



THE KORAN GATE, SHIRAZ

W. H. R. CHAMBERS

A
PERSIAN JOURNEY

BEING AN ETCHER'S IMPRESSIONS
OF THE MIDDLE EAST

WITH
FORTY-EIGHT DRAWINGS BY

FRED RICHARDS.
R.E.



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carpets are treasured up in families as heirlooms. It was explained to me that the difference between a good Turkish carpet and a good Persian one was, the former would only last a life time, while the latter would last for ever.'

If this 'ancient and valuable Persian carpet' were the famous Ardabil treasure, and if Colonel Stewart were alive to-day, a conversation with the officials of the Victoria and Albert Museum as regards the price of this famous carpet to-day would probably interest him.

The only monuments of antiquity in the town besides the bazaars are the ruins of the famous Blue Mosque and the Citadel. The former has just enough of its enamelled tiles left to give a suspicion of its former glory. The 'Blue Mosque of Tabriz' was considered to be the 'chef d'œuvre of Persia and perhaps of all Oriental architecture.' To have been told of all its virtues and to read of its many perfect qualities, are sufficient reasons to make the traveller cross the mountain passes for a glimpse of this historic gem of Islamic architecture. The up-to-date Tabrizi have preserved it in a little park with flower borders and seats. To-day, however, the journey to see it should be rather in the nature of archæological research than anything else. The Citadel, too, is but a shadow of its past. Some of its walls, 120 feet high and 25 feet thick at the base, are still standing. These can be mounted by a rather perilous flight of steps, and from the top is a glorious view of the beautiful surroundings of Tabriz, which shows the great extent of the city. It was at this point of the Ark that faithless wives used to be hurled to the ground. The building is said to have been built by Harun ar Rashid. The enormous proportions of its ruins and the Eastern character of its style make it an ideal setting for one of the tales of the *Arabian Nights Entertainment*. It has now become part of a town park where the young Tabrizi gallants disport themselves. The stones of the citadel preach many sermons. There, in 1850, the Bab Mirza Ali Muhammed, founder of the Babi sect, was shot. After being

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led by the order of the authorities, his body, with that of one of his disciples was dragged through the streets and the bazaars and cast out beyond the city gates – food for the dogs and jackals. The story of his death is an ugly one.

Not far from Tabriz, on the north-western side, the country is remarkable for its natural features and its historic associations. There is Mount Ararat – at the moment more or less forbidden ground to the stranger owing to the warlike activities of the Kurds and the Turks. Urumiah, a town on the lake of the same name, has two ancient traditions. One writer makes it the birthplace of the roaster, while another speaks of it as the burial place of one of the 'three wise men' who made the historic pilgrimage to Bethlehem on Christmas Eve, B.C. 1.

The last time that Tabriz came into the public eye was ten years ago (1921) at the signing of the Russo-Persian Treaty when, as part of the cancelling of debts and concessions, Russia handed over to Persia the section of railway from Julfa on the Russian border to Tabriz.

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came more into touch with European politics. Diplomacy and business gradually took the place of battles, and assassinations were less frequent; heaps of eyes and pyramids of skulls dropped out of fashion. In the nineteenth century Fath Ali Shah, who, although better acquainted with the West than many of his predecessors, still showed that the Kings of the East were not without inventive minds both in domestic and diplomatic affairs.

Professor Browne explains how this Shah invented, on the domestic side, a beautiful marble bath in Teheran into which the ladies of the Harem entered by sliding down a marble slope, while their lord, Fath Ali Shah, waited below to catch them. Still he did not mix state affairs with his pleasures. Finding his Vizier, to whom he owed his throne, too firmly entrenched in public favour, he removed him by having him thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil. Fath Ali Shah is best remembered in Persia by the length of his beard and his family.

From now on, Persian affairs assume a more modern atmosphere. The pages of its manuscripts become illuminated by such names as Napoleon, Captain John Malcolm and Rawlinson. England, Russia, and Turkey are also frequently mentioned. Nadir-ud-Din, who twice visited Europe and was assassinated by Mirza Rida of Kerman on the eve of the Jubilee, 1896, stands out as the chief figure. The Babis and their new religion and the subsequent brutal persecution brings Persian history almost up to date. To give a detailed account of this last period of what might be called 'the other day' would require more pages than the whole of this book contains already. There is, however, one last story which should be told, which is still coloured with the romance of the Orient.

