could only hope that he would get through safely. From the account that I had afterwards I learned that the first night it pelted with rain and was horribly cold, and the Persian mule-drivers were so frozen that they all curled up in rugs and slept. Hence eleven mules were stolen on the first night from the banks of the river.

On their arrival in Susa at sun-down on the 21st — received a telegram by runner from headquarters saying that all animals were to go via Ahwaz. This meant turning south and marching direct from Susa to Ahwaz, or eighty miles in two marches across the desert. So he got on his horse and rode back to Dizful, twenty-two miles, in order to telegraph to

Basra, asking to be allowed to continue his original route, and explaining that he had already made all arrangements. He waited there till midnight for the reply, which, as it happened, gave him the necessary permission, and then left at twenty minutes past midnight, rode twenty-two miles in the dark and swam two rivers to reach his camp by daylight. The next day he continued his journey to Amara, marching forty-seven miles ; not a bad record !

The news we had from Kut-el-Amara was far from good. Our attack was apparently held up for some reason, and we were still twenty-five miles from General Townshend's force, which had been shut up there since the battle of Ctesiphon. He was said to have had three months' provisions in the camp ; but even if that were so, they would be nearly finished. It seemed at that time almost impossible to entertain the fear that he would be obliged to surrender with ten thousand men for want of food, and we could only hope for the best. There were a good many troops arriving in the country, but we had no idea where they had come from. News of all kinds was very difficult to get ; the home

papers probably knew better than we did what was going on.

For my own part, I was extremely busy, although not feeling particularly brilliant owing to a horrible two days' cold. A good many mules were brought in, and the judging and buying took many arduous hours of each day. Things went on quite smoothly until one day, just as I was starting for the *serai* (market), the owner of the house I was occupying stopped me and said that it would be wise to "wait a little."

Then the Daffadar of the guard suggested my not going down, and others said I had better put off purchasing mules for that day. So, smelling a rat, I asked why. "Well," they said, "the fact is that your Indian officer, clerk, *salutri* (vet.), one driver and the Consul's messenger have all been taken by thieves!" I am sure that anyone at that moment could have pushed me over with a bath-brick! I inquired what had happened, and was told that some of the thieves of the city had captured them en route for the *serai*, but that matters were being arranged. I thought the best thing to do was to send for all the friendly head men, and by

noon I had twenty or more of the head citizens and heads of *mohullas* in my room, all smoking my cigarettes, and jabbering to one another in a language I did not understand; the important parts were interpreted to me by the Daffadar.

The gist of the matter was that they were all very annoyed at what had happened, and were determined to bust the four gentlemen who had originated the scheme. In the middle of the palaver in walked the prisoners, Shah, Riaz Ahmed and Wassan Khan! Shah was distinctly amused at the assault; he informed me that the thieves had stolen from the party three watches, 95 *tomans* (£15 16s. 8d.), the pay of the Persian establishment which he was taking down to pay out in the *serai*, also his horse and saddle. He and the others were finally released on the demand of the Lashkari Bahadur (who was sitting by my side). My Persian friends determined on vigorous action; a peremptory order was forthwith sent for the return of all stolen property, and in about ten minutes back came the horse.

It was now nearly 1.30, and they had smoked a whole box of my cigarettes (all the

way from Bombay), so I suggested, through the medium of the Daffadar, that, as there did not seem anything more to be done *chez moi*, we should go and telephone the news abroad. So off we went to the phone, and gave the story to Shushtar, Bandi Qir and Ahwaz.

That evening I was informed that the chief of the offenders had been captured, and that one watch and half the money had been recovered. Off I went again to the phone to tell Ahwaz, and, after answering many questions as to the political situation, was eventually supplied with eight Bakhtiari guards as a further means of protection. The next day I proceeded as usual down to the *serai*, this time in real style! I might almost have been a Persian potentate, with my Bakhtiari guards all round, my own clerk, Daffadar, Shah, *syce*, *salutri* and following. I purchased quite a nice lot of mules and returned in similar state.

Later the same day I had a visit from the chief man of the city, who was quite a good sort and very pro-English. He offered me a nice house next to his own to live in, so that I should be near my work, and also to the place where most of my sowars and men were

quartered. With him was Chirag Ali Khan Lashkari Bahadur Bakhtiari, Commander-in-Chief of the Bakhtiari Army (so-called). They told me that they had captured four servants of the man imprisoned, and asked what should be done with them. Should they be punished or let go? I was loath to say anything; so, looking for a way out, I asked how they had been captured, and was told that they had thrown themselves on the mercy of the high priest, who had handed them over with a request that they might be forgiven. Here was a worse dilemma! To be on the safe side, I suggested that they should be allowed to go. My two friends said: "But why not punish them first?" Then I suggested their reporting the capture to the Bakhtiari chief (the Ilkhani), so that he might inflict a suitable punishment. "Oh, yes!" was the answer. "But why not give them your own punishment first? and then whatever the chief gives will come along as an extra!" Things began to look as if I really should have to do something, when I thought it would be a good idea to let them settle it with the Consul on the phone. Off we went at eight o'clock at night, and rang up Colonel L—,



Shush Castle from the North, showing the Excavations.



Shush Castle from the East, showing the Ancient Mounds.



Judging Mules in the Arena at Shushtar.



who had arrived that day at Ahwaz. I then introduced the two Persians to the telephone for the first time in their lives.

The first man was a *syed* and rather old and stout, but a really good chap, with a keen sense of humour. It would have made anyone laugh to have seen me clasping him round the shoulder with my right arm, and pressing the telephone receiver against his ear with the other hand, whilst the old man was shouting into the thing for all he was worth. I don't think he quite caught on at first; he apparently heard Colonel L— say "*Salaam alaikum*," and he repeated the same words in a dazed sort of way into the telephone. At the close he was frightfully taken with it, but I don't think he really quite grasped that he was actually talking to a man over a hundred miles away.

All this time the commander-in-chief was giving directions in stentorian tones from two paces in the rear, and I had to request him with one of the few Persian words I know to be silent—it is an easy word—" *Hamoosh!* "

Then the commander-in-chief took the phone, and, having seen the procedure, he gave his story like a man. The result was

that Colonel L— called me up, and said he had told them to release the men pending —'s arrival, when, if necessary, they could be caught again and punished. He asked me if I agreed, and I said it appeared to me to be the most politic thing to do under the circumstances ; so the men were released.

## CHAPTER XV

**S**HORTLY after this adventure, — arrived back from Amara, and with him — of the — Corps, and we three had a big confabulation on the situation in general, particularly as to whether it would be better to move on to Shush (Susa), or remain where we were. I was suffering from acute neuralgia, and had been in perfect misery for ten days, after which I developed a bad throat to add to my difficulties. I was almost glad that one of my men got shot through the foot by accident, or we should not have had a doctor. As it was, we had an assistant surgeon, who came up supplied with medicines of all sorts; and as I was the boss man there, he concocted a different medicine daily for me. I had about four kinds of cough mixture, none of which were of much use, and to try and relieve my head I took salicylate of soda, both in tabloids and in powder form, also a tonic; really, I was

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quite happy about the medicine question. The assistant-surgeon made me up a bottle of smelling salts in an old formamint bottle, which I carried about with me wherever I went, and sniffed whenever I got a worse go of neuralgia than usual.

After the affair of the attack and robbery, the head man of Dizful had given me the promised house in his *mohulla*. It was a large roomy place, with a big courtyard, in which I was able to purchase and tether my animals, so that everything was transacted in my own compound, a much better arrangement in every way than the previous one. Occasionally we took all the horses out for exercise, but as it meant a lot of guards, each of whom got three shillings and fourpence a day, and a good deal of extra bother for everyone, we did not venture out oftener than was absolutely necessary to keep ourselves and our animals in health. I was rather anxious to take some photographs, but could not develop the negatives, as I was short of chemicals; the water, moreover, was too muddy to use for that purpose, owing to the amount of rain we had. Water was, in fact, one of our minor troubles. When it arrived on the

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*bhisti's* (water-carrier) donkey in *mussacks* (goat-skins) from the river, it was not even fit to bathe in. We had to set it out in buckets and pans, stir powdered alum into it, let it settle, pour off the cleared liquid, boil it and set it to cool; it was quite a troublesome job.

I made a purchase of a brand-new Browning pistol with fifty rounds of ammunition, as I rather wanted a small weapon to carry about either in my pocket or in the belt under my coat, something that was not visible. My big revolver was all very well in its place on my Sam Browne belt when I was dressed up, but there one did not go about with a Sam Browne belt on at all; I usually wore *jodhpurs*, a serge coat and a muffler. One had to mix with the most appalling crowd, all very dirty, suffering from every type of disease, and crawling with insects of many kinds and sizes. All one's clothes ought to have been disinfected daily.

About the middle of February we heard that a mail was expected up with the caravan of the Imperial Bank of Persia, which was financing our operations, and was also bringing us stores and necessaries from more civilized parts. We heard also that amongst other luxuries there was some beer, which

cheered us immensely ; we were all utterly sick of drinking dirty water. On the day that they arrived, a cavalcade, consisting of self, —, two Indian officers, three cavalry sowars and four Persian sowars, attended by four mule-corps drivers on mules, sallied out to meet them. It was a great occasion.

Although we were far from the din of war, all was not exactly peace around us. One could not move outside the town without a big escort, as there were always bands of brigands numbering anything up to twenty prowling about, on the look-out for small parties or lonely travellers ; they were not bloodthirsty, but wanted warm clothes !

I have described before how they strip their captives, and it has just struck me that this would make quite a good picture :

“ THE CAPTIVE’S RETURN ” (in Persia).

One man, one topee, one pair of boots—striding towards home (a Persian house), followed by a cheering crowd.

We got our beer and our mail, both of which gladdened our hearts exceedingly ; but the war news from Mesopotamia was very depressing. Kut-el-Amara had not yet been

relieved, the food was running short, and unless help was soon forthcoming they would undoubtedly be done. The relief force was apparently doing wonders, but was short of everything and greatly hampered by the weather, a difficulty which we had, of course, foreseen long before. I don't think people at home quite realize all that our troops went through in that gruesome country. France may be hard, with its fearsome methods of killing, high explosives, gas bombs, etc.; Russia and Serbia, with all these horrors and the addition of cold, may be as terrifying; but for downright damnable misery in almost every form I put Mesopotamia easily first. Neither am I giving only my own opinion. Men who have been in France, and who afterwards were sent to Mesopotamia, have frequently told me that the fighting was infinitely worse in the East, partly owing to the difficult nature of the ground and partly to the absolute lack of cover. In addition to this, they had to contend with a river which flooded thousands of square miles at a time, a wind which blows the marrow out of your bones, intolerable heat, sand, flies, mosquitoes, and insects of every description, and last, but not

by any means least, no blessed leave to set one up for a fresh start. Even when invalided, it was not to England, with a nice comfortable hospital and all the luxuries of the season, but to India—and I need not say what sort of a picnic that is for a sick man!

No, the war news could not be said to be exactly cheering, and the withdrawal of our troops from Gallipoli had done nothing to improve matters for us; it was, in fact, about the most fatal thing that could have happened as far as we were concerned. We were extremely glad to know that they had got out of it all so well, but it released a large number of European-trained Turks much superior to anything we had previously encountered, who hurried down and arrived in Baghdad long before they were expected, with the result that we took it in the neck at Ctesiphon and afterwards in the attempted relief of Kut. It is utterly impossible nowadays, with the large forces employed, to try and capture a position which has only a limited front and an unlimited number of men to hold it, and the venture from the first had little chance of success; but, at any rate, they might have sent out four or five



divisions to Mesopotamia before withdrawing from the Dardanelles ; it took us a long time and cost us the lives of many dear gallant fellows to make up for the initial error of withdrawing from Gallipoli before we were really strong on the Mesopotamian front.

We heard that the Turks had had a bad knock at Erzerum, and also at Mush, and had in all probability lost a hundred thousand men and a large number of guns which they could ill spare ; and there was always the chance that the Russians would buck up and cut the communications of the Euphrates force north of Baghdad, in which case we should have been able to bag the whole force then opposed to us. But . . . we are always inclined to wait too long to see what the enemy is going to do ; thus he is able to make us conform to his movements ; whilst, if we landed forces at suitable places, we could upset his " bundobust " completely, and make him move armies by land all over the place—a much more difficult proceeding than moving by sea when there is only a long single line of railway by which to carry all stores, troops and everything else.

However, it is no use to argue now about

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what might have happened or should have been done, and I will get on with the modest history of my own proceedings and the events in our immediate neighbourhood.

As I have said, the mail arrived, and the beer, but my long-expected boots did not turn up. I could never have believed that boots could be such a nuisance! For nearly a year and a half I had been trying to get a suitable pair and failed every time. This mail was my last hope, as after leaving Dizful we should be altogether in the wilds. Eventually I had to take to a pair of Persian slippers, a type of footgear which is something between a deck-shoe and a bedroom slipper, their parentage probably throwing back to the Moorish fit-nothing-flip-flap which I wore as a child in Tangier. To add to the pleasures of life at that time, I heard that the high priest at Shushtar had been murdered under circumstances of deep mystery, and was quite prepared to learn that the deed had been laid to our door by some of the pro-German neutrals who infested the district. Events proved that my apprehensions were correct, as I shall explain later.

I grew perceptibly balder and greyer over

arrangements for our move to Shush: the chief difficulty was grain and fodder. I had a wire from our chief to say: "Feed the animals well, and fatten them before dispatch." Grain I could not get for love or money, and only with the greatest difficulty collected a little *bhusa* to feed the two hundred and fifty odd mules I should have whilst at Susa. I sometimes had to try to perform miracles with one bag of grain for over a hundred animals, and even had to feed them occasionally on thatching grass.

