

JOURNEYS  
IN  
PERSIA AND KURDISTAN

INCLUDING A SUMMER IN THE UPPER KARUN  
REGION AND A VISIT TO THE  
NESTORIAN RAYAHS

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any day, it can scarcely be expected of Oriental, or indeed of any human nature, that he will not make a good thing of it while he has it, and squeeze all he can out of the people.

The streets are very narrow, and look narrower just now, because the snow is heaped almost to the top of the mud walls, which are not broken up as in Turkish towns by projecting lattice windows, but are absolutely blank, with the exception of low-arched entrances to the courtyards within, closed by heavy, unpainted wooden doors, studded with wooden nails. The causeways, on which, but for the heaps of slippery snow two men might walk abreast, have a ditch two or three feet wide between them, which is the roadway for animals. There are some open spaces, abounding in ruinous heaps, others where goods are unloaded, surrounded with warehouses, immense brick bazars with domed roofs, a citadel or *ark*, where the Governor lives, a large parade ground and barracks for 2000 men, mosques of no pretensions, public baths, caravanserais, brick warehouses behind the bazars, public gardens, with fountains and avenues of poplars, a prison, and some good houses like this one, hidden behind high mud walls. Although the snow kindly veils a good deal of deformity, the city impresses one as ruinous and decayed; yet it has a large trade, and is regarded as one of the most prosperous places in the Empire.<sup>1</sup>

The bazars are spacious and well stocked with European goods, especially with Manchester cottons of colours and patterns suited to Oriental taste, which loves carnation red. There are many Jews, otherwise the people are Shiah Moslems, with an increasing admixture of the secret sect of the *Bābis*. In some

<sup>1</sup> A journey of nine months in Persia, chiefly in the west and north-west, convinced me that this aspect of ruin and decay is universal.

respects the Shiah are more fanatical than the Sunnis, as, for instance, it is quite possible to visit a mosque in Turkey, but here a Christian is not allowed to cross the threshold of the outer gate. Certain customs are also more rigidly observed. A Persian woman would be in danger of death from the mob if she appeared unveiled in the streets. When I walked through the town, though attended by a number of men, the *major-domo* begged me to exchange my gauze veil for a mask, and even when I showed this deference to custom the passing through the bazars was very unpleasant, the men being decidedly rude, and inclined to hoot and use bad language. Even the touch of a Christian is regarded as polluting, and I nearly got into trouble by handling a "flap-jack," mistaking it for a piece of felt. The bazars are not magnificent. No rich carpets or other goods are exposed to view for fear of exactions. A buyer wanting such things must send word privately, and have them brought to his house.

Justice seems to be here, much as in Turkey, a marketable commodity, which the working classes are too poor to buy. A man may be kept in prison because he is too poor to get out, but justice is usually summary, and men are not imprisoned for long terms. If prisoners have friends, the friends feed them, if not they depend on charity, and charity is a Moslem virtue. There is no prison here for women. They are punished by having their heads shaved, and by being taken through the town on asses. Various forms of torture are practised, such as burning with hot irons, the bastinado, and squeezing the fingers in a vice. The bastinado is also most extensively used as a punishment.

Yesterday by appointment we were received by the Governor of the Province. Riding through the slippery snow-heaped alleys is not what Europeans would think

toilet could add no additional beauty, were treated with *kohl*, and the eyebrows artificially extended. She wore fine gray socks, white skin-fitting tights, a black satin skirt, or rather flounce, embroidered in gold, so *bouffante* with flounces of starched crinoline under it that when she sat down it stood out straight, not even touching the chair. A chemise of spangled gauze, and a pale blue gold-embroidered zouave jacket completed a costume which is dress, not clothing. The somewhat startling effect was toned down by a beautiful Constantinople silk gauze veil, sprigged in pale pink and gold, absolutely transparent, which draped her from head to foot.

I did not get away in less than two hours. The Amir and Mirza, used to each other's modes of expression, found no difficulties, and Mirza being a man of education as well as intelligence, thought was conveyed as easily as fact. The lady kept her fine eyes lowered except when her husband spoke to her.

The chief topics were the education and position of women in England, religion, politics, and the future of Persia, and on all the Amir expressed himself with a breadth and boldness which were astonishing. How far the Amir has gone in the knowledge of the Christian faith I cannot say, nor do I feel at liberty to repeat his most interesting thoughts. A Sunni, a liberal, desiring complete religious liberty, absolutely tolerant to the *Bābis*, grateful for the kindness shown to some of them by the British Legation, and for the protection still given to them at the C. M. S. house, admiring Dr. Bruce's persevering work, and above all the Medical Mission, which he regards as "the crown of beneficence" and "the true imitation of the life of the Great Prophet, Jesus," all he said showed a strongly religious nature, and a philosophical mind much given to religious thought. "All true religions aim at one thing," he said, "to make the heart and life pure."

