UNDER THE STARS

To the people of Afghanistan

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"O frati," dissi "che per cento milia
  perigli siete giunti all'occidente,
  a questa tanto picciola vigilia
de'nostri sensi ch'e del rimanente,
  non vogliate negar l'esperienza,
  di retro al sol, del mondo sanza gente.
Considerate la vostra semenza:
  fatti non foste a viver come bruti,
  ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza."
e volta nostra poppa nel mattino,
  dei remi facemmo ali al folle volo,
  sempre acquistando dal lato mancino.
Tutte le stelle gia dell'altro polo
  vedea la notte, e 'l nostro tanto basso
  che non surgea fuor del marin suolo.
Cinque volte racceso e tante casso
  lo lume era di sotto dalla luna,
  poi che 'ntrati eravam nell'alto passo,
quando n'apparve una montagna, bruno
  per la distanza, e parvemi alta tanto
  quanto veduta non avea alcuna.
Noi ci allegramo, e tosto torno in pianto;
  che della nova terra un turbo nacque,
  e percosse del legno il primo canto.
Tre volte il fe girar con tutte l'acque:
  alla quarta levar la poppa in suso
  e la prora ire in giu, com'altrui piacque,
infin che 'l mar fu sopra noi richiuso.

-Dante, Inferno:Canto 26.

Prologue

In the summer of 1969, I was in Cambridge, taking my A levels at the local Tech, and very close to realising two lifelong ambitions. At the tender age of eight, on a visit to Cambridge, I had stood in the gardens of Newnham College, decided I liked them, and announced that I would one day be coming there as a student. At the age of nine or ten, thoroughly besotted with maps and atlases, I worked out a route via the Trans-Siberian Railway and one or two yaks to Central Asia. I didn't know about Afghanistan, but I did know about the wide steppeland, the Oxus, Samarkand and Bokhara, Kubla Khan and the cossacks, and those I wanted to see.
The great influence of my formative years was having to dust the bookshelves in our London flat. I had to dust them every morning, and names and titles thus became familiar before they meant anything to me. When no one was watching to see that I didn't leave dust in the corners, I learned all sorts of things. I remember that half way down the stairs, among the Left Book Club editions, was a green copy of James Elroy Flecker's 'Hassan'- in which I read 'For lust of knowing what should not be known/We take the Golden Road to Samarkand.'
My parents favoured the South Coast or Cornwall for holidays, and we never so much as crossed the channel. At fourteen I ran away from home and embarked on a chequered and rather shady career. During the years that followed I was variously on the run, sleeping rough, being a beatnik, living in Cable Street in the East End, in an L.C.C. children's home, and in a remand home.
By 1966, disowned by the L.C.C., I was in Cambridge bus conducting and working in factories and at the same time taking evening classes.
As one of my A levels I chose geography, which gave me an excuse to sit around drawing elaborate maps. It also gave me an excuse to cross the channel and do a lightning tour of Europe, taking particular note of Rotterdam Europoort, Ranstadt Holland, the Ruhr, and other tourist attractions.
Cambridge immediately after May Week is an empty and depressing place. All the students have gone down and the tourists are coming up.
Transcendental Meditation had just arrived that year, and whether it was the Transcendentalists or something else that suggested it I don't know, but while I was sitting on a tombstone doing some last minute revision I suddenly decided to go to India. Why India? Well, it seemed the most far removed place easily accessible by a land route.
Everyone told me I was mad, and that I would either run out of money or contract some dreadful disease. I started looking at maps and drawing up lists. A helpful sheet of paper from the Arts Lab (now defunct) gave me various bits of information about buses and where to change money.
I got myself a passport, filled it with the odd visa, and had myself vaccinated against cholera, smallpox, typhoid, paratyphoid, tetanus, polio and plague. I bought a rucksack and spent days packing and unpacking it.
The day finally arrived, and I took a train to London. It's an odd feeling, boarding an ordinary commuter train en route for the Orient. One thinks 'Don't these people realise that I am going to India?'

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Stamboul Train

The Stamboul Train, however romantic it may sound, especially to one brought up on dusting bookshelves, is not the ideal mode of transport between London and Istanbul. However, hitching has little to recommend it either. In fact the European leg of the journey is the most expensive and least interesting part of the whole trip, though it was exciting enough for me in 1969.
My Rubicon was to be the Bosporus that year, though I have since felt it to be the Alps. This side of the Alps is civilisation, the other world begins on the other side, and the two are mutually exclusive. I find it hard enough, sitting at my typewriter in Cambridge, to really believe in the existence of Herat or Calcutta, but I found it even harder in Herat to believe in the continued existence of a world whose streets were paved and empty and clean.

My very foreign looking green Stamboul train carried me through the flatness of Belgium and the forests of Germany and deposited me at München, where I indulged in a last civilised slice of chessecake and a wander round the Pinakotheks. We left again at eight in the evening. As we crossed the Austrian border I climbed into the luggage rack, the compartment being already sardined with bodies, stretched myself across the bars in the least uncomfortable poistion , and prepared to sleep. Little did I know that luggage racks were soon to become my favourite kind of bed. I was to become a connoisseur of luggage racks - ones with bars, ones with netting like hammocks, ones like wooden shelves, ones only twelve inches wide, high ones, low ones, ones for which sleeper reservations were required and ones which were perilously close to whirring ~~iron~~ fans in iron cages. I was to become adept at hoisting myself up and letting myself down, and the wonder is that I never fell out.

My only impression of the Alps was as a sort of unseen bulk through which we passed in the night, along with dimly lit station halts and the voices of porters unloading mailbags. At intervals officers in uniforms reminiscent of the Gestapo would board the train, stamp passports, and inspect tickets. When I woke, stiff and aching, we were in Jugoslavia. It was beginning to be distinctly hot. One of my fellow travellers was changing into a thin cotton shirt- she had been before and was better prepared than I. My sandwiches were squashed and rather nasty, and I could have done with a bath, so I consoled myself by concentrating on the changing views outside, trying to pick out the various geological formations in the deep chasms and gorges to our right. After a while we passed into flatter country, with strip cultivation and peasants - yes, real Peasants at last - walking their cows on strings to nibble at the grass between the rails. I was reminded of the parable of the old woman and her cow - if you remember she let it up onto the roof to eat the grass, but forgot to take the string off her wrist first, with unfortunate consequences. Somewhere before Beograd the train drew to a halt and gave no appearance of ever moving again. We all descended to the trackside and admired the engine way up front - a steam engine such as I hadn't seen since the chocolate and cream Cornwall expresses of my childhood. In the distance rose the drab apartment blocks of Belgrade , and in the foreground a family of gypsies were encamped by a muddy puddle, ~~and~~ their children ~~were~~ playing with old car tyres.

After Beograd the landscape seemed to consist of limitless flat fields of maize simmering in the heat until at Niş the rocks returned and we ~~en~~tered Bulgaria. I slept through Bulgaria and was woken by Greek passport control. The railway line cuts a corner of Greece, about forty miles or so, before entering Turkey. Oxen carts were moving off in a light dust to work in the fields, small children herded pigs and sheep, and a man walked up the line selling chai, or black tea. Children jumped up and down with peaches and huge knobbly tomatoes, and I bought an envelope of bread containing meat and peppers. Other children begged from the train until the guard chased them away.

Towards the Turkish border the land became less cultivated; scrubby and arid. We crossed a brown muddy river by an iron girder bridge. Soldiers were exercising at the border, and a dog lay in the sun. The soldiers saluted the train, and all around was brown bush.
As we rushed on down deep cut river valleys I had the impression that the sea, like a presence, was always just over the brow of the hill. The valleys seemed unchanged since the barbarian tribes had pushed down into Greece from the north.
Just before Istanbul we caught our first glimpse of the inmost sea of all the world- what the Turks call the Ak Deniz. A dark blue inlet was crowded with small boats and wooden landing stages. A group of new looking flats, and we were in Istanbul and pulling into Sirkeci station.

What followed was my first introduction to the Eastern crowd, compared to which a Western crowd is sparse. A great crush of Turks in cheap suits and shiny Italian shoes had arrived with us, migrant workers back from the factories of Germany. They all bore huge bundles and bursting suitcases which appeared to contain nothing but tape recorders and transistor radios, and therefore were very interesting to the customs men. It seemed like hours before we emerged from the other end of the Customs Shed, battered and downtrodden, into the dazzling glare. Perhaps we had come through Purgatory only to find ourselves in Hell.
A mass of cars, all hooting and shrieking, had somehow converged outside the station and were unable to move in either direction. Their owners were shouting obscenities at each other, while the sun glanced off the bumpers and windscreens and blinded me. Above the noise of car horns came other sounds- the cries of street traders and the general hum of the city. The heat rose from the tarmac and the sun felt like a hammer on my bare head. Lecherous looking Turks followed me up the steep cobbled street twisting strings of prayer beads in their hands. Men bent nearly double with pads on their backs carried rolls of linoleum and wardrobes. Shoeshine boys with rows of brass stoppered bottles ran after me and pointed at my feet - could they clean my shoes? Since I was wearing sandals it didn't seem a good idea. Men with what looked like toy rockets on their backs were selling water or sherbet, clinking the glasses against the saucers. Is there a noisier city than Istanbul?

I had been directed to Guven Hostel, which I found up by the old University with its white walls. Guven Hostel was being repainted, and strings with screws of paper warned the passer by of wet paint. An enormously fat Turkish woman, in baggy trousers and a forehead-covering headscarf descended from the veil, made up a bed for me with clean sheets and a bolster, nodding and smiling at me all the while. The washing arrangements were strange - stone bowls and pitchers on a stone floor, and a tap that only produced water between certain hours in the morning. As for the loo - well, south of the Alps, and even north of them in some places, everyone squats over a hole in the ground. Sanitary fittings, where they exist, consist of a rectangular surround with footprints to show you where to place your feet. This is all very well until you get Istanbul tummy, or the Delhi runs, and then prolonged squatting tends to make one feel faint if the smell of ammonia has not already done so.
In the evening I went and had supper in a restaurant called the Kazan, where I sat on the roof and ate yoghourt and eggplant, tomatoes and cucumbers, and meatballs known as 'Lady's thigh'. I drank Ayran, or sour milk, and looked down into the courtyard of a mosque where prayers were being chanted.

Having got as far as Istanbul, I stalled. I looked across the Bosporus and saw the brown scrub which was Asia, still an unknown quantity.
My piece of paper from the Arts Lab was quite clear:
'Assume you have already arrived at the Old or New Gulhane Hotel in Istanbul. You can travel by bus for about £2 to Ankara, and then to Erzerum for another £2.'
But it didn't say anything about where to buy the ticket or how to ask for it without speaking a word of Turkish.
So for several days, Asia just sat there on the other side of the Bosporus while I wandered round the bazaars. I visited the Blue Mosque and Aya Sofia which impressed me with its heavy sad atmosphere. Light filtered down from high in the dome, and black circles were covered with gold Islamic script. The Turks have adopted a romanised alphabet since Ataturk, but the inscriptions one still sees on tiles and on postcards which lorry drivers stick in their windows are complicated in the extreme. The letters are so intertwined as to produce

ornate and elegant patterns but at the same time to be virtually indecipherable. In Topkapi Palace, also known as the Old Saray, I saw the robes of the various Sultans and the soft shoes they wore as children. The Courts of the Sun, I found, were untidy with blocks of stone and unpruned rose bushes. In the Topkapi Sarayi Restaurant I wondered what 'fried bar' and 'boiled bar' might be, ordered döner kebab, and watched the traffic on the Bosporus.
I even took a boat up the Bosporus, to take a closer look at the enemy shore. The day was windy, the sea liquid. Chai sellers tripped over my feet on the deck.
On the Galata Bridge men were selling plastic combs, and placards advertised refrigerators. Under the Galata Bridge are a series of floating platforms where one can eat fish or lobsters, or buy an English newspaper, all the while gently rocking up and down on the litter strewn waters of the Golden Horn. It was while hanging around the Galata Bridge that I discovered the quay for boats crossing the Bosporus. At last I plucked up courage, queued at the right gate and bought a ticket for the ferry to Haydar Pasha. I even found myself picking up the odd word of Turkish.

From Haydar Pasha I took a train to Ankara, sleeping of course on the luggage rack. Ankara was a disappointment after Istanbul - far too Western. I took a Dolmush (stuffed taxi) to a point on the road out of Ankara where I might reasonably hope to hitch a lift. My first lift was in a lorry already containing a French Peace Corps boy going out to Kashmir to 'work with the tribes'. Like all Turkish lorries, this one was bedecked with tassels, Turkish flags, Blue donkey beads, muslim prayer beads, and little cards saying 'Mashallah'. Thus protected by his various talismans, the Turkish lorry driver does not concern himself too much with the rules of the road.
At Kirikalle we picked up another lorry going to Trabzon, on the Black Sea Coast. In the cab it was intolerably hot, and it soon became impossible to keep awake. We stopped for water and chai, ducked our heads under a tap at a petrol station, and refused to be reincarcerated in the cab. The rest of the way we rode in style, on top of the floursacks at the back. An oven-hot wind blew, the rocks were red and green, hills beyond hills stretched away giving at the same time an impression of great distances yet also of the whole scene being only a painted backcloth. I saw my first black goatskin tents- the tents of the nomads scattered all over Asia. We picked up an American called Jim. He said he had been travelling for some years but had vague thoughts of settling down and going to University. In his visa form he had described himself as Shayir (Poet). The Ambassador had called him in and said 'So you're a poet? In other words a human being.' When we stopped at village teahouses he told the Turks he was a Shayir, but they didn't seem to think he looked the type. He was also passing himself off as English, as the Turks didn't seem too fond of Americans and had actually thrown stones at him a few villages back.

Towards evening we saw Merzifon spread out in the valley ahead, with lights coming on here and there. We opened our sleeping bags, tucked ourselves in under the ropes in case of falling off at a sharp corner, and slept. Overhead, the stars were very bright and close, as they never are in England. I was vaguely conscious of passing through Samsun in the night, with ferris wheels and much mournful Turkish singing. Between Samsun and Trabzon we followed the Black Sea shore, the water pale and moonlit, black rocks jutting out, and interminable tunnels. Then it was morning and we were in Trabzon. Our driver was tugging at the ropes and shouting 'Lorry finish, Lorry finish.'

East of Trebizond

My first impressions of Trabzon were fleeting, as we were only there an hour or so before pushing on to Erzerum. In later years I was to spend many weeks in the sticky climate of Trabzon eating delicious fish from the Kara Deniz and watching the ships load and unload. A semicircle of houses fronts on to the quay and is backed by the table cliff that gave Trabzon its name- Trapezus. On top of the cliff an American radar ~~xxxx~~ scanner looks across the grey water at Russia. On the quayside we bought sesame seed circles of bread from glass fronted boxes on stands, and washed them down with vishne sharop - iced cherry juice. We also bought pistachio nuts which are called sham fistiyi. Seeing a group of Europeans in white cotton clothes we went over to talk to them. They had just come back from India and were waiting for the boat to Istanbul. Apparently the boat was cheaper and more comfortable than buses or trains, and I decided to try it on my way back. They advised us to hitch over the mountains to Erzerum rather than taking a bus, as the scenery would be worth seeing properly. They also advised us to get money pouches which we should wear round our necks even when sleeping. In a steep little alley ascending from the quayside to the centre of town, we bought material, cord, needles and cotton and sat on the wall sewing them into suitable pouches.

Hitching from Trabzon was no problem. All the locals travel that way rather than by bus. When they want to go from A to B, they simply go to the nearest corner, squat down at the side of the road with their baggage, and wait for the first truck. The Machka road starts with a steep hill at the east end of Trabzon, and from there ascends equally steeply to penetrate the perpendicular mountain wall by way of a river gorge. Our truck was carrying split logs, not the most comfortable things to sit on, but it was worth the discomfort for the breathtaking views along the road. This road is roughly that along which Xenophon brought the ten thousand out of Persia and Kurdistan, though I didn't know it at the time. At Machka we stopped for chai and bought a kind of halva or sweet cake, a cross between marzipan and madeira, with almonds and raisins and colonies of ants in it. We sat on the bridge eating, surrounded by men and shaven headed boys. We didn't see any women- no doubt they were working in the fields. It's a nice life for men in Anatolia- they seem to spend all day sitting at tables outside cafes, drinking chai and puffing at nargilehs or bubble pipes. In between puffs they play a board game known as Tavla, which I believe is Backgammon. When we arrived they dragged themselves away from their games to bargain for our watches and for me.

There were clouds below the village and clouds above, and as we went on upwards it grew cold and misty. The road was rough to say the least, and hairpin bends all the way with a cliff to the left and a precipice to the right. The Turkish lorry driver knows perfectly well how to deal with such a road. When he comes to a sharp bend where there is no room for two trucks to pass, he accelerates and keeps one hand on the horn. That way, Allah willing, he gets round before any oncoming traffic. Pieces of cab and old tyres strewn about the lower hillsides testify to the capriciousness of Allah's will.

Allah was merciful that day, and we emerged out of the clouds at last. Zigana Cecidi is the name of the pass, and we had come from sea level to about 7,600'. We could see ranges of hills extending for miles to the south. Presumably it was somewhere along this watershed that Xenophon's ten thousand shouted Thalassa, though we couldn't see the sea looking back for massed clouds below. In a little shack at the summit of the pass, perched precariously on the edge of the southern declivity, we feasted on delicious strips of mutton cut from a dead sheep hanging by the door and roasted on glowing embers. With the mutton were cucumbers- the short stubby ones of the middle east, yoghourt, and sutlac - a kind of creamy rice pudding quite unlike its namesake eaten in British schools.

The loo was notified by 'OO' on the door, and was simply a windy hole in the wall.

On the southern side of the pass the road winds tortuously to cope with the steepness of the slope, so that the stones we dislodged on one bend went hurtling down to land in our path on the next. Further down, we followed a river gorge for a time, the river aquamarine and braided below by shoals of pale pebbles. The steep hillsides were terraced and sown with maize. By the time we reached Gumushane, a straggling village of shanty-town shacks lit rather incongruously by electricity, it was dusk. Marco Polo mentions a large silver mine near Bayburt, and 'Gumus' means silver in Turkish. Whether silver is still mined in these parts I don't know, but certainly the electricity and the presence of dusty heaps of stones by the roadside suggested some kind of mining activity. Perhaps this is where the pyrites, or fool's gold, which I had seen lying in piles along Trabzon quayside, had come from.
On the Erzincan road we changed lorries, piling on top of an assortment of iron girders, mattresses, and bundles of pots and pans along with whole families of villagers. Thunder rolled in the hills, and rain began to fall through the black leaves of the poplars edging the road. At every bend in the road the loads shifted dangerously while we clung to girders and tried to get under tarpaulins or sacks for cover. At Pirahmet, which is the junction between the Erzincan and Erzerum roads, we dismounted. A man appeared out of the dark and rain with a hurricane lamp and showed us to bed on the floor of an outhouse.

We woke to one of those beautiful clear Anatolian mornings where the quality of the light is quite indescribable and only approximated by French impressionist paintings. We were in a small valley among endless superimposed golden coloured hills. Poplars rose beside a stream, and as I washed among the rocks I found blue flowers something like large daisies growing in profusion. Noticing these flowers later has always reminded me of Anatolia. Pirahmet itself consisted of one Shell station, two houses with chickens rooting in the doorways, and a lokanta (cafe) for truck drivers. We breakfasted well on greasy 'omelette' which was really more like scrambled egg, and which we ate straight from the pan. Chai was served in the usual little glasses with saucers, and I noticed that the locals always swilled out their water glasses and threw the contents on the floor before refilling them and drinking. In a flyblown glass case were tins of stuffed vine leaves and jars of honey, but I think they were for show only.
It wasn't long before a coal truck stopped for petrol, and the driver agreed to take us to Erzerum. We climbed up onto the front part of the lorry - the little railed enclosure which middle eastern lorries have on the cab roof, and sat there wiping coal dust out of our eyes while the wind whipped our hair and the road wound on down through rocky outcrops. At Kale there was a street market in progress, with wares laid out on mats, and much shouting and jostling. The children of Kale took pot shots at us with handy rocks, while the women stood around in small groups, all wearing charshafs of the same grey black and white stripe. The charshaf is the Turkish form of purdah, though since Ataturk's reforms the women do not actually cover their faces. Rectangular in shape, it is thrown over the head and shrouds the whole body, sometimes being tucked in at the waist to leave the arms free. In Anatolia different designs denote the wearer's native village.
As we rolled on towards Bayburt the brown hills seemed to stretch for miles, and army trucks were scattered about them. Eastern Anatolia is still depopulated since the early part of the century, when the Turks and the Russians battled over land. Mention Russia in an Anatolian teahouse and you get instant aggression. The men stiffen in their seats, and more than one Turk has told me that if only their government would say the word, they could take Moscow in ten days.
In Bayburt we drank chai under the battlements of the castle, and watched the women pass in brown charshafs embroidered with tiny blue stars. Beyond Bayburt the road rose again to cross the last range of hills before the central plateau, and passed the Ataturk monument on the summit. Many miles away we could see further mountains with patches of snow, and below us a sinuous river and a black locomotive steaming along on a single track railway. A sweet pungent smell surrounded us - presumably emanating from the frondy plants thick on the ground among dark bushes whose name I didn't know but whose leaves looked like oak leaves. I later tasted the local honey made by bees feeding on these slopes, and it was delicious.

Soon the land became noticeably flatter, and it was quite cold. I had to extract my pullover from the depths of my rucksack. This central

plateau is known to geographers as the Siberia of Turkey, and I could quite see why. For many months of the year Erzerum is snowed up. Those huge Munich to Teheran or Glasgow to Karachi container lorries can only pass with chains on their wheels, and their drivers carry guns for protection against the wolves.
In Erzerum we had chai and watched the horsedrawn 'Faytons' trotting past. Finding there was no night bus to the Persian border, we obtained truckle beds in an 'Otel' for three Turkish Lira apiece, signed the book, left our rucksacks, and went to look at the twin-towered building at the end of the street. 'Visitez le Musee' said the sign, so we did. Built in 1253 by a Seljuk Sultan, it was called the Cifte Minareli Medrese, and the two phallic towers were minarets.

It was in Erzerum that I had my first lesson in the Eastern concept of time. We were told that the bus left at six a.m., so at twenty to six, still yawning, we arrived at the bus station in the early morning chill. The bus was there, but the driver had 'changed his mind' and wouldn't be leaving till about eight. Six or eight, today, tomorrow or next week, what does it matter in the East? Many times in Persia I was told 'Yes, you can take a bus to such and such a place from here at such and such a time' when no bus in fact existed. I honestly believe that if one made enquiries about a ship from Isfahan to Kerman across the Great Salt Desert, one would be told 'Yes, it leaves at five tomorrow morning.' And what do they say when you point out that the promised bus never arrived? 'Excuse me, it is you who don't understand Persian.' Infuriating people, but I believe they mean well. They prefer to lie than to disappoint, and are incurable optimists.