There were also certain provisions to be made against possible attack on the road, and it was with a feeling of distinct relief that I learned of the arrival of a force from Ahwaz which had been posted at Daniel's Tomb near Shush. It had, indeed, seemed more than probable that without some such assistance we should never be able to get out of Dizful. The force, however, made all the difference, and, arranging for an escort of cavalry from Shush to meet us at the aforesaid ford, we set out one Monday morning, a fine procession of horses, mules, men and baggage.

Owing to the *bhusa* not arriving the previous evening as promised, we were very

much delayed in our start, as we had to send a party round the town to collect the bags from each house. However, we managed to get off at about 10.30, and it was then that our real troubles commenced.

Our loads were large bags of *bhusa* (chopped straw), roughly seven feet by four feet, carried one bag per mule, the bag slung across the animal's back and tied to him by a rope passing over the load and under the mule. Every mule tried to dump his *shalif*, as these bags for *bhusa* are called, and either go home or feed on the crops; every *shalif* came off at least three times. It seemed that they never went a quarter of a mile without getting rid of something, and, of course, the Persian drivers refused to lift a little finger to help adjust loads or whip in animals. Added to all this, the road proved about fifteen miles instead of the twelve or under which we had expected.

To augment our troubles and difficulties still further, we had only gone a few miles when there were shouts of "Brigands!" We stopped the caravan and parleyed for about a quarter of an hour, eventually finding that the brigands were friends. From that point

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onwards to the ford we had constant halts for brigands; the escort charged magazines in case of a rush, and we kept our revolvers handy for trouble; but as there was nothing much to be seen except an occasional black hat in a nullah, we pressed on to our destination as fast as circumstances would permit.

At one point, however, we thought we were really "in for it." The track led through a cutting over a small bridge crossing a deep canal, then between the canal on our left and a high wall surrounding an orange grove on the right. The wall extended for about four hundred yards, whilst the canal described a graceful curve across our front at the end of the grove, and then meandered off to our right front.

Our main body had just crossed the small bridge, and proceeded about a hundred yards along the place described, when a mass of about three or four hundred wild-looking people suddenly scrambled out of the canal in front of us. Every man carried a weapon, it seemed, and it certainly looked as if we were ambushed.

To turn back was impossible—the cutting in the rear was full of animals; we could go

neither to the right nor the left, so we went straight on—to find that our ambush consisted of a large number of Persian coolies employed in clearing the canal, all of them armed with long-handled spades. Under the circumstances, we should have preferred their not having put in so sudden an appearance to see our little cavalcade.

We eventually reached the ford at 4.30 p.m., having had only a few shots fired at us, to find that the cavalry from Shush had given us up and had gone back to camp! There was nothing for it but to dump all the *bhusa* on the river bank and return to Dizful. I saw an Arab on the bank who appeared to have something to do with Shush and the cavalry escort, so I gave him a chit for the officer in command, and, having no interpreter, managed to explain that the *bhusa* was being left on the bank in his charge and was meant for Shush, and that we and the mules were returning to Dizful as quickly as possible.

What I actually said was: “Kah ingar *tum* zeminwar Sahib chitty Shush ruft mun Katar adam Dizful ruft zood”—a motley of words which literally translated means:

“*Bhusa* here you responsible Sahib letter

Shush go I men mules Dizful go quickly.” However, he twigged what I meant, and we left for Dizful, fifteen miles distant, at about 5 p.m.

Some “damfeller” said the road we had come by was not safe, and we had better return by another road; so he led us all off—eighty mules, thirty Persians, twelve cavalry sowars, my *syce*, — and self, helter-skelter straight across country, and plunged the lot of us into a “blinkin’” bog. Shamrock went in over her saddle-flaps, and I jumped off just as she gave a big heave, and landed on my back in the most horrible stinking mire. Everyone got bogged, and I was afraid at one time that one or two of the cavalry horses would be lost—we were like a lot of flies in treacle!

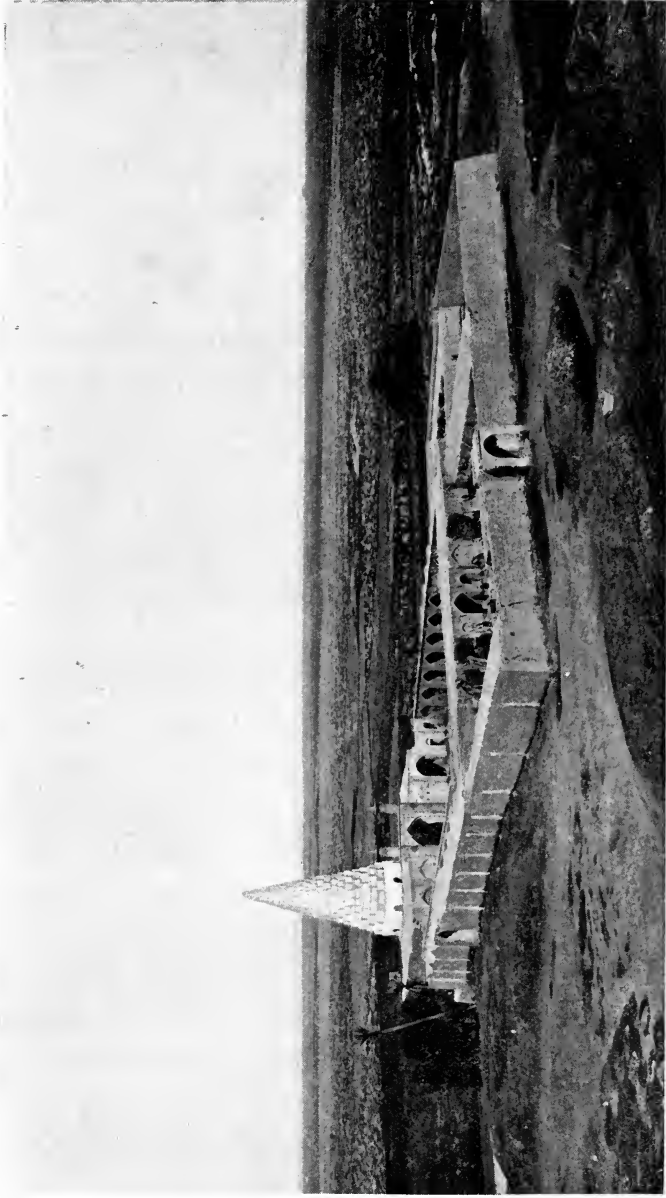
We managed to get our own escort and horses out, but five of the mules stuck in the mud and appeared likely to stay there; it was then six o’clock and getting dark, we had fourteen miles to go, and none of us, including the horses, had had anything to eat or drink since breakfast. It was, therefore, decided to leave the mules in charge of the head Syed of the Persian establishment and make for Dizful.

We had gone about half a mile when some man belonging to a crowd near a village blazed off at us. The sowars got out their rifles, and were just going to loose off when we managed to stop them; it was as near a fight as possible, but saved in the nick of time. Two minutes later a man rode towards us out of the same crowd, who proved to be none other than one of our own Persian guards who had lagged behind on the outward journey. We made him ride with us and show the road home; and off we went, passing villages at the walk, as they fire at you if you go fast, thinking you are up to mischief.

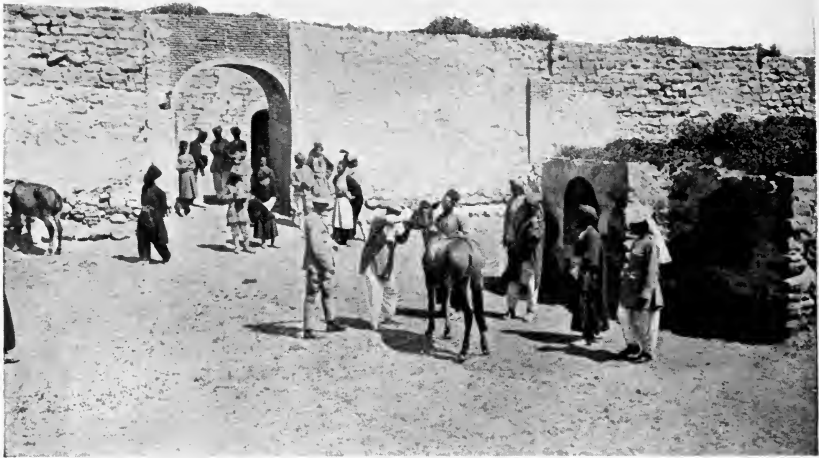
We had just passed a village about four miles from Dizful and were breaking into a trot, when another Persian friend blazed right into the middle of us. He made a bad shot and got nobody, and we rode like the devil to get out of range, arriving without further adventure at Dizful at 7.30 p.m. All the mules turned up by ten o'clock.

That is the sort of game we had to play in that charming spot. I expostulated with — when I saw him, saying that I did not see the fun of being made an “Aunt Sally” of.





Daniel's Tomb in the Desert, near Shush.



Shushtar : Examining a Mule to see his Age.



Swimming Mules across a River.

“Oh,” said he, “that’s nothing. I am fired at on every journey. I’ve been fired at eight times on the way here this morning—you must not mind *that*.” That is all the satisfaction one got!

Of course, the next day’s journey was off, principally because it rained, and continued to rain for two days, making the ford impassable.

## CHAPTER XVI

**A**FTER a good deal of delay for one reason and another, we at last left Dizful on March 3rd. We got up at 5 a.m., loaded and sorted mules from 6 a.m. onwards, breakfasted at 7.30, and finally started at 8 a.m., with a crowd of about two hundred mules, for the ford over the river Diz. We had sent nearly half the mules off the previous day, intending them to cross early on March 3rd, so that we should have less to do on arrival at the ford; but, of course, when we got to the river at 12.30, there were all the mules of the previous party standing on the bank. So much for Persian drivers and promises!

It took us until 5.30 to swim all the horses and mules across, and ferry over all the gear on the six *killicks* we had ordered; but it was all very interesting, particularly the way the horses and mules were managed.

The river was about two hundred and fifty

yards wide and very swift ; the starting-point was a low shingle bank, the far side a steep cliff, with a ledge about a hundred yards long on which animals could land. Below the ledge there was a rapid, and no landing-place whatever, so that if an animal missed the landing-place he was done for. For a few yards they could walk through the river ; then there came a sudden drop, and they were whirled away down stream, making for the ledge, which, luckily, none of them missed.

The Arabs are extraordinarily good at swimming animals across these rivers, a job they often have to do, as there are no bridges in the country. At every ford there are certain professional horse-swimmers, who strip absolutely stark, and are each provided with a blown-out sheepskin on which is a strong loop. The man steps into the loop and pulls the bladder up to his hips, making the rope sufficiently tight so as not to slip up his body. Thus armed and accoutred they enter the water, the bladders keeping their bodies out of the river ; they can swim in a standing position at a great pace even in a swift stream, but how they manage not to topple over in the water is a mystery. Three

or four of these men seize the head-stalls of the leading animals and take them into the water; the rest of the mules follow, or are driven by another three or four men from behind. When the animals are swept off their feet, the men lead the foremost towards the landing-place, and all the rest follow naturally, the men behind being ready to swim after any animal in difficulties and lead it ashore. We got our drove of about three hundred animals straight over the river like this, and it was a wonderful sight.

Having got our mules and baggage across the Diz, we had to re-load and re-saddle. Luckily I had asked F—, of the — Cavalry, who was on the bank with his squadron as escort, to bring along every available Government animal from Shush, so that we not only had saddled animals, but also experienced drivers to tie up the loads. Still, we had to improvise some Persian saddlery, and we left the bank of the river eventually at about 6 p.m.

It was only six miles to Shush, but it was the worst six-mile march I have ever accomplished. The road was much intersected with water-ways for irrigation, channels only per-

haps three feet across, which in daylight are no obstacle ; but at night, with a hundred and fifty Government animals and some three hundred wild Persian mokes, each ditch was a trap. Animals got into them and were bogged every time, and we had a perfect nightmare of a march, arriving at Shush at midnight, and leaving behind us a trail of bundles of *bhusa* and Persian saddlery for miles !

The Government mules all brought in their loads, but I don't think ten per cent. of the Persian loads turned up ; however, we sent out a party at 4 a.m. the next day and recovered all we had dropped. Of course, I ran out of smokes ; so did everyone else. We had had a snack of lunch at the ford at one o'clock, and knowing we only had six more miles to go, we did not have any more during the afternoon, so that we arrived at Shush thoroughly miserable and hungry and tired.

Shush is mentioned many times in the Books of Esther and Daniel ; it is called Shushan in the Bible, Shush by the Arabs to-day, Susa by ourselves and Susan by the French. The town was destroyed by the Assyrians in 640 B.C., but must have been

quickly rebuilt, as Daniel undoubtedly visited it in 550 B.C. He died there, and was buried in a tomb which is most carefully guarded by the Arabs, who to this day call the place Danniell. The story of Belshazzar and Daniel at the feast of the writing on the wall, and of Darius and Daniel in the lions' den, have given rise to a local belief that Daniel was thrust into the lions' den at Shush. But the date of Belshazzar's feast is approximately 538 B.C., or a hundred years after the destruction, and there is no doubt that Babylon was the scene of the famous *Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin*. At the same time, it is astonishing how Daniel managed to spend so much of his time at each place; travelling was perhaps easier in those days.

From the numerous mounds near and round the main citadel, Susa must have been a very large city in ages gone by; but it could never have reached to anything like the size of Babylon, which was said by Herodotus to have been sixty miles round the walls. I have seen it stated that the site actually dates from somewhere near 10,000 B.C. However, there are traces of three towns, the lowest of which is forty feet below the surface,



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the next about twenty-five feet, and the top city about six feet below the surface, the last being the city of Darius the Great. The place is divided into several distinct mounds, covering altogether some twelve hundred acres, and the main mounds must be about three miles or more in circumference. From the general outline of these mounds and the ruins that have been discovered, it is gathered that the first consisted of immense temples, the second of the king's palace and the houses of wealthy men, and the third of the town proper. Beyond these there are various small heaps and other remains which must have once been included in the main city.