Discontent and intrigues eventually brought forth the Constitution, but bribery and corruption still lingered, and among other things the younger generation demanded an all-Persian Army. A soldier came on the scene at this moment. By his own exertions he had raised himself from the ranks where, from the age of twenty-

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five, he had been a trooper of the Cossacks. He was now forty years of age, and not very well educated outside his own job; but, although of poor parents, was of a good presence and of splendid physique. He it was who was chosen for the task of expelling the Russian officers, and he carried out his orders. One night a conspiracy was arranged. The soldier, now a junior colonel with 2,500 troops, entered Teheran through the Kasvin gate and occupied the Government offices. The same day this junior colonel became supreme head of the Persian army. Thus the story goes on in all its Eastern swiftness. The new commander of the army demanded money to feed, clothe and pay his troops. He got it. He became Minister of War, and demanded more troops. He became virtually dictator. During the next four years he created a new army, which was clothed and paid for the first time for many years. The militant tribes, the Bakhtiari, the Qashgais, the Kurds and the Lars accepted his authority, and, with the subjugation of the Sheikh of Mohammerah, the unification of Persia was now complete. The soldier had become a national hero, while the real shah was not even sulking in his tent, but he was enjoying himself in Paris and Deauville. The soldier returned (after receiving the surrender of the Sheikh in person, through Kerbela) to visit the shrine of the Martyrs. His entry from the shrine to Teheran was in the nature of a Roman triumph. Five years had elapsed since the soldier had become the head of the army. The Crown Prince was advised to join his brother, the deposed Shah. On August 25th, 1926, the great Mogul throne which Nadir Shah brought from Delhi was brought out, with its assets of large uncut diamonds and pearls, outvieing the magnificence of the great Peacock Throne. On it, in a coronation robe embroidered with pearls, the one-time Cossack soldier was crowned His Imperial Majesty Shah Riza Pahlavi.

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TEHERAN of to-day is being Westernized with feverish haste. Whole strips of the veneer of Western styles and periods, irrespective of the countries from which they emanated, are being adopted and adapted. Town planning, road making and building at the moment, absorb the inhabitants. Of the new buildings, one or two do credit to their architects; one in particular being the new edifice of the Imperial Bank of Persia with the fine lettering of its name in Roman capitals. This building shows evidence what excellent craftsmen the Persians still remain under proper guidance. In spite of its success as a fine building, one cannot help thinking how much better it would look in the home of its inspiration. So, too, the Bank at Isfahán, another modern building which is outstanding in Persia, but, at the same time is out of keeping with its surroundings. The tile work of the Persian lion panel on this latter building shows very obviously the downward trend this craft has taken. The old Bank which was on its last legs last year (speaking architecturally) may have disappeared by now. It was by no means a perfect building but its tile work gave an Oriental charm to the square, which is fast becoming to look like a modern square in any modern town. In a country where the sun not merely shines but blazes, one would have thought that buildings with arcaded fronts like those in some Italian towns and villages, or even something similar to the 'Rows' at Chester would have given the kindly shade every one longs for between nine a.m. and five p.m., which, after all is a fair proportion of the day - in spite of the fact that most people in Persia go to bed in the heat of the afternoon. (In some schools, even the schoolboys undress themselves and go to bed between

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o and four in the afternoon.) Strangely enough most of the old fronted modern buildings of Teheran give no cool recesses for the passer-by to shelter occasionally.

It is to be deplored that modern Persia should have, in a few years, become ashamed, as it were, of its national traditions in architectural styles. Nothing in the world is so beautiful as arched streets, if treated with consideration for sun and shadow and for their use as shops as well. It is deplorable too, that so many towns in Europe, particularly in England, are setting the bad example of trying to look pitiful replicas of New York.

Because a building is tall does not mean it is bound to be beautiful or even always more useful. One has only to look at certain humans, or sunflowers, or telegraph poles, or a beautiful horse by the side of a giraffe to see this. The last things American visitors to London would wish to see would be Westminster Abbey, the Tower of London, the Inns of Court or the City churches replaced by skyscrapers; or Waterloo Bridge outspanned by a pale imitation of Brooklyn Bridge. The skyline of a beautiful city is as important as the profile of a beautiful face. Personality or individuality—call it what you will—is one of the richest assets of which a city can boast. Replicas generally are poor imitations of the original, at their best, and just as we do not require two Shakespeares, two Michelangelos, two Columbuses or two inventors of exactly the same type of machine; neither do we require two Romes, two Londons or two New Yorks. That is the feeling a visit to Teheran produces in the visitor just now. It is not the Orient, it is a poor imitation of a European town. 'Scrap the East' and 'Westernize everything' are the mottoes in use there to-day. Soon at the rate progress is stamping through its streets, Teheran will have only its foreign legations upholding its traditions.

There is no lack of social life in Teheran, for the *Corps Diplomatique* of almost every country in Europe as well as the United States of America have their legations here, together with the representatives of many Western business houses of long standing.

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Most of the legation staffs boast beautiful gardens, those of the British and Russian being outstanding, both very generous in size. Teheran is singularly destitute of fine buildings, for neither mosques, *madradas* (schools) nor even royal palaces are distinguished like those of Isfahán. The Shems-el-Imaret, a twin-towered palace, is a conspicuous feature of the road leading to the bazaars. The Palace Museum contains probably the most mixed collection of exhibits in the world, and the glittering Peacock Throne has been described as often as the Niagara Falls or the Crystal Palace.