Our bus, when it left Erzerum with its full complement of Turks and baggage, proved to have an added attraction - free lemon flavoured cologne. This was doled out by the conductor, and freely rubbed into hair and poured down necks until the whole bus reeked. It formed a sort of aromatic accompaniment to the Radio Erzerum Turkish pop music. Meanwhile we had entered the valley of the Aras (Araxes) and were following the river along with a railway line. At Horasan we left both, and turned south for Agri. A sign to the left indicated the road to Russia, but the road looked so decrepit that I doubted whether anyone ever used it. Our bus only went as far as Agri, and there we stopped and had paklava and Turkish coffee. Agri takes its name from Buyuk Agri Dagi, which is Mount Ararat. From Agri we took another bus to Dogu Beyazit, the last town in Turkey. In Dogu Beyazit we had to hire a jeep to the border. Luckily there were some other intending passengers with whom we shared the cost. The Turkish driver wanted ten Turkish Lira per head, but we suggested five, and at this he seemed quite happy. 'Tamam, tamam, besh tamam' he kept repeating as we drove out of Dogu Beyazit towards the frontier.

The land around the Iran/Turkish frontier is sparsely populated and bare of cultivation. The only signs of life were an occasional army base and one lone horseman. Notices reading IRAN HODUDU and the number of kilometres appeared at intervals along the road.
By two thirty we had arrived at the square concrete compound of Gurbulak, the Turkish border. Passport stamping and customs inspection are always a leisurely procedure in the East. We drank chai in the Gumruk with the customs men, and then adjusted our watches and passed through the door to the Iranian side of the building. Under a statue of the Shah, an old man was playing a long stringed instrument, and ahead of us, snaking off into the distance, was a real asphalt road.

We boarded a minibus and set off for Tabriz between rose coloured mountains, the sun setting behind us. To the left was an immense snow streaked volcanic peak - Mount Ararat. Further over to the north one or two lights showed, and when we asked what town it might be the driver said 'Shuravi' (Soviet). Somewhere in the midst of this boulder-strewn land we stopped for kebabs and rice with spring onions and herbs.
On the minibus was a Persian who spoke some English, and I had been filling my notebook with a rudimentary Persian vocabulary: How much, Goodbye, Where, Food, Good, Rice, Thankyou, Bread, Tea, Coffee, Meat, Tomatoes, Water, Melon. Equipped with this vocabulary I endeavoured to order my own supper, but since all the bus passengers were automatically served with Chelow Kebab and nothing else appeared to be 'on', I didn't have much success.

It was late when we reached Tabriz, and though we were shown to a hotel run by a very dignified looking old Azerbaijani in a long tattered sheepskin coat, the concensus of opinion was that we should sleep on some marble steps. As all the street signs were written in flowing Arabic script, only the coloured posters showed that our bedroom was the portico of a cinema. During the night we were woken by members of the Tabriz constabulary who, puzzled by our appearance on the steps of the local picture palace, kept counting and recounting us in Turkish-
'Bir, Ichi, Ush, Durt, Besh, ...'
This at least I could understand. Tabrizi Persian is an intermixture of Persian and Turkish, and spoken with an accent which causes Tehrani Persians to split their sides. I remember being very impressed when one of our party got up and began talking to these gentlemen in Farsi. A very strange tongue it sounded, and if anyone had told me I would soon be speaking it like a native I would have been very much surprised.

In the morning I tried to hitch on the Teheran road, but there was no traffic. A girl in a chador came and washed some clothes in the jube beside me. The chador, which means tent, is the Iranian version of the charshaf. Made of silk rather than wool, it is usually brown, black or white with and sprigged with tiny flowers or stars. The better the class of family (excepting the Westernised Teheranis) the younger the girls start wearing the chador, so that one sees children of five or six in miniature versions. I had my doubts about hitching in Iran, so when no lorries appeared on the horizon I retraced my steps into town and started looking for a bus office. A baker invited me into his shop for chai, and I sat watching the bread being made. Iranian bread is called 'Nan' (to rhyme with barn) and is unleavened. The most common variety is about three feet long, flat as a pancake, and roughly triangular in shape. It is baked on hot stones which leave little brown marks and sometimes stick to the bread - hence 'Nun e sangak', or stone bread. One of the many idiosyncrasies of the Persian language is that the long 'a' is colloquially pronounced 'oo' thus Nan becomes Nun, Teheran becomes Tehrun and so on.
In the white tiled bakery an old man in a skullcap sat crosslegged kneading dough in a stone trough. Another man wielded a long pole with a flat end which he watered before spreading on dough. He then shoved the bread in the oven, shook it about, and pulled it out baked. The baked breads were hung up to cool like so much washing, then folded and taken away by young girls in chadors.
Leaving the bakery, I met two Iranian students who wanted to practise their English. They gave me a guided tour of Tabriz. In the Azerbaijan museum we looked at potsherds and national costumes both in and out of the showcases. There were some Kurds looking at the exhibits, and my two students pointed them out. Kurdish men wear distinctive turbans with fringes over the eyes. Most ordinary Iranians now wear western suits and caps, like the Turks. The 'Old King', Reza Shah, forbade the wearing of turbans and national dress as 'backward'. However, one does see men in the provinces wearing striped pyjamas, and small boys still have their heads shaved almost bare.
After the museum, we visited the inevitable (crumbling) blue mosque, hidden away in a back street of the bazaar. Built in 1465, it was now mostly sand coloured brick, with only odd fragments of blue tilework still adhering. The Arabic script on the tiles was almost as involved as that of Ottoman Turkey. On the way back from the mosque we had something called a 'sandovich' from a street stall. It consisted of half a loaf of leavened bread stuffed with gherkins.

The Teheran bus was unbearably hot and stuffy, with plastic seats and free coca cola. A fat little man squashed into the seat next to me fed me on peaches and then fell asleep on my shoulder. Nobody on the bus spoke more than a word or two of English so I had ample opportunity to enlarge my vocabulary. We stopped in the middle of a dry river bed, a vast tract of channelled shingle, to change a tyre. Everyone got out and tried to wash in the green standing water of the ditch, as the puncture had coincided with the hour for prayers. Although the road was rough, it was obviously being surfaced fast, and at intervals we would come up with road builders and a line of little white stones across the road. At these points the bus would lurch down onto the rough ground, drive along beside the road, and lurch back up again.

We reached Teheran at midnight, having covered 380 miles in just over ten hours. My helpful piece of paper from the Arts Lab noted the Hotel Baghdad for 30 Rials, but of course I couldn't find it at that time of night and had to settle for a hotel at 180 Rials.
Teheran by day is a hot noisy city, full of screaming orange taxis, dubious looking men with sinister moustaches and caps pulled down over their eyes, more students wanting to try out their English, and small shaven headed boys sitting on the pavement outside repair shops wielding oxy-acetylene torches. Or so I thought. Actually I was in south Teheran, the poorer part near the railway station. North Teheran is higher, and the difference in temperature can be as much as twenty degrees. At the time, my one impulse was to get out, and I took the first Mihantour bus to Meshed.

We went north, over the Elbruz mountains. At dusk, with a grey fleece along the backs of the Elbruz, and Damavand a snow streaked conical peak above us, we stopped for corn cobs roasted in embers on the ground. We pushed on through the mountains, under the stars, passing the fires of nomad encampments and the lighted tents of the road menders. Nobody on the bus spoke any English at all. They were all pilgrims going to Meshed, which is the holy city of the Shi'as as Mecca is the holy city of the Sunnis. All the pilgrims, especially the women, were very interested in me and kept making enquiries about my religion. They assumed I was 'Isavi' or Christian, and I didn't know enough Persian to contradict them, which was probably just as well. To be Isavi is O.K. to a muslim, it just means you are a little backward in still following the prophet before Mohammed. Later I learned to recite 'Bismillah ilrahman ilrahim' which is the opening phrase of Muslim prayers and effectively silences all questions as to one's religion.

On Iranian buses children are regarded as luggage and travel free of charge but without seats, so I had three sleeping on my lap all the way from Amol to Bojnurd. At some point in the night I woke to see the pale gleam of the Caspian over to the left. The morning light revealed the lush greenery of Mazanderan, where even tea is grown on the northern slopes. Towards Meshed, however, this greenery gave way once more to semi-desert, and the road got progressively worse. I saw my first camels outside a zoo, grazing near the road. As we approached the holy city, the periodic chanting of Allah's name on the bus reached hysterical proportions with the bus driver acting as cheerleader.
The gold dome over the shrine of Imam Reza hove into sight and a great sigh went up. Simply to have seen the dome, apparently, makes one a better person, whereas to have visited the shrine allows one to add the title 'Meshedi' to one's name just as to have been to Mecca entitles one to be called 'Hadji'.

I found a hotel for 50 rials opposite the bus station for Afghanistan, which is in another downtown area full of piles of rubber tyres and boys sitting on the pavements welding. It was a Sunday, for which I was truly thankful as I had already been warned against Meshed on Fridays. In Meshed on a Friday, the Western infidel is quite likely to find the hotels and kebab shops closed to him, and he may even be stoned.
The shrine of Imam Reza is in the centre of the town, and a circular avenue encloses the shrine, the mosque and the surrounding bazaar alleys. From the central circle all other main roads radiate. An old man selling fruit juice near the gateway to the shrine refused to serve me, and I couldn't understand why until some students wanting to practise their English explained the situation.

Afghanistan

On Monday morning, feeling strangely excited, I presented myself at the bus station - a mud yard with one or two tethered goats and heaps of fat melons. Next to the ticket office was a little kebab shop offering the ubiquitous coca cola, and behind that several rickety looking buses. While the bus driver was debating whether to go or not I filled my army water bottle at a stand pipe and drank several glasses of chai. I was in Khorassan, the land of Marco Polo's 'dry tree' and Omar Khayyam's jug and bottle. Soon I would be in Afghanistan. What would it be like? At least I would know a few words of the language, as Farsi is also spoken in a variant form over the border.

Some hours later, in Taiabad, the border town, I had my passport stamped and my rucksack tipped out in a pleasant garden while the friendly Gumruk officers drank chai. There are about forty kilometres of no man's land between Taiabad and the Afghan border post at Islam Qala, and as relations between the two countries are not all they might be, this strip of desert is notoriously difficult to cross. Nobody came along with a jeep and offered to take me, so I just sat and drank chai. Three French boys who had just been checked out started off walking- foolish to say the least, in the heat of the day. However, for some reason the bus driver suddenly decided to go on empty to the border post, and I jumped on just in time. Before we had gone very far, we caught up with the three French boys. I administered water, and the bus driver produced a large watermelon which we sliced up. Mirage lakes and islands floated on the horizon. At the border post two soldiers reclined in the shade of a mud hut, and there was water in a deep well with a bucket made out of old car tyres.

The bus went back to Taiabad, the French boys set up their flysheet and prepared to wait for some form of through transport. The Medical Officer and the Chief of Police came out to see what had arrived, and invited us into their mud walled office. The domed ceiling and alcoves kept the place beautifully cool, and we sat on the rug covered mud floor drinking iced water and playing cards. The Medical Officer seemed perturbed that we were going across the border to Afghanistan. When pressed, he revealed 'There is cholera in Herat. Six people have died.'
He further informed us that a temporary quarantine post had been set up by the Iranian government just the other side of a large sand dune, and that they were having difficulties with a Pakistani lady, the wife of the Ambassador, who 'is not ready to be vaccinated'.
Slowly digesting this information, I wondered about the efficacy of my own cholera vaccination. Opinions were divided as to whether they were thirty percent or eighty percent effective, but everyone agreed not a hundred percent. Similarly, no one could agree on the duration of the disease- some thought death within eight hours, some within twenty four; though all agreed on the symptoms- projectile vomiting.
The Medical Officer thought that the cholera had started with the white grapes and advised us not to eat any in Herat. He then steered the conversation round to Malaria, which was his special interest. Normally he worked in the Malaria Eradication centre in Torbat Djam, and kept assuring us that malaria was now virtually eradicated in Iran, though not, of course, in Afghanistan. He offered us some pills, as if they had been sweets, but we declined politely. I already had a bottle full in my rucksack, and was supposed to be taking one a day, but they had tasted so bitter I couldn't face swallowing them and later gave my supplies away to other travellers who had come unprovided. I never took any anti-malaria pills in all my eastern travels, and I suppose it is only thanks to Allah that I never got malaria. I was certainly bitten by enough mosquitoes. Those wretched insects used to seek me out in preference over my travelling companions, and the resulting lumps grew into blisters the size of half crowns if I didn't promptly swallow half a dozen anti-histamine tablets. In consequence, 'Mosquito' (Sivrisinek) / (Pashe) was one of the first words I learned in Turkish and Persian, as I needed it to explain to various pharmacists what I wanted in the way of medicaments. I became a connoisseur of anti-histamine tablets - German brands, American brands, French brands, brands with caffeine incorporated to stop you falling asleep, brands with sugar coating and brands without.

We played cards all afternoon, and a young soldier with cropped hair, doing his national service, cooked us a delicious stew which we ate with raw pink onions and Nan and followed with white grapes and chai.

At six a bus appeared from the direction of Afghanistan, and offered to take us to Herat. The Medical Officer came out to wave goodbye, saying as I left that should there be a full three day quarantine in force when I came back, I would of course spend the three days as his personal guest.

Soon after we left the border post, the mud domes and trees of Islam Qala appeared over to one side on the horizon. However, it was a long time before they came any nearer. Whether this was some sort of visual trick played on us by the desert I don't know.
Islam Qala consists of a square bisected by the road an enclosed by mud walls. Inside the square, trees line the road and a sort of dried up garden is laid out. On either side of the garden are two complementary buildings, each with domed roofs and a mud platform with steps. One is the passport control, the other the Gumruk or customs house.
At Islam Qala I saw my first Afghans - tall, fair-skinned and dark eyed, proud looking, with voluminous clothes and half unwound turbans fluttering in the wind. The passport officer, also in robes, carefully inscribed all the details of our passports in a elegant flowing Arabic script into a massive dusty ledger. It was evident that passport stamping, like all other eastern transactions, had to be conducted with the appropriate ritual and in a leisurely manner.

On the bus was an old whitehaired Afghan acting as interpreter for the Farengis. Impeccably polite and dignified, he must have learned his English in the days of the Raj and the Anglo-Afghan wars. Perhaps he was an Afridi. He tried to persuade the oriental looking driver to take us straight through to Kabul as we were afraid of the cholera. But the driver was not to be persuaded. Apologising, he explained 'He is not merciful man, he is ruffian.'

As we left Islam Qala dust devils pirouetted over the desert. As we came under the lee of the Paropamisus darkness fell. With my nose pressed to the glass I could see little lights moving about in the distance, but whether they were real or illusory I don't know. After what seemed an age we turned off to the right and entered Herat. A boy sleeping on a charpoy or string bed in the street jumped up and lifted the barrier for us. Tall pillars loomed out of the darkness on either side of the road. It wasn't until the next morning that I saw they were minarets. In the main street a row of postin shops were still open, lit by oil lamps, and someone somewhere was playing a flute. A horsedrawn carriage rattled down the street, bells jingling and tassels flying. A distinct smell of hashish pervaded the hotel, but the mud walls were clean and the floors carpeted.

Despite the cholera I felt strangely elated, and woke up at dawn full of anticipation. Since my first arrival in Herat the streets have been paved, new hotels have been built, tourists have increased, but whenever I am within a thousand miles of it I feel a magnetic pull, and Herat will always be my favourite place, perhaps because it was my first encounter with the truly alien.
It wasn't until several years later that I read the following passage in Robert Byron's 'The Road to Oxiana':

> 'On approaching Herat, the road from Persia keeps close under the mountains until it meets the road from Kushk, when it turns downhill towards the town. We arrived on a dark but starlit night. This kind of night is always mysterious; in an unknown country, after a sight of the wild frontier guards, it produced excitement such as I have seldom felt.
> Suddenly the road entered a grove of giant chimneys, whose black outlines regrouped themselves against the stars as we passed. For a second, I was dumbfounded - expecting anything on earth, but not a factory; until dwarfed by these vast trunks, appeared the silhouette of a broken dome, curiously ribbed, like a melon. There is only one dome in the world like that, I thought, that anyone knows of; the Tomb of Tamerlane at Samarcand. The chimneys therefore must be minarets. I want to bed like a child on Christmas Eve, scarcely able to wait for the morning.'

In the morning I went out onto the hotel roof and had a look at the minarets beyond the pine trees that line all the streets in Herat and sound like the sea. Crossing the street below I saw what looked like the three fates - three women in Afghan chadors, which really are tents. The Afghan chador is made of pleated silk, dyed in bright colours, and completely coveres the wearer who surveys the world through a lattice at the front. After breakfast I spent a couple of hours changing money in the Da Afghanistan Bank - a pleasant walled garden with tables - and scanned the gutters for corpses on my way back. No signs of cholera, but nevertheless I took the Kabul bus at three.

Afghan buses are not luxury coaches like Iranian ones, nor do they give free coca cola, free nougat, or even free lemon scented cologne. They mostly appear to be made out of old packing cases and held together by string. The seating arrangements consist of backless wooden benches over which one climbs to take one's place squeezed between the other passengers and with one's feet on bundles and packing cases and one's knees under one's chin. One usually sits there for some time waiting to start while the driver and the passengers argue about their tickets, and eventually everyone gets impatient and starts shouting 'Burro be Kheir, Burro be Kheir'. Literally translated this means 'Go with God', but a more accurate translation would be 'Get Going'.

Just outside Herat we stopped at a roadblock and had our passports and cholera vaccination certificates checked. I had an ungovernable thirst and couldn't stop drinking. The more I drank the thirstier I became. It wasn't until much later that I learned to take deserts with equanimity. Afghans cope with the dryness and the dust by winding the spare ends of their turbans round their mouths and noses. Rather than drink water, they suck the small round lemons that grow in Afghanistan.

As the sun set behind a wall of red rock, we stopped for muslim prayers in the desert. The desert night falls very suddenly, and by the time we stopped for chai the stars were out. Our chai khane was a couple of alcove teashops with tilley lamps, birds in cages hanging from the rafters, and carpets spread on the ground in front. The waiter was most efficient, running about between various crosslegged forms with bowls of chai and shouting over his shoulder
'Do chai siah agha, do chai siah, yek chai sabs, bale agha,'
Two black teas, one green tea, yes sir...
Afghan chai is drunk out of little green bowls with 'Made in Japan' printed on the bottom, and can be green or black. I prefer black. Each bowl is generally half filled with sugar and provided with an individual pot filled from the samovar. As I don't like sugar in my tea it was just as well I had learned enough Farsi to ask for chai talkh (bitter). This place was Dilaram, which translates as 'heart-peaceful' and was close to water. I learned the truth of a theory I had hitherto dismissed as fancy - that bedouins can smell water in the desert. I could smell it myself before we reached it.

We entered Kandahar in a pale dawn. Pack donkeys with bells round their necks carried loads of bricks or refuse through the muddy streets. Camels sauntered past in caravan, laden with straw in ropework panniers. In alcove chai shops turbaned Afghans sat happily drinking chai. I bought some white grapes and looked for one of those street taps to wash them under, but there were none in sight and the jube looked too dirty.
In Kandahar we changed buses, and I found myself seated behind an Afghan merchant with glossy black girls escaping from under his piled turban. He had with him his two wives, three children, and two small babies. We left for Kabul at six, and it was already hot and the sun strong. Camels grazed in the desert, raising their heads to watch us pass. The man with the curls borrowed my water bottle for his thirsty children, and kindly refilled it for me from the muddy jube. His two wives sat breastfeeding their babies, whose eyes were heavily smudged with black kohl. Apparently kohl is used to keep off the flies, who settle around the eyes and nostrils and at the corners of the mouth in search of moisture. The merchant's two wives periodically lifted their chadors to look at me and giggle and show me their babies.

At Ghazni we stopped for lunch, and there was the bus from the border with the old whitehaired interpreter, still apologising profusely.
'You are angry with me? Or you are happy with me?'
Happy, of course, who could be otherwise?
We ate in a strange sort of cafe under the walls of Old Ghazni. One climbed up a ladder to a sort of wooden platform with tables covered

by oilcloths, and there were wooden benches too, though most of the eaters were balanced precariously on these in their normal crosslegged posture. Lunch was a dish of unidentifiable fried things floating in grease, and was helped down with nan. The walls of the cafe were covered with vulgar reproductions of mountain scenes, framed portraits of Pakistani film stars, tinted postcards of Mohammed and the Virgin Mary. I took the opportunity of discreetly emptying my sullied water bottle and refilling it from a stand pipe. I don't suppose the water was any cleaner, but at least it didn't look quite so brown. The heat in Ghazni was phenomenal, and when at last we climbed back into the bus for the last stage of the journey I dozed off in a stupor.

We arrived in Kabul at five in the afternoon, and some of the heat seemed to have dissipated. Kabul, at about 7000', is appreciably higher than Ghazni or Kandahar, sweltering on the Arachosian plains. We approached the capital over a saddle pass from the south, and as we rose to the crest Kabul appeared spread out in a circular bowl of mountains, with its mud coloured houses spilling up the nearest hillsides. A swarm of little boys collected round our bus, each thrusting forward cards bearing the names of hotels and reccomendations in English and Persian, for the most part atrociously misspelt. I chose the Hotel Sakhi, 'Clean watter, verv cheap PRiCES.' This hotel proved to be in Jadi Maiwand, the main street of Old Kabul, and was indeed cheap - 30 Afghanies the night.
The national currency of Afghanistan is called the Afghani, and comes mostly in notes of small denominations such as tens. There are coins, but at a rate of 88 Afs to the dollar(variable) they are practically worthless and useful only for giving to beggars or buying cups of chai. My leisurely transactions at the Da Afghanistan bank in Herat on the previous day had resulted in a thick wad of dirty crumpled Ten Afghani notes, mostly falling apart. It wasn't until later that I discovered one should never accept mutilated Afghani notes. Any note with the corner torn off or a tear down the middle is considered worthless as the banks won't take them back, and therefore no shopkeeper will take them either. I had a fine time getting rid of my dogeared notes - sandwiching them between cleaner ones and looking nonchalant.
Having deposited my baggage at the Hotel Sakhi, I went out to explore the bazaars. A line of camels was just passing along Jadi Maiwand roped together and carrying bales of thorn scrub. Taxis were hooting and the traffic policeman looked hot and bothered in his thick serge uniform. Even in Herat they had installed traffic police. Each one stood on a circular plinth at each intersection, and solemnly waved on the non-existant traffic, perhaps a couple of donkeys or the odd horse carriage. Since the horse carriages of Herat usually galloped everywhere and took no notice whatsoever of the traffic policeman, it must have been a thankless job. I should think the high point of the Herat traffic cop's day was when the Post bus went through. What little traffic there was in Kabul consisted of Volgas and Moskvitches and the occasional Chevrolet with wings. The Volgas were all taxis, and the Chevrolets were owned by government ministers and numbered accordingly on their registration plates. A hobby of my later visits to Kabul was minister spotting - number so and so, Ah, the minister of transport, or the minister without portfolio (a woman this one). The only other makes of car were labelled AID or UN or CD, or were Citroen deux chevaux belonging to French tourists.