On the largest of the Shush mounds, standing perhaps a hundred feet above the general level of the surrounding flat country, the French archæologists, under M. de Morgan, have built an enormous castle, somewhat on the plan of an old French château, with crenellated battlements and walls which in some places have a drop of a hundred feet; it can be seen for miles, and looks from a distance a most gigantic pile of masonry. It is built of white bricks about six inches square and one inch and a half thick, laid in

proper white mortar, not mud. Needless to say, the place is impregnable to men armed with rifles only. It really is rather a surprise to find a French medieval castle in the middle of the desert, and one can imagine the labour and expense required to build it.

Susa was the ancient winter capital of the early Persian kings, whilst Hamadan, or, as it was called in those days, Ecbatana, was their summer resort, so that a through route between these two places exists.

The French have purchased all the mounds from the Persian Government and have been digging here for several years. They have found a lot of valuable things, amongst others the tomb, or *stele*, of Naram Sin, who ruled over Akkad three thousand two hundred years before Nabonidus (556-540 B.C.), according to an inscription found in the temple of Shamash at Sippara. Nabonidus appears to have been the first authentic archæologist, and it is to him that we owe a great deal of our knowledge of the past history of Assyria and Babylon.

We had to cable to Paris to get leave from the French Government to use the castle, and they gave us permission to open four

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rooms. Like idiots, we opened the four worst ; however, the remainder were full of treasures, so perhaps it was just as well.

Of course, we were at the end of everything and got no news at all. Dizful was the nearest telegraph office, and Bandi Qir, the nearest military post, thirty-five miles off. We were plump in the middle of the desert, but in the castle were fairly comfy.

The old temple on the southern portion of the adjoining mound has been excavated and the plan of the flooring laid bare. Apparently there were six rows of twelve pillars about four or five yards apart. The square bases of the pillars are still in their original places, and are about eight feet square. On the top of these were huge fluted pillars about seven feet in diameter at the base, but I have no idea how high they must have been. Two lengths are lying near one of the bases, and they are each about ten feet long and belong apparently to one pillar, so that these must have been twenty-five feet high at least. I cannot understand where the white stone of which they are made was brought from, as there is no stone of this sort within a hundred miles, and then only in the hills ;

nor how they got the pillars to Shush after cutting them at the quarries wherever they were. Again, I don't see how they put them up, nor how they pulled them down; nor do I quite understand how the conquerors managed to smash all the stone pillars into small pieces the size of a hat, without dynamite or some other explosive, for the place is now littered with the fragments of these once gorgeous columns.

Living amongst these wrecks of the past, one's mind cannot help revolving round the rise and fall of man and the destiny of nations. How surprised one would be if on visiting Stonehenge one found oneself in the midst of ancient Britons covered with woad! Yet this is almost a simile of what happens in Shush. Tribes and nations have lived there and disappeared long since, yet we still have the Arab as in ancient times, living his patriarchal life and probably dressed in very much the same style as his ancestors of early Bible history.

Some say that we English represent a tribe which migrated northwards from this district in the far ages back, leaving the Arab master of all; if so, we must be akin to the old

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Elamites of the Bible, whose empire ceased to exist in these parts in 640 B.C., when Susa, their chief city, was utterly destroyed by the Assyrians under Ashurbanipal, and the Medes were permitted by him to occupy and rebuild it.

During our visit we tried to collect a few odds and ends from the inhabitants. I bought a lot of beads made of all sorts of stone—onyx, bloodstone, cornelian, red marble, agate and other pebbles—most of which had been found in prehistoric tombs of ancient women. Some of them are very handsome and highly polished, but the most valuable are nothing much to look at, merely rough bits of stone with a hole through the centre. These were the earliest ornaments of women, belonging to the Egyptian period of about 1000 B.C. and onwards, and are therefore much rarer than the beautifully polished agates and cornelians which look so nice.

I also bought some cylinder seals and old stone seals, which are wonderfully engraved and give perfect impressions. We were, I believe, the only Englishmen who had been in Susa for many years, so our collections should be interesting.

## CHAPTER XVII

OUR stay at Shush was necessarily short owing to lack of food for animals ; hence, on March 16th, after all arrangements had been made with the Arab Sheikhs who ruled the eighty miles between Shush and Ahwaz, we left that seat of ancient greatness. Our first march took us to Sheikh Mozan, an Arab village in the middle of the desert, at that season of the year a land of luscious grass. These Arab villages are not stationary ; they are merely collections of black camel-hair tents, which are moved to wherever the grazing is best. Hence, where the village of Sheikh Mozan rests to-day, it is hardly likely to be found in two months' time. The difficulties of surveying a country where houses and people change their habitat from time to time, and rivers constantly change their courses, are great, and render anything but brand-new maps false guides. However, as a convoy on the way out to

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Shush had a few days previous to our departure, found Sheikh Mozan's whereabouts after a fifty-mile trek and search in the wilderness, and as the particular men who formed the convoy accompanied me, we managed to locate it successfully after a march of thirty-six miles.

We were all somewhat tired with the journey, and on arrival were welcomed by the Arabs, who brought round milk, fowls and eggs for sale.

The next day, having an even longer march before us, we left camp at 5.30 a.m., and made for the Kerkeh river, where it bends round to the west. Arriving at this place, we struck an old caravan route leading into Ahwaz, which we reached on St. Patrick's Day at 7 p.m., after a march of forty-four miles.

The country we passed through was flat and uninteresting except for the vivid green and the wild flowers. That portion of the journey between Shush and Sheikh Mozan was almost entirely through meadowland, on which hundreds of flocks and herds of sheep, cattle and camels were browsing. Shush district is noted for its grazing, and Arabs and

others bring their animals from all parts of the country to fatten them on the rich grass.

Between Sheikh Mozan and Ahwaz the country is inhabited entirely by Arabs under the rule of the Sheikh of Mohammerah. In the hot weather it is one vast mud desert of a khaki colour, but it was noticed that some parts were dull coloured, others encrusted with what appears to be saltpetre. The impression one would get of the country if looked at from an aeroplane would probably be of a gigantic lace-pattern. All the saltpetre portion is infertile; nothing grows on it, not even a blade of grass; whilst the dull parts are excellent soil, so good that the native of India likens it to *sonar*, or gold. All these fertile portions were cultivated to their utmost extent even where only a foot or so wide. All had magnificent crops, and the majority were irrigated, principally by small water-cuts running from prehistoric canals. Hence, our long journey was still further lengthened by détours to find fords in the canals, and by many windings to avoid the crops. Our caravan, which consisted of a large number of mules, looked like a huge black caterpillar winding across the plains.



I found the mails for several weeks on my arrival, together with some welcome parcels, including my Boots ! (I must spell them with a capital B), and still another parcel of sausages, Worcester sauce and curry powder from the — Stores. I don't think I have mentioned before the perfect bombardment I suffered from in this line ! I once wrote for six tins of sausages, one tin of curry powder and one bottle of Worcester sauce ; this was in November, and they sent me a similar consignment every month afterwards. The first lot to arrive were most welcome ; the second, third and fourth lots were delayed, and I got them all together just before leaving Dizful ; at Ahwaz I was met by the fifth whack !

I picked up two nice ponies at Dizful, which I called Dizfuli and Shustan. I had then four : dear old John, who was getting rather past work ; my own pet Shamrock, a lovely Irish bay only seven years old, who had been with me all through the campaign ; Dizfuli, a grey of five years, and the baby Shustan, also a grey, who was only two and a half years and stood 14.2. She played like a tiny foal, and loved to try and suck

the buttons off my coat. Most of the journey from Shush to Ahwaz—eighty miles—she was loose, as she was too young to ride. She simply refused to leave my side, and was devoted to Shamrock, whom I believe she imagined to be her mother. Shamrock did not like the baby fooling about and often bit her; she bit her right on the end of the nose one day and raised a large lump, and Shustan spent three days trying to blow the lump off her nose, and then started banging her lips together to get it off; it was too funny. Shamrock also hated mules like poison, and never missed a chance of either biting or kicking one if within reach.

I was obliged to halt for some days at Ahwaz whilst political arrangements were made for us to go to Shushtar again; the Bakhtiari Khans there had to give a written guarantee that we should not be molested. Perhaps matters took rather a long time owing to the high priest having been murdered some time before, a mystery which had not then been solved.

The Bakhtiaris appear to be descendants of the Mongol hordes who overran Persia in the thirteenth century. They formed a dynasty



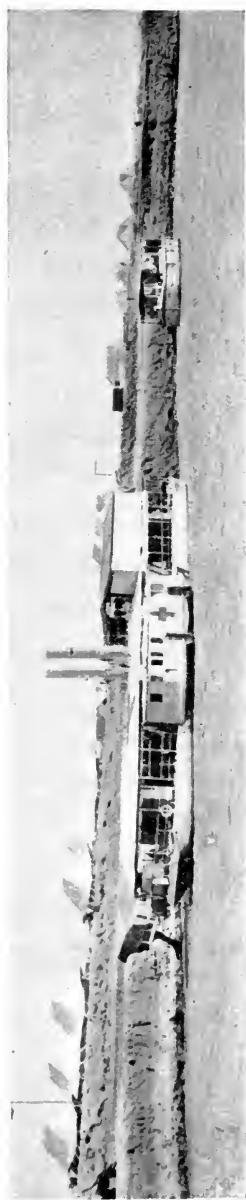
The Tomb of a Turkish Officer at Dujailah.



Turkish Trenches at Dujailah.



A Creek near the Camp at Basra.



The Camp and a River Boat at Sheikh Saad.

known as the Hulaguids or Ilkhans of Persia, somewhere east of the Euphrates, in about 1260 A.D. Previous to this they had attempted to overrun Mesopotamia, Syria, and even Egypt. Baghdad had been captured by Hulagu and the Caliph murdered in 1258 ; from thence a Mongol army under Ketbugha marched with fire and sword through Syria to the borders of Egypt, whose surrender they demanded. Ketbugha's ambassadors were executed by the then Sultan, Kutuz, who sent an army against the would-be invaders under Beybars. They drove the Mongols out of Gaza, routed them at Beysan, where Ketbugha was killed, and forced them to retire to the country they now inhabit. The old name of Ilkhan is still preserved, their head Khan being known as the Ilkhani.

It is interesting to note that the man Beybars, who had started life as a slave costing twenty pounds, was the founder of the Mameluke Empire. Mamelukes were originally Turkish slaves from the north, brought down into Egypt and Baghdad by the Arabs from near the Caspian Sea ; their name signifies " White Slaves," and their nationality was identical with the Turks of

to-day, but the rôle of Arab and Turk has now been reversed.

On the 24th we got news that all arrangements had been completed for our journey, and began at once a feverish commotion of packing and shifting kit, horses and mules across the river to make ready for a start. This time we intended to try a new route, as owing to the exceptionally high floods our previous crossing to Bandi Qir at the junction of the Diz, the Shatait and the Gargar, was almost impossible. We proposed, therefore, to cross the Karun at Ahwaz by the local steamer and march along the eastern bank via Wais.

Of course, when we got there we just missed the A.P.O.C. weekly boat, which runs from Ahwaz to Dar-i-Khazineh, on the Gargar river, passing Bandi Qir, and were obliged to march the thirty-odd miles. Our kit and half a lac of money (nearly four thousand pounds) were loaded on two large oil-pipe wagons belonging to the oil company, which were hired for the occasion. We were not very favourably impressed with the appearance of the mules when they turned up for our kit, and asked for a change of **animals at**

the half-way ; but, on being assured that the mules were all right and could easily do the distance, and, best argument of all, that there were no others available, we made the best of a bad job and started.

We left at 8.30 a.m., our caravan including wagons and escort ; each wagon had six mules, and carried about a ton and a half of kit, the money alone weighing close upon a ton.

At 10.30 the mules had only gone six miles and were completely done up. Luckily we had several Government mules with us, on one of which Solomon in all his glory was mounted. We took two A.P.O.C. mules from the first cart, put a big strong pair of Government animals in their places, and away they went at a trot, arriving opposite Bandi Qir at 5 p.m.

The other cart had eight A.P.O.C. mules put on to it, but the lot broke down hopelessly twelve miles from its destination at about dusk. Eight mules were then obtained from Bandi Qir, and a further two Government animals which were with the cart were harnessed up, making ten mules in all. But in spite of this addition, the wagon stuck

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for several hours. At last the conveyance crawled to a point three miles from Bandi Qir, where it finally broke down, this time with a broken wheel, at midnight. The first wagon then had to be sent for and the load changed on to it, the outfit eventually arriving at 5.30 a.m. Not a bad march : thirty miles in twenty-one hours with eighteen mules and only one wagon !

At Bandi Qir we found ourselves faced by the Gargar river in such high flood that the boat bridge which usually existed had been removed for safety. We were, therefore, obliged to swim all the animals, whilst the personnel were ferried across in a rickety boat possessing only one oar and a half. However, we and the immense sum of money we were carrying got safely across. We halted a day at Bandi Qir, leaving there on the 31st in detachments.

The mule convoy left camp at 6 a.m., which was quite a good achievement, and meant that we must have been up early to have packed up our kit and pushed off the mules by such an hour. We ourselves left at nine with an escort of four sowars and three Arabs. We went pretty fast as far as



Arab Hassan, a village about fourteen miles from Bandi Qir, where one of the Shushtar big bugs, Ajam Khan by name, awaited us with his escort. We were, of course, invited into the village to tea, and were shown into a mud hut with a central room about twenty-five feet long and ten wide. It was devoid of furniture but full of flies, and with an old mattress rolled up at one end for me, as the honoured guest, to seat myself upon, which I did. The conversation was not brisk, as I don't talk much Persian or Arabic, and the Khan could not speak English or French; so our interview did not sparkle with repartee!