He asked a good deal about my travels, and special objects of interest in travelling, and was surprised when I told him that I nearly always travel alone; but after a moment's pause he said, "I do not understand that you were for a moment alone, for you had everywhere the love, companionship, and protection of God."

He regards as the needs of Persia education, religious liberty (the law which punishes a Moslem with death for embracing Christianity is still on the statute-book), roads, and railroads, and asked me if I had formed any opinion on the subject. I said that it appeared to me that security for the earnings of labour, and equal laws for rich and poor, administered by incorruptible judges, should accompany education. I much fear that he thinks incorruptible judges a vision of a dim future!

The subject of the position of women in England and the height to which female education is now carried interested him extremely. He wished his wife to understand everything I told him. The success of women in examinations in art, literature, music, and other things, and the political wisdom and absolutely constitutional rule of Queen Victoria, all interested him greatly. He asked if the women who took these positions were equally good as wives and mothers? I could only refer again to Queen Victoria. An Oriental cannot understand the position of unmarried women with us, or dissociate it from religious vows, and the Amir heard with surprise that a very large part of the philanthropic work which is done in England is done by women who either from accident or design have neither the happiness nor the duties of married life. He hopes to see women in Persia educated and emancipated from the trammels of certain customs, "but," he added, "all reform in this direction must come slowly, and grow naturally out of a wider education, if it is to be good and not hurtful."

small shops, making watches and jewellery, carpentering, in which they are very skilful, and market-gardening; they are thrifty and industrious, and there is very little real poverty.

The selling of wine does not conduce to the peace of Julfa. A mixture of sour wine and *arak*, a coarse spirit, is very intoxicating, and Persians, when they do drink, drink till they are drunk, and the abominable concealed traffic in liquor with the Moslems of the town is apt to produce disgraceful brawls.

Wine can be bought for fourpence a quart, but the upper classes make their own, and it costs less than this. Wines are both red and white, and one red wine is said to be like good Chianti. The Armenians tipple and also get drunk, priests included. It is said that some of the jars used in fermenting are between 200 and 300 years old.

The excellent education given in the C. M. S. schools has had the effect of stimulating the Armenian schools, and of producing among the young men a large emigration to India, Batavia, Constantinople, and even England. Only the dullards as a rule remain in Julfa. Some rise high in Persian and even in Turkish employment.

The Armenian women are capital housewives and very industrious. In these warm evenings the poorer women sit outside their houses in groups knitting. The knitting of socks is a great industry, and a woman can earn 4s. a month by it, which is enough to live upon.

In Julfa, and it may be partly owing to the presence of a European community, the Christians have nothing to complain of, and, so far as I can see, they are on terms of equality with the Persians.

However, Isfahan is full of religious intolerance which can easily be excited to frenzy, and the arrogance of the

*mollahs* has increased since the fall from almost regal state of the Zil-i-Sultan, the Shah's eldest son, into the position of a provincial governor, for he curbed them somewhat, and now the restraint is removed. However, it is against the Jews and the *Bābis*, rather than the Christians, that their hostility is directed.

A few weeks ago some *Bābis* were peaceably returning to a neighbouring village, when they were attacked, and seven of their number were massacred under atrocious circumstances, the remainder taking refuge for a time in the British Telegraph office. Several of both sexes who escaped are in concealment here in a room in the Hospital compound, one of them with a broken jaw.

The hiding of these *Bābis* has given great umbrage to the bigots of Isfahan, though the Amir-i-Panj justified it on all grounds, and about the time I arrived it was said that a thousand city fanatics purposed to attack the mission premises. But at one of the mosques there is a *mollah*, who with Gamaliel-like wisdom urged upon them "that if 300 Moslems were killed nothing would happen, but if a single European were killed, what then?"<sup>1</sup>

I cannot close this letter without a few words on the Armenian churches, some of which I visited with Mr. and Dr. Aganoor, and others with Dr. Bruce. The ceremony representing the washing of the disciples' feet on the Armenian Holy Thursday was a most magnificent one as regards the antique splendour and extreme beauty of the vestments and jewels of the officiating bishop, but

<sup>1</sup> I have written nothing about this fast-increasing sect of the *Bābis*, partly because being a secret sect, I doubt whether the doctrines which are suffered to leak out form really any part of its esoteric teaching, and partly because those Europeans who have studied the *Bābis* most candidly are diametrically opposed in their views of their tenets and practice, some holding that their aspirations are after a purer life, while others, and I think a majority, believe that their teachings are subversive of morality and of the purity of domestic life.