On either side of the Jadi Maiwand the town was riddled with alleyways mostly containing dyer's shops, with huge black cauldrons of boiling vegetable dyes and scarlet, crimson, indigo and grass green clothes fluttering from lines strung high between the medieval leaning mud houses. At one end of Jadi Maiwand was a rather ugly looking monument which I later discovered commemmorated the 'final Afghan victory' over the British at the Battle of Maiwand. At the other end was the Pamir Cinema, the ticket office for buses to Pakistan, and the Kabul river between its steep mud banks. The Kabul river consisted of a tract of slimy looking mud with a thin channel of water in the very middle, at which various Kabulis were doing the weekly wash. The south side of Jadi Maiwand seemed to be mainly occupied by photographers' shops, with ancient looking tripod cameras under black cloths, and Agfa film on sale at a price which suggested it had fallen off a transit lorry. Naturally I bought up a stock. At corners where alleyways ran off the main street vendors were selling poisonous looking drinks in luminous colours reminiscent of those bottled liquids that used to be displayed in chemists shops. These drinks were contained in old style soda bottles - the kind with marbles in the neck. The fruit stalls were thick with flies - but I had yet to see the meat market. Baluchi tribeswomen sat all along the pavement

selling bangles and strings of beads, and women in chadors crouched around an old greybeard who was telling fortunes from square rods engraved with arabic characters. Further along, a scribe was writing a letter for two youths, and just outside the Sakhi hotel another greybeard was specialising in readings from the Koran to an enthusiastic audience.

There were two other Europeans installed at the Sakhi by the time I got back from my explorations, and the proprietor offered to take us to a local dive to watch authentic Afghan nightclub dancing. We crossed the street to the bazaar area enclosed by Jadi Maiwand and the Kabul river. By the crossing sat a beggar with no legs, and we added our small coins to his collection. The 'nightclub' was in a seedy looking bazaar street and consisted of a few chairs in front of a stage. I was the only woman in the audience, and caused quite a distraction, as half the audience turned their chairs round and stared at me instead of the dancers, all the while cracking their melon seeds and sunflower seeds and spitting the shells on to the floor. One of the dancers sang, in a high pitched nasal voice, and all were dressed in tinsel and sequins. I suspect that they were boys dressed up as girls.

By this time I was very much taken with Afghanistan, both the country and the people, and I would have liked to spend longer walking round the bazaars, but my visa was only a Transit visa and my objective was India, so at seven the next morning I boarded the bus for Peshawar and prepared to descend from the Central Asian Plateau into the steam bath of India.

India

The Kabul-Peshawar road follows the course of the Kabul river through the spectacular and treacherous Tang-i-Gharu gorge, with its sheer rock faces. The road winds along the cliff in a tortuous system of hairpin bends while the clear green pools of the Kabul river lie far below. Beyond the gorge is the Sarobi Dam, built by the Germans just after the war. One emerges from a rock tunnel beside an immense thunderous waterfall which always has its own rainbow. Below the dam a long green lake stretches for miles, bordered by experimental rice paddies where the land flattens out into the Jalalabad plains. In Jalalabad we decanted from our cramped positions in the bus and drank chai. It was already appreciably hotter than Kabul. The Jalalabad valley has an almost Indian climate, being so much lower than the rest of Afghanistan, and rich Kabulis maintain houses there for the winter.

After Jalalabad we left the Kabul River and veered off to the right for the Khyber Pass. Twenty seven miles from Torkham to Jamrud, the famous Khyber is pedestrian and disappointing after the Tang-i-Gharu. At Torkham we went through Afghan passport and customs control, and walked the ten yards or so across no-man's land, with its circle to allow for the change from right to left hand driving, to find ourselves in West Pakistan. Our bus meanwhile had not cleared customs, so we wandered around the Pakistani customs post producing our various documents and drinking coca cola. In the passport house the fat Pakistani official was eager to talk, especially to those of us who possessed British passports. Outside in the heat fierce looking Pathans reclined in the shade of their gaily painted trucks and Pathans with rifles and bandoliers sat on string beds in front of the kebab shop talking business. Our bus finally appeared, and we climbed back in and set off over the Khyber. Up to Landi Kotal, and down from there through a wilderness of brown arid hills and piled rock fragments. Below the road the pass was littered with anti tank barriers, and along the face of the cliff were plaques commemmorating various regiments, but I was already falling asleep in the heat and only vaguely noticed the flat plains opening ahead.

Waking up with a start as the bus swung into Peshawar Cantonment, I was struck by the incongruity of the long treelined avenues with strangely English names -Nicholson Road and so on.
With two other Europeans I took a tonga to Peshawar Cantt. station, and we bought third class railway tickets to Lahore. The third class waiting hall was full of ragged travellers camping out all over the floor. A little boy who came to beg from us had black and swollen eyes. One of my fellow Europeans produced a bottle of eye drops, and soon the whole of the third class waiting hall was queueing up for their dose. I wanted some chai, but discovered that we had left the chai drinking area behind. Indian or Pakistani chai is brewed with milk and sugar and quite undrinkable. So I settled for a bottle of iced lemon barley water. Meanwhile, I had no Paksitani rupees other than the few I had bought on the black market in Kabul, and all sorts of people were pressing round us with
'Change money mister? I give very good rate.'
I went off with one old man in a tonga, and the rupees were counted out very furtively in a curio shop among the sandalwood chests and inlaid ivory tables. Remembering advice I had been given, I watched carefully to see that none of the notes were folded over and counted as two. A common trick is for something of the sort to be done, and then for the seller to mutter 'police' and hurry away before you can protest.
Back at the station, I repaired to the 'refreshment room' with electric fans spinning in the ceiling, and filled myself up with rice and dal.

At seven forty-five we followed a porter down the track to our third class carriage with sleeper reservations. Sleeper reservations means that having paid a few extra rupees one is entitled (in theory) to sleep on the benches or the luggage racks provided that one can persuade the other passengers to sit on the floor or perch on the edge. Electric fans in iron cages spin incessantly and can be quite nasty for anyone with long hair trying to sleep in the luggage rack. Windows and doors are all kept open and let in smuts from the engine. The floor is a jumble of bundles, tin trunks, and people; while those who cannot find any space on the floor, seats or luggage racks, hang from the window bars or sit on the steps. I noticed in our carriage a stencilled notice which read 'Capacity 22 persons' but there were already seventy or eighty aboard, all shouting and gesticulating, and more were trying to push their way in from the platform. The heat was intolerable, and I kept taking handfuls of salt tablets.

Intermittently dozing on the windowsill, I watched dawn over the paddy fields. It is amazing the positions people manage to sleep in - our carriage was a mass of sleeping bodies and the soles of upturned feet. Outside the window the sky was now grey and heavy over muddy brown rivers and mud coloured fields and villages with dusty black water buffaloes. A sudden spot of rain struck my arm, and soon everyone was leaning as far out of the windows as possible to catch the first of the monsoon rains. At Lahore there was a mad rush to get out which was almost panic, as all those on the platform were doing their best to get in, pushing tin trunks in first, and in their eagerness clambering through the windows. On the platform porters in red shirts and red turbans, bony legs sticking out from under their shorts, scurried about balancing two or three tin trunks on their heads.

We took a tonga to the Secretariat to get road permits to cross into India, and then tried to find a hotel. Most of the cheap hotels refused to take us as they didn't have a licence for Europeans. They didn't look any worse than some hotels I had seen in Turkey, but the Government of Pakistan obviously felt very strongly about what sort of accomodation should be offered to its visitors from the West. We sat for some time in the entrance way of a possible looking hotel in the bazaar, waiting for the proprietor to come back from the mosque. In the street small naked children splashed under the pump. The proprietor arrived and said he too had no licence for Europeans. We tried another hotel further down the street. A youth was kneading dough with dirty fingers in the doorway, while pans of curry steamed over the mud oven. The proprietor showed us to a filthy cupboard of a room and quoted an outrageous price. When we asked why he was charging so much for such a third rate room, he said
'Because we don't have licence for Europeans'.

Defeated, we trudged off to the nearest European style concrete hotel, paid the price, had a shower, and sat under the fans in the hotel dining room eating tough roast chicken and watching English television programmes interspersed with Urdu commercials. The evening's entertainment consisted of The Fugitive, Chekhov's Seagull, and the Ganges Debate - a discussion on the respective rights of East Pakistan and India to the waters of the Ganges. Woken by a morning chorus of crickets in the shower, we breakfasted on soggy cornflakes - soggy because for some unaccountable reason they came with hot milk - and went off to the bus station to find a bus to India. The bus station is behind a large fruit market, and consequently the already muddy ground is strewn with rotten peaches and squashed mangoes through which one has to pick one's way with care. We queued to buy a ticket for the border bus, only to be told on reaching the head of the queue that we couldn't buy one until the bus was actually in and ready to go. When the bus arrived people rushed to cram themselves on, and we wondered how they had managed to get their tickets. We queued again, fearful that the bus might leave without us before we reached the ticket booth, and this time were told
'Why didn't you purchase before time? Now you will not get a place.'
The truth of this was all too obvious. The Pakistani bus superintendent, although sympathetic, was also obtuse. He took as long as possible to write out our tickets, and before handing them over wanted information on rates of pay in England - the El Dorado of Pakistan.
'Can you help me get to England? In your country one can move with the girls, here it is not possible.'
As the bus moved off, a few seconds after we had elbowed our way on board, more people leaped on and hung in a knot at the doorway. I was jammed between sharp elbows and unidentifiable knees. Several of the passengers tried to make me sit in front with the women, but claustrophobia verging on panic made me cling to the door rail and kick myself a space to breathe. Only then did we learn that everyone else bought their tickets on the bus, and not before. The ticket man had a face like a mynah bird. How he managed to collect any fares at all in such a crush I don't know. One of the women in black turned round and gave me some ice to suck. A small girl, crouching on the floor between the bundles raised her tear stained face and clutched at her mother whimpering in the heat.

After three hours of sheer purgatory we arrived at the Indian border. A row of huts strung out along the dusty road led up to a tree branch which was the official border. Walking from passport hut to customs hut and customs hut to chai hut I consumed several bottles of iced lemon barley before crossing the branch. On the Indian side of the branch was a row of ex army tents all occupied by Sikh officials in tight turbans. Finding they didn't sell lemon barley in India I crossed back to Pakistan for a last bottle while my passport was being stamped, and then took a tonga to Ferozepore,

the first Indian town. At three rupees, the tongas are twice as expensive as the scooter wallahs (a kind of boxed in scooter rickshaw decorated with cut glass and coloured plastic) but worth it for the ride. The scraggy ginger pony trotted ahead, and I was enveloped in the strong spicy smell of the trees - the smell of India. The change after Pakistan was immediately noticeable and relieving. Women's faces were visible once more. The trees were different and the birds were different, flying across the road like big butterflies or insects in an extravagance of wings. Big grey shouldered crows watched us. Tall reeds lined the road, and in a green surfaced patch of water heron-like birds balanced on stones. Tiny striped squirrels darted across almost under our wheels. We crossed the iron bridge over the River Sutlej, wider than I had ever imagined a river could be, greyish brown and curded like the sea, stretching away into the distance where it became indistinguishable from the haze and the softly outlined trees. The great stone pillars of the bridge, half submerged, were calibrated with dates and flood levels. One or two guards stood at the end of the bridge, and notices forbade photography. On a shingle bank below two men and some boys were bathing in their loin cloths.

The contrapuntal smells and the hazy greenness of the trees on the Ferozepore road impressed themselves in my mind and became part of the essence of India, so hard to recapture and yet so distinctive.

We passed through a village with big black dusty water buffaloes. The men were all bearded and wore topknots - Sikhs. Children played naked under the trees, small girls carried their younger brothers or sisters on one hip, dogs lay panting in the sun. White cows with flat humps and dewlaps passed us on the road. We crossed the rail track and entered an area of paddy fields, but still the same pale green haze hung over the delicate trees.
Ferozepore was a city of faded pink brick walls, patterned and latticed. Cows wandered about the streets taking something from a stall here and there as they passed, and munching meditatively. Beans were cooking in black pots. In Ferozepore station rested against the wall with her hand on her child's head. Beggar children with hoarse voices and sliding eyes asked for baksheesh and rubbed their stomachs beseechingly.

The thought of another third class train journey made me cringe, so I lashed out on a second class ticket to Delhi, and went off to find some food. In the station yard was a kitchen of sorts, with one of those mud oven complexes one sees all over the east. A man sat on the oven making chapatties, patting them between his hands. Another man ladled out rice and curry for me, but the curry was too hot and burnt my mouth so I ate mostly rice.
My second class carriage proved to be a lot more comfortable than third class. By the time we reached Delhi at six a.m. I had slept well and felt refreshed. I took a gaudily decorated scooter wallah and directed the driver to 'Gold Post Office'. This was the post restante, and I wanted to see if there was any mail for me. Five minutes later I was wishing I had taken a taxi - scooter wallahs are just about the most dangerous thing on the roads in India. They weave in and out of oncoming traffic and bullock carts on the wrong side of the road at breakneck speeds, swerving on the edge of one wheel, brakes shrieking. We had a circular tour round Delhi in this manner, as nobody could understand where I wanted to go. The driver kept stopping passers by and I kept repeating 'Gold Post Office', but they only shook their heads and looked blank. We collected quite a crowd of well meaning Indians, all making various suggestions, and when one of them finally tumbled to what I wanted he said 'Oh, you mean Gold Post Office, well why didn't you say so before?'
Although many Indians speak English, they only speak Indian English which amounts to almost a separate language, and unless you pronounce all your words with a Peter Sellers accent and happen to know the right local idioms, they will say 'Why don't you speak English?'
As it turned out, the post office was closed. It was a Sunday.

The scooter wallah driver, a Sikh, to make up for his earlier incompetence, ascertained that I wanted a bed for the night, and produced a card advertising Mr Singh's Hostel, in Hailey Road. Mr Singh's hostel wasn't bad. It had a garden, showers, string beds, and fans. I booked in, and the scooter wallah driver got his commission. There was a 'boy' in the hostel who existed solely to be woken up and sent for chai or lemonade. He tried to teach me the numbers in Hindi, but I only ever got as far as ten. The showers were in the garden, and inhabited by a lot of ants at least an inch long who liked to practise mountaineering on one's feet while one was trying to take a shower. The kitchen, where the boy brewed his special lemonade for us Europeans, was inhabited by a rat which used to run up and down the pipes and wasn't at all worried by onlookers.

Delhi is really the most un-Indian, un-chaotic city in India; but at the time I had nothing to compare it with, and was content to wander about wondering at the Indianness of things like the scaffolding on a half built skyscraper - scaffolding composed entirely of not too straight branches tied together with rope. Hailey Road is not too far from the main shopping centre of New Delhi, which consists of two circles, an outer and an inner, both colonnaded so that one may walk from shop to shop without the heat of the sun striking one's head. Most of the shops and restaurants are air-conditioned, and this was new to me. I kept walking into shops to feel the cold air and the sudden absence of sticky, clinging clothes. Walking out again was like walking into an oven, and my glasses would steam up. Outside the curio emporiums and the haberdashers sat pan sellers with their various leaves and powders spread on the ground beside them. Pan chewing never struck me as a very attractive habit - the streets were spattered with betel juice as were the floors of the third class carriages. I was captivated to discover that inside the haberdashers' shops they still had those cylindrical boxes on wires for the cash, where one assistant pulls a string and the box shoots along and rings a bell. I hadn't seen them since my childhood.

I explored the bookshops in serach of something to read. They were mostly dark and dusty, and full of old school books. I did find some penguins though. I think it was in Delhi that I later met a man who said that he and the Minister of something or other had the only available copies of the Penguin Special 'Asian Drama' in the country. Apparently when he had cycled along with it under his arm booksellers would rush out from their bamboo curtained shops and accost him with 'Where did you get that book?'
One evening I went to look at Jantar Mantar, which is an old observatory built by the Maharajah of Jaipur in 1725. Oddly shaped red stone structures like staircases leading nowhere pointed upwards, while the centrepiece was an enormous red stone sundial. On the way back I took a short cut through a back alley, full of spicy smells and people on string beds. Even the smoke from fires in India smells different, and the grass is brittle and curly. At the crossroads some small boys were flying kites.

My helpful piece of paper from the Arts Lab suggested that I could travel all round India for a few rupees by buying a third class student rate ticket for the whole journey in Delhi. Accordingly, I planned an itinerary via Agra, Bombay, Goa (by ship), Bangalore, Madras, Calcutta, Raxaul (border for Nepal), Benares and back to Delhi.
While I was looking at the map, it occured to me that here I was, in Delhi, after only fourteen days of travelling from Istanbul. It struck me that it hadn't been at all difficult - simply a matter of getting on and off buses - and that really India wasn't as far away from England as I had imagined. The world had shrunk a little. I took a scooter wallah to the Railway Superintendent's office to get my student concession form. The office of the Northern Railways was a large dilapidated building with dark curtained doorways, ancient paintwork, dusty filing cabinets blocking the stairway, and innumerable clerks bashing away at old black typewriters in the midst of a veritable sea of paper in imminent danger of being blown away by the punkah wallahs. I filled in a makeshift form on the back of a page torn out of an old exercise book. The superintendent sent a boy for chai, before I could protest, and out of politeness I drank it, sickly sweet though it was. He was most interested to know my views on schools in England, as he was thinking of sending his son to one, and he also wondered whether I knew his cousin in Birmingham.

The Jumna and the Ganges

The train for the first lap of my journey was due to leave at five in the afternoon, but when there was no sign of it I asked an official and was told that it was running one and a half hours late. Trains are always running late in India. On arrival at the station it is best to ask how many hours or days late your particular train is running. No one will bother to tell you otherwise, in fact when asked any other question with regard to the train they will simply tell you what time it is supposed to leave. Many soldiers in olive green uniforms and ginger plimsolls were sleeping among their bedrolls at one end of the platform, and when the train came in I was allowed (illegally) to take a seat in the Military compartment, designated by chalk marks on the door, and much less crowded than the ordinary compartments. The soldiers were going back to their barracks at Agra, and a paratropper opposite me invited me to stay at the barracks - 'You don't go to hotel, you come with me.'
We took a bicycle rickshaw from Agra station to the barracks. Fires and cooking pots and lights in the streets gave way to a warm darkness with only the creaking of the bicycle and the churr of crickets. A half moon was running between monsoon clouds as we turned into the barracks and were challenged by the sentry. My military man knocked softly at a door and was answered by 'Saab?' from inside. There was a shuffling of feet as the houseboy sleepily unbolted the door. A charpoy was put in the entrance hall for me, underneath the fan. In the morning the paratrooper's wife made me a sort of curried porridge, while his daughter swung the calender on the wall and smiled shyly. They were Madrassis, and the hot porridge was a South Indian breakfast. After breakfast a rickshaw was summoned to take the Memsahib to the Taj Mahal.

What can I say about the Taj Mahal? We approached it by a treelined road with Hindi slogans painted on the walls. In the distance white onion domes lit by the morning sun stodd bright against the monsoon clouds. Then, further over, behind the trees, appeared the familiar Persian dome of the Taj. Monkeys ran about among the banyan roots and green parrots chattered in the branches. I paid twenty paisa entrance fee at the gate, and there in front of me was the picture postcard perspective across the water. Photographers hung around waiting for tourists so that they could photograph them against the Taj Mahal to send to all their friends. In the forecourt of the central building I removed my sandals and entered with bare feet. Latticed marble screens surrounded the central sanctuary, and four alcoves each with a latticed window let in a dim light. The inner sanctum was circular, with the sarcophagus of Mumtaz Mahal and beside it the larger one of Shah Jehan. Mumtaz was Shah Jehan's favourite wife and bore him fourteen children before dying in childbirth. He originally planned to build a replica of the Taj on the opposite bank of the Jumna, in black marble, linking the two by a marble bridge. Unfortunately, before work could be started on this he was deposed by his son Aurangzeb and shut up in one of the red towers for a while until he died and was buried beside Mumtaz. On the soft white marble of the sarcophagi lilies had been laid, and incense burned. The marble was inlaid with a delicate tracery of pietra dura work, with jade, jasper, lapis lazuli and cornelian flowers. In a vault below, the same scene was repeated, but these were the real tombs containing the remains. The incense and lilies were there too, but there was a heavy atmosphere of exclusion. It reminded me somehow of Forster's Marabar caves.

Outside, at the back of the Taj, ran the dark Yamuna or Jumna river. An ancient Sanskrit couplet came to mind -
'The night that's past will not return to me.
The Jumna's floods flow onward to the sea.'
I stood on the terrace and watched the Jumna curving away to Agra town on the left and open country on the right. A small temple stood on the bank, and one or two people were washing clothes. Someone told me the waters were full of man-eating turtles. I walked back under the banyan trees and took a rickshaw to the station. We passed under the walls of the Red Fort where a snake charmer spoke to his snake in a sing song voice in the midst of a crowd of Indians. At the station I had an altercation with the rickshaw boy who seemed to think he should be paid twice, and of course we collected quite a crowd before the matter was sorted out.

Happily, the Bombay train was only running thirty five minutes late. Haevy monsoon rain passed down the platform and silvered the stones between the rails. I didn't manage to find a seat in the third class compartment, but sat on my rucksack behind the door. A small boy sat in the corner smoking a bidi - one of those cheap Indian cigarettes with a pungent smell all their own, wrapped up in leaves and sold from bundles. The countryside was fairly level, broken by strange mounds of granite weathered and streaked with black. Vultures wheeled above and perched over dead cows. Great black molars and cloven hoofs of rock protruded from the grass, and strange hills like half submerged water buffaloes stalked the horizon. After a while this landscape gave way to what geographers know as Badlands - highly eroded soft earth pinnacles and canyons lorded over by peacocks.

I fell asleep with my head on my arms, half out of the window, and when I woke the next morning we were back in green countryside with the bare black bones showing through. Rice paddies occupied the depressions, and the brown water was creased under a wind running in from the west. Women in brightly dyed saris were out planting rice, and men were ploughing with water buffaloes. We passed a small temple on the banks of a brown snaking river, and I thought of those watercolours by George Chinnery. Groups of village women went down to the water in the morning haze with shining brass and copper pots on their heads. It was raining intermittently, and water started to run down into the carriage. The rice planters covered themselves with straw rain shields, or put up black umbrellas. We crossed a broad brown river by an iron bridge, and a brilliant blue and green bird flew out from under it. In the distance I could see table mountains, half obscured by ragged clouds. Forested hills began to close in, and soon we were running through a series of tunnels and cuttings. On the side of one such cutting, running with water and green mosses, a board read 'Tunnel No. 8 Daylighted 1949.' The clean cut rock surfaces ran and dripped with water. At one point a whole stream appeared to have altered course and was cascading down the cliff.