I sat with — at one end of the room on the old mattress (it must have been full of things of all shapes and sizes); on my left was the Khan (slightly deaf), with a sowar who talked Persian by his side as interpreter; the remainder of the room was full of Arabs, all armed to the teeth, of course, both sitting and standing. At the far end of the room our late escort hurriedly bolted a meal, led by Shah, my native adjutant.

These Arabs are a rum-looking crowd; they are usually big men with beards, and their hair done in two long plaits, one hanging over

each shoulder. Some are handsome in a wild, lawless sort of way ; they see a joke quickly, and were often hugely amused at some of our antics in the buying ring.

They also admire a good horse and a good rider ; in fact, there is one thing which to an Arab or a Persian is unforgivable—that is not to be able to ride a horse. They thought Shamrock a lovely beast, and were much taken at my riding a fiery little animal like she is on an old watering bridle, which has only a snaffle bit and no curb whatever. They could not make out how I made her do what I wanted, so I informed the questioner that I used my *hands* to rule my horse, whilst he himself had to manage his beast with a bit of iron, as his hands were apparently unfit for the job ; he was rather pleased than otherwise with the reply.

To get back to the journey : After about an hour's halt at Arab Hassan we proceeded on our way, our escort now augmented by the arrival of the Khan and his sowars, and pushed on fairly fast till we caught up the mule convoy at about one o'clock, when we halted for water and food.

After a lunch off chicken and *chupattie*,

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we started off again at about 1.30, reaching Shushtar (thirty-one miles altogether) at 4.30 in the afternoon.

The country had gone through a marked change since I had last passed that way. The first time it was all burnt and dried up, but since then there had been abundance of rain, and the whole country was green, either with crops, which looked most flourishing, or with luscious meadow grass such as one sees in an English field. Dotted the meadows, and in places colouring the whole landscape, were masses of wild flowers, of which I could distinguish red anemones, marsh mallows, poppies, wild hyacinths, and a blue orchid rather like those mauve ground orchids that grow in such numbers during the rains in the Himalayas, only very sweet-scented and far prettier. Also a flower that looked like wild candytuft, both white and yellow, and a bulb with a stalk about eighteen inches long, covered with purple red bells, each bell being about an inch and a half long. I believe it is a wild leek; if so, its flower is very much more handsome than its name would lead one to expect. In addition to the above, there were hundreds of others of which I do not

know the names; forget-me-nots were certainly there, as well as daisies, yellow and white. The most showy, however, was the anemone, which grew in brilliant masses, as large as a poppy, though not so tall. It is really an astonishing country—one minute a desert and the next a garden. The gorgeous colouring brought to my mind the Field of the Cloth of Gold, especially where the landscape lay in a blaze of yellow bloom, rippling in the sunlight to the caress of a desert wind.

## CHAPTER XVIII

**WE** reached Shushtar without any particular adventures beyond the frequent crossing of innumerable irrigation cuts and the consequent trouble with our mules, many of whom, following their usual routine, got themselves bogged and had to be helped out by main force.

Our entry into the town partook of the nature of a triumphal procession, the whole population turning out *en masse* to meet us. On our arrival we were offered accommodation of sorts, which we were just on the point of accepting, having placed our escort some distance away, when a sinister suggestion caused us to alter our plans. A friendly person inquired—whether by design or otherwise we never knew—if we remembered the murder of the high priest which had taken place during our previous visit. We assured him with all politeness that we had naturally not forgotten such an important event.

“Well,” said he, “at the time it occurred three possible solutions were mooted. Suspicion fell first upon two deserters who had been given sanctuary by the high priest, and had disappeared on the day following the murder; secondly, on a certain man who had also left the town the next day and had not returned, the general impression being that he had gone to receive his blood-money; and thirdly, on two British officers who, disguised as Bakh-tiaris, had broken into the priest’s room, cut his throat, and then escaped to Dizful.”

The last statement had rather too much personal reference for our liking, so we asked if he knew who these British officers were. “Oh, yes,” he replied affably; “they are yourselves; and now that you have arrived again, the people here have unanimously decided that you did it—moreover, that you have perhaps come to do away with another.”

The situation had taken a serious, almost tragic turn. We therefore decided not to occupy the rooms so kindly placed at our disposal, and took up our position in the most inaccessible and secluded corner of the fort. Here we installed ourselves in an old stable, sixteen feet by eight, with eight doorways

and no doors. On two sides of it was a drop of thirty feet into the river below, the other two sides being guarded by sentries, while we ourselves sat upon our ton of money. Solomon, as inventive and wonderful as ever, cooked our meals on a range made out of a few ancient bricks stuck together with mud and some old iron picketing pegs.

After a time the Governor very kindly provided us with a large tent of the Turkish military pattern, several chairs and a lot of carpets. Unfortunately the tent had only a single fly, consequently, on fine days we had to sit in it with our hats on, and on wet days we were obliged to vacate it, as it leaked like a sieve, and take refuge in our little home, the stable. But, on the whole, we were more than passably comfortable considering the means at our disposal, while the food—well, for lunch one day we had curry and rice with chutney, broad beans, raspberry and red-currant tart (out of a bottle), spring onions, cheese, *chupatties*—all washed down with good old English beer. I need say no more!

We had only one complaint—flies! The whole of this tumble-down fort had been used

for many years as a stable ; every room was full of the litter of horses, sheep, goats, donkeys and human beings, the result being that flies swarmed there in millions. We invariably filled two " Tanglefoot " papers a day ; on many days four were crowded out, and still the tent was a mass of flies. We have on occasion sat in front of a bait of a few drops of beer, armed with a bottle straw—to the intense amusement of the sentries—and have continued smiting anything over twenty at a blow for half an hour on end on the word of command. The slaughter each time was incredible, and had to be swept up by Solomon.

At that time of the year they were in the drowsy stage, and were the most persistent pests that I have ever come across. They got cut up with the meat, embedded in the pudding and spread on the bread with one's jam ; and, as for drinks, they simply wrestled for them, and were swallowed by the score.

Our evenings went somewhat slowly, so we commenced to collect stamps and to rub up our French to pass away the time. It is peculiar that the court language of Persia should be French when their own language



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has such a rich vocabulary; the Governor and all his satellites talk French, as do also the postmaster and the telegraph clerk.

Purchasing mules is not such a dull job as it may appear to be, and we managed to get a good deal of amusement out of our day's work. Neither the animals nor their owners showed to much advantage when they paraded before me for inspection, and some idea of the general trend of the proceedings may be gathered from the nickname given me by the natives, the translation of which is, roughly, "I don't want it." This remark, made with painful monotony by myself, became a source of intense joy to the crowd who invariably watched the daily sales, and greeted me whenever I ventured into the town; it will probably survive as a local joke long after I myself am forgotten. The majority of the mules lived well up to their reputation; I remember particularly one who was a perfect tiger. On entering the arena he knocked his owner down with his hands, kicked him with his feet, and shook him with his face. I thought the man was going to be killed, and dashed off to get my camera; but he got up smiling, and com-

menced battering the beast with a pole to cool his ardour. I eventually took some rather nice photos of the mule in his tantrums, but I missed the great push—it was so unexpected.

Whilst at Shushtar I received a letter telling me that a valuable piece of steel shafting belonging to the A.P.O.C. had been stolen from their wharf at Dar-i-Khazineh. Two inhabitants of Shushtar were suspected, and I was asked to cause a search to be made in the bazaar, as it was believed that they would try to sell it for making mule shoes, supposing it to be of soft iron. The Governor of Shushtar was prevailed upon to use his influence, and with his efforts, ably assisted by those of his Bakhtiari guards, the shaft was recovered. It was returned to its owner, with a note also asking if a search could be instituted for some of *our* lost property.

I must now record the adventures of the beer! To do so, I must hark back a month or more to the arrival of the Imperial Bank of Persia at Dizful. We had arranged for two cases of beer to be sent up from Ahwaz with the bank, and whilst at Dizful we opened and, I regret to say, finished one case there, reserving the other, a rather peculiar-looking

box, for consumption during our sojourn at Shush. The morning after our arrival at Shush, when our arduous labours were over, we proceeded to open the case preparatory to refreshing ourselves. What was our surprise on opening it to find that it contained nothing but small panes of window glass ! The author of our misfortune, the bank agent, was heavily cross-examined on the subject, but could give no clue to the whereabouts of the beer, nor the ownership of the glass ; nor had the case any marks whatever. Sorrowfully we replaced the lid, nailed it down, and quenched our thirst with someone else's beer !

We carefully took the case back to Ahwaz and visited the headquarters of the A.P.O.C., with a view to finding out the ownership of the glass, but more particularly the whereabouts of the beer. Conversation, commencing naturally with Shush and the places we had visited, was dragged gently but firmly to the house that I had built (the famous " Mutty Mahal " ), and I innocently asked the officer in charge if he knew where I could obtain some window glass for it. The astonishing reply to this was :

" Have you lost some beer ? "

“Yes,” I said, “we have; and have you got it?”

“No. I have never heard about it,” said he. “But where is the glass?”

“Glass!” said I. “I am afraid I can’t help you over that. Have you lost any?”

As he would not own to having seen any beer I went away quite contented, and departed shortly after to Shushtar, leaving the glass behind me in very safe custody, and determined to hold it as a hostage for the beer.

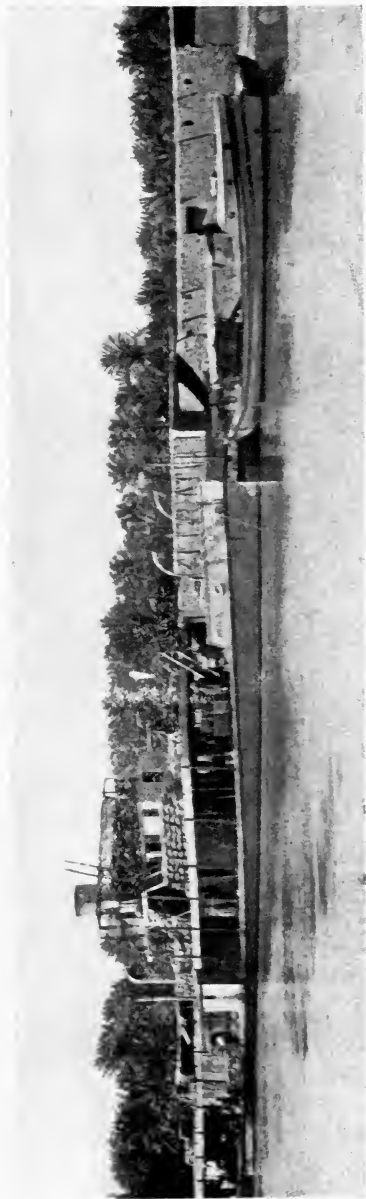
After finding the shaft I thought we might make tender inquiries from Dar-i-Khazineh, the furthest point on the river to which boats ply, regarding the fate of the beer, and I sent a message saying that if the case of beer were found, we might be able to help to trace some lost glass.

We were rewarded by the receipt of a letter saying :

“Not only is that which was lost found again” (the shafting), “but another problem which has long exercised me (viz., the identity of two cases of beer ex-‘*Aminiyeh*,’ the address or addressee of which was not discoverable even after much inquiry) has now been solved ;



Ezra's Tomb on the Bank of the Tigris.



The "Julna" ready to start for the Relief of Kut.



Dumps of Stores at an Arab Village, near Sannaiyat.

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the whereabouts of some urgently required glass is also traced. ‘*Alhamdu’lillah.*’

“ I am, indeed, most grateful to you for all your trouble in the matter of the shafting, and for the solution of these secondary problems. Could you add to my overflowing cup of indebtedness by giving me a clue as to the fate of my much-desired glass ? ”

Needless to say, we handed over his glass when he sent along our beer, which, as a matter of fact, arrived at a most opportune moment, just as we were leaving Shushtar, and was greatly appreciated on our hot and arduous journey.

Before we left we had the welcome piece of news that punishment had been exacted from the Saghwands opposite Dizful. I have already mentioned the trouble given by this tribe to the party who went to Amara on January 20th, also our own difficulties in getting to Shush, when, in spite of the presence in the vicinity of a squadron of cavalry, we were potted at and held up. Shortly afterwards the same squadron paid the Saghwands a surprise visit as a reprisal, killing one and wounding about forty, our only casualty being ——’s horse, which was wounded. The story, of course, spread and

was embellished in the spreading ; at Shushtar the yarn was that the Saghwands had attacked the British at Shush and killed a hundred and fifty British soldiers. Thus tales are told in Persia, and from this we can judge how much faith can be put in a report received of doings in the interior after filtration through a multitude of Persian bazaars.

About the middle of April we had orders that every mule was required for certain military proceedings, and we were obliged to leave Shushtar at a few hours' notice. Transport had been sent down the river to bring up money when the telegram arrived ; they returned with the cash at about three o'clock in the afternoon, and between that hour and six the next morning we paid out the equivalent of half a lac of rupees, and re-packed the equivalent of thirty thousand rupees into small, light mule loads without carpenter, hammer, new nails, or saw. It was all done with a knife, an old picketing peg, and any old nails we could find out of the broken boxes.

We had also had news that a party of Bakhtiaris, Kurds and odd desperadoes, who had been defeated by the Russians near Kangavar, were making their way down to



Dizful via Shush, thirty-seven miles distant. There was nothing to prevent their coming into Shushtar, especially as it was perfectly evident from the telegram that troops from Ahwaz intended to move against them via Shush. The possibility of these men retiring through Shushtar in front of our cavalry, and the prospect of a *tête-à-tête* with them, to say nothing of the risk of losing the large sum of money we had with us, determined us to go with the mules rather than be left behind with no means of defence or conveyance.