The most frequented street is the Lalehzar. This is the Bond Street of Persia, and many of its shops are adopting modern shop-fronts. In this street the wail of many a gramophone is ever on the air, and the wax models in the window (though suffering very much from the heat) provide amusement to the Europeans and great interest to the Persian shoppers, particularly the tribesmen.

The young Persian 'dandy' of the Lalehzar – the Bond Street of Teheran – sees to it, that, be his suit of palest lavender, chequered like an illuminated manuscript, black like a government official's, or as expensive as a rich merchant's, his Pahlavi hat must match in colour and material, and his waist must be the slimmest in all the middle East.

There are many shops where cigarette-makers sit in rows, weary pale-faced youths, all looking oblivious of romance. Like many other parts of Persia, the Lalehzar provides many contrasts. In it, one sees an example of the water supply of the towns. Here, in this busy little street, in Persian fashion, the water runs down, not even in the gutter, but under the pavement where, at uncertain intervals, holes are left where the shopkeepers get their supply of water. These holes allow the entrance of all the street refuse, while no protection or warning of their presence is given to the passer-by, so that if he does not keep his eyes well opened he might fall in. No one seems to mind or protest. This



SHEMS-EL-IMARET, FROM THE SHAH'S GARDEN

*don't forget
to thank Howard Kameron
by G. G. G. G.*

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also applies to the middle of the side streets where holes are avoided only by the dexterity of the drivers of vehicles.

The question of impure water and sanitation in Teheran, and throughout the whole of Persia, is one which the Westerner is completely at a loss to understand. He fails to appreciate the mentality of a nation which ignores its consequences, openly and admittedly, in a country where noisome diseases of all kinds are prevalent. But for the sun, one sometimes wonders if a single Persian would be alive.

Here, in the capital city, outside the very walls of the British Legation, in the Boulevard des Ambassadeurs, there runs a stream in an open gutter. In this, almost any morning, may be seen people washing vegetables, the offal of butchers' meat, dirty clothes, their hands and feet, or an amateur photographer who snaps films – all in the same stream, while farther down someone may be quenching his thirst. Needless to say the Legation has its own underground water supply straight from the mountain, and by arrangement with the authorities the Legation water is sold to Europeans.

The bazaars of Teheran still remain. Both exteriors and interiors are interesting and an entirely different side of Persian life can be seen there. As an example, here about half a mile from the Chahar Bazar and from the Government offices, even in these days of financial crises one can see an old Persian money-lender with his whiskers dyed with henna, heedless of all changes that are going on. In front of him are his bowls of coins of silver and copper of almost every currency. It is possible to dip one's hands into them, as one might into a bran pie, and pull out a prize sometimes in the shape of a Shah Abbas coin. In exchange he will take a few coins from a different country. But he is always shrewed enough to see that the exchange is in his favour. There are one or two shops in the bazaar where the initiated may 'pick up' something really interesting.

For some strange reason the Persians themselves are becoming

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ashamed of their bazaars, and the building of ordinary shops in the streets is being encouraged. The mosques are of secondary importance. Schools are now getting a great deal of attention in Teheran, but the best is still the one attached to the American mission.

Not far from Teheran, about three miles, over a most execrably dusty road, worse even than those outside the walls of Meshed is a 'mountain of dust' – the remains of the City of Ray or Rhages, the capital of ancient Media which had once a population of one million. These dust-heaps were once the happy hunting ground of curio collectors. This casual hunting for coins, tiles, etc., has now been forbidden by the state. From these dust-heaps can be seen the golden dome of the shrine Abdul Azim, the 'City of *Bast*' where Shah Nasr ad Din was assassinated and for which the Babis were blamed.

In the summer heat the English and European officials retire to the cooler breezes of Gulahek, about seven hundred feet higher, where there are some beautiful gardens, more or less at the foot of Mount Demavend. There is a little village on its side called Rene. Its villagers obtain sulphur from a crater at the top which is about two yards in diameter. The mountain is a volcano in a state of suspended animation, but apart from slight earthquake shocks, nothing occurs to remind one of its existence. One last year was violent enough to destroy a few houses. The pass over it has the descriptive name of Haza Chan, 'the pass of the thousand twists.'

Teheran is blessed with many gates; there used to be twelve, but they are all very second-rate specimens of the tile-maker's craft. One of them leads to Qum, the shrine of Fatimah, who was the daughter of Mohammed and the wife of Ali. She died at the age of eighteen, leaving three sons. (It must be confessed that Qum, a fanatical and not too pleasant town, was visited five times, but no drawing was made of the shrine.)

In comparison with the cities of Europe, although Persia seems