Every station platform we passed through was crowded with peasants, beggars, pariah dogs, sellers of mangoes, sellers of fried things, sellers of concoctions in leaf cups, and chai sellers. The chai sellers walked up and down with buckets of hot chai in one hand and buckets of clay beakers in the other. 'Chai Garam' they shouted, 'Chai garam'. I was puzzled to see the passengers breaking their clay beakers after drinking, but later I realised that this was due to the Hindu's concept of the clean and the unclean. Towards Bombay blocks of flats appeared, and the tracks were cluttered with people who had set up their homes between the railway lines in tents or shacks or simply under black umbrellas. Bombay station was the usual confusion of tin trunks and porters in red shirts. I took a taxi to Red Shield Salvation Army Hostel, which at 12.25 rupees per day provides full European style board. I then changed some more money on the black market and went to enquire about ships for Goa.In Delhi they had assured me that ships sailed every day for Goa, but it wasn't so. They were all laid up for the duration of the monsoon. Also laid up were trips to the caves at Elephanta Island. So I went and sat under the Gateway of India, just around the corner from the Red Shield. The Arabian Sea was heavy with movement, and silky as dusk fell. Out at sea a string of lighted ships waited beside the bulk of the two islands. Back at the Red Shield they were serving roast pork- my favourite - while below in the street a man played a one stringed instrument.

In Bombay I met an Indian lawyer who lived in an apartment partitioned not quite to the ceiling, in one of Bombay's older houses with cockroaches and peeling paint. His friend, a film director, claimed to be descended from the Emperor Ashoka, and they both insisted on calling me 'Shakespeare's daughter' which appeared to be a common euphemism for Englishwoman. They took me round Bombay by taxi, visiting Chowpatty Beach, the Marine Drive, or 'necklace of lights' as the tourist brochure calls it; and the notorious 'cages' in Falkland Street, Bombay's redlight district where prostitutes of all nationalities sit in barred housefronts waiting for custom. The descendant of Ashoka possessed a motor byke, though as he told me 'only one person in 540 in India has a motorised vehicle', and took me on it to Juhu Beach one night. The sea was dark and full of movement, and a fine rain was coming in across the Worli Milk Colony. Palm trees leaned into the sea wind. At Juhu a statue of Gandhi on the beach looked inscrutably out to sea while the cold rain beat along the soft sand and the palm trees hung in black suspension.

As I couldn't take a ship to Goa, I decided to take a train to Benares. I also planned to get off at Jalgaon and visit the Ajanta and Ellora caves, but we must have passed through Jalgaon in the night, and I couldn't read any station names on the darkened platforms where we stopped, nor could I get any intelligible answers from my fellow passengers. A beautiful young girl - she must have been only fifteen or sixteen - sat crosslegged on the seat opposite me in the Ladies Only compartment, suckling her baby. In the corner a bony woman was suckling a girl child of two or three at least, who when hungry would simply run across and undo her mother's blouse. The woman's husband was further up the train, and at stations he would bring her fried things to eat, passing them through the window. Some of the babies were wearing nothing but silver ankle rings, though many also wore the black thread of the twiceborn. At Nagpur the connection to Delhi was running two and a half hours late. I managed to find a seat on the step of a third class carriage, but all the other passengers tried to make me either move to the Ladies Only compartment or at least off the step and onto a seat.
'If the guard sees a lady sitting on step, he will stop the train.'
After a while they gave up, and started asking the inevitable Indian questions. 'Which country belong to you?' How much would they earn for such and such a job in England? How much would a house with all facilities cost? A graduate teacher in India, I learned, would earn 250 to 270 rupees per month.

At Itarsi we joined the main Delhi- Bombay line. The train sounded its horn - a sonorous minor third, a mournful,unhappy, opening sound. Itarsi station was dark and people walked up and down with lanterns. The rest of the train curved away under a cage of black iron girders. The sky was grey, immeasurably soft, impalpable, with the monsoon darkness ranged in bales. The platform, irregular cracked stone, glistened at different levels. Men stood about in groups, in white nightgowns and pyjamas, or so it seemed, the warm night air ruffling the cotton and touching their skins. A steam train moved in on the other side of the platform, its cyclops eye projecting a blind beam of light from the black forehead into the dark. Two little boys begged, with metal bowls and low voices. The small one walked away disconsolate, one side of his thin shirt fallen away, one arm raised in a gesture of tiredness. At the next station it was fully dark. Someone under a black umbrella stood alone at the end of the platform, the tip of his cigarette intermittently glowing. Inside the train my ambitious friends sat crosslegged on their bedrolls above the heads of the other passengers, eating curry out of leaf plates with their fingers. Turning away from the bare upturned soles of sleeping feet, I watched the distant lights whose long downward extensions implied a stretch of water. Rectangular shapes of light from the windows ran beside the train, now and then distorted by some object beside the track, and I fell asleep watching them.

In the morning a little boy came into the compartment and sang with an anxious concentration on his raised face, playing on two pieces of wood as castanets. On Indian trains there is always a steady stream of beggars, itinerant vendors, musicians, sadhus, dervishes and so on who get on at one end and work their way through the train. Naturally they don't pay any fares, but then neither do many of the bona fide travellers. If a ticket inspector gets aboard they simply climb out of the windows and up onto the roof.

Back in Delhi, I feasted on egg and chips in the Milk Bar on Connaught Circus, and then went to the Nepali Embassy to get a visa for Nepal. There were two American hippies there trying to get a visa for their friend who had hepatitus. One of them, a blonde girl, had a pet monkey on her shoulder. Hepatitus is one of the endemic diseases of the North, particularly among the hippies, but I was informed that Gamma Globulin injections were given out by the American Peace Corps Office in Kathmandu every Tuesday at twelve rupees apiece. When I had left Delhi, newspapers had been reporting the Moon landing -
'So the moon is not, after all, deified soma juice.'
Now they were reporting 'Moon samples igneous.' However, the Hindu religion had absorbed so many incompatible ideas in the past that I didn't think it would be shaken to the core by any new evidence about the moon.

In the Kwality restaurant I met two Peace Corps workers on leave from helping with agriculture in Uttar Pradesh. They informed me that the cholera in Herat was worse, that thirty people had died in one day, and that the border with Iran was definitely closed. Meanwhile, President Nixon was due to visit Delhi, and officials were busy cordoning off the streets against beggars. On the following day I went back to Barrakamba Road for my Nepal visa and came back by way of Golf Links to enquire for Afghan visas for the return journey. The Afghan Ambassador was polite but firm-
'At present no visas are being issued.'
I had thought of taking the Radjhani Express to Calcutta to visit my friends the Bhattacharyas, but I soon discovered that the Radjhani Express consisted entirely of 'air conditioned chair cars' and cost ninety rupees one way, so I gave up the idea. Instead I took a scooter wallah to Old Delhi Station, clutching on for my life as the Sikh driver zoomed in and out of bullock carts and Ambassador taxis. There was a train at eight for Varanasi, otherwise known as Benares.

I travelled in the Ladies Only compartment. In a corner squatted what I would have described as a beggar family, but I was told
'these are the people of India'.
They wore ragged saris and were drinking water from a brass bowl.
A more well to do woman and her daughter sitting opposite me were eating curry and chapatties from one of those three tiered aluminium food carriers. They wrapped up the leftover curry in the last chapatties and gave it to the grandmother of the family, who noncommitally knotted it into the corner of her sari. A little rain fell across the paddy fields.

By morning we were in Benares. I took advantage, as usual, of the First Class Ladies' waiting room, and breakfasted on eggs in the Non-Vegetarian Refreshment Room. Choosing a name at random from the dozens of hotel cards thrust at me outside the station, and earning the lucky rickshaw driver a commission, I found myself at the New Imperial hotel. Also staying there was an American clothes designer - looking at fabrics, he said. He was the only other Westerner I saw in Benares, though undoubtedly there were others. At his suggestion I visited the silk sari shops, where fat Indians in upper rooms furnished with mattress floor coverings offered me chai, and unrolled bale after bale of gorgeous silks. I also visited Varanasi New Hindi University, said to be one of the most forward universities in India. Certainly it had a most industrious atmosphere, with tables and chairs set under the trees and buddhist monks walking two by two in saffron robes. Inside, the classrooms had blackboards and forms and double wooden desks that looked as if they had been lifted straight from my old London primary school. In the evening the American designer took me down to the Ganges to see the six-o-clock ritual at the bathing ghats. People in dhotis were immersing themselves while others sat on the steps under large umbrellas. Flowers were strewn on the water and in the background tinny temple music played. I think I was a little disappointed as I had half expected to see the scene from Satyajit Ray's Pather Panchali, and hear classical ragas. It was just dusk, and the Ganges was pink and wide. The far bank was pale green under a sky full of monsoon clouds. Leaf boats with burning incense were cast out into the water as dusk fell, the little flames rocking about between the boats. When the tinny temple music had ended and the houseboats were bluish bulks under the lamplight, we took a boat along the waterfront. We passed temples open to the river, water lapping in over the sills. One temple with red lights an grotesque figurines was pointed out as the Hindu smallpox temple. All along the river bank flights of steps led down into the water. We passed under the burning ghats, the fires bright against the sky. A man was poking the embers with a long pole, while a dog ran around sniffing.
Hindus come to Benares from all over India, to die in sight of the Holy Ganges. The boatman informed us that about a hundred corpses a day were burned. As we passed into the gloom and looked back at the great glow over the burning ghat, a few drops of rain fell. Below the boat the water was dark and strong, the current persistently turning the nose of the boat inward onto the steps. I dipped my arm into the holy river, hoping I wouldn't catch any gruesome disease from it. Back at the incense ghat we paid the boatman and went off to find a restaurant. Walking through the crowded Benares streets, I had an irresistible impulse to grasp the horns of the water buffaloes and slap the flanks of the holy white cows. In the restaurant we had curry and chapatties, and I asked for water. My American friend was horrified, but I drank it anyway. It was preferable to coca cola.

On the next day I took a rickshaw to Sarnath to see the deer park where Gautama Buddha preached his first sermon. Having read Hermann Hesse's Siddhartha, I don't know quite what I expected to see, but it certainly wasn't the All India Radio Mast in the middle of a field. There was a Buddhist temple containing scenes from the life of Buddha painted by a Japanese artist, and also a Chinese Buddhist temple and a Tibetan monastery. A museum contained various statues of Buddha and the famous lion capitol which India adopted as her national emblem. In the deer park itself, an enormous stupa was erected by the Emperor Ashoka to mark the spot on which Gautama Buddha was supposed to have preached.

Kathmandu

In Varanasi station I consulted the stationmaster about going to Raxaul, on the Nepali border. He gave me an extremely complicated timetable from which I took down a list of train times and train codes and instructions for crossing the Ganges at Patna. As it looked as though the journey had to be made overnight, and there were so many changes that I obviously wouldn't get much sleep, I went back to the pleasant New Imperial Hotel for a preparatory rest. At half past two in the afternoon I caught a train for Patna. We reached Patna at just after seven, and I then had to take a rickshaw to Mahendra Ghat, the Steamer Quay. The shops around Mahendra Ghat were lit up with neon signs in the darkness. The Ganges was so broad at Patna that the lights of the far shore were scarcely distinguishable. The steamer took from eight forty to ten thirty to cross, while I had coffee and potato cakes on the badly lit deck. People had spread out mats on the boards and were sleeping. Others crowded the rail, watching the string of lights on the shore. There were two Europeans on board also going to Kathmandu, the girl had a sitar wrapped in purple velvet.

When we reached the far bank crowds of people were sitting around in orange and yellow clothing, and carrying scarlet bunting. Was there some festival or were they on a pilgrimage? I followed the crowd along the towpath in the warm night until we were stepping across railway lines and looking for Train number B2 Down for Muzzafarpur. The carriage was crowded and there were no lights on in the train. We reached Muzzafarpur at one thirty five a.m., and walked along the rails to board Train number 363 Up which left in an hour for Sagauli. The only place I could find to sit was a sack full of pots and pans with distinctly sharp edges. There were no lights in this train either, and I was feeling ill. The train stood for some time in the dark by a farmhouse. Outside was the sound of crickets, and a strange bird churred in the reeds. I slept fitfully on the pots and pans, and at five fifty a,m. we arrived at Sagauli.

I had some chai and cake on Sagauli platform while a crowd of Indians grew around me and began to ask the inevitable stupid questions.
'Which country belong to you?' 'China' I said.
The Raxaul train left at ten past six. Still feeling ill, I leant out of the door watching it grow lighter. The countryside was much greener here, the vegetation quite lush. There were lakes or tanks beside the railway with white water lilies in the form of daisies. At Raxaul I wondered what everyone was crowding round and staring at in the goods van. It was a dead woman, covered over but for her feet which stuck out stiff and yellow.
I took another rickshaw to the passport and customs shed, then crossed the bridge into Nepal. A ramshackle bus was leaving for Kathmandu immediately, there was nothing to drink, and I felt worse. At Birganj, the border town, I bought a Coca Cola for about four times the normal price as it isn't made in Nepal but imported from India. I hoped it might settle my stomach. The driver, a Mongolian type, was also taken ill, so we stopped in a village while various men argued under a tree, and eventually another came to take over the driving.

The hills rose ahead, green and forested, and beyond them the mountains, purple and jagged in outline but not yet high enough for snow. We climbed and climbed. In a tiny village on a steep hillside we stopped, and I washed my hot feet in a cool stream. Demonstrating my malady to the villagers, I was given hot lemon juice which they brewed specially for me. I sat it a mud house sipping it. Enquiries for the loo, however, met with blank stares. There wasn't one - why should there be, with plenty of bushes outside?
On we went through the rain, always higher and higher. The terrain was so steep that at times the road had to wind right to the head of a cross valley and back again. We climbed steadily for three or four hours. Terraced green paddy fields covered the slopes below, and houses were perched on impossibly steep inclines. It reminded me of the father of Babur, the Mogul Emperor, whose hobby in his old age was keeping pigeons. He kept them in a pigeon cote perched over the edge of a ravine in the Hindu Kush. Unfortunately the earth gave way when he was tending them and he fell'with his pigeons and the house of his pigeons and so became a hawk'. Depressions had been built into the road to allow for streams in spate to flow across rather than washing the road away. The views downwards were unbelievable - at one point the whole plain of the Ganges could be discerned in the distance beyond ranges of hills and brilliant green cultivated pockets. By now we were among the clouds. The vegetation was extraordinarily luxuriant. Rhododendrons grew in profusion, and great misshapen trees dripped with lichens and ferns. The rock beside the road was also covered with lichens and green mosses, though where it was

exposed it appeared to consist of a kind of coarse grained white and black granite.

At last we reached the top of the pass - over eight thousand feet above sea level, which meant that we had climbed at least eight thousand feet since leaving the Indian border. From this point on the Tribhuwan Raj Path, as the road to Kathmandu is called, we should have been able to see the whole Himalayan range including Everest, but unfortunately rolling thunderclouds obscured the view. The road turned down across the foothills, and the rock gave way to red sandstones and shales. There were more villages, and people working in the fields. The Nepalese people appeared to be very beautiful, though small. The women dressed in vivid crimsons and scarlets. Just before Kathmandu, by which time I had a high fever and was half delirious, there was another passport check to make sure nobody had strayed off the road into forbidden territory. It was raining hard, and the road was full of muddy puddles. Electric lighting in the streets of South Kathmandu gave it an oddly European look as we entered in the darkness. A rickshaw driver proffered a card which read 'Oriental Lodge, Hot Water.' So to Oriental Lodge I allowed myself to be taken. Halfway through signing the register I had to rush to the loo, which turned out to be a genuine Doulton. The hotel proprietor supplied me with a bucket of the said hot water for 25 paisa, and also two whisky bottles full of it as an approximation to hot water bottles. It was the first hot water I had seen since leaving England, and most welcome in my fevered state. In fact, with the genuine Doulton instead of holesx in the floor, and real beds with blankets, the Oriental Lodge was the height of civilisation. As I crept into bed with some more hot lemon laced with brandy from my medical kit and clutched the hot whisky bottles to my aching stomach, I actually felt quite happy.

I woke up feeling much better, though rather weak and watery, and went out to a cafe known as Ravispot for a boiled egg. This was the cafe 'where travellers meet', and all the Europeans in Kathmandu used to congregate there. I met two Americans I had last seen in Teheran, and they expressed surprise that I had got this far, travelling alone as I was. I went back to bed for the afternoon and listened to the heavy monsoon shower outside. In Kathmandu it always seems to rain in the afternoons. Later I went out to Ravispot for dinner. It is one of my peculiarities that however ill I may be my appetite is always the last thing to be affected. I ate a tomato sandwich and drank some buffalo milk, though I must admit I could hardly taste what I was eating. In Ravispot I ran across the boy from Emmanuel who had given me advice on the journey before I left Cambridge. At the next table was a Welsh boy from Trinity, and there were rumoured to be even more members of Cambridge University staying at the infamous Camp Hotel. The little boy who served us was called Krishna. He looked about five or six, and was a Nepali orphan who had been taken in by David and his wife, the English couple who ran Ravispot. They were spending a year here en route for Australia. Ravi, the original proprietor, was reputed to be in Istanbul, having run away from his wife, a sour faced Indian.

On the next day I was still feeling weak and watery, so I decided to go with the Welsh boy from Trinity to the Shanta Bhawan United Mission Hospital and have my disease diagnosed. He had come out by car with three friends, but had fallen ill with pneumonia and suspected hepatitus for which he was still under treatment. His friends had gone back without him, and every day frantic cables would arrive from his mother in Wales saying
'Overland out of question stop will forward air fare.'
Shanta Bhawan Mission Hospital is staffed mainly by Americans and Germans. The registration fee is one rupee, and each day of the week is allotted to a different complaint. Be sure not to go on Leprosy Day or Gynaecology Day. There were a great many Tibetan refugees waiting there - taller than the Nepalese, they wear long crossover garments rather like Edwardian gymslips. A row of benches inside accomodated the waiting sick, On the floor a Nepali peasant girl lay moaning feebly. My doctor was the famous Dr.Alice Fischer, a German, hard but skilful. She diagnosed bacillary dysentery and a cold. I was relieved to hear it was bacillary and not amoebic - the former is more drastic but the latter persists and is almost impossible to get rid of. It must have been that glass of water in Benares. Dr Fischer prescribed Tetracyclin, Vitamins B and C, throat lozenges, and diarrhoea pills. At the dispensary I paid twenty eight rupees and got the pills in little packets made out of pages of Time Magazine. She also advised me to drink milk every day while taking the Tetracycline. This was all very well, but where does one get milk in India apart from the Goverment Dairies in Delhi?

I dined that evening on Sweet and Sour Buff in the Lido Chinese Restaurant, under a portrait of Chairman Mao. The 'buff' puzzled me for a while, but turned out to be buffalo. It seemed rather a pity to be eating such good food when I couldn't taste it at all. At Ravispot next day I polished off a plate of egg and chips, pancakes and buffalo milk. A great leather bound book known as Ravi's Travel Bible was brought round. Everyone passing through had made an entry, and it was full of information on travel in remote corners of the world.
'When in Israel eat at Uncle Mustache's. When crossing the Sahara remember to take some lipsalve. Hitching from London to Manchester - raincoat essential.' There were details of the route to Australia via Timor and Bali, where to change money, where to sleep cheapest, where to get jobs in East Africa and so on. The same night I heard the full story of Krishna, from Dave. Apparently he had wandered in two weeks before, looking very sad, asking for food and saying 'I work for no money.' He had no father, and his mother had died in hospital. He was covered in sores and cried with the pain of them. David had taken him to a doctor and a skin specialist who prescribed mustard oil. Now he was clean, and dressed in cast off European shirts that hung down round his ankles.The other Ravispot waiter was Kama Lama, a Tibetan refugee boy of eleven, very intelligent. He had come over the mountains three years previously from a village near Lhasa. He made an excellent waiter as he could remember everyone's orders however complicated without writing them down. No doubt he would have made a better schoolboy, given the opportunity.

When I had sufficiently recovered from my dysentery, I wandered through the muddy alleys of the bazaar among the temples and pagodas hung with grasses and green moss. Carved lions bared their teeth, and in every niche was a grotesque idol with offerings of flowers and incense. Piles of brown balls on sale puzzled me until the shopkeeper demonstrated by gestures that they were soap - just the right colour to match Kathmandu's murky water.
I spent an afternoon in the British Council library, opposite the American Embassy which is barred like a jailhouse. They had English newspapers only a week old. At Tashi's I drank more buffalo milk and heard the story of Tashi. Another Tibetan refugee, he had come over the mountains with others, carrying his old blind mother on his back. They were set upon by a band of robbers - here Tashi displayed the long scar on his neck - but the story ended happily as hospitals in Nepal are good, and his blind mother was blind no longer. She had only had a cataract, and it was easily removed.

I had decided by this time that Nepal was the nicest country I had been in since Afghanistan. The people were charming, and didn't have the Indian habit of incessantly asking questions and then arguing with the answers. However, tempting though it was to rent a room overlooking the [illegible] River and earn my living writing articles for the Rising Nepal, it was time to leave Kathmandu. I left the battered copy of Penguin Russian Short Stories which I had bought on Delhi railway station with the Welsh Trinity boy so that he could read it while he was waiting for his air fare to arrive. In the early morning I walked down to the post office to catch the mail truck to the border. The mail truck takes passengers for five rupees, who sit in the back along with the mail sacks. My fellow passengers consisted of an English couple going to Australia, and several Nepali families going to various villages along the Tribhuwan Raj Path. These last carried what looked like their entire worldly goods with them, including furniture and cooking utensils all tied up with string. The children were bedecked with scarlet wooden beads, multiple strings of red and green glass beads, and ear ornaments. Nepali women wear earrings not only in the lobe but all the way round the ear, and the small children have ears full of little sticks as sleepers where the flesh has been pierced. They also plait lengths of green and red silk into their hair.

At last I saw the Himalayas. I happened to look out of the back of the truck as we left Kathmandu. A bank of clouds rose halfway up the sky, and above that, far higher than I would have looked for them, were the white peaks.

We passed a gruesome accident, and the driver stopped to have a look. A petrol tanker had fallen over the precipice inside one of the hairpin bends. Fragments of cab and wheels were scattered all down the cliffside. The Nepali policeman sitting on the parapet with his legs dangling over, contemplating the wreckage, informed us that the steering had jammed. One killed, three taken to hospital. Our driver shrugged and pulled a face. Suitably chastened, we continued our climb. Trees loomed out of the cloud on all sides, and sometimes the road was invisible a few yards ahead. I had learned by this time not to be frightened in such situations - when one isn't doing the driving, it is pointless wasting adrenalin. One might as well trust to the will of Allah. In places the road had been partly swept away by landslides, and teams of workmen were busy breaking stones and shoring it up again.
We stopped in a village for rice and dal, and I asked for 'ek glass pani'- a glass of water. The English couple stared at me in consternation -
'You're not going to drink that, are you?'
Well what did they think, I was going to wash my hands in it? I didn't tell them I had already had dysentery, very probably from drinking a glass of water in Benares. Most Europeans carry sterilising tablets and sterilise everything religiously. I never have, and apart from that one attack of dysentery I was fairly free of stomach upsets. I work on the theory that by drinking and eating everything indiscriminately from West to East one builds up an immunity while travelling. It seemed to work quite well. In my fourth year in Afghanistan I had no intestinal reactions whatsoever, although oddly enough I was upset by English food when I got back. Possibly it was the chemicals. A couple of months of Afghan sun and wind, Afghan stone ground nan and rice, and sitting crosslegged on the hard ground does wonders for the health.