My last memory of Shushtar brings visions of fields and fields of opium poppies fluttering in the wind as we left the outskirts of the town. We passed through the same muddy track, the same flowery meadowland, and reached Bandi Qir that afternoon. Bandi Qir was at the time infested with mosquitoes and flies, and we spent four days there almost imprisoned in our mosquito nets. It rained hard most of the time, and we lived in constant expectation of being flooded out. Eventually we swam the animals over the river, which was in extremely high flood, and reached Ahwaz on the 19th, leaving shortly afterwards by boat for Basra.

## CHAPTER XIX

**WE** arrived at Basra on Good Friday after a very quick and pleasant journey down the river Karun in a stern-wheeler, and up the Shatt-el-Arab from Mohammerah in a Richmond-to-Windsor penny steamer; it felt almost like being on the Thames again. I found the town considerably changed since I had last seen it, and an entirely different place from the Basra at which I had first landed in November, 1914. The river was full of craft, and reminded me of Southampton Water, with its masses of shipping. On the banks and quays were acres and acres of stores, equipment and the necessary machinery to maintain so large a force as was by that time gathered in the district. After the primitive surroundings we had left behind us, it was all a little bewildering, and one could not help wondering when, or if, such an immense quantity of material would be used up.

There were changes everywhere, and all

for the better; it was, indeed, grateful and comforting to find that the Mesopotamian campaign was at last being fully supplied with the materials of war. The swamp once occupied by my corps had become the site of a huge wireless station, the third which had been erected on the same spot since I left. The first, I was told, had been improvised from a couple of old masts; the second, a good deal larger, was of the umbrella type, and the third and last had evidently been constructed as a permanent and powerful station from which news could be received from Malta or even from the Eiffel Tower.

The main topic of conversation, and, in fact, the only subject to which any of us gave any thought at all, was the condition of the beleaguered force in Kut and the attempts which had been made to relieve it. The full description of every battle which was fought during that anxious three and a half months in repeated efforts to force the Turks from various positions, requires more accurate knowledge than I was able to obtain on the spot; but perhaps a synopsis of events and the accounts given me by eye-witnesses may be interesting.

I will therefore set down quite briefly the actions fought, with their various dates and approximate results :

January 6th, 7th, 8th : Capture of Sheikh Saad.

January 13th, 14th : Capture of Wadi on the right bank of the Tigris.

January 20th, 21st : Attack on Hanna on the left bank.

March 8th : Attack on Dujailah redoubt.

April 5th : Capture of Hanna.

April 5th : Capture of Ab-ul-Rahman.

April 5th (night) : Capture of Falahiyah.

April 6th : Attack on Sannaiyat.

April 8th, 9th : Second attack on Sannaiyat.

April 12th : Capture of outpost line of Beit Aiessa.

April 15th, 16th, 17th : Attack and capture of Beit Aiessa.

April 17th (night) : Further attack (repulsed).

April 20th, 21st : Bombardment of Sannaiyat.

April 22nd : Unsuccessful attack to force Sannaiyat.

April 24th : Dispatch of food-ship *Julnar*.

I must here mention that between the 6th of December, when Kut was invested, and the 6th of January, when the relieving force fought the action at Sheikh Saad, there had been several attempts by the Turks to take Kut-el-Amara by assault, notably on December 10th and 11th, when the Turks suffered very heavy losses. On the night of the 17th of December the British attacked the Turks, and the Turks assaulted Kut again on December 26th.

Meanwhile troops had been hurrying out from France. On arrival in Basra they were pushed up stream, both by boat and by road, as fast as supplies could be brought up after them, their concentrating point being Ali-al-Gharbi. Owing to the unavoidable disorganization of units during the embarkation, sea voyage, and their arrival in a further state of disorganization caused by the pace of vessels at sea, the — Division, which arrived first at Ali-al-Gharbi, was wanting in many essentials, principally cohesion. Nevertheless, they advanced and took Sheikh Saad and Wadi on the right bank after two severe actions, when it was necessary to reorganize them.

But time was precious, and it was believed

that the supplies in Kut were far more limited than was actually the case. Hence this Division was again thrown against the Turks at Hanna, where it suffered heavy losses, the weather being execrable. After the attack on the Hanna position, the — Division was so depleted by casualties and so disorganized, that a rest to recoup and re-form battalions was necessary; and as another Division had commenced to arrive shortly after the attack, it was apparently decided to await the assembling of the new Division before commencing further operations.

The month of February was spent in preparation for another attack, information having been received from General Townshend that he had eighty-four days' supplies in hand, not counting three thousand mules.

On the 7th of March dispositions were made for a night march on the Dujailah redoubt, some fifteen miles from the British position. This redoubt had been the most southerly point of the Turkish trenches, and was open up to the beginning of March to a turning movement from the south. Between March 1st and 8th the Turks had continued this line, digging a trench from Dujailah in a south-

westerly direction as far as the Shatt-el-Hai. The attack on this redoubt was to have been performed by two strong columns, the plan being that part of one Division should attack from the east and part of another Division from the south.

The dispositions for the night march were most successful, and are recognized by all as a piece of brilliant Staff work. The eastern force was in position at daybreak, but the southern was an hour behind time. According to all eye-witnesses the Turkish trenches were empty, and had we gone straight on, even after the late arrival of the southern column, the consensus of opinion is that Dujailah could have been taken almost without a shot having been fired. But individual initiative is not encouraged in the British Army; orders appear to have been given to the effect that no assault on the Dujailah redoubt was to take place until after effective artillery preparation. The guns were therefore ordered to open fire, and three hours were lost whilst they registered and carried out their instructions. The Turks, meanwhile, had discovered the situation, and reinforcements had been hurriedly pushed up the communication trenches. Thus, when our

troops attacked the redoubt four hours after the arrival of the first column, they were met by an extremely strong opposition—made doubly strong by the nature of the ground, and the clever manner in which the enemy trenches were so concealed amongst the scrub as to be invisible until within a few yards. Further reinforcements reached the Turks during the day, and they several times counter-attacked us; our own troops being practically pinned to the desert without any sort of cover.

On the southern face an attempt was made about midday which got up to within five hundred yards of the enemy's position, and a further attempt in the evening got within two hundred yards, but was again repulsed. Only five miles away the palm-trees of Kut could be seen standing up against the rising sun as the last force made their retreat, and the defenders of the gallant little garrison must have been anxious spectators of the fight, which, if successful, would give them their freedom. However, in spite of heroic and persistent efforts, the Relief Force could make no further headway; want of water decided the situation, and our troops were back again in Wadi on the night of March 9th.



The remainder of the month was taken up in a struggle against mud and flood, and with the arrival and assembling of another Division. In spite of our reinforcements, the numerical strength of the two forces was still about equal, as the Turks had also been joined by fresh units; moreover, the front over which we could attack had been further restricted by floods and the consequent rising of the Suwaikieh marsh.

April opened wet, but in spite of this most serious obstacle, a Division attacked Hanna on the 5th of April and captured it. The position was by no means held in such force as it had been when the first attack was launched on it on the 20th and 21st of January, and, after artillery preparation, Falahiyah was assaulted and taken the same night. Meanwhile a force had captured Ab-ul-Rahman on the right bank. The position, owing to the rise in the river and the possibility of the Turks cutting the river *bunds* and thus flooding the country, was still precarious; hence an immediate attack on Sannaiyat was decided upon, and was carried out at dawn on April 6th.

A force passed through during the night, their orders being to keep their direction by an old

Turkish communication trench running from Falahiyah to Sannaiyat on their left, and to be in position before daybreak. But during the darkness the direction was mistaken, and the many deep trenches so delayed them that daybreak found them still a mile and a half from the Turkish trenches. They were, of course, discovered, but with great gallantry, in the face of machine-gun, rifle and artillery fire, they continued their advance until their losses compelled them to retire and dig in at a thousand yards from the Turks.

That night, the night of April 6th, weather conditions for the division reached, as its members say, the limit of all things. The wind blew the waters of the marsh over their right flank, and they were obliged to construct *bunds* to keep out the marsh on the right and the river on their left under a heavy fire from the Turks. Guns got bogged and isolated in the water, and everyone was reduced to desperation. Meanwhile the force on the opposite bank, at Ab-ul-Rahman, was almost surrounded by water.

During this period of bad weather another bridge had been under construction, and this was completed by the evening of April 8th

at Falahiyah, close behind our positions on the two banks. The possession of Sannaiyat being the key not only to Kut, but to the control of the floods on the left bank, it was essential to dislodge the Turks as soon as possible. A fresh assault was, therefore, determined upon and carried out on the night of April 8th. Again the attack failed, and again all accounts of the action are not without variation as to the cause of failure.

It appears that the first line reached to within three hundred yards of the enemy trenches before they were discovered; they were then subjected to a terrible fire from machine-guns and rifles, whilst lit up by the flare of Very lights and other illuminative devices used by the Turks. Nevertheless, they reached and entered the Turkish trenches.

The second line, however, failed to arrive in support; apparently they lost their direction (though the Turkish lights should have shown them the way one would have thought), and fell back on the third and fourth line; with the result that when the Turks counter-attacked, our first line were too weak to hold them and were ejected from the positions they had won, eventually digging

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in at a distance of five hundred yards from their objective.

The restricted front between marsh and river on the left bank, also the two costly and unsuccessful attempts to force Sannaiyat, were apparently deciding factors against another immediate attempt at taking this position. Accordingly, a force was directed to commence operations against Beit Aiessa on the 12th of April, with a view to subsequently attacking the Sinn Aftar redoubt, a strong natural position held by the Turks some five miles east of Kut. This point the Turks had been obliged to vacate some months earlier when the 6th Division, under General Townshend had enveloped their left and gained such a signal victory over them at the taking of Kut-el-Amara; but it had since been occupied by the enemy.

The preliminary movements against Beit Aiessa from Ab-ul-Rahman were made through swamps, mud and deep water-cuts, and culminated in the capture of part of the Turkish outlying trenches on April 16th. After consolidating the positions won, the

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guns were moved forward, and on the early morning of the 17th a brilliant attack on Beit Aiessa ended with the capture of that important position.

During these operations it was decided apparently that a force should make the final attack on Sinn Aftar, consequently, on the night of April 17th this force commenced crossing the river by the bridge at Falahiyah, whilst another Division got ready to concentrate on the left rear as soon as they had taken over the line, so as to be ready for the assault on Sinn Aftar on the morning of April 18th.

The Turks, however, had evidently guessed our intentions, and commenced a bombardment of Beit Aiessa on the evening of April 17th, almost before the force had commenced to cross the river. A barrage was established to prevent reinforcements or supplies reaching them, and about an hour later, at 6 p.m., a very strong attack was launched against our left. A double company guarding two captured guns bore the first onslaught, but were obliged to retire, unfortunately masking the fire of the regiments in the vicinity whilst carrying out this operation. The

immediate result was that a brigade on the left had to give ground, exposing the front of another brigade, which also had to withdraw a short distance. As a consequence of these retirements the line assumed a V shape, with the apex towards the Turks. Continuous attacks were made throughout the night by the Turkish forces, which greatly outnumbered the British, and the apex of the line was several times the scene of the most desperate struggles. Hand-to-hand fighting went on practically all night, the Turks attacking in mass formations, and repeatedly attempting to overwhelm them.

One mountain battery was in the thick of it, firing point-blank into the masses of the enemy and doing terrific execution, while at the same time carrying on a hand-to-hand conflict with those Turks who had managed to escape the fire from the guns.

Reinforcements eventually arrived towards morning, having been very much delayed by the swamps, bogs and darkness; and the Turks withdrew at daylight, having suffered enormous losses, estimated at about five thousand men. Their efforts had not been wholly



A Busy Scene on the Quayside at Amara.



The Basra Camp during a Flood.

[To face p. 257.]



unsuccessful, for that portion of the position nearest the river, and therefore controlling the river *bund*, remained in their hands. The withdrawal of their main body, moreover, was a model of precision and showed the hall-mark of German discipline.

Our further attack on Sinn Aftar redoubt had to be postponed until the recapture of Beit Aiessa. Owing to the impossibility of digging and the exhaustion of the troops employed, practically no progress was made, with the exception of a few saps towards Sinn Aftar.

Meanwhile the force in front of Sannaiyat on the left bank had been steadily digging towards the enemy lines; and possibly because it was thought that men had been withdrawn from the Turkish trenches to reinforce the right bank, thus weakening the probable opposition at Sannaiyat, an assault was ordered again on the morning of the 20th April. But on the 19th there was a strong gale from the north, and, as was the case on the night of the 6th of April, the water from the Suwaikieh marsh was blown into the trenches; with the result that for the second time the Division battled

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with the elements and the pending attack was postponed.

The following two days were occupied in a bombardment of the Turkish position, and arrangements were made for an attack on the morning of the 22nd. Owing to the storm of the preceding days, the enemy front had been reduced to less than a quarter of a mile in length. There were several lines of trenches, all held by a determined enemy amply supplied with machine-guns and ammunition. There were no possible means of carrying out anything but a frontal attack, which, under conditions such as now presented themselves, is usually considered very costly in men, if not impossible of accomplishment. However, to reduce in part the difficulties of a frontal attack, massed machine-guns were placed on the right bank, where they could enfilade the Turkish trenches at Sannaiyat, whilst every available gun on the right bank bombarded the enemy's positions.

The attack was launched in spite of the heaviness of the ground, which two days before had been covered with several inches of water. The first Turkish trench was un-

occupied ; the second line of trenches was a dyke with five feet of water in it ; beyond this again were remains of Turkish pits, dug-outs and trenches, all full of water, whilst the mud between the second and third Turkish lines was over the tops of the men's boots. It was impossible to advance over this quagmire at more than a slow walk ; and this the gallant regiments endeavoured to do in face of a terrific fire from the Turkish third line. The attack, in spite of these physical difficulties, might have reached the Turkish trenches had our men been able to reply to the enemy's fire ; but every man had fallen down, the whole division was floundering in mud and water, rifles were choked up with mud, and the men could not open and close the breeches of their rifles. They even went to the length of trying to suck the mud off the breeches, but all their heroism was in vain ; the Turks at this critical moment were heavily reinforced, and strong counter-attacks forced our men to retire before reaching their goal. Highlanders and Punjabis had vied with one another in heroism, and never was more gallant effort unsuccessful.

This attack on Sannaiyat was considered

the bloodiest battle in the series of operations for the relief of Kut. The casualties on both sides were so heavy that a truce was called, under which the Red Cross and Red Crescent parties collected the killed and wounded on either side.

## CHAPTER XX

**T**HE last act in this Eastern tragedy was the fateful voyage of the *Julnar*, perhaps the most courageous and daring undertaking performed either collectively or individually in the whole history of the Relief Force, as it was also the culminating disaster. The gallant 6th Division had held out, hoping against hope for five months, and every attempt to provision the garrison had failed. The Flying Corps had made daily attempts to relieve the food question by dropping into Kut supplies, money and much-needed medicines, also fishing nets, with which it was hoped they might be able to augment their supplies from the river. But the number of aeroplanes available was too small and the strain on the pilots was too great to keep up a constant service; moreover, the danger of the proceeding increased daily, as the Turks were on the look-out for aircraft attempting the journey to Kut, and had, in fact, shot down one of our machines.

It had become obvious that Kut could neither be relieved by the Tigris force, nor materially assisted by the Air Service, and that only a few days remained before the supplies of the garrison would be exhausted and their surrender inevitable. Volunteers were therefore called for from the Royal Navy to run the Turkish blockade and force a boatload of stores up the river. Needless to say, the response was magnificent. On the night of the 29th of April the *Julnar*, under the command of Lieutenant H. O. B. Firmin, R.N., having been previously provisioned at Amara, attempted the hazardous passage. She was the fastest boat on the river, and it was hoped that, assisted by fire from every available gun to draw the attention of the enemy, she might succeed in reaching her destination. But unfortunately the arrangements for her dispatch were not conducted with sufficient secrecy, or possibly it was the exaggerated attempts at secrecy which were her undoing; at all events, her movements appear to have been known by all and sundry many days before her departure, and there can be no doubt that the Turkish Intelligence Staff combined with Headquarters

to frustrate her mission. She started at 8 p.m., and was due in Kut about midnight, or before; the garrison there had been informed of what was being attempted, and one can only faintly imagine the agonizing strain of those waiting hours! At one in the morning a wireless message was received from General Townshend that she had not then arrived, and that gunfire had been heard in the direction of Magasis, eight miles down the river. It was then feared that, owing to the floods and the strong current running, the *Julnar* must have missed the channel, and that in rounding the Magasis peninsula she had run on a sand-bank. From Turkish reports afterwards received, it transpired that this, more or less, was actually what had happened. The commander had been killed while running the gauntlet of the Turkish guns, his second-in-command, Lieutenant C. H. Cowley, R.N.V.R., had also fallen, and the ship, losing its direction, had drifted on to a sand-bank, where it became a good target for the enemy's fire. These two officers were awarded posthumous V.C.'s in January, 1917, for their very gallant action, and never were honours more richly deserved.

From that moment Kut was doomed. The next day General Townshend opened negotiations for the surrender of the garrison, and capitulated without any delay to the Turkish commander, Major-General Khalil Pasha. For several days afterwards there was an armistice, during which the more seriously wounded and sick of the Kut garrison were sent over to our lines in exchange for an equal number of Turkish (not Arab) prisoners.

So ended the Siege of Kut, and with it the history of the 6th Division, to which I am so proud to have belonged. Had it not been for a turn of Fortune's wheel I should myself also be "Somewhere in Turkey," together with those dear fellows who have struggled so long and so bravely against overwhelming odds. Many a weary hour I have spent cursing the luck that had laid me low when the first advance took place, and bemoaning my enforced inaction while the rest were doing so much; but, at any rate, I am still able to carry on, and I suppose one ought to be thankful for small mercies.

The career of the division, ending as it did with the battle of Ctesiphon, within nineteen



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miles of Baghdad, against overwhelming odds, its retreat therefrom over ninety miles of desert with its wounded and many prisoners, followed by an unparalleled siege of five months, constitutes one of the most glorious pages in Britain's history.

The time has not yet come, perhaps, to tell the whole story of Kut, but a few extracts from the orders issued by General Townshend to his troops during those tragic days may be of interest.

*Kut-el-Amara,*

*26th January, 1916.*

#### COMMUNIQUE TO THE TROOPS.

The relieving force under General Aylmer has been unsuccessful in its efforts to dislodge the Turks entrenched on the left bank of the river some fourteen miles below the position at Es Sinn, where we defeated them in September last, when the Turkish strength was greater than it is now. Our relieving force suffered severe loss, and had very bad weather to contend against; they are entrenched close to the Turkish position.

More reinforcements are on the way up river, and I confidently expect to be relieved some day during the first half of the month of February.

I desire all ranks to know why I decided to make a stand at Kut during our retirement from Ctesiphon. It was because as long as we hold Kut the Turks cannot get their ships, barges, stores and ammunition past this place, and so cannot move down to attack Amara, and thus we are holding up the whole of the Turkish advance. It also gives time for our reinforcements to come up river from Basra, and so restore success to our arms ; it gives time to our Allies the Russians, who are now overrunning Persia, to move towards Baghdad, which a large force is now doing. I had a personal message from General Baratoff, in the command of the Russian Expeditionary Force in Persia, the other day, telling me of his admiration of what you men of the 6th Division and the troops attached have done in the past few months, and telling me of his own progress on the road from Kirman-Shah towards Baghdad.

By standing at Kut I maintain the territory

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we have won in the past year at the expense of much blood, commencing with your glorious victory at Shaiba, and thus we maintain the campaign as a glorious one, instead of letting disaster pursue its course down to Amara and perhaps beyond.

I have ample food for eighty-four days, and that is not counting the three thousand animals which can be eaten. When I defended Chitral some twenty years ago, we lived well on *atta* and horseflesh; but, as I repeat above, I expect confidently to be relieved in the first half of the month of February.

Our duty stands out plain and simple—it is our duty to our Empire, to our beloved King and country, to stand here and hold up the Turkish advance as we are doing now, and with the help of all, heart and soul with me, together we will make this defence to be remembered in history as a glorious one. All in India and England are watching us now, and are proud of the splendid courage you have shown, and I tell you, let all remember the glorious defence of Plevna—for that is what is in my mind.

I am absolutely calm and confident as to the result ; the Turk, though good behind a trench, is of little value in the attack ; they have tried it once, and their losses in one night in their attempt on the fort were two thousand alone ; they have already had very heavy losses from General Aylmer's musketry and guns, and I have no doubt they have had enough. . . . I did my duty. You know the result and whether I did right or not, and your name will go down to history as the heroes of Ctesiphon, for heroes you proved yourselves in that battle. I perhaps by right should not have told you of the above, but I feel I owe it to you—all of you—to speak straight and openly and take you into my confidence ; for God knows, I felt our heavy losses and the sufferings of my poor brave wounded, and shall remember it as long as I live, and I may truly say that no General I know of has been more loyally obeyed and served than I have been in command of the 6th Division.

These words are long, I am afraid, but I speak straight from the heart, and you will see that I have thrown all officialdom overboard. We will succeed, mark my words,

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but save your ammunition as if it were gold.

(Signed) CHARLES TOWNSHEND,  
Major-General,  
Commanding 6th Division.

#### COMMUNIQUE TO THE TROOPS AT KUT.

As on a former occasion, I take the troops of all ranks into my confidence again. . . . Since the 5th of December, 1915, you have spent three months of cruel uncertainty, and to all men and all people uncertainty is intolerable—as I say, on the top of all this comes the second failure to relieve us. And I ask you to give a little sympathy to me also who have commanded you in those matters referred to, and who, having come to you as a stranger, now love my command with a depth of feeling I have never known in my life before. When I mention myself, I would couple the names of the Generals under me, whose names are distinguished in the Army as leaders of men.

I am speaking to you as I did before, straight from the heart, and, as I say, ask your sympathy for my feelings, having

promised you relief on certain dates on the promise of those ordered to relieve us—not their fault, no doubt. Do not think I blame them; they are giving their lives freely and deserve our gratitude and admiration.

But I want you to help me again as before. I have asked General Aylmer for the next attempt, to bring such numbers as will break down all resistance and leave no doubt of the issue.

In order, then, to hold out, I am killing a large number of horses, so as to reduce the quantity of grain eaten every day, and I have had to reduce your ration. It is necessary to do this in order to keep our flag flying. I am determined to hold out, and I know you are with me in this, heart and soul.

(Signed) CHARLES TOWNSHEND,  
Major-General,

Commanding the Garrison at Kut.

*Kut-el-Amara,*

*10th March, 1916.*

COMMUNIQUE TO THE TROOPS, BRITISH AND  
INDIAN.

The result of the attack of the Relief Force on the Turks entrenched in the Sannaiyat position is that the Relief Force has not yet won its way through, but is entrenched close to the Turks, in places some two hundred to three hundred yards distant. General Gorringe wired me last night he was consolidating his position as close to the enemy's trenches as he can get, with the intention of attacking again. He has had some difficulty with the floods, which he has remedied.

I have no other details. However, you will see that I must not run any risk over the date calculated to which our rations would last—namely, the 15th of April—as you all understand well that digging means delay, although General Gorringe does not say so.

I am compelled, therefore, to appeal to you all to make a determined effort to eke out our scanty means, so that I can hold out for certain till our comrades arrive, and I know I shall not appeal to you in vain.

I have, then, to reduce the rations to five

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ounces of meal for all ranks, British and Indian.

In this way I can hold out till the 21st of April if it becomes necessary, but it is my duty to take all precautions in my power.

In my *communiqué* to you on 26th of January I told you that our duty stood out plain and simple—it was to stand here and hold up the Turkish advance on the Tigris, working heart and soul together; and I expressed the hope that we would make this defence to be remembered in history as a glorious one, and I asked you in this connection to remember the defence of Plevna, which was longer than even that of Ladysmith.

Well, you have nobly carried out your mission, you have nobly answered the trust and appeal I put to you; the whole British Empire, let me tell you, is ringing with our defence of Kut.

You will all be proud to say one day: "I was one of the garrison of Kut," and as for Plevna and Ladysmith, we have outlasted them also. Whatever happens now we have all done our duty, as I said in my last report of the defence of this place, which has



now been telegraphed to Headquarters. I said that it was not possible in dispatches to mention everyone, but I could safely say that every individual in this force had done his duty to his King and Country.

I was absolutely calm and confident, as I told you on the 26th of January, of the ultimate result—and I am confident now. I ask you all, comrades of all ranks, British and Indian, to help me now in this food question as I ask you above.

(Signed) CHARLES TOWNSHEND,

Major-General,

Commanding the Garrison at Kut.

*Kut-el-Amara,*

*10th April, 1916.*

#### COMMUNIQUE TO THE TROOPS.

It became clear after General Gorrings's second repulse on 22nd of April at Sannaiyat, of which I was informed by Army Commander by wire, that the Relief Force could not win its way through in anything like time to relieve us, our limit of resistance as regards food being the 29th of April.

I was then ordered to open negotiations for the surrender of Kut in the words of the Army Commander's telegram, "the onus not resting on yourself. You are in the position of having conducted a gallant and successful defence, and you will be in a position to get better terms than any emissary of ours. . . . The Admiral, who has been in consultation with the Army Commander, considers that you with your prestige are likely to get the best terms. We can, of course, supply food as you may arrange."

These considerations alone—namely, that I can help my comrades of all ranks to the end—have decided me to overcome my bodily illness and the anguish of mind which I am suffering now, and I have interviewed the Turkish General-in-Chief yesterday, who is full of admiration at "our heroic defence of five months," as he put it.

Negotiations are still in progress, but I hope to be able to announce your departure for India on parole not to serve against the Turks, since the Turkish Commander-in-Chief says he thinks it will be allowed; and has wired to Constantinople to ask for this, and that the *Julnar*, which is lying with food for

us at Magasis now, may be permitted to come to us.

Whatever has happened, my comrades, you can only be proud of yourselves. We have done our duty to King and Empire. The whole world knows we have done our duty.

I ask you to stand by me in the next few days with your ready and splendid discipline shown throughout. We may possibly go into camp, I hope, between the fort and the town along the shore, whence we can easily embark.

(Signed) C. V. F. TOWNSHEND,

Major-General,

Commanding 6th Division and Force at Kut.

*Kut-el-Amara,*

*28th April, 1916.*

## CHAPTER XXI

**A**FTER the fall of Kut and the excitement of the final efforts made by the Relief Force, life in Basra settled down to something like its old monotony; war, as someone has wisely remarked, consisting of long periods of tedious inaction punctuated with lurid and unpleasant episodes. The place was full of people of all nationalities, and languages of the most varied and incongruous description were to be heard on every side. One morning, as I passed through the town, I listened to a group of Chinese carpenters who had been imported, every word ending apparently in "ting" or "tang"; a few yards further on were Madras coolies talking Tamil, other Indians chattering Urdu, Arabs with their "*yaller-wosh-a-wosh-hukka-bubble-La'illah,*" Persians, Chaldeans, Greeks and French. I really began to wonder if Babel were starting all over again!

On the whole, it was rather nice to be back

in civilization of sorts after my sojourn in the deserts, and especially to be able again to take part in the more active work of my corps. There was a good deal to be done, dispatching supplies up the river and making preparations for another move which was already contemplated. In the intervals of work there was generally something amusing to be seen of native life, and I remember on one occasion having quite a festive day in a motor-boat.