The distance from Kathmandu to the border as the crow flies is only about sixty miles, but it takes a good twelve hours, and by the time we arrived it was dark. We passed a Russian camp just before the border, and fireflies hovered above the road. A line of pony traps at the mail post offered to take us to the border for exorbitant prices, but we started walking. They followed, calling out lower prices at each step we took. Finally we accepted the offer of two small boys whose pony was so emaciated it really shoudn't have been made to carry us. Our combined weight almost lifted it into the air on the shafts, and it kept hitting its heels on the front of the trap.
The border checkpoint was a little hut occupied by numerous pink lizards who sat halfway up the wall and blinked at us.
'Have you any Guns? Raw Wool? Silk? Rock Salt?'
We hadn't. The customs men came and shone torches vaguely into the cart, while on the road toads hopped about after crickets.

If our mail truck had not had to stop on the Tribhuwan Raj Path to change a tyre, we would probably have caught the evening train with a connection to Delhi. As it was, I slept on a bench in the First Class Ladies' Waiting Room, and failed to wake up in time for the three a.m. train. Since there was no connection, however, it didn't really matter. I caught another at seven forty for Sagauli, and then to Muzaffarpur. The Janata Express to Lucknow was said to be running three and a half hours late. In the refreshment room at Muzaffarpur were glass cases containing scenes from the life of Buddha. While I was sitting having my dinner two Europeans came in bound for Kathmandu. They had a dog with them, on a leash. The refreshment room staff were very upset indeed - to Hindus dogs are unclean, and certainly ought not to be in refreshment rooms.
The Janata Express, when it came, was surprisingly empty. I slept on a seat all the way to Lucknow, while rain drifted in through the windows.

Do Not Spit in the Compartment

In Lucknow a man invited me to his house for dinner, and then, true to E.M.Forster, mysteriously disappeared. In the First Class Ladies' Waiting Room I met an Englishwoman from Leicester who said she had been forty years in India. I was getting short of rupees, so I wandered round Lucknow station waiting for someone to come up and say 'Change Money Missis?' but no one did, so I was forced to change it in a bank. In the bank a great fuss was made. My travellers cheque was passed from clerk to head clerk to under manager to deputy manager to superintendent manager. I had to fill in all sorts of forms and sign across the ten paisa stamp before I got my money - at a very low rate and with deductions. I also needed to buy a bag, as some Indian had sat on my rucksack while I was asleep in the train, and buckled the frame. The best thing I could find was a thin green army bag, which fell to pieces in a matter of weeks.

Back at the station, I found that the Delhi train was running five and a half hours late. I went and had vegetable cutlets in the Vegetarian Refreshment Room- a splendid place with potted palms, cabinets of silver, starched white tablecloths, and the initials of the Northern Railway inscribed on the mirrors. On most Indian stations one can choose between 'Western Style', 'Vegetarian', and 'Non-Vegetarian' refreshment rooms. They all, however, possess an impressive menu which starts off with Soup of the Day and goes on through Irish Stew, Roast Lamb, Fish Cakes and Jam Roly Poly. It is only by trial and error that one eventually learns that each item on this menu is 'finished' (since the Last Days of the British Raj presumably) except for the items at the bottom of the list, which are Meat Curry in the case of the Non Vegetarian, Vegetable Cutlets in the case of the Vegetarian, and Eggs in the case of the Western Style. Besides having a menu, they also have a Complaints Book. This is a very useful item for the hungry traveller. If whatever you have ordered is a long time coming, simply ask for the Complaints Book, and in a twinkling your original order will be placed before you. Undoubtedly there is an official whose sole occupations is to go round reading the Complaints Books and reprimanding the people concerned.

I purchased a copy of the Statesman to read with my coffee, and on the front page was the following item:

> 'IRAN PAKISTAN LAND ROUTE CLOSED.
> The Land Route between Pakistan and Iran has been closed by Iran due to the inflow of Pakistani beggars into Iran, says UN quoting a leading Karachi daily, 'Jang'.
> Officially, the reason for closure has been given as the outbreak of cholera in the Quetta region and neighbouring areas. But newspaper reports contradicted it saying that if the intention had been to prevent cholera infection then passengers travelling by sea and air should also have been stopped from entering Iran.
> Another important reason, the reports say, is the sudden spurt in smuggling carried on through the land route.'

Whatever the reasons, it meant that if the Afghan Embassy was still not issuing visas the two possible land routes would be closed to me, and I would be in an awkward situation.

Back in Delhi, I found that the Afghan Embassy was issuing visas only on the production of two hundred dollars, which I didn't have. I went to the Tourist Office and enquired about boats up the Persian Gulf, but this method takes ten days and costs at least fifty five pounds.
That evening, I went to a party at the British High Commission, and had fish and chips wrapped up in airmail copies of the Times and served by white coated Indian servants. There was also Scotch Whisky and genuine coca cola as opposed to the Indian variety.
Mr Singh at the hostel wanted to know how he could get to England, as his wife hadn't slept with him for three months. That was his problem, but how was I to get back to England? I went to the Afghan Embassy and showed the Ambassador my ticket for the student flight from Istanbul to London on August 25th, explaining that with a three day quarantine on the Iranian border, if I left Delhi the following day I might just make it. He agreed to make a special concession, and kept the air ticket overnight.
That problem solved, I visited to Railway Superintendent to claim a refund on my round India ticket. He was quite pleased to see me as it gave him the opportunity for another cosy chat about his cousin in Birmingham.
As to the refund -
'Come back tomorrow. It is very irregular, but I will see what can be done.'

Meeting some other travellers in the Kwality Restaurant I heard on the grape vine the reason for the Afghan Ambassador's reluctance to issue visas. Apparently a German Tourist had been shot dead by Iranian border guards. The Iranians had closed their border completely against the cholera, only to find that a steady stream of Europeans were still crossing no man's land from Herat, having had their passports stamped out by the Afghans at Islam Qala. They could not enter Iran, nor could they go back into Afghanistan without first entering Iran and getting new visas from the Consulate in Meshed. They were held on the border for several days, and as they had no food or water supplies, tempers grew short. Four Germans in a Volkswagen decided to make a break for it, but as they edged forward the Iranian soldiers slashed their tyres. At this point some French tourists made a move towards the soldiers which was construed as threatening. One soldier fired into the air, and another, thinking it was the signal to open fire, did so and killed the German, wounding a Pakistani and another tourist.

On the morrow, armed with my refund, and a fresh supply of money from the Black Market in Shankar Bazaar, I went to the Afghan Embassy to collect my visa. 'Have you my visa?' I asked 'I most certainly have' replied the Ambassador. I now had to get a road permit to cross the border. Where should I get it? I tried the Secretariat. I was wrong. Road permits, they informed me, were issued by the Pakistani High Commission, not by India.
'We don't mind you crossing the border, it's Pakistan that makes all the fuss.'
Back I went to the foreign embassy quarter, and found the Pakistan High Commission, looking just like a mosque, with blue domes. The visa section was closed. 'Come back tomorrow.'
I spent the afternoon in Connaught Circus, stocking up on penguins for the quarantine camp. I noticed that cars in car showrooms had 'Applied For' notices. Trucks, as in Nepal, had 'Public Carrier' on the front, 'Horn Please' on the back, and were decorated with painted lake scenes and mirrorwork. There was a notice pasted up all over the walls which read
'To Check CRIMES AND MURDERS in the Capital Citizen Council Demands Complete Ban On SEX AND CRIME (007 and James Bond Type) Movies in Delhi.'
Also stencilled on walls in white paint were the humped cow symbols of the Congress Party, and Family Planning slogans. The wall with the most slogans was Delhi's favourite public urinal. There were always rows of men squatting along it, quite unconcerned, with the thread of the twiceborn wound round their ears. Apparently the Hindu gets claustrophobia in enclosed latrines. I can't say I blame them- I got claustrophobia myself in some of the smellier varieties. I always thought it was rather nice the way grown men would sit in trains with tucked up dhotis nonchalantly fondling their genitals. In some ways sexual innocence seems to increase as one goes east. The physical licence allowed between adult males in Iran, for instance (one sees panel members on television programmes with their hands on each other's knees), would probably by interpreted in the west as homosexuality. It is true that homosexuality is widespread in the east (the Afghan song about the 'boy across the river with a bottom like a peach') but so is friendly physical contact. The terrible crush of bus and train travel was one of my nightmares in India, but many Indians said they liked it. In the paper I read that a Dutch boy, arrested for going naked in Connaught Circus ('That's how God sent me here') had hanged himself in Delhi jail. Perhaps he should have smeared himself with ashes and grown a beard before taking his clothes off. I never heard of anyone arresting a Sadhu.

The Ferozepore train, when I finally caught it, provided more amusing reading matter. Stencilled on the wall of each carriage, in Urdu, Hindi and English, was the following litany:

HELP THE RAILWAYS
TO SERVE YOU BETTER
TRAVEL ONLY WITH A PROPER TICKET
AND SHOW IT ON DEMAND
SWITCH OFF FANS AND LIGHTS WHEN
YOU DON'T NEED THEM
DO NOT SPIT IN THE COMPARTMENT
PREVENT DAMAGE AND THEFT OF FITTINGS
THEY ARE NATIONAL PROPERTY
DISCOURAGE BEGGARS
SMOKE ONLY IF OTHER PASSENGERS
DO NOT OBJECT
TRAVEL LIGHT BOOK YOUR HEAVY
LUGGAGE IN THE BRAKE VAN
RECORD COMPLAINTS WITH THE GUARD
OR ASSISTANT STATION MASTER. THEY

HAVE A COMPLAINT BOOK.
PLEASE DO NOT PLAY RADIOS IF
OBJECTED TO BY OTHER PASSENGERS.

TRAVEL SAFELY
DO NOT OPEN DOORS, ENTRAIN OR
DETRAIN OR LEAN OUT OF WINDOWS
WHEN THE TRAIN IS MOVING.
PREVENT FOOTBOARD TRAVEL.
BUY ANY DRINKS OR TOBACCO
ONLY FROM LICENSED VENDORS
DO NOT THROW LIGHTED MATCHES
OR CIGARETTES LIGHT STOVES OR SIGRIS
OR CARRY INFLAMMABLE
MATERIALS LIKE PETROL OR FILMS
INSIDE THE COMPARTMENT
DO NOT THROW BOTTLES ETC. FROM
A RUNNING TRAIN.

In every station one sees signs proclaiming 'TICKETLESS TRAVEL IS A SOCIAL EVIL'. But how many people take any notice of these signs? That is if they can read them. When I first arrived in Delhi I made the mistake of pointing to an item on a menu instead of saying it. 'Omelette?' asked the waiter hopefully, after scrutinizing the words. Of course he couldn't read. No wonder the family planning slogans daubed on the walls of villages go unheeded - most of them are in English. No wonder most of the railway workers are graduates who can't get posts - who else could cope with the paperwork, all in English?

On this, my last day in India, I began to realise that despite the beggars on their little wheeled platforms holding out their deformities, despite the mountains of paper and red tape, despite the irrationalities of the Hindu, despite the inevitable questioning and poking and importuning throngs, despite the trains running several hours late, despite the inability of the Indian to answer a straight question, despite the chaos and the noise and the dirt and the smells of a seething mass of illogical humanity; I was becoming strangely fond of India. I suppose it is always the imperfections or idiosyncrasies in a place or a person that one grows fond of. A fortune teller in the Janpath relieved me ofseveral rupees one day but told me that I would come back to India.

In Ferozepore station I visited the last Indian refreshment room and ordered eggs. The service was so slow I had to ask for the Complaints Book. Instead, they brought me the eggs. I took a bus to the border across the River Sutlej. It had risen noticeably since I last crossed. I presented myself at the passport tent.
'When did you last enter India?'
'Raxaul, from Nepal? Well, where is the stamp on your passport?'
I looked. True, there didn't seem to be an entry stamp.
'Here is the exit stamp, but no entry stamp. If you haven't entered India, how can you leave India?'
Good question. We must have missed the passport check in the dark, though I did remember the customs check in the hut with the pink lizards.
In vain I protested. How was I to know what stamps my passport should have? Anyway, wasn't I here now? Hadn't I obviously entered India, stamp or no stamp?
The passport officer became angry, threw my passport across the room, and shouted 'You cannot leave India.' With that he obviously considered the matter closed, and went on to the next in line. One of the other officers took pity on me, and in whispers so as not to arouse the wrath of his superior, advised me to go back to Ferozepore and ask the Senior Superintendent of Police for permission to leave India. Gratefully I hired a tonga and set off back across the Sutlej to Ferozepore. It was some time before I could make anyone understand 'Police Headquarters', let alone get someone to actually direct us there by a route simple enough for the tonga driver to understand.

The Senior Superintendent of Police was a Sikh. He took my passport, and without batting an eyelid inscribed the following words:
'Permitted to leave India today, i.e.14th August 1969.'
He then enquired politely whether I was a priest.
'A Priest? Why?'
'Because you are wearing long clothes.'
I was wearing a long cotton skirt and shirt made for me in Afghanistan, this being the most suitable garb for a hot and humid climate. I don't know why he should have found it so surprising. Don't Indian women wear saris?

Back at the border my passport was stamped.
'Now this is the correct procedure,' he said, as if it had all been my fault.
I crossed the branch into Pakistan and found some kind of festival in progress, with flags and bunting, and loud Pakistani pop music blaring from loudspeakers hung in the trees. They were celebrating Independance Day- independence from the British.

North West Frontier

I couldn't find any lemon barley - it was 'finished', but there was plenty of mango juice, and some little urchins were selling biscuits. They also ran the Change Money market. It is amazing what astute businessmen children are in the east. When you leave Europe and come out east, you notice something missing on Turkish trains. At first you can't think what it is, and then you realise. There are no schoolchildren larking about and making a nuisance of themselves. They are far too busy earning a living to behave like western children. I don't feel so critical of all those Turks sitting around playing Tavla all day while their wives fo all the work, when I think of them as small boys running their fathers' businesses.
I suddenly realised that I had left my grass fan in India, with all the commotion in the passport tent. I went to buy myself another for four annas, as a fan is a most necessary piece of equipment south of the Khyber.
In Pakistan there are four classes of train travel - First Class, second class, interclass and third class. Notices on the footbridge in Lahore station read 'UPPER CLASS ONLY. THIRD CLASS ARE NOT ALLOWED.' I suppose the third class have to cross the line by the rails. Refreshment rooms are divided into Western Style and Pakistani Style rather than Vegetarian and Non Vegetarian. I caught the Khyber Mail, which used to be the Frontier Mail, to Peshawar, and slept on the floor. I didn't get much sleep though, as I kept waking to find Pakistanis touching me, which rather made me wonder what they had been doing while I was asleep. In the middle of the night they shook me awake and tried to tell me I should get off and change trains. But nobody had said anything about changing in Lahore, and wasn't this supposed to be the Khyber Mail? I slept on.

In the morning I woke to find the train, now only three carriages, steaming up a long valley on a single track line. Mountains were all around. Peasants in the fields were wearing white latticed Burkas. Where on earth had we got to in the night? It certainly wasn't Peshawar. Noting the name of the first small station we passed - Haripur Hazara - I got out Bartholomew and looked it up. We were right up near the Kashmir border. The frontier was the range of hills to the right. Obviously there was no point in 'detraining' as it was a single track. I thought I might as well go on and see what lay at the end. It made a change from the Punjab. The engine was labouring, and it took some time before we reached Havelian at the end of the line. Over chai at Havelian, I explained my position to the stationmaster. He was very sympathetic, but thought I should go back immediately as I shouldn't really be here, so near to the disputed border. He warned me against taking photographs, and sent me back in an Interclass carriage with the Assistant stationmaster who was on his way to Rawalpindi on leave. The train was almost empty. A very dark old man from Karachi offered me his railway timetable, while the Assistant stationmaster taught me a few words of Urdu.

At Taxila junction we rejoined the Lahore-Peshawar line and I had some time to wait before the next Khyber Mail came along. I was invited into the cab of a goods train and shown how to work the levers. Steam hissed from every orifice, the heat from the furnace was like a solid wall, and the black iron vibrated. Condensation ran down the walls. To small square holes on either side of the engine gave a restricted view ahead. I pulled a wire and the engine whistled. I lifted a great oiled lever, worn into shiny indentations by much handling, and the train began to move. What a sensation of power I could feel through that lever, as the train edged forward and all the heavy goods wagons rolled behind. Halfway down the platform the engine driver took over and slowed down for me to jump out. The Peshawar train had come in on the other side.

From Taxila on we never left the hills, although they receded a little. The land was grey and bushy. Villages gave way to encampments. It was still hot, but noticeably drier. We crossed a sinuous river, the Indus possible, running dark and steely between blue hills. A string of baggage camels passed.
In my diary for that day I find I have written the following:
'The people here must be the descendants of the Central Asian horsemen. The air is resonant with hoofbeats and thick with blood and battle.'
Actually I knew very little about the area. 'North West Frontier' and 'Khyber Pass' were little more than names to me, and I had never heard of the Afghan Wars. Similarly, I never looked for Kim's Gun in Lahore as I hadn't read Kim, and Lucknow and Cawnpore were only stops on the line to Delhi as I knew nothing about the Indian Mutiny.

The people of Peshawar and the surrounding area were certainly very different from the Indians or the Punjabi mussulmans, but had I known about the stones of the frontier being soaked with blood I would have felt more in awe of them. They were, of course, Pathans. Peshawar was once the capital of the Afghans, and they still feel bitter about losing this portion of their territory. The present Afghan-Pakistan border follows the Durand line, a line drawn across the map by an Englishman called Durand. It goes right through the middle of tribal territories, splitting tribes and families. Pathans live on the Pakistan side, and their brother Pathans on the Afghan side. Of course, little notice is taken of the theoretical border in the mountainous country where it is difficult to police. The Afghan Government has, on certain occasions, tried to stir the tribesmen up for 'Independent Pushtunistan', but those on the Pakistani side are pacified by a combination of subsidies and airborne threats.

Already as we approached Peshawar I felt that I was in Afghan territory. Opposite me in the railway carriage sat a Pathan, carrying his small son in his lap. The child had kohl rimmed eyes, and his father carried a rifle and bandolier. In Peshawar the tonga drivers were proud, not cringing. Their horses were groomed and healthy, not the ribby threadbare specimens of India. Just as the Indians have somehow never managed to learn to make cheese, so that it has to be imported; so they have never learned how to look after horses. Generations of travellers, from Marco Polo onwards, have reported on the sorry state of the horses in Hindustan. They import them from Central Asia, and in a few months they become wrecks, fit only for the knackers yard. Even Babur noticed it. Babur took Delhi after losing Ferghana, and became the first Mogul Emperor. He never forgot his birthplace though, with its wonderful horses and wonderful fruits. He takes great delight, in his memoirs, in mentioning the apricots that had their kernels taken out and were stuffed with almonds. Babur had a soft spot for Kabul, the last place, I suppose, which was anything like Ferghana before India. He was buried in Kabul. He only knew Ferghana in his boyhood, and spent the greater part of his life an exile Emperor of a vast and not particularly captivating country.
'In the month of Ramazan in the year eight hundred and ninety nine (1494) and in the twelfth year of my age, I became king of Ferghana.'
He goes on to describe Hindustan -

'Hindustan is a wonderful country. Compared with our countries it is a different world; its mountains, rivers, jungles and deserts, its towns, its cultivated lands, its animals and plants, its peoples and their tongues, its rains and its winds, are all different. In some respects the hot country (Garm-sel) that depends on Kabul, is like Hindustan, but in others it is different. Once the water of Sind is crossed, everything is in the Hindustan way - land, water, tree, rock, people and horde, opinion and custom.'

If Babur meant the Indus by the water of Sind, then here is another advocate for the border following the Indus rather than the Durand line. It is a much more natural and traditional boundary between ethnic types than the Suleiman range. These were only first impressions, however. He goes on -

'It is a country of few charms. Its people have no good looks; of social intercourse, paying and receiving visits there is none, of genius and capacity none, of manners none; in handicraft and work there is no form or symmetry, method or quality; there are no good horses, no good dogs, no grapes, musk melons or first-rate fruits, no ice or cold water, no good bread or cooked food in the bazars, no Hot baths, no Colleges, no candles, torches or candlesticks.'

and 'The towns and country of Hindustan are greatly wanting in charm. Its towns and lands are all of one sort; there are no walls to the orchards, and most places are on the dead level plain. Under the monsoon rains the banks of some of its rivers and torrents are worn into deep channels, difficult and troublesome to pass through anywhere. In many parts of the plains thorny jungle grows...Except for the rivers and here and there standing waters, there is little 'running water'. So much so is this that towns and countries subsist on the water of wells or on such as collects in tanks during the rains.'

Peshawar itself was on one of the great trade routes - the silk road from Balkh, which passed through Bamian, Peshawar and Taxila. It is also on the route followed by the nomad traders or powindahs, who traditionally spent the summer months in the Oxus valley and the winter months in the Indus valley. Now that national frontiers cut across their routes they have begun to settle, but plenty of transfrontier trading and smuggling still goes on.
On the way out I had only seen Peshawar Cantonment, now I had time to explore Peshawar town before taking the bus to the Afghan border.
The main street was a blistering expanse of dust and stones between ornate balconied houses whose upper stories jutted out irregularly above the ramshackle blinds and lattices of the shops. Scooter wallahs careered up and down, tassels flying and canopies flapping. Half the shop signs were in Urdu, half in shaky block-lettered and misspelt English. At the far end of the street was a row of dentists' shops, all exhibiting huge and ghastly plaster models of grinning teeth and gums, and signs such as 'John Camphor(Cal.)' Further along were the druggists' shops with their 'Piles Cure' testimonials. Then there were the gun repairing shops and gloomy little stationers' shops selling cheap exercise books and bottles of ink. I had run out of paper for my notes, so I bought myself an exercise book on the back of which appeared the following homily:

'TRADE MARKS are symbols of their MASTERS to identify their goods!
It is, therefore, worthwhile paying attention to this fact. While buying an imitation you subject yourself: FIRSTLY to Deception SECONDLY to Encouraging the Criminals, and LASTLY to hurting the MASTERS of the Marks. None can afford to expose oneself to any of these Risks. ALL RIGHTS OF PROPERTY TO ALPHA TRADE MARKS DULY REGISTERED WITH THE TRADE MARKS REGISTRY, GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN, KARACHI, EXCLUSIVELY VEST IN THE PARTNERS - PROPRIETORS ALPHA Mian & Company, 4 Nicholson Road, LAHORE. WHO ARE THEIR ONLY LAWFUL USERS. 'alpha' alone can deliver the Goods you want. It is only by insisting on 'alpha' that You will get the Right Type of Note Book, since some unscrupulous note books' manufacturers have taken to pass off their inferior note books as of genuine 'alpha' Make. In the achievements of their Criminal Objective, they have started with unauthorised conversion of Public Property Marks into private Trade Marks for personal use to brand their goods and the same are so dextrously designed that clearly violates the phonetic and physical traits of 'alpha' Trade Marks. We trust our worthy patrons shall not grudge us the due protection we need against this complex crime.'

Unscrupulous notebooks - what next? The mind boggles.
On the front was a picture of some Arabs on camels pointing to a distant range of mountains, and the lines
'Hundreds of deserts have we traversed
And still, as we go on, more appear.'

On either side of the main street, narrow paved alleys climbed away into the jumble of the bazaars. Lean cats crept out of dark recesses under shop steps. A man carried a block of ice on a string - from one of the ice shops whose open fronts diffuse cold air into the street. The great bars of ice that lay there waiting to be cut up and sold were obviously the product of refrigeration. The ice shops in Afghanistan were supplied by another and more bizarre means though, the means by which ice was made for centuries before refrigeration was ever thought of, and presumably the means to which Babur alluded when he said there was no ice in Hindustan. In the winter, deep pits are dug and filled with ice and packed snow. This is covered with straw and earth, and then in the summer the ice is mined. So, when you want ice in your water in Afghanistan, you get a lump of compressed snow with bits of earth and straw in it.
From the street of ice shops I passed into the street of karakul skins. The best Karakul, or Persian Lamb as they call it in Peshawar, is the skin of unborn lambs. Most of it comes from North Afghanistan, and is made into karakul hats which are very much a status symbol and worn by government ministers.

Garlands of white jasmine on sale at street corners perfumed the air, mingling with the smell of kebabs, ordure, spices and sweat. A cobbler sat crosslegged on the raised platform of his shop, stitching leather sandals by the light of a wick oil lamp. Flames leaped into the darkening street from under great black pots and trays of sizzling mutton. Sheeps heads were on sale, the skin stretched like parchment. There were dishes of curd and vast pans of simmering sheep's milk. Two small girls spotted me and called out 'What ees your name?' giggling and clutching one another in confusion.
In the tailors' shops apprentices ran here and there passing things to the older men seated at their sewing machines. A kebab seller insisted on giving me one of his kebabs to sample - it was full of chillies. In the bakery shops boys patted out chapatties from grey dough. Heaps of rice were on sale - pink rice, saffron rice, rice with beans. All kinds of sweetmeats, nuts, raisins,

dates and edible seeds were heaped in circular baskets. Doughty, in Wanderings in Arabia Deserta, writes 'I went through the encampment and came under the kella, where sweetmeat sellers, with stone counterpoises, were selling pennyworths of dates upon their spread mantles.'
They are still using stone counterpoises in Peshawar.

On a string bed in a narrow side alley,a small boy slept, curled up, the knobs on his spine gleaming in the dark. Down a flight of steps, I came out into another main road with a cinema and neon lights. Guinea fowl rooted by the wall, and a couple of goats were tethered to a telgraph pole. Dimly to the left of the road leaned the bulk of a fort, with wide circular towers and faintly crenellated battlements. Above the fort hung the plough, and across the street Cassiopeia, the two forming a traid with the Pole Star directly above the gleam of the humped road. I bought some dried fruit and nuts from one of the roadside vendors - a handful in paper for five annas. The old man put my money under the edge of a piece of sacking that served also to display his wares. Incidentally, Naya paisa have replaced annas for some time, with a hundred Naya (new) paisa to the rupee. Prices are still quoted in annas, though, and at sixteen annas to the rupee this becomes a little confusing.

Great yellow melons spilled in profusion along the roadside. A boy with only the useless vestige of one leg sat on a wooden wheeled board, pushing himself about with one wooden clogged hand. A tall Pathan suddenly saw him, squatted down in the road and held out his arms. The boy propelled himself forward and they hugged, the boy's face looking our over the man's shoulder with a dazed, radiant look. Were they long lost relatives, or simply friends who hadn't seen each other recently? I suppose the reason I found this scene so moving was that I had just returned from India, where the beggar would have been an untouchable and the man a Brahmin, and the latter would probably have crossed the street and walked by on the other side. The Pathans, like the Sikhs and the Parsees, look after their own. I never saw a Sikh beggar. The only beggars I saw in Afghanistan were the Sadhus or Dervishes, one or two schizophrenics rocking backwards and forwards outside the shrine of Hazrat Ali in Mazar-i-Sharif, and the odd blind man or cripple in the streets of Kabul. Cripples who still had the use of an arm were to be seen around the busyards in Kabul, fitted out with wheelchair cigarette shops, earning their living like everyone else. Village idiots were teased, tolerated and looked after by their own villages.

In the morning I woke to a view over different levels of roofs under the morning sun. On one roof with railings and string beds, an old man shook out a red quilt. Behind, the sky was blue and cloudless. Below, melons and mangoes were heaped for sale in the noisy street. At the Afghan bus stand I found that all buses were fully booked for the next ten days. Everyone was going to Kabul for the Jeshn, or Independence Day celebrations. In the Popular Cafeteria on the main street, I found some truck drivers who were willing to take me as far as Landi Kotal at the head of the Khyber Pass. But they were in no hurry to start, so I had some 'porridge' and got into an argument with a couple of Pakistanis who wanted to discuss race relations in Britain. At eleven, the truck drivers condescended to depart. It was a hot dry morning, and the sun felt good on my bare arms. Dung cakes were spread out along the ground to dry. Many of the walls were patterned with circles of fingerprinted dung. The land was arid and desolate. In the misty distance hills rose beneath a bank of clouds. Between us and the hills were villages, with the blue domes of mosques, elliptical like unlaid eggs. An irrigation channel ran beside the road, and strange trees drooped clouds of pale needles above us. We crossed the vast fan of a dry river bed, interlaced by stony channels. Imperceptibly the hills were drawing in and metamorphosing into mountains with shrouded heads and veined and gullied scree slopes. Towards Jamrud, the mountains closed in to meet the road and form a wall through which no pass was visible.

At Jamrud is the stone arch of the Khyber Gate, a military fort, and a couple of general stores under the Gate selling bars of soap and knives, which items I suspect had fallen off the backs of lorries. A sign beside the Gate read 'PHOTOGRAPHY OF TRIBAL WOMENFOLK PROHIBITED' and another bore crude pictures of a camel and a car, indicating the motor road and the baggage animal track. Here I left my Landi Kotal truck and picked up another going through to Kabul. Climbing up the side I swung myself into the railed box over the cab, and settled down among the petrol cans and bedding to enjoy the ride. The Khyber Pass is a waterless Pass, the only vegetation being the dark tufts of bush dotted among the rocks and standing out like knots along the ridges.

From the khaki coloured hill slopes khaki coloured rocks spill down. Heaps of shattered shale and fragmented rock choke the valleys. From my perch on top of the truck I read the regimental plaques all along the road - The Khyber Rifles, Leicester, Punjabi, Sikh, Her Majesty's Own, Honi Soit Qui Mal y Pense and so on. Near the top of the pass the truck stopped before a fort of sunbaked mud. Children playing up among the battlements joined in as the driver sounded his horn, laughing as the echo came back from the head of the pass. A single track railway accompanied us for part of the way, winding in and out of tunnels. Forts stood out on eminences, and the bottom of the pass was strewn with concrete blocks. At the top of the pass was Landi Kotal, the Thieves' Bazaar, where we stopped to fill the radiator with jube water. From Landi Kotal it was downhill most of the way to Torkham, the truck plunging at the corners.

The Pakistani passport officer was chatty, and sent a bearer for chai while we went through the laborious business of filling in currency declarations and stamping passports. The lemon barley boy was charging three times the normal price, but then he had the monopoly. I walked across into Afghanistan and had my passport stamped in, then waited for the truck which still had my baggage on top and hadn't cleared customs. I bought a pomegranate and sat sucking the seeds on the customs house wall. After some time, I took a walk back into Pakistan, leaving my passport in Afghanistan, to see what had happened to the truck. The driver had decided to stay the night, so there was nothing for it but to carry my baggage across and look for another truck. It wasn't long before a truck drew up, and I was soon installed on the roof.
The Kabul road ran dead straight between trees for the first few miles, and the dust rose in clouds as we breezed along it. The mountains were misty and purple, and the sun was setting in a string of golden beaded clouds like pomegranate seeds. Soon the crescent moon hung above the irregular crests, while the Kabul river swung round, flat and gleaming, to join the road.
We passed several military checkposts where sleepy soldiers had to lift branches for us to pass. Gathering my sleeping bag round me against the sharp cold of the night, I slept in my railed box while the stars wheeled above me.

I woke in a truck yard somewhere on the outskirts of Kabul. Men were climbing up and motioning me to get down. Shivery with half sleep, I asked for a tonga. 'We don't have rickshaws or tongas here' someone explained.
But they did have godas or gadis, and one was fetched for me. I asked the driver to take me to the Sakhi Hotel, but he had never heard of it, and neither had anyone else. I kept trying to explain that it was near the bus station, but everyone misunderstood me and patiently repeated that there were no buses till the morning. Finally we set off through the dark shuttered streets, and at the beginning of Jadi Maiwand I knew where I was. Loud knocking on the door and shouting by my driver woke the hotel staff. I was feeling very hungry by this time, having subsisted on porridge and one pomegranate all day. I asked for food, but they only shrugged and shook their heads. Eventually a small boy was woken up and despatched to the bakers to fetch me some nan. Thinking of my air ticket from Istanbul, I asked for a five a.m. call so that I could catch the Post Bus to Herat. But at five a.m. I felt differently about getting up and pressing on. The bed was too comfortable after all those Indian train floors, and I slept on.

Aseman Abi

I spent the whole of Sunday wandering round the Kabul bazaars. The fascination of bazaars, particularly those of Afghanistan, is something which I have never exhausted, and I have spent whole weeks doing little else but walk and look and listen in the bazaars when other Europeans were content to sit in the Khyber Restaurant and imagine themselves well away from those dirty, smelly, noisy, marvellous labyrinths. It was in the bazaars that I learned Persian - bazaar Persian as opposed to the classical variety. In the bazaars I met people, talked, drank chai, bargained and even bought.

Entering the bazaars a few hundred yards from the Khyber Restaurant and the Arg, or King's Palace, one finds oneself in an alley full of pancake shops. Afghan potato pancakes and spinach pancakes are sizzling on trays, filling the whole alley with a delicious smell. This alley opens out into the tinsmiths' bazaar, where the noise of metal on metal is deafening, and where all sorts of articles are ingeniously contrived from old tin cans. Leading off from the tinsmiths' bazaar is the street of tailors' shops, where I often had shirts and skirts made to measure in a matter of hours. A muddy path leads down to the riverside, where painted tin trunks spill out into the roadway. To the right are the jewellers' shops with their water gold, filigree silver, and lapis lazuli. To the left are the general stores festooned with pots and pans. Across the river is the new mosque (the old one was burned down by the British) with old men selling tasbih, or muslim prayer beads. Behind the mosque are the material shops with bales of cotton from India and Russia and woollen socks from Nuristan. Opposite the mosque is the black market where small topknotted Sikh boys offer top rates for rupees. Then there is a row of butchers' shops where the sheep carcases hang outside and are covered with a living black coating of flies. The carpet shops are to be found further out next to the Jeshn grounds, where the Buzkashi is played. Buzkashi, the national Afghan sport, means 'dragging the goat' and is played by the horsemen from the North. Two teams compete, the riders hanging from their horses at full gallop and whipping each other to get the goat carcase. It is a dangerous game, and usually involves casualties if not mortalities. The best buzkashi riders are reputed to come from Maimana, on the edge of the Central Asian steppes.

There are plenty of curio shops full of ancient flintlock guns and powder horns, jezails inlaid with mother of pearl, curved swords, old stone oil lamps, Afghan tribal finery covered with coins, rababs and other musical instruments, carpet bags, blue glass donkey beads, thick coins with arabic inscriptions, greek coins from the times of Alexander, of which most are replicas, wolf skins and so on. The proprietor of such a shop is more than pleased to lay down his balance with which he has been assessing various pices of silver, send his boy off for chai, andtalk with you while his pet cat rubs against your feet. Since my first visit to Afghanistan, a new area of curio shops, postin shops and carpet shops has sprung up in the Shahr-i-Nao, or New Town. These shops cater entirely for the Western Tourist, and their prices reflect the fact. The Afghan traders, shrewd as ever, have learned to ask the nationality of a customer as soon as he enters the shop, and adjust the price accordingly. As you might imagine, the highest prices are quoted to Americans. I was amused to find that the British come quite low on the scale.

In the area surrounding the Masjed-i-Shah-Do-Shamshira, or Mosque of the Two Sworded King, are the spice bazaars. Little courtyards open off the main bazaar street, and spices of various colours and smells are stacked in sacks and heaped in boxes. Here too one can buy a seer or a pow (roughly equivalent to a quarter or a pound respectively) of sultanas, dried mulberries, pistachios, walnuts, tamarinds, and so on. There are so many different varieties of dried fruit, even the sultanas and currants come in various dufferent grades and types. Further along from the spice shops are the salt shops. In the back of each shop are blocks of rock salt, stacked up to the ceiling. Men sit grinding the pieces between heavy stones, and the resulting powder is heaped, white and glistening, in round trays. At first I didn't know what the white pyramids were. I stopped in front of one of the shops, looked at the powder, looked at the blocks of rock at the back, and was mystified. The rock looked like quartz or something, and I couldn't imagine why they were grinding it up.
'Chi?' I asked
'Namak' said the old man sitting on the step. But this was a new word to me, and meant nothing. He motioned me to taste some on my finger - and that is how I learned the word for salt.

While I was in Kabul I decided to visit the Noon Gun. This is an ancient cannon that is fired every day at noon, and I had read about it in the National Geographic. It is up on one of the twin hills through which the Kabul river flows, known as the Shahr Darwaza, the city gate. I walked up beside the Kabul river, and coming to a track zigzagging upwards asked an old man leading a donkey whether it led to the Noon Gun.
'Noon Gun, ha' he said, meaning yes.
It was quite a climb, or perhaps I should say scramble, with the hot dust burning my feet through the soles of my sandals while dislodged stones glistening with mica ricocheted down. From the gun rampart one can look out over the whole Kabul valley, stretching away from the neck of the Shahr Darwaza towards the hills, scarcely visible in the dusty air. The Shahr Darwaza must once have been a gorge judging by the dry swirls and water carved potholes in the rock. Further up the hillside run the old city walls, yellowed and broken now. From beyond the walls I could hear the sound of metal on rock, and donkeys were picking their way down laden with whatever was being mined. Below me on the hillside facing away from Kabul city was a laid out garden with a pool. This was the Bagh-e-Babur , or garden of Babur, containing Babur's tomb. Although he died in Agra after walking three times round the bed of his sick son Humayun and saying 'I have borne it away', he especially asked that his body be taken to Kabul and there interred in a place open to the weathers. His tomb has since been covered with a marble shelter.
The Noon Gun proved to be a black iron cannon, beside which an older cannon, presumably the original Noon Gun, leaned drunkenly with its back broken,propped up by boulders. A very old man in a black waistcoat and a white turban was preparing to prime the cannon. He wore goggles against the flash.
'Salaam Aleicum' I said.
'Waleicum Salaam' he replied, and went on talking in Pushto. I understood not a word, but I nodded in what seemed the right places. He removed a flat stone and some rags from the hole in the cannon, inserted some powder and what looked like dry black caviare. Checking the time by his pocket watch, he lit the fuse, and an earth shaking bang lasting only a fraction of a second, which I felt rather than heard, was followed by a long low rumbling in the hills for many seconds.

Such, then, was my first meeting with Kabul, a city where I was to spend many days in later years. This was the city which Babur loved and in which he is buried. It was also the city in which an Englishman who loved the Afghans was murdered at their hands. Alexander Burnes, known as 'Bokhara Burnes', came to Afghanistan in 1831. He came armed with the advice of a certain Chevalier Court, a Frenchman in the court of Runjeet Singh :
'Si tu veux vivre en paix en voyageant, fais en sorte de hurler comme les loups avec qui to te trouves. C'est a dire, conforme toi en tout, aux mouers et coutumes des habitans des contrées que tu parcours.'
Sound advice, not followed by French tourists today. Although Burnes wrote of the Afghans
'they are a nation of children; in their quarrels they fight, and become friends without any ceremony. They cannot conceal their feelings from one another, and a person with any discrimination may at all times pierce their designs. If they themselves are to be believed, their ruling vice is envy.'
he was perceptive enough to realise that Dost Mohammed, and not Shah Shuja, was the man to rule the Afghans. Despite his advice, the British insisted on having Shah Shuja as their puppet, and in the bloody uprisings that followed, Akexander Burnes was murdered by the mob in his house in the centre of Kabul.
Here is his account of his arrival among the Afghans:
'It required some arrangement to commence our advance into the country of the Afghans; for they and the Seiks entertain the most deep-rooted animosity towards each other...
The subjects of Runjeet Singh escorted us to their frontier, which is three miles beyond the Indus; here we met the Afghans. Neither party would approach, and we drew up at a distance of about 300 yards from each other. The Seiks gave us their 'wagroojee futtih', synonymous with our three cheers, and we advanced and delivered ourselves to the Mahommedans; who said, Wus-sulam alaikoom! "Peace be unto you!"...
There are five different roads to Cabool; but we chose that which leads by the river, since the pass of Khyber is unsafe from the lawless habits of the people; and we therefore crossed the beautiful plain of Peshawar to Muchnee...
At Muchnee, the hills are sandstone: on the tops of the passes there are veins of quartz. In the bed of the Cabool river the rocks are granite; and over the village of Duka the formation is mica, which occurs in vertical strata. A sweet aromatic smell was exhaled from the grass and plants...
Before leaving Duka we had a visit from the chief of the Momunds, Sadut Khan,

of Lalpoor, a handsome man of about thirty, with a good humoured countenance. We sat under a mulberry tree, on a cot or bed, for half an hour; he pressed us much to cross the river, and become his guests for a few days... After a fatiguing march of twelve hours on the saddle, three of which were spent waiting for stragglers, we reached Julalabad on the morning of the 26th. As we passed Soorkhdewar, where the caravans are sometimes plundered, our conductor, the Persian, whether to show his courage or the disordered state of his imagination, fancied himself attacked by robbers. He fired his carbine, and, by the time those in the rear came up, had completed a long story of his own daring bravery...

We halted for a couple of days at Julalabad, which is one of the filthiest places I have seen in the East. It is a small town, with a bazaar of fifty shops, and a population of about 2000 people; but its number increases tenfold in the cold season, as the people flock to it from the surrounding hills...

They do not appear to have the smallest prejudice against a Christian; and I never heard from their lips the name of dog or infidel... The Afghans take great care of their horses, but do not pamper them with spices as in India, and always have them in excellent condition...

I was particularly struck with their idleness; they seem to sit listlessly for the whole day, staring at each other; how they live it would be difficult to discover, yet they dress well, and are healthy and happy. I imbibed a very favourable impression of their national character...

Cabool is a most bustling and populous city. Such is the noise in the afternoon, that in the streets one cannot make an attendant hear. The great bazaar, or 'Chouchout', is an elegant arcade, nearly 600 feet long, and about 30 broad. Its roof is painted, and over the shops are the houses of some of the citizens... there are few such bazaars in the East; and one wonders at the silks, cloths and goods which are arrayed under its piazzas. In the evening it presents a very interesting sight: each shop is lighted by a lamp suspended in front, which gives the city an appearance of being illuminated. The number of shops for the sale of dried fruits is remarkable, and their arrangement tasteful. In May, one may purchase the grapes, pears, apples, quinces and even the melons of the bygone season, then ten months old. There are poulterers shops, at which snipes, ducks, partridges and plovers, with other game, may be purchased. The shops of the shoemakers and hardware retailers are also arranged with singular neatness. Every trade has its separate bazaar, and all of them seem busy. There are booksellers and vendors of paper, much of which is Russian and of a blue colour. The month of May is the season of the 'Falodeh', which is a white jelly strained from wheat, and drunk with sherbet and snow. The people are very fond of it, and the shop-keepers in all parts of the town seem constantly at work with their customers. A pillar of snow stands on one side of them, and a fountain plays near it, which gives these places a cool and clean appearance. Around the bakers' shops crowds of people may be seen, waiting for their bread. I observed that they baked it by plastering it to the sides of the oven. Cabool is famed for its kabobs, or cooked meats, which are in great request.'

The 'chouchout' or Char Chatta Bazaar was burned down by the British in 1842, in retaliation after the deaths of Burnes and MacNaghten and the loss of almost the entire Kabul army in the Khurd Kabul Pass. An army officer who was in Kabul before the burning down of the Great Bazaar describes it as follows:

'Kabul is a well built and handsome, and is one mass of bazaars. Every street has a double row of houses of different heights, flat-roofed and composed of mud in wooden frames. Here and there a large porch of carved wood intervenes, giving entrance to the courtyard of the residences of the nobles, in the centre of which is a raised platform of mud, planted with fruit trees and spread with carpets. A fountain plays near; and here, in the heat of the day, loll the chiefs at ease, as they smoke their pipes to the sound of sacringhi or guitars. The houses overhang the narrow streets; their windows have no glass, but consist of lattice work, wooden shutters ... the shop windows are open to the sun, and the immense display of merchandise, fruits, game, armour, and cutlery defy description. The Grand Bazaar (or Chahar Chouk) has a substantial roof built in four arcades...'

On Monday morning I left Kabul by the Afghan Post Bus. The advantage of the Post Bus over the ordinary buses is that it takes twenty two rather than twenty six hours to make the journey, and is marginally more comfortable. It also costs 210 Afghanies where the others only cost 180, and is occupied by businessmen in suits and karakul hats rather than tribesmen in flowing robes with roses in their rifles. I spent most of the journey having a Farsi lesson from my karakul hatted neighbours. First I learned the colours, then I wrote down the names of anything we happened to see from the bus windows. It is amazing what can be done in the way of conversation with a few nouns and adjectives. The beauty of Farsi is that in simple statements verbs are not strictly necessary, and articles do not exist. Thus 'Aseman (sky) Abi (blue) ' can mean 'The blue sky' or 'the sky is blue.'
My conversation went something like this:
'Sky - blue. Eyes me-blue, eyes you brown. Desert - camels, no river, hot, tents, nomads. River - village, corn, trees, grass. Desert - sun, hot; Mountains - snow, cold. Afghanistan-good, sun, hot, blue sky, yellow desert; Inglistan - no sun, cold, white sky, green grass.'
And so on, with infinite variations on the same theme. This is the best way to learn a language that I know of, and beats the grammar books hollow.

We made the first chai stop at Mukur, a village consisting of a few dwellings and two or three chai khanehs. We sat crosslegged on a carpeted mud platform under a roof of golden sunbleached branches, in a moving pattern of light and shade. A boy brought plates of rice, and potatoes in sauce. At the centre of each pile of rice was a piece of mutton. This proved to be the Afghan national dish in the way that Chelow Kebab is in Iran, that is to say, it was served more often than any other in all parts of the country.
We followed the rice with slices of melon, and then the bacha came round with a long necked silver ewer and a bowl so that we might wash our fingers.
After chai the karakul hatted ones spread out their mats and said their prayers. We reached Kandahar around four in the afternoon. A Kandahari businessman asked if I would consider becoming his third wife. It was blisteringly hot. According to the geography books, the mean maximum July temperature for the Kabul area is 89'F, for the Kandahar area 104'F, and for the Herat area 97'F. I always felt Kandahar to be much hotter than Herat. In Herat the streets are lined with shady trees and the Sad-e-Bist Ruz Bad, the Hundred and Twenty Days' Wind blows continuously from May to September. Kandahar is close to the Dasht-i-Margo, the Desert of Death, and any wind which does blow is the hot breath of a furnace. In Kandahar I often had nose bleeds from the dust and heat, and so did other Europeans I met there. Afghans on desert journeys cover their mouths and noses with the long ends of their turbans.