It was the occasion of an Arab *jolly*, a universal holiday, and the water was crowded with *bellums* full of joyous folk shouting and singing after the usual Arab style. In many of the boats were *nautch* girls doing extremely vulgar dances to the accompaniment of ribald songs, and in others were more discreet parties of the ladies of the town; some of them, I must say, were distinctly pretty. They were of all nationalities: the Arab women were ugly and dark, the negro ladies the same, only more so, and the Persians, Chaldeans and Circassians pink and white, with dark hair and beautiful eyes. One particularly lively lady I tried to photograph many times by motoring up fast from behind

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and then stopping the engines, so as to glide past noiselessly ; about four times I got her trying to hide behind a silk handkerchief, but eventually I snapped her at her best. It was a great success !

The *jolly* was really very like Henley ; a great number of boats massed on one side of the river filled with a medley of all sorts of Orientals. There were women of all types, some dressed European style, with feathers in their hats ; others in Parsee fashion, showing their faces ; others in silk kimonos, with their hair done up like a turban, and some with pink, black, green and blue *sarees* over their heads and black silk veils over their faces. One pair of pink silk ladies with black veils were decidedly good-looking, and were just as interested in us as we were in them ; they couldn't see us well enough through their veils, so pulled them up and had a good look. I don't think they would have done it if there had been any of their own people watching them !

Shortly after my arrival G—— turned up, having recovered from wounds received in France and Gallipoli. He is always a welcome addition to the mess, and is known as “ My

G—,” on account of a rather nice story connected with his misfortunes. Somewhere near Gallipoli, it appears, a German aeroplane sailed over his lines and started dropping bombs. G— was having breakfast at the time, but he rushed out, caught sight of the enemy plane ten thousand feet up in the air, shook his fist at it, clenched his teeth, and muttered “ My God ! ” Just then another bomb dropped close behind him, and poor G— retired to hospital for some weeks !

Of course, after the surrender of Kut we had the usual crop of rumours, some of which I fear were true. A couple of sepoys arrived who had managed to escape from the Turkish lines, and by hiding in a swamp by day and creeping through the bushes at night, had succeeded in reaching Corps Headquarters. They told us that all prisoners had been hurried off by forced marches to Baghdad, in spite of their weakness from starvation and other causes ; and that many of the weakest had fallen by the wayside. Another story, for which I cannot vouch, was that a British sergeant-major happened to pass a remark to a German officer whilst on the march, to the effect that this double marching was

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cruel, and that men in their state of health could not be expected to do it. The column was immediately halted, the N.C.O. put out into the desert and shot by the German officer with his revolver.

We were all, of course, very upset at hearing these tales, as up till that time the Turk had fought like a gentleman and had treated his prisoners excellently, even going to the extent of asking British officer prisoners to dine with the General. Everyone will have heard the story of General Townshend sending a request to the Turkish General for news of certain officers who could not be accounted for, and receiving the reply that "they are in excellent health and are at present dining with me."

From several other sources we had the same sort of rumours, and there can be no doubt that the advent of a large number of German officers was responsible for many hardships and cruelties which the Turks alone would never have committed. Until the fall of Kut they had fought well and behaved, on the whole, quite decently, and had matters gone as we all hoped, and as they should have done with proper management, no one would have had anything to complain about. It is not my



object to criticize what has perhaps been the most difficult campaign in the war ; but it is impossible to study the history of operations in Mesopotamia without being struck by the fact that on no occasion were simultaneous attacks carried out on both banks by all the troops in combined action ; nor can one help speculating as to what might have happened if the divisions had been massed instead of working as they invariably did in rotation.

About the beginning of May I left Basra for Amara, a hundred and fifty miles up the river. We had a very pleasant journey in almost the same circumstances as when I had seen it last : same old muddy water, same ramshackle boats, same swamps between the same palm-trees. It can hardly be called a picturesque route, although one passes several objects of interest on the way. Leaving Basra behind, with its busy tugs and barges, the last glimpse of the port shows the Custom-house at the mouth of the Ashar Creek, and, on the other bank of the river, the old Turkish hospital, which has been converted into Flying Corps Headquarters.

As we pass up stream we leave the mouth

of the Euphrates and Magill on the left, and here we see the last of the pushing, heaving, shouting crowds of coolies belonging to the Base. Perhaps we may be struck with the long line of brick kilns which mark the banks of the Euphrates, but even these soon disappear in the mirage as we turn northwards and pass up the Shatt-el-Hai to Kurna.

Up to this point the river is a really fine stream, broad and deep enough for the navigation of fairly large steamers. At Kurna we turn due north, and with Kurna on our left and Mazeera on our right, we leave the placid blue waters of the old Euphrates and enter the narrow swift current of the Tigris. A short distance above Kurna the palm-trees cease, and one's range of vision extends. Nothing is to be seen but water—one vast expanse of water—it is wonderful that the captains of the boats know which is river channel and which is swamp. Some mistakes had evidently been made, for several "beetles"—as the motor-propelled barges are called—were stuck on the banks. It is almost impossible to keep one's bearings owing to the various windings of the river; a boat following you one minute will appear to be coming

towards you the next and going away from you five minutes afterwards. It even puzzled Alexander the Great.

Norfolk Hill and the old Turkish positions appear like islands in a sea, and through the blue of the marshes stretches a khaki thread—the road built with much labour by many hands for our troops to march along. El Ozier, or, as it is more familiarly known, Ezra's tomb, can be seen from here ; it stands out of the sea, looking in the distance like a huge balloon, which, as one approaches it, resolves into a clump of trees with a dome-shaped tomb of green enamelled tiles—another small oasis of land amidst the desolation of water.

A few miles above Ezra's tomb we pass the Devil's Elbow—the most famous and difficult turn in the river's course. Even going up stream it is difficult to navigate, but returning down stream a boat has so little steerage way, owing to the swiftness of the current, that the method usually adopted is to bump round the corners.

It is at this point of the river that the Narrows begin, owing to the ground assuming a higher level, a fact which is very obvious in flood-time,

as dry land appears on either side shortly after passing the Devil's Elbow. The stream being very narrow and exceedingly swift, boats cannot pass each other at this point, and a telegraph station at either end has been constructed to regulate the traffic, so that the vessels may pass singly, no downward craft being allowed to enter the Narrows if another is threading its way up stream. The whole way along these Narrows are Arab villages, and the inhabitants run for miles along the bank, keeping pace with the boats passing up stream, endeavouring to sell chickens and eggs to the voyagers, who are only too pleased to get such delicacies. I must add that for half the journey through this bit of the river the barges lashed to either side of the boat are bumping against one or other of the banks of the river, so that there is no difficulty in making such purchases.

Arrived at Qal'at-Saleh, the river broadens and the floods are considerably less, the river not only running between well-defined banks, but desert scrub and meadow land appearing on either side as far as Amara. Only one spot claims our attention on this portion of the journey, principally because it is the

only place at which a tree other than an occasional palm has been visible since Ezra's tomb. Like El Ozier, this is also a place of pilgrimage, the tomb of Imam Abdulla-ib-Ali, who is buried there. The grove of trees round the dome-shaped edifice attracts the gaze of all passers-by, albeit they are but thorn-trees.

Amara is a town of moderate size, situated for the most part on the left bank of the river, between the river and the canal, which here tails off to the east. Facing the river is a long row of two-storied brick buildings, the old Turkish barracks, which detract considerably from the picturesqueness of the place; they had then been turned into a hospital for British troops. The town owns a good covered-in bazaar, where there are several Sabæan silver workers, who charge fabulous prices for mediocre goods. There are quite a number of palm groves, and a bridge of boats connecting the two banks. At the north end of the town, at the point where the canal joins the river, stands the Pindi Hospital, whilst on the opposite side of the river, in addition to the small Arab portion of the town, stand several Indian General

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Hospitals, and many men were employed at the time of my arrival in erecting new huts for further accommodation for the sick and convalescent. Amara was, indeed, beginning to be considered the health resort of the country, and was the nearest approach to civilization for those further up the stream.

Amara, the "Place of Tears," is by tradition the spot at which Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden, but it is very difficult to locate any places mentioned in the Bible, owing to their names having been altered during the course of time. I discovered the river Hiddekel in Genesis xi. 14, and looking up all available references, decided that it must be what is now called the Kerkeh river, while the Ulai can be none other than the river Diz. It is all very interesting when one has seen the country ; but, as I remarked, accurate information is not easy to get, and one must rely principally on a lucky brain-wave for inspiration. There can be, however, no doubt that the Kerkeh and the Euphrates were two of the rivers in the Garden of Eden, the other two remaining for the present a mystery.

After a short stay at Amara we proceeded

to Sheikh Saad, where our journey for the time being was to terminate. It was a dull voyage through country which soon after leaving the port began again to take upon itself a water-logged appearance; and the sight, after five weary days, of our white tents flying the Union Jack was most welcome. We had, indeed, been lucky to do it in so short a time; if you have the misfortune to get stuck on a sand-bank, you may be anything from fifteen to twenty days en route.

Travelling up the river day after day, with vast stretches of country on either side, brought home to one how immensely long are our lines of communication, and what a large force we need to protect them.

We soon got settled down in our new camp, at any rate for the time being; there seemed to be a sort of general post going on, and as I had no idea how long I might have to be there, it seemed hardly worth while going to any trouble, and I contented myself with a forty-pound tent, full of flies and extremely torrid as to temperature.

Everyone was wondering when the new offensive was to begin, and the camp was pervaded by a spirit of unrest. We were

getting on fairly well into the summer and reinforcements had not then arrived; it was supposed, from previous experience, that they would turn up just as the weather really got nice and warm to swell the sunstroke casualty list! The universal opinion was that the fall of Kut had opened the eyes of the authorities as to the importance of keeping up British prestige in the East, and that they were at last beginning to take us seriously. There was, in fact, quite a lot of good advice waiting in Sheikh Saad for anyone who had wanted to hear it, especially as to the manner in which things might be more advantageously conducted. Our methods were forcibly illustrated by a well-known Persian proverb: "The mule works that the yaboo may eat." The yaboo, I should explain, is an old and decrepit beast, whose sole use is to lead its own caravan of laden mules along difficult and almost impossible tracks. I will not further enlarge upon the aptness of the allusion, but will merely add that we considered our yaboos might have chosen an easier road for their hard-worked animals. Somebody, of course, has to lead, and it is possible that we might do better by following the German



plan of eliminating all initiative. At any rate, matters would then be reduced to the mere automatic carrying out of orders, and consequently there should be no mistakes, provided that the man issuing orders was a genius in every way and able to carry even the minutest detail in his head. *But* we should first have to catch our genius!

One hears curious stories of men being tied by their orders, afraid to use their own discretion and initiative, and so many cases of what might have happened if someone had done something else! I suppose everything will be in plain black and white for the nations to read some day after the war.

One read amusing things in the home papers, and I remember we were greatly entertained by a cartoon in the *Daily Sketch* depicting "Justice holding out a bottle of punishment for shortage in Mesopotamia." We hoped that even if there were inaction in certain quarters, the daily Press was keeping its eye on us, and that eventually the right men would be brought to book. I think if the question had been put to the vote amongst the officers in the country that the first on the Black List would be he who announced

before the war that, having reduced the Army in India to a skeleton, he was now going to proceed to grind its bones. Next to him would come the man who was happy to say that even with the enhanced Army and war conditions, *the Military Expenditure in India had not risen*, and that the expedition had paid for itself out of the export of dates! Third on the list would be the man who permitted the first offender to carry out the skeletonizing process above quoted.

I am glad to say, however, that matters appeared even then to be moving in the right direction as regards transport; it has always puzzled me why in England one man (A.S.C.) is considered barely sufficient to look after one horse or mule, whilst in the East three mules are for practical purposes apparently insufficient for one man. I fancy we shall yet see the status of the mule driver in India raised to very nearly the equivalent of the sepoy.

The question of promotion in the Indian Army had apparently been entirely overlooked; newly-joined men were going over the heads of those who had seen many a long year's service, and several of us had the satis-

faction of watching our contemporaries blossom into colonels, and even generals, while we ourselves remained mere captains of the good old Indian *Foj*. There were also many cases in which the square peg was in the round hole, together with various other misfits; for instance, C—, whose duties consisted of taking out thirty odds and ends of men to cut grass, his pay for this onerous task being the equivalent of £680 a year!

However, on the whole, there was very little grousing, and I only mention these facts to give some idea of what we felt and thought in those days.

## CHAPTER XXII

**B**Y the end of June it was getting distinctly torrid, and the heat being too trying for white troops to remain long in the front trenches, a move was made which necessitated our going to Sinn, further up the river. Things were certainly beginning to speed up; river boats began to arrive, and it almost looked as if at last the great "Offensive" was to make a start. But, as usual, the elements were against us. We had battled against the floods earlier in the year, and when we were again ready to make a move, we were delayed by the drought, and boats had the greatest difficulty in getting up the river.

We went by land to Sinn, marching by night through the desert, and halting three days at half-way, reaching there eventually after a trying but not adventurous journey. The heat was terrific, and as there were only tents for our occupation, I set about making myself a dug-out immediately upon

my arrival. No sooner had I done so, than we were moved half a mile away ; however, the process was again repeated, and I lived in comparative comfort in my rabbit-hole.

The difference in temperature at midday between a forty-pound tent and an underground hole, rigged up with a grass window facing the prevailing wind and kept wet by an automatic drip-feed, is extraordinary. Many officers used to drop in to pass away a cool half-hour during the heat of the day, and we often wondered whether it would have made any difference to the health and comfort of the troops had certain areas been set aside as permanent camping grounds, with standing orders that any troops occupying them should build something in the shape of huts or dug-outs before they moved on.