In the bazaar glazed pottery bowls, water pipes and hookahs were on sale. Boys were watering the streets to keep the dust down. They do this every evening by shovelling water from the jube with a sort of spade. I had some chai and a bowl of something like cornflour pudding, then we transferred to the Musa Wardak bus for the second stage of our journey. Before we left there was the usual fierce argument about seating arrangements and the numbering of tickets. Towards nightfall we stopped in the desert for evening prayers. The sand beside the road was rippled by the wind. There were dreikanters, stones shaped by the desert wind. A line of camel footprints ran parallel with the road. Beyond the line of men bowing and prostrating in the general direction of Mecca, the stony desert extended into a sullen red sky. On we went, with the driver singing at the top of his voice, whether to keep himself awake or from sheer joie de vivre,I don't know. I got into conversation with the old man in front of me and learned that he was headman of a village in the north called Karrukh. He showed me his watch , which was inscribed on the back, and said it was a present from the King for his services as tribal representative. He also wore a medal which he had won in the Third Afghan War. This was my first encounter with the Afghan wars, and I naively asked who he had fought against. 'The British.' 'And who won?' 'We did.' I felt a bit sheepish and wondered whether I should have avoided the subject. He seemed to think it was a huge joke, however, and clapped me on the back with a reminiscent gleam in his eyes. It was as if he was thinking 'They were good old days.' I later learned that this attitude was common among the Afghans, I had only to mention I was British to draw a crowd in the bazaar, at least among those whose beards were long enough. Doddering old men would come forward to shake hands with me. Some had fought with the British, some against them, but the general opinion seemed to be that it had indeed been a 'Great Game'. The Afghans enjoy nothing better than a fight, if it is fairly matched. If they can't fight themselves, they crowd into halls to watch cock fights or camel fights. If two small boys

fight in the street, they are encouraged, unless one is bigger or stronger than the other in which case he is dragged off by the scruff of his neck and cuffed by his elders.

I had an interesting conversation with the headman of Karrukh about the stars. I pointed out the Plough, and he called it the'Seven Brothers'. We agreed that the Pole Star was North, and then he pointed out a constellation I didn't know, calling it 'Akhrab'. When Akhrab gets too near the moon for three weeks of the year, he said, the weather is cold and wolves come down out of the mountains. By other stars he could tell when droughts were imminent or when certain rivers would begin to flow again after the long summer drought. It wasn't until an incident at supper that I understood the meaning of 'Akhrab'. We had stopped at the Dilaram chai khaneh, with its Tilley lamps and carpets. I was sitting crosslegged on the carpeted ground outside, with my back against the hard mud wall, waiting for the bacha to bring my rice. Suddenly there was a scuffle and a silver flash on the ground. Everyone started hitting about with sticks and shouting 'Akhrab, akhrab'. What they killed was a scorpion. I wondered whether the constellation the old man had pointed out was the same as our Scorpio. I don't know why, but I had somehow expected the Afghans to have totally different names for the stars. In fact, their months correspond to our astrological ones, whereas the Persian months, Farvardin, Ordibehesht and so on are called after ancient Zoroastrain genii. Of course, all the original stargazers were from the Middle East - with the stars so bright and close, how could it have been otherwise?

I was very tired when we left Dilaram. I wanted nothing more than to get my head into a horizontal position. I tried lying down on the floor between people's feet. But I couldn't sleep for the jolting. At four a.m. we drove in under the black pine trees of Herat. Men bustled about in the yard with oil lamps, and started throwing baggage down from the roof of the bus. I wasn't sure which end of Herat we had arrived in, but an old man with a skullcap,whom I was later to know as Aziz, came with a lamp. He showed us into the chaikhaneh in one corner of the Post Bus yard, and told us we could sleep on the carpeted floor till morning for five afghanies. Smoke from the stove filled the little room, hurting my eyes which were already sore from desert dust and lack of sleep. As I fell asleep, I felt inordinately happy to be in Herat again.

In the morning I woke to the illusion of being surrounded by the sea. It was the hundred and twenty days' wind in the pine trees. While I was eating my breakfast in the Behzad Hotel on the main street, a whole convoy of Russian built tanks rumbled past. After breakfast I went to the bazaar to practise bargaining. I soon found it to be a very enjoyable game, and the carpet sellers seemed to enjoy it as much as I did. In the covered bazaar, a great hall with shafts of light coming from high windows, clothes were on sale in alcoves and all up the walls. I tried on a chador, just to see what it was like. I could see quite well through the embroidered lattice, except that downward vision was restricted. It was far too hot and stuffy, though. In a vaultlike room off a quiet courtyard, I bargained for a double carpet bag, of the kind thrown over donkeys, to replace the Lucknow army bag which by now had fallen to pieces. It was colourfully striped, with bands of vivid red and thinner bands of camel hair. The fastenings on each side were black horsehair loops which one closed by crocheting them through each other - a sort of primitive zip fastener. Outside the postin shops men sat drinking chai and calling 'Come into my shop please.' So I did, and was taken upstairs to watch the sheepskin coats being made. Men and boys sat around cutting the skins from brown paper patterns, and sewing them together. The embroidery was done by women, and this I could not see. In another room the skins were being beaten and combed with wire brushes. I bought a brown sheepskin for two dollars, but declined a coat.

I had a delicious meal of kebabs and potatoes in a chai khaneh, but when night fell and the lamps were trimmed and lit, I had to leave. Women, they explained, were not allowed in chai khanehs after dark. I never saw any women in chai khanehs before dark for that matter. If there were any women on any of the buses, they ate in solitary confinement in the buses, never in the chai khanehs with us. How they managed to eat at all under their chadors I don't know. Back at the busyard, I discovered that there was also a hotel on the premises - the Zendevanan. I transferred my luggage from the chai khaneh up some mud steps overlooking the yard, and was shown to a room. It had no furniture of any kind, but french doors opened onto a balcony formed by the roofs of the shops below. Below, a Post Bus was laoding up for the journey to Kabul. Across the yard was the most marvellous view of a sand coloured castle known as Alexander's Citadel and said to have been built by Alexander the Great.

The old man from the previous night, Aziz, who habitually wore a skullcap without the flowing turban, came with a bunch of massive keys and selected the key for my room. The hotel proprietor in his karakul hat came five minutes later with a huge book for me to sign, bowing gravely and stepping out backwards. Ten minutes later Aziz was back with an earthenware pitcher of water and a glass, which he placed in the corner. Then, stepping back and beaming all over his oriental face, he enquired
'Issno English, Issno?'
I agreed.
'Issno chai, issno?'
Before long the hotel bacha, a round faced mongolian of about ten, appeared with a pot of chai and a bowl. Whether Aziz's phrase 'Issno Issno ' was a corruption of Yes No, or something else, I don't know, but whatever it was he remained convinced it was intelligible English, and used it to full advantage. Meanwhile, I wandered round Herat saying 'Aseman Abi' to everyone, and pointing upwards. Delighted, they agreed. By this time I had learned the Persian for 'What is your name?' and 'How old are you?' and kept crowds of children amused for hours by asking these two questions. Children soon catch on to the game of learning a language, and soon I had only to point to something in the bazaar, a donkey, say, for them to shout its name in chorus, jumping around me with glee and laughing at my mispronunciations. Wherever I went in the bazaars I usually collected a train of children.

There were courtyards off the street where horses munched lucerne. All the tongas or gadis in Herat appeared to be drawn by stallions, and it was not uncommon to see a beautiful bay stallion, muscles rippling, galloping down the main street with a whole family perched on the tonga behind. Once I saw a tribesman riding through with his unveiled wife on the saddle in front of him. In dark circular rooms behind some of the shops, blindfolded camels walked slowly round and round grinding sesame seeds. The children commandeered a donkey for me to ride. The pack saddle shifted from side to side and my bare feet rubbed against the donkey's warm flanks. They led me to a courtyard with a very deep well, where water faintly rippling far below made soft plopping sounds. Both bucket and rope, with typical Afghan ingenuity, were made from old rubber tyres. Everyone drank, and the children washed my feet for me in ice cold well water. I wanted to get some more clothes made, so a boy took me off to the material bazaar to buy Russian printed cotton at twenty three Afs a metre. We took the material to a tailor's shop above a dim hexagonal courtyard. The tailor measured me with lengths of knotted cotton and told me to come back in two hours. Back at the Zendevanan, I found a New Zealander and two English boys, all suffering with stomach upsets, and just about to leave for the quarantine camp on the Iran border.

At five I went back to the tailor's, and found them sewing on the buttons. Men and boys sat sewing the quilted silk coats called Chapans worn by the northerners, on Zenith treadle sewing machines. We had some chai and I took the opportunity of increasing my Persian vocabulary to include words concerning clothes. In the grocers' I examined the consumer goods and found quite a variety. There were things from every imaginable place - Russian and Chinese matches, Russian sugar in blue paper cones, English Vim, English lemonade powder, Pakistani biscuits, Indian Coca Cola, Chinese padlocks, and various canned products from Denmark, Austria, Italy and so on. In fact the only Afghan product I could find was tinned pomegranate jelly. A coin and trinket seller on the pavement wanted to know the value of his various coins, so I got out my exchange rate list and began converting. He had been selling English pennies for more than English sixpences, because they were bigger. At the Behzad I stopped for eggs and potatoes, and made myself some cooling lemonade by squeezing lemons into my water and adding sugar. When the ice supplies have run out, lemonade is quite a good substitute, and lemons are plentiful in Afghanistan. I call them lemons, but I rather suspect they may be limes- they are much smaller than our lemons and rounder in shape. The Behzad Hotel had a waiter with a very attractive smile that year, though I never saw him again, and I used to go in just for the pleasure of talking to him. There is a story about a European doctor who used to work in the Northern parts of Afghanistan. One day a woman was brought to him for treatment, and under her veil she turned out to be a Scots girl. She had seen an Afghan smile, and got off her train and stayed. There was an international incident, but she was never found. The doctor asked if he could do anything to help her escape, but she just smiled and said it was too late, she had already had six children by the Afghan. Quite a few British soldiers and camp followers were susceptible to the Afghan smile, and this accounts for the occasional incidence of blue eyes among the Afghans.

Still rather limited in my conversation, I discovered that three boys outside the Behzad were Haft, Hasht and Da soleh, or seven, eight and ten. The waiter with the smile, two policemen who stopped to listen, and I were all Bistoyak soleh, or twenty one. Back at the Zendevanan, the old man who kept the chai khaneh was Hashto, or eighty, and the little roundfaced boots was da soleh. The names stuck, and the old man became 'Old Hashto', and the boots 'Aziz Da Soleh' to distinguish him from Aziz Issno Issno. The others had left for the quarantine camp, and I was again the only European in the hotel.

The next day in my bazaar wanderings I discovered the silk weavers. Sitting in dark little cubby holes on a back alley in the direction of the mosque, they were engaged in weaving the purple, blue and green striped silk for the Chapans. They used wooden looms, and the unwoven silk lengths were weighted down with stones and extended into deep holes in the mud floor. Different coloured silks on wooden bobbins lay about. Each weaver worked a group of treadles in a complicated ACBD pattern. Meanwhile I had collected the usual crowd of children, and they dragged me off to the other side of the alley to see the sweetmakers. Sticky lengths of sugar syrup congealed as soon as they were pulled from the cauldron, and the lengths were then cut up and arranged on brass trays. Through a maze of back streets which were dark and narrow and at times became tunnels through the houses, we emerged on an open maidan,and there was the blue mosque. Tiled all over with an intricate design of turquoise and lapis lazuli blues, it rose up against an intense blue sky. The shops around the mosque were festooned with blue glass donkey beads and blue glass cups, and a cart passed with its two drivers standing up against the sky dressed in turquoise and royal blue robes.'Aseman Abi' was certainly a good phrase to learn in this part of the world. The blue of the sky is the dominant colour of Afghanistan, echoed everywhere one looks, and set off by the golden colour of the earth and everything made from the earth. Even Alexander's Citadel, which one is constantly coming upon at the end of a street, stands out above the city like an extended sandcastle irregular against the sky, and is flecked at one end with fragments of blue mosaic that have not yet fallen away.

In my diary for August 21st I find the following:
'I was planning to leave Herat today, but there are not enough people to take a jeep, and anyway I would rather stay. I could sit and look at Alexander's Citadel for a few more weeks.'
In the afternoon I took a gadi to see the Asia-i-Badi - the windmills. They are known as Alexander's windmills because similar ones existed when he passed through, and he wrote about them. The windmills of Herat turn only in the time of the Hundred and Twenty Days' Wind, when they grind the wheat which lies in golden circular piles all over the Arian plain. We drove out between the minarets, leaning slightly, and passed the blue dome of the musalla. At the end of the road was the tomb of the poet Jami, a petrol pump, and then open plains between Herat and the Paropamisus. The windmills of Herat turn hoizontally rather than vertically, the sails being enclosed in square mud walls with strategically placed gaps to catch the wind. After much poking about with knives to dislodge the key from the lintel, the local children succeeded in letting me in. Inside, under a low door, the great millstones were still. The slatted wooden sails cast black shadows on the walls, and the floor was thick with a soft dusting of flour and odd grains of wheat. The quality of the light on the walls was strange. Straw fragments shone bleached in the afternoon sun. Outside in the walled garden, purple eggplants and blue cabbages grew close on the dry ground. The earth had been heaped into ridges to grow the famous white grapes.

On the way back I asked the gadi driver to stop beside a muslim cemetary while I climbed up among the graves and photographed the minarets. Actually I didn't know they were graves, I thought they were just heaps of stones, or I wouldn't have risked climbing on them even though they are the best vantage point for photographing the minarets. There are six minarets now, there were more, but the combined ravages of snow and earthquakes have begun to bring them down. Much of the Timurid blue has fallen away, leaving the white faience, so that from a distance they appear netted and shining. On the way back from the minarets I encouraged the gadi driver to gallop his horse along the pine avenue - I had picked out the best looking horse on the gadi stand expressly for this purpose. I went to a kebab shop for kebabs and potatoes, which I ordered in Farsi, wherupon they asked me to write them an English menu for the tourists. They brought little dishes of eggplant and meatballs from the dark recesses of the kitchen for me to identify and translate.

I had spent a week in Herat. By now plenty of Europeans had arived from Kabul, and were hiring a jeep. I decided to leave with them. The Welsh Trinity boy had turned up from Kathmandu, his anxious mother having sent him £200.

I went to the Behzad to say goodbye to the waiter with the smile, and he gave me a copy of the Fodor guide to Afghanistan, in French, which some guest had left behind. At the Zendevanan, Old Hashto joked with me about his age, saying 'I am five' or 'I am a hundred', and the whole hotel staff assembled to see me off. Aziz Issno Issno, Old Hashto and the karakul hatted proprietor all said 'Don't go back to Inglistan, stay here. We can find you a room.'

Marooned in the Desert

The Welsh Trinity boy and I climbed up onto the roof of the jeep and sat among the rucksacks. It was windy and cool. We drove out between the pine trees and the minarets towards the Paropamisus, then westwards across the plain, the road running straight into the haze. We crossed the Hari Rud, that great river that once watered the whole of Khorasan and made it the granary of Asia. It was visible only as a great stony waste threaded with empty channels. The Asia-i-Badi were turning slowly in the hundred and twenty days' wind. An Afghan fell off the back of the jeep, and was dragged in the dust for some way before the cries of his friends brought the jeep to a halt. His hands and face were bloody and full of grit. The driver got out and had a shouting match with him, then, shrugging his shoulders, he walked off into the desert.

At Islam Qala we stopped for passport stamping. 'Are you smuggling transistor radios? Tape recorders? Refrigerators?' We could have done with a refrigerator. At this point we had a heated argument with the jeep driver over fares . He had evidently forgotten the rate agreed on in Herat, and it wasn't until we had unloaded all our baggage that he remembered. We loaded everything back on, and climbed aboard ourselves. At the point between Islam Qala and the Iranian border post where the theoretical border crosses the salt desert, a great sign reminiscent of Ozymandias' legs announces 'Welcome to Iran. Tourist Office, Naderi Street, Meshed.' I noticed a group of people sitting beside the road under the sign. They were Pakistanis, the women black veiled, crouching among their bundles. Our driver stopped, and they seemed to want him to take them to Herat. Money changed hands, and we were told to get out. We didn't much want to get out and sit in the middle of the desert beside a road that only sees two or three trucks a day. However, after about half an hour of arguing and loud shouting on the part of the Pakistanis, we gave up and climbed down. The jeep loaded up with the Pakistanis and disappeared in the direction of Herat.

It was one o clock, the sun was at its zenith and blazing fiercely. There were twelve of us, all Europeans, some sitting on their rucksacks beside the road, some trying to shelter from the sun under a couple of oil drums, and one or two reading in the shade of their white cotton hats. I went off to explore the possibilities and the desert flora. What looks at a distance of a few feet like barren ground covered with a network of greyish brown dried grass, is in fact a mass of tiny succulents with pink, green, purple and blue flowers. A small brick hut standing by itself a few hundred yards away turned out to be a latrine. How idiotic, I thought, in all this waste of desert. But the thought struck me also that where there is a latrine there must needs be water, especially in a Muslim country where they don't use loo paper. Sure enough I found a tap on one of the outside walls. My felt covered army water bottle was only half full, and some of the others had neglected to bring any water at all and were complaining of thirst. I rushed back and told them, and they all came running over with their various water containers. With the aid of a pumping lever we caused a spasmodic trickle of water - but alas it was quite salt. The drops which blew onto my bare arms dried immediately leaving white marks. No amount of pumping or examination of the supply could render it any less salt. After all, we were in the Great Salt Desert, so I suppose we should have expected it. Even Marco Polo's horses turned up their noses at the brackish waters of Eastern Persia.

Four French boys set out to walk to the Iranian border. The rest of us held a conference and decided to wait until nightfall, or at least the cool of the evening before trying to walk anywhere. None of us knew how far it was. We pooled our food, and this amounted to: two tins of Danish luncheon meat, one tin of vegetable juice, one dark green tin of army ration cheese, one packet of Milky Biscuits made in Karachi, and a jar of Pakistani mixed pickles which appeared to consist mainly of sour lemons and to have been pickled in acid. It was quite a feast. Two Polish gentlemen passed in a limousine with CD plates. We flagged them down and tried to explain our predicament in halting Russian and German. They refused to take any of us to the border, but said they would ask the other side to send transport for us. At around three, a couple more Europeans and some Afghans arrived from Herat, The driver very kindly gave us a cool drink from his earthenware pitcher, then after a short siesta in the shade of his jeep, he too departed in the direction of Herat. At five, a very small jeep - capacity six including the driver - arrived from Iran. We had to use physical force to prevent the Afghans with their massive carpet bundles from getting inside and taking up all the space. They were taking postins to Meshed to sell at a vast profit. Then followed the usual farce of loading the baggage, roping it up, and taking it all down again to lower the price. The driver wanted us to pay on the spot, but we didn't fancy being left in the desert a few kilometres further on, so we agreed to pay half then and the balance on arrival.

We stopped at the checkpoint where I had played cards with the medical officer on the way out. Everyone drank bowls and bowls of water from the well. The young soldier who had cooked the stew recognised me and came to shake hands. A little further on was the quarantine camp. Surrounded by chickenwire fencing, it consisted of a central concrete building and rows of green canvas tents. At the gate was Saderghi the medical officer himself. He grinned broadly when he saw me, and said that although the camp was full, I could of course stay.
'What about the others?' I asked
'They must go to another camp, second class camp.'
I protested, saying they were my friends, and he relented. He said he would arrange for some tents to be put up outside the wire until there were spaces inside.

We all had to undergo tests for cholera in the medical tent, then we went to inspect the facilities.The concrete building proved to be the canteen, where we were offered chai and cold beer. Dinner was at 8.30, and all paid for by the Iranian Government or UNICEF, no one seemed quite sure which. Whoever our benefactor was, it cost them seventy rials per head per day (about a dollar). There was one shower in the concrete building, and another had been rigged up in the open air. A shop tent by the gate sold coca cola and other gaseous drinks, tinned sturgeon from the Caspian Sea, baked beans, tinned fruit, soap, shampoo and biscuits. Dinner, which was taken in three sittings, consisted of 'Irish stew', nan, yoghourt, iced water and chai. I could have done with more. After dinner we retired to our tents outside the wire with an oil lamp. From the other side of the wire we could hear voices, and shadows moved about in the lighted tents. Across the sand dunes toward the Afghan border all was quiet, and the stars were coming out.

Breakfast next morning consisted of one hard boiled egg apiece, salty white cheese, cardboard nan, lukewarm milk, and chai. Feeling the need for something a little stronger, I had purchased at great expense a small tin of Nescafe, and I tried spooning it into the lukewarm milk. Not very nice, but it made a change from chai. I washed under the outside shower, then washed my clothes under it and hung them out to dry on the chickenwire fence. Our tents of the night before were being dismantled by two soldiers, as there were now vacancies inside the wire. Blue Shirt, second in command under Saderghi, told us the sad tale of the shot German. Apparently the unfortunate soldier who fired the shot, an eighteen year old on national service, was now in Meshed Jail awaiting trial.
There was a luxury coach party of middle aged couples from France at the camp, though what such a party was doing in Afghanistan I don't quite know. Unfortunately for them, one of the French ladies had a positive reaction to the cholera test, and so none of them could leave until her test became negative. They had already been there twelve days when we arrived. We soon learned that in the face of such opposition it was useless our queueing for the first sitting of meals. Only the silly English stand in lines- other people just put their best elbow forward. After lunch we retired to our tents for a short siesta. I shared a tent with the Welsh Trinity boy, who was engaged in reading War & Peace in Russian, and another boy from Cambridge. Our tent was much more commodious and had electricity. However, the poles had come apart and needed re-erecting before we could settle in. There were six Cambridge students among our group. We decided to have a tentwarming party that night, and invited Saderghi, the camp commandant.

All the guards at the camp found my Afghan accent highly amusing when I tried to speak Farsi. The Afghan variant of Farsi, called Dari, is in some ways like a dialect, in some ways like an archaic form of Persian as it is spoken in Iran. For example, the Afghans call their chai bowls 'Pioleh' which is understandable to an educated Iranian but makes him laugh because it is only used in classical poetry. Imagine meeting a foreigner who had learned all his English from Chaucer, and you have some idea of how I sounded to the camp guards. In later years I learned to adapt on each side of the border, but not without a certain lag in which I would forget and come out with a foreign idiom. When this happened in Afghanistan, the locals used to ask me where I came from. 'I am English.' 'No you're not, you're Irani.' I was even mistaken for Irani in Persia, where they thought my English accent was simply an accent from another part of Persia. I had a hard time convincing them I was English, because they would simply point out 'If you are English, why do you speak Persian?' Why indeed.