Our chief difficulty was food ; our rations at that period barely kept body and soul together. They consisted nominally of half bully-beef, half fresh meat, and bullet-proof biscuits ; even of these there was little enough, and we all used to watch each other like wild animals, in case anyone took more than his share. There were no vegetables to be had, no chickens, eggs, nor fresh milk,

and the sugar, butter and cheese—what there was of it—had all melted in the heat. Some genius one day conceived the idea of boiling the tenderer sprouts of the thorn bushes, and we had occasionally a dish of something that was rather like bitter spinach, very unappetizing, but there was so much scurvy and general sickness that one was glad of fresh green food of any kind. The animals also suffered considerably, and lived principally on a sort of woody fibre, overgrown grass which had seeded and died. Some people called it grass and others hay, but these, at any rate, contain a certain amount of sap, whereas the fibre had none; it was, however, considered to contain valuable nutritive qualities in Mesopotamia at that time of famine.

What I really needed more than anything was a book showing how to feed a Clydesdale on six pounds of grain per diem, plus a few pounds of woody fibre, with instructions on rearing a mule on about half that quantity. Such a work would be of the greatest use to veterinary officers, gunners and transport officers, and I here present the suggestion to anyone who knows enough to write it.

The camp was well within range of the

Turkish guns, and we were liable to be shelled at any moment ; but, as a matter of fact, the enemy confined himself to a little gentle hate morning and evening, probably because he knew quite well that any frightfulness on his part would be followed by even more on ours. He was particularly fond of sending over a shell which we called "Lizzie," a little beast of a thing, out of a long-range 10-lb. gun, which often annoyed us extremely, although her bark was worse than her bite. I was patting my horse one morning when I thought I heard a flight of sand-grouse overhead, and before I had time to make sure "Lizzie" fell about a hundred yards away from where I was standing. The total result of that day's bombardment of the camp and hospital was injury to one syce, who fell off his horse with fright and broke his leg. A Tommy in the hospital told the *padre* that he was "fair bewildered"; and added: "I comes in from the front trenches, where we never sees a shot fired, into hospital to 'ave a nice rest, and I 'as to take to shelter trenches to get out of the fire. It's wicked, it is."

There were two extremely active flying men in the Turkish lines opposite us; one was

certainly a German and the other believed to be a Turk, so we called them Fritz and Fazal. They flew a Fokker machine, faster than anything we ourselves had in the country, and were frequently over our lines. Nothing seemed to daunt this enterprising couple ; and owing to our having nothing capable of putting up a decent fight against them, they did pretty much as they liked. On one occasion they drove our machines right into our own lines, and after describing a graceful curve, sailed away unmolested to the futile accompaniment of all our available guns. Of course, everybody claimed a hit, but they appeared as usual the next day.

We got quite accustomed to their pleasant little visits, and almost grew to enjoy the daily excitement of heading them off, and the slightly more thrilling experience of dodging their shells when we failed to keep them at a distance. Three dropped one morning in the Supply Depot, but did no damage except to the feelings of one of the Devons ; he was walking along chewing a dog biscuit, when a loud explosion startled him out of his customary calm, whereupon he merely turned his head and remarked in



disgust : “ ’Old ’ard ! Chuck it ! ” and went on with his breakfast. On another occasion Fritz dropped a message, saying : “ If we evacuate the Sannaiyat position, please do not claim that you took it ! ” This was a sarcastic comment on an article in the *Times* announcing that we had captured the Dujailah Redoubt, which, as a matter of fact, we did not do, the Turks having left it on their own account and for their own reasons. The place was only a quarter of a mile from our camp, and I went over to have a look at it ; it was like a small replica of Shush, with masses of old bricks and pottery embedded in mounds of earth. From the top of the mounds one could plainly see the trees and houses in the ill-fated village of Kut, not more than six or seven miles away.

The 14th of August was, indeed, a glad day ; I shall never forget it. Fritz had sailed over on a strafing expedition and was taken on by three of our machines ; for some days he had been rather overdoing it, and our men were getting desperate. They had a grand fight in mid-air, swooping about and around each other to the intense interest and excitement of the whole camp, who, needless to say, were

watching the battle from the ground. Suddenly, a lucky shot from an anti-aircraft gun got our Fritz in a useful spot, ripped the aluminium casing off his plane, damaged his engine, and down he came, just on the Turkish bank of the river opposite the camp. We had visions of a mangled heap of human débris underneath the fallen Fokker, but, to our surprise, the indefatigable little man struggled from beneath the wreckage, and we saw his little fat legs running as hard as they could go across to his own lines. It would have been quite easy to get a shot at him, but somehow no one had the heart to do it. We were, in fact, secretly I think rather glad that he had escaped unhurt; one could not help admiring the plucky and skilful way in which he had evaded our airmen all those months.

Another event, and one which has left a very different impression on my mind, was the death of poor Shamrock, the pony which had carried me faithfully throughout the whole campaign. She had gone through every conceivable danger and hardship, and met her end by accident; her death troubled me more than I can say. A British gunner was

fooling about with his rifle one night when it went off, the bullet passing straight down the horse lines, missing twenty horses and hitting Shamrock in the fore-paw, and eventually lodging in the near fore of one of my other horses. The poor beast was in a hopeless condition, and I was obliged to shoot her—a horrible moment, for she had been such a good pal and had carried me gallantly many hundreds of miles. Often when I dismounted in the desert to give her a breather she would follow me without a lead, and when she thought it time that we were getting on, would quietly rub her nose on my shoulder. Although a thoroughbred, she was full of gentle ways, and had many admirers. The poor syce Buggoo, who had been with her ever since she had arrived in Bombay from England in 1914, was quite broken-hearted about her; they were the greatest of friends; she used to follow him about like a dog and call to him directly he came within sight.

During the whole of that hot weather we had a good deal of trouble with the transport, in spite of the railway which had by that time been built and had taken the larger part of

our work. We were short of water, short of food, and lived in a chronic atmosphere of hungry anticipation, and yet, I think, on the whole we were not at all unhappy. Our poet laureate was a source of endless joy, and I must not omit a specimen of the priceless verse with which he regaled us :

- “ G is the grazing we do all the day.  
We fervently hope that some day we may  
Get issued again with a ration of hay,  
Although we're in Mesopotamia.
- “ W's the work that we do—cutting hay—  
That dreary monotonous job day by day ;  
But what it is used for we really can't say.  
We're all mad in Mesopotamia.
- “ H is for Hanna, rushed without doubt  
By the Iron Division with many a shout.  
Did they know in the night that the Turks had cleared  
out  
Into beautiful Mesopotamia ?
- “ O are the ' orders ' we get from the corps.  
No doubt you've all heard of such orders before.  
They are issued at three and cancelled at four  
In muddled Mesopotamia.
- “ R are the rations ' By Order ' we get,  
Though no one I know of has sampled them yet—  
And I don't think we will, so it's best to forget  
That they're somewhere in Mesopotamia.

“ F is for Fritz and his Fokker which brings  
Nice messages, bombs, and similar things.  
But just let him wait till we get our new wings,  
And we'll drop him in Mesopotamia.

“ Q are the questions they'll ask *re* this show—  
But they never inquire from the fellows who know,  
Though they'll get some home truths if ever we go  
Away from Mesopotamia.”

Each of these verses has a local significance all its own, and the whole alphabet represents a series of facts which have not only indelibly inscribed their memories on our minds, but were from time to time the chief topics of conversation amongst the troops out there.

One of them refers to a fact no doubt already mentioned in the English papers—the blowing up of the ammunition barges by the Turks. Fritz directed the fire of the Turkish guns from his Fokker overhead, and it was a very pretty piece of shooting. I am told by one who was close enough to be knocked down by the force of the explosion, that it was even fascinating to watch the shells dropping closer and closer at each shot, until at last one hit a barge, and exploded immediately, of course blowing the barge to pieces. Amongst other things which hurtled through the air was a motor-bicycle. The explosion took

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place close to some mule lines; the mules all broke loose and escaped into the desert, but were caught again shortly afterwards. The crash of the explosion was heard eight miles off, and to those on the spot it must have been a perfect inferno.

“R” refers to the luxuries troops are entitled to draw anywhere in Mesopotamia; but the less said about them the better! Rations and luxuries were rather a sore point in Mesopotamia.

Talking of rations reminds me of rather an amusing story. A regiment unexpectedly arrived at the local bakery and demanded its bread ration. “Very sorry,” said the man in charge, “but I have only got five loaves.”

“If you could give us a few small fishes as well, perhaps we might perform a miracle,” was the somewhat profane reply which greeted the baker’s apology.

There was quite a wave of alphabetical poems in Mesopotamia about that time. I think it must have been the result of men arriving from Gallipoli full of the “Anzac” book-songs and sayings. They seem to have parodied most things in Gallipoli, even to composing a new creed in the style of

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the Athanasian, called the "Mediterranean Creed." My principal memory of the effusion is the attempt to prove by "logic" that there are "not three Generals but one General."

During my sojourn in the country there have been only two things in Nature to admire. The first is the wonderful night-time; after a day of terrific heat and suffocating dust the night comes upon one as a gift of the gods. The silence can almost be felt; the dust sinks to earth and all things rest. The heavens are a glittering mass of the most marvellous stars; and as one gazes at the sky from one's blankets out in the open, it almost seems as if some giant hand had scattered an untold wealth of gems on to the blue carpet of the firmament. The moon comes up in brilliant majesty, not wooing the night as in the north; there she is as much Queen of the Night as the sun is Lord of the Day. Can one be surprised that the worship of the moon and stars should have been that of the old Babylonians? or can we wonder that the emblem of Sîn and the star of Ishtar should be perpetuated to-day in the

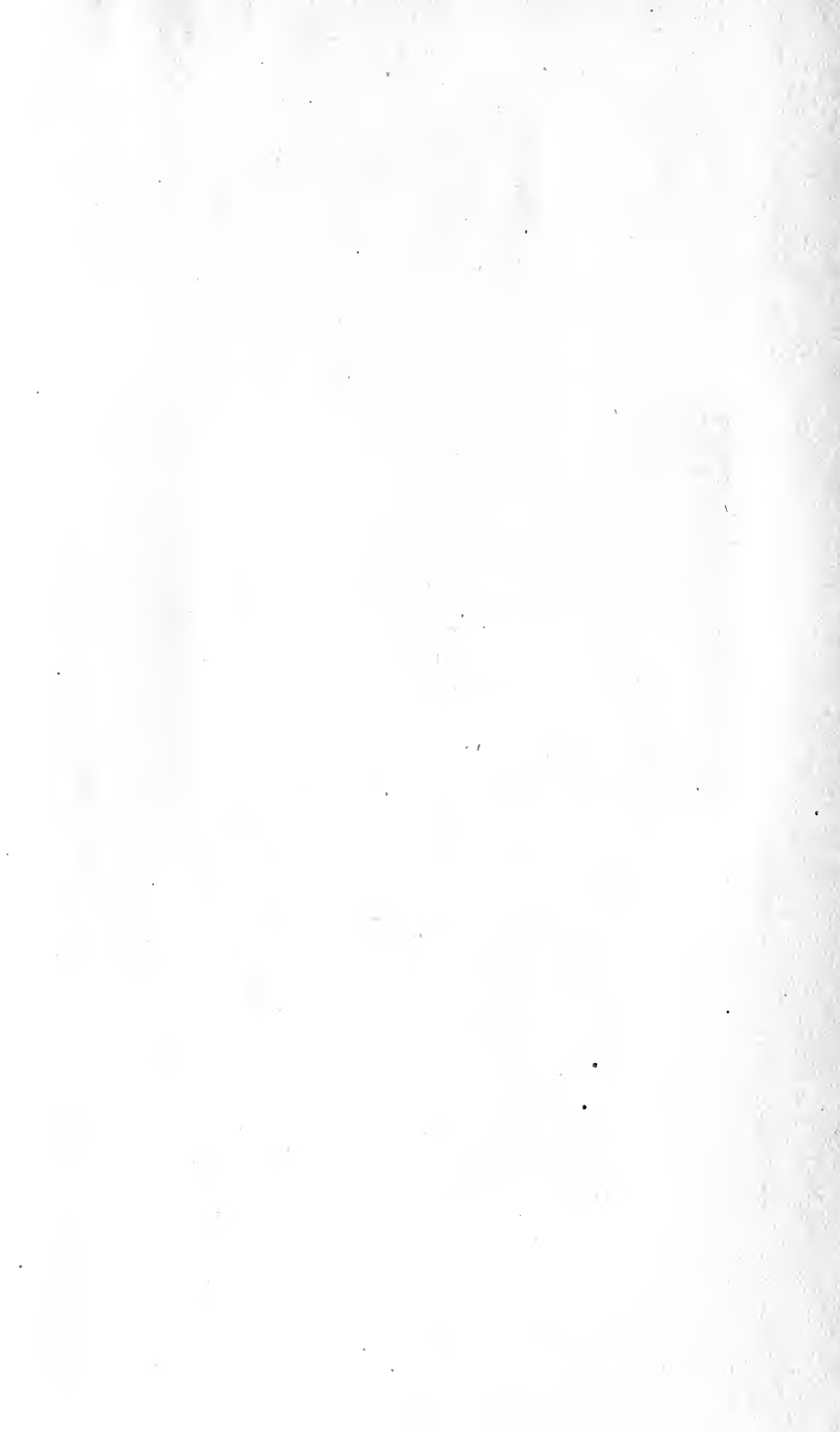
Crescent and Star of the Ottoman Empire ? I have often seen the Crescent and Star shining in the evening sky, and cannot marvel that it should have been taken as a national emblem. Night, with its cool air, quickly brings sleep, in which one forgets the horrors of the day that is past and the terrors of the day to come.

Early dawn brings the second of Nature's wonders. Long before daylight the larks begin their morning hymns of praise ; never have I heard birds sing more sweetly. It is not a twitter or a chirrup, but one long carillon.

God knows what they sing to or what for ; it cannot be for joy at the coming of day ; perhaps it is for joy of life or to give thanks to their Maker for the blessing of Night. Anyhow, their song makes one glad that there is at least one of God's creatures that has heart to rejoice amidst the general desolation, and to give one a blessed message of faith and hope for the future.

THE END





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