I spent the afternoon talking Farsi with Saderghi, for whom I was beginning to feel great affection. We sat in the shade behind the canteen, looking out through the chickenwire across the Chorasmian waste to a low line of hills that must have been many miles away. Lunch had been rice, meat, and yoghourt. Supper was potatoes, meat and yoghourt. After supper I went and practised my
Farsi

Farsi on the gate guards. One little man spoke Turkish and Russian too. His name was Timur- after Tamerlane. He went off to Taiabad in his jeep to fetch me a sandovich because I had been complaining about the cardboard consistency of the local nan. The gate guards gave me some Raki, and one of them belly danced and clicked his fingers in a really amazing way. At the tent warming party we all sat around eating tinned peaches from the camp shop with our fingers, and Saderghi contributed cold beer.

The next day was Sunday. We managed to get in for the first sitting of breakfast and sit through all three sittings. So we each had three eggs, three pieces of white cheese, three folds of nan, and three glasses of chai. Talking to Saderghi that afternoon I learned that his father had died when he was eleven, and that he was still saving to go to university. He lived with his mother in Meshed when he wasn't at the malaria eradication centre in Torbat Djam.
On Monday morning Blue Shirt brought round a pile of navy blue passports - we were free to go. I decided to stay until noon as I prefer not to travel in convoy. I spent the morning washing my clothes again on the stones under the outside shower. At lunch time I got a lift in the jeep of Govorichy po Russki, to Taiabad. I presented myself at the passport house, but 'Passport Finished' they all shouted, and waved me on. They must have stamped our passports while we were at the camp. I had eggs and potatoes in a little cafe where posters warned against cholera - 'Wash all fruit' 'Be vaccinated.'
At one the daily bus to Meshed left. Mountains lined the horizon. The steppeland was golden with corn, and a white mist of dust rose where a shepherd was moving his flock. Smaller clouds of golden dust showed where peasants were winnowing corn. At Torbat e Djam we stopped for chai. The road from Torbat Djam to Meshed was through one vast field of sunflowers. We were back in the land of Marco Polo's Dry Tree.

> 'When the traveller leaves Kuh-Banan he goes for fully eight days through a desert in which there is utter drought and neither fruit nor trees and where the water is as bitter and as bad as before. He is obliged to carry with him all that he needs to eat and drink, except the water that the beasts drink very reluctantly - they may be tempted to drink by mixing flour with it. After these eight days he reaches a province called Tun and Kain, where there are cities and towns in plenty. It is situated on the northern borders of Persia. There is an immense plain here, in which stands the Solitary Tree, which the Christians call the Dry Tree. Let me describe it to you. It is of great size and girth. Its leaves are green on one side, white on the other. It produces husks like chestnut husks; but there is nothing in them. Its wood is hard and yellow like box-wood. And there are no trees near it for more than a hundred miles, except in one direction where there are trees ten miles away. It is here, according to the people of the country, that the battle was fought between Alexander and Darius. The villages and towns hereabouts enjoy great abundance of good things of every sort; for the climate is admirably tempered, neither too hot nor too cold. The people all worship Mahomet. They are a good-looking race, and the women in particular are of outstanding beauty.'

In Meshed I booked into the bus station hotel where I had stayed on the way out, sleeping on the roof. I left my bags, and went in search of the Shrine of Imam Reza. The gilded dome and minarets are visible from all sides, also a lesser turqoise dome. At the main gates of blue mosaic I was turned away as an unbeliever. However, I managed to find a dark little alley in the bazaar whose end opened onto the central courtyard. A man naked from the waist up was flagellating himself with a vicious looking whip made of several lengths of what looked like chains of paperclips. The metal lacerated his skin, but he looked rather half hearted. From the dark of the alleyway I could see into the courtyard, brightly lit under the evening sky. Crowds of Muslims in black chadors and white turbans were milling about. At the edges of the crowd, family groups sat around on rugs or prayed on prayer mats. Nearer to the shrine itself, a block partly covered with scaffolding, the crowd was dense, and a murmur moved through it like a wave. A music of lamentation began, and the crowd began clapping slowly, or were they beating their breasts? A strange hollow sound. A mullah climbed up a ladder and began to intone, leading the crowd in their rising chant. The atmosphere was thick and electric, but at the same time heavy and mournful. The lament rose and fell, then with ragged shouts it reached a climax and fell silent. I made my way back through the bazaar. I slept on the hotel roof under the stars, the lights of Meshed low all around, the mountains a black backcloth.

In the morning I woke to find the morning sun pink on the mountains, the pale mud houses of Meshed stretching away, and white birds wheeling on a thermal. The streets were full of flowers - sunflowers and marigolds, planted alongside the jube. I went to the blood bank to sell my blood. The doctors and nurses were all in white and very friendly. I was paid two hundred and fifty rials, and given a large breakfast of eggs and nan. On the way back I passed the high walls of Meshed Jail and thought of the young soldier from the border. It must have been visiting day, there was a little queue of wives and mothers all in black and clutching food parcels. Some men were throwing bundles of thorn scrub over the walls from the back of a lorry, for the prisoners to make into brooms and brushes. After a siesta on my rooftop bed, I went to the bazaar to see the famous 'Turqoise Factory'. It was not a factory at all, but a pleasant courtyard with a green water tank, alcove shops selling mullahs' robes, and a balcony full of little cubby holes in which men and boys were engaged in polishing raw turqoise. Sacks of turqoise streaks in dark grey matrix were stacked against the walls. They had been brought in on donkey back from the mines. Each turqoise when cut out of its matrix was mounted on a wooden stick, and then polished against stone wheels over little troughs of water.

At five I caught the Teheran train. The railway runs east for a few miles, before skirting the end of the Kuh-i-Binalud range, and crosses the road from Herat before turning West and following the southern side of the mountains along the fringes of the Great Salt Desert.

I amused my travelling companions, all pilgrims returning from Meshed, by drawing an elaborate map of my travels in Indian ink all over the windows. The moving desert provided a most suitable backgorund. I finished by drawing portraits of them, and they were soon rolling about the carriage with mirth. At Teheran I took the first train to Tabriz. I slept on the luggage rack, and woke in the early morning to find Daryacheh Rezaiyeh, or Lake Urmia on our left, with its steep islands and salt marshes. In Tabriz I went for a walk, drank carrot juice and feasted on new potatoes which they sell on street corners with salt and spearmint. I also inspected the bookshops, looked at the antiques, posted some cards at the Post Office, and then went to Ferdowsi Avenue for the bus to Bazargan on the Turkish border. I could hardly wait to see the Turks again.

Held Up by Bandits

We left Tabriz at one, and drove through barren countryside with red and green rocks. At Macou, a village dwarfed by great sandstone cliffs, we stopped to unload some iron girders from the bus roof. Soon after leaving Macou, we came in sight of Ararat to the North and other, lesser volcanic cones to the south. It was dark by the time we reached the border and crossed through the empty customs hall. On the Turkish side it was one and a half hours earlier, and I was so pleased to be back in Turkey that I unloosed my entire Turkish vocabulary on the unsuspecting customs officers. At this point I quote from Marco Polo again, travelling in the opposite direction:

> 'Let us now leave this province and turn to Greater Armenia. This is a very large province. Near the entrance to it stands a city called Erzincan, in which is made the best buckram in the world and countless other crafts are practised. Here are the finest baths of spring water to be found anywhere on earth. The inhabitants are Armenians and vassals of the Tartars. There are many towns and cities, of which the most splendid is Erzincan, which is the seat of an Archbishop. The other chief cities are Erzerum and Ercis. And on the route from Trebizond to Tabriz is a fortress called Bayburt, where there is a large silver mine.
>
> I can tell you that in summer all the armies of the Tartars of the Levant are stationed in this province, because it has the best summer pasturage for the beasts .... but they do not winter here, because of the intense cold of the snow, which falls in these regions in prodigious quantities, so that the beasts could not survive it...
>
> In the heart of Greater Armenia is a very high mountain, shaped like a cube, on which Noah's Ark is said to have rested, whence it is called the Mountain of Noah's Ark. It is so broad and long that it takes two days to go round it. On the summit the snow lies so deep all the year round that no one can ever climb it; this snow never entirely melts, but new snow is for ever falling on the old, so that the level rises.'

I took a glass of chai in a little hut behind the customs shed, surrounded by darkness and the presence of Mount Ararat. A minibus full of Turks was leaving for Dogu Beyazit, the first Turkish town, and I joined it. The radio was churning out that peculiar blend of gay and sad pentatones that passes for Turkish pop music. The driver's mate amused himself by shooting his rifle out of the window. At Dogu Beyazit we all piled out and drank Turkish coffee before crossing the street to the one and only Otel. In the large dormitory with its central stove most of the beds were already occupied by sleeping forms clasping their rifles to their breasts and breathing heavily.

In the morning I decided against taking the bus to Erzerum. I thought I would probably see more by hitching. Over breakfast in the local Lokanta, a friendly Turk, beguiled by my repetitions of 'Turkey Chok Guzel', translated the posters on the wall for me. They were poems by Ashik Veysel, a popular local poet, and lauded the black earth- Kara Toprak, or what the Russians call Chornaya Zemlya. I fell to thinking about the Turks and about my Romany origins. Kara is the same word in Romani as in Turkish. Both races had come west along much the same route that I had just followed. The gypsies' original home is supposed to have been the Sind desert in India. One of the early Persian emperors summoned them to his court as musicians, and from there they came to Europe. The Turks started out from the Altai mountains in China, and by spreading out Bartholomew's map of the Middle East, one can more or less trace their path by the Turkish place names, from the Kara Kum (Black Sand) desert and Alma Ata (Father of Apples) via the various Kizil and Qizil somethings.

My first lift was a very slow one indeed, in a tractor drawn wagon with threshing machinery roped onto the back. The men shared their bread, tomatoes and salt with me, and I had ample time, sitting with my back to the engine, to gaze on the magnolia snows of Ararat. The land for many miles was strewn with lava and volcanic debris - great chunks like black pudding and black honeycombs. A group of tribesmen rode up on mongolian ponies with long manes blown out by the wind. They watered their ponies at a spring halfway up the hillside. A little later we drew in at a lone petrol station. Ararat was still visible behind a line of low hills. A stream ran beside the petrol station, and some brightly dressed nomad women sat by it. They young girls had their black hair done in numerous thin plaits. In the Petrol Ofisi I drank chai with some local soldiers, and then the friendly round faced youth who looked after the petrol pumps disappeared into the back and reappeared with a dish of river fish in grease and half a loaf of bread. It tasted delicious - in fact it was the first fish I had eaten since leaving England. I spent the whole day in the isolated Petrol Ofisi, until towards evening a minibus passed through and took me to Erzerum.

From Erzerum I got a lift on top of a lorry that was going to Bayburt. When we had got well out into the foothills of the Zigana mountains, a man from the cab climbed up onto the back while the lorry was still moving. He sat and stared at me for a while, then said 'Para, para' and rubbed his finger and thumb together in the universal sign language. I knew perfectly well that 'Para' meant money, but pretended innocence and made some remarks about Turkey being chok guzel. He reached into his pocket and extracted an object wrapped in a far from clean handkerchief. It was a gun, which he carefully unwrapped and aimed in my direction. 'Para, para' he repeated. For a split second I felt frightened, and then a curiously objective feeling took over. I remember thinking 'Well, it had to happen somewhere. It wasn't a lorry going over a precipice in Nepal, it was bandits in Anatolia...' At the same time I acted as if the whole thing was a huge joke, smiling at him and chatting in broken Turkish. He seemed to enter into the spirit of the joke, then, and disappeared over the side to reappear a few minutes later, with bread, salt and tomatoes, and one or two of his friends from the cab. They shared their food with me, an obviously friendly gesture, especially if there is any truth in the idea that eating someone's bread and salt is a primitive kind of contract. They all sat staring at me, so I took out my Swiss Army knife, and demonstrated the various implements for getting stones out of horses' hoofs and scaling fish and so on. They passed it round and had great fun with it. This was the signal for them all to take off their caps and bring out a murderous array of flick-knives for my inspection. Knives are forbidden in Turkey, and for this reason they kept them under their caps. One of them wanted to swop his flick-knife for my Swiss Army Knife, but I preferred not to. They also wanted to buy my watch. Meanwhile we had reached that hill which had so caught my attention on the way out with its aromatic bushes. My friend with the gun leaned dangerously over the side and had a conference with the driver. Then they explained that this was the hill called Kop, where they had fought the Russians and won a victory, and that the driver would be leaving me at the top. We all roared with laughter at this joke.

All the way down to Bayburt the hillside was studded with beehives. The roofs of the mud houses were extended back into the hillside and formed threshing floors. At Bayburt I had to leave my bloodthirsty friends and find another lorry. I met a Turkish schoolteacher who spoke grammatically perfect English, labelling all his prepositional clauses and so on. He had learned all his English from gramophone records, and was delighted to have a chance to use it. He told me that the huge castle overshadowing Bayburt was built Roman Emperor Justinian. From Bayburt I took a grain lorry to Pirahmet, lying back in my sleeping bag on the sacks of grain. The moon was rising, almost full, and the stars were bright over the gleaming silver curve of the river. At Pirahmet I slept in the same little shack with a hurricane lamp. Crossing the Zigana Pass next day, I thought of Xenophon. He and his ten thousand had been fighting Cyrus in Persia, and were at last coming home:

> 'On the fifth day they came to a mountain called Thekes. When the vanguard reached the summit, a great shout went up. Xenophon and the rearguard heard it, and imagined that other enemies were attacking from the front, since enemies were following behind them from the district they had left in flames, and the rearguard had killed some, and taken others captive by setting an ambush, and had also taken about twenty wicker shields covered with raw shaggy oxhide. However, as the shouting became louder and drew nearer, and as the successive ranks that came up started to run at full speed towards those at the front, who were still shouting, and joined in the shout, so that the more men reached the front, the louder the shouting became; it looked to Zenophon as though something of unusual importance was happening. So he mounted his horse, and, taking Lycius and the cavalry, pushed on ahead to give support, and in a moment they heard the soldiers shouting, 'The Sea, The Sea!', and passing the word back along the column. Then all the troops of the rearguard broke into a run, driving the pack animals and horses before them. And when they had all reached the summit, then indeed they fell to embracing one another, generals and captains too, with tears in their eyes.'

When we reached Trabzon I walked along the seafront asking for a cheap hotel, and was directed to the Otel Samsun, overlooking the quay. The proprietor was a friendly man with blue eyes - possibly an Armenian - who laughed a lot when I reapeated my request in broken Turkish for a cheap hotel. He took me upstairs and showed me to a room, small but clean, which was indeed cheap. Then we went down to the communal chai room immediately over the shop below, to sign the hotel book. This chai room had a fine view over the quayside, and a wooden balcony. Men were sitting at table drinking chai and playing Tavla, there was a central stove, and in the corner underneath a portrait of the Prophet Mohammed and a mirror adorned with tassels and arabic inscriptions, sat an old man with a bony nose and a woollen

knitted skullcap. He was the man who looked after the registers and kept the accounts. It was a Sunday afternoon, and the sun was shining over the sea. I left my luggage in my room, which even had a key on a chunk of wood, and went out to explore Trabzon. First I went down to the quay. A Russian ship, the Ivan Bogun, was moored in the harbour. I talked to the sailors for a while, then went to enquire about boats to Istanbul. The next boat, the Hopa Express, was due to leave on Friday. There should have been a sailing on Wednesday, but it had been cancelled. I bought a ticket for the Friday boat, Deck class with half price student reduction, for 27 Turkish Lira.

Back at the hotel Samsun I was given free Turkish coffee and learned to play Tavla. During that week while I waited for the Istanbul boat, I became quite good at Tavla, and even won several games against the locals.
No meals were served at the hotel, but I found a shop that sold eggs, butter and honey. Every morning I would go to the egg shops and buy eggs, and take them to a restaurant beside the Ataturk Park where they would boil them for me in one of the cauldrons on the massive oven. They didn't charge me anything for boiling the eggs, so one morning I stayed and helped the boys peel beans. Ataturk Park was a square with trees and tables where one could sit all day and drink Turkish coffee. One afternoon I walked up through the narrow cobbled streets and through the hazelnut groves to the American radar station on top of the hill. Mint and flowers and blue thistles grew in profusion up the hillside, and at the top I had to push my way through a field of wet maize. The station was wired in with warning notices, and Turkish soldiers stood guard outside. I wondered whether they were guarding the Americans from the Turks or vice versa. There seemed to be a certain amount of anti-American feeling in the town, but the anti-Russian feeling was stronger - Turks making rude gestures at the Ivan Bogun - and since the radar scanner was pointed straight across the Black Sea at Russia, one might think that the Americans would be popular.
I noticed several old copies of Playboy on sale in the Trabzon streets at vastly inflated prices.

On Monday night a couple of handsome Turkish policemen with moustaches came up to the chai room and wrote 'Tek Yatmak Yasak' on the back of an envelope for me. I looked up the words in my dictionary. 'Alone Bed Forbidden.' Whether they were making improper suggestions or trying to tell me that I shouldn't as a lone foreign woman sleep in an Otel full of Turks, I never found out, for they couldn't make me understand and eventually went away. On Tuesday I walked out along the pier, between the blocks of concrete where little broken iridescent fishes expired in the sun. The water was so clear that shoals of fish could be seen below the green surface swimming among the weeds. I wanted to swim, but was soon chased away by outraged Muslims. Wednesday was grey and overcast, and I discovered a shop on the other side of Ataturk Park where one could get bread with butter and jam for breakfast. I spent the afternoon playing Tavla in the Otel Samsun. A sound of hammering came from below, loud and clacking. The sea was running in with white flecks, wind veins drawn across the harbour water. On Thursday the sun returned, and I discovered a place called the Kale Park Gazinosu, under a kind of fortress overlooking the sea. It was a clifftop graden, with tables where one could sit and drink chai. Boys were swimming below the point, and lying on the dark sand which clung to their wet bodies almost like coal dust. The boy at the table next to me was engrossed in a book of biological diagrams. While I was sitting there watching the boys dive off the rocks into the green water, a policman blew a whistle and they all came out of the water. While I was wondering why, a cannon went off from the fortress above and scattered showers of stones down the cliff. Boats were coming in on the beach, and a boy invited me to go out in one. We rounded the promontory, and there was Trabzon under its table rock across the blue water.

On Friday at five the Istanbul boat was due to leave. It came in at lunchtime from the eastern ports. I packed my rucksack, said goodbye to my Tavla playing friends, and went aboard. After an hour or so of going up and down companionways and through the dark and smelly passages of the tourist class accomodation in the bowels of the ship, I managed to find my way up onto the lifeboat deck, where I laid out my sleeping bag under one of the lifeboats. This appeared to be the deck universally chosen by Europeans travelling Deck Class, and there were some Australians there already, en route for the mother country. The sky was grey and overcast again, and it looked like rain. Below on the middle decks peasants were building themselves shelters out of blankets slung from hatchways to winches. They made little hammocks for their babies and set the small boys to work rocking them. As we left Trabzon a light drizzle hissed over the water. We reached Giresun in the evening sometime, four hours late. Sitting huddled under the prow of my lifeboat I watched the coloured lights from the first class deck,

and listened to the sounds of loading and unloading.
In the morning we stopped at Samsun long enough to go ashore and have breakfast. The translucent umbrellas of jellyfish hung just below the surface of the water. A portly Turk who claimed to be a factory director but was travelling tourist class insisted on buying us all dinner in the Tourist Class lounge and tipping the waiter extravagantly. In the late afternoon we came to Sinop, where we lay at anchor while boats plied between us and the mainland, there being no harbour. The sea and the sky were one misty blue divided by a faint line, so that the boats with their huddled peasants and crates of chickens seemed to hang in space over the mirror of the sea. In the evening it rained, so we crept as far under the lifeboats as possible. But during the night a Turk came and woke us to point out that our sleeping bags were getting wet as the water ran across the deck. We went down to a lower deck, and when the rain stopped in the morning I slept again. The Tourist Class dining room had run out of almost everything by this time, including water. and those staples of the Turkish diet, white cheese and black olives. The boat was rolling and pitching in a rough grey sea with white wavecrests. In the afternoon we reached the neck of the Bosporus and turned into it in company with the Indian Trust of Calcutta, carrying Russian tanks, and a Japanese oil tanker. The sea was leaden. We drifted down past the castellations of Roumeli Hissar, past the old wooden waterfront houses and the cars and advertisement hoardings of Europe shore, past the white American school on the hilltop. The Australians leaned over the rail and said 'Europe!'

As we rounded the last bend, Istanbul appeared with its outline of domes and minarets against a steely sky, the Golden Horn grey and misty. As we touched the bank, it began to rain. Disembarkation took some time, and then we ran through sheets of rain to the nearest cafe where we sat huddled and dripping and ate hot cheese pizzas. On Monday I took a dolmus to Topkapi Gate, wandered round the melon market under the old Byzantine walls, and took up my position on the Londra Asfalti to start hitching. Tuesday, as it happened, was national liberation day in Bulgaria, and my arrival in Sofia coincided with a massive parade of tanks and missiles which ground through the cobbled streets leaving white tracks. Small girls in pioneer scarves stood to attention with rifles. I and my hitching companion had an incredibly cheap lunch at the Cafe Berlin, and were given flowers, chocolates, a newspaper, and bus tickets by people in the streets. We slept in a pea field just inside the Bulgarian border, and I was given a lesson in Astronomy, and taught to recognise Vega, the Dog Star, Aquila, Cygnus and Delphinus. Sleeping in fields is strictly prohibited in Bulgaria, but you have to pay eight dollars for a visa if you don't stay overnight. In the morning our sleeping bags were wet with dew although the ground was quite dry. The sun was just rising over a line of low blue hills, and dogs were beginning to bark.
At the border we met two boys who were not allowed to cross into either Greece or Bulgaria because of the length of their hair. We got out our scissors and gave them haircuts. A couple of years later, on that same border in the hills between Bulgaria and Jugoslavia, I met a Scotsman in a kilt. He had walked all the way across Europe, but they wouldn't let him into Bulgaria because he was wearing a skirt. He had booked into a local hotel, and every morning would set out for the border only to be turned back again.

As I went north the weather grew colder, and I grew proportionately hungrier. At a cafe in Zagreb I polished off two dinners, one after the other. On September 13th I caught the night ferry from Ostend to Dover. I was very tired, and tried to sleep on the deck, but the boards were running with condensation from the thick Channel fog, and the foghorns were sounding. Several hours late, the Captain announced Dover. Nothing was to be seen over the rail on either side but dense fog and lapping water. It was as if we had reached the latitude and longitude of Dover, but England had somehow sunk into the North Sea. It only confirmed my suspicions that such a place as England could not exist in the same world as Afghanistan and India. However, exist it did, and what a strange place it appeared to me as I stepped off the boat. How foreign the porters seemed, and how odd that they should be speaking English as if they had known it all their lives. How insular it all seemed, in some ways so far ahead of Afghanistan, in some ways so far behind. He knows not England who only England knows.
