PART II

I walked all night
in the deepest mountains
listening to the sound of water
on stones,

and in the dawn I came out of the hills
to a land of warm nights
and racing winds.

I drank green tea
from Japanese bowls
in the company of proud strangers.

I slept on a carpet
in a smoke filled room.
The old man boiling water
on the stove
was one of a race
who weave silk
and hunt wolves in the deserts.

I walked all day
between the turquoise sky
and the warm sand
watching the painted mountains
on the horizon.

Just before nightfall
a city rose out of the road ahead.
I spent the evening drinking tea
before a crowd of moving faces,
the walls of the citadel black and silent behind.
A few streets away
someone was singing.

I slept
while lights moved across
the folds of my blankets.

Now I walk along a road
dim between stars
and reaching trees.
I feel the wind in my clothes
and the joy of the empty road.

The hills are marching away,
the stars travelling between clouds,
and the wind flying between black tents on the plain.

7.2.70.

The Hundred and Twenty Days' Wind

Before my first journey to India I thought I liked mountains and forests. My favourite weather was rain, and my favourite month November. However, it soon became apparent that I had fallen victim to that peculiar fascination with deserts that so afflicted men like Doughty and Lawrence. At Christmas I heard that I had been accepted at Newnham, meanwhile I spent my whole time accosting Persians in cafes and forcing them to listen to my Persian phrases. I talked to them about their deserts, and they talked about how much greener England was. I never managed to find a Persian or an Arab who was as enthusiastic about deserts as I was becoming. I read 'Wanderings in Arabia Deserta':

> 'The sun going down left us drowned in the drooping gloom, which was soon dark night. We held on our march in hope to meet with the Arab, and there fell always a little rain. Serpentine lightning flickered over the ground before us, without thunder, long crested lightnings shot athwart and seemed suspended, by moments, in the wide horizon; other long cross flashes darted downward in double chains of light. The shape of all those lightnings was as an hair of wool that is fallen on water. Only sometimes we heard a little, not loud, roaring of thunder. In the lull of the weather we beheld the new moon, two days old, at her going down. The first appearance of the virgin moon is always greeted with religious emotion in the deserts of Arabia, and we saluted her, poor night-wanderers, devoutedly; the day by my reckoning should be the 23rd of April. We held on ever watching for the Beduin fires and heard about us in the night shrieks of I know not what wild birds. At length Hamid thought he had seen a watchfire glimmer far in front. As we rode further we saw it sometimes, and otherwhiles it was hidden by the uneven ground of the wilderness. The night darkness was very thick, the naga stumbled, and we could not see the earth. Hamid, whose wit ever failed a little short of the mark, began to be afraid we might fall from some cragged place: he would adventure no further. We had nothing to eat, and alighting with wet clothes we lay down in the rain beside our camel; but the wind blew softly, and we soon slept.'

I suppose that the desert claimed me on that first day when I left Meshed and crossed the Afghan border, when cholera was raging in Herat; when I saw my first camels raising their heads in the silence while dust devils flew like whirling dervishes in the hundred and twenty days' wind, and the mud domes of Islam Qala floated above the horizon like a mirage. Although I never felt in the desert what I felt for Herat, the sudden catch in the throat; it seemed to have made a deeper impression on me. Perhaps I felt for the desert what Melville felt for the sea, perhaps it was essentially a matter of forsaking hearth and home. Perhaps I was grateful to the waterless, empty, silent, heat washed desert for showing me the taste of sweet water and hard bread, the cool of the shade, and the softness of carpets. Perhaps it was the desert itself that I fell for, with its strange rocks, like an unknown script that I couldn't read; by day loved by the sun and by night so close to the stars. And the desert is like the sea. Its timelessness covers all things, and heals all things. Just as the great shroud of the sea rolled over the Pequod, so the desert has swallowed up whole civilisations.

Thesiger writes in Arabian Sands

> 'Hour after hour, day after day, we moved forward and nothing changed; the desert met the empty sky always the same distance ahead of us. Time and space were one. Round us was a silence in which only the winds played, and a cleanness which was infinitely remote from the world of man.'

He also wrote of his life with the Bedouin

> 'No man can live this life and emerge unchanged. He will carry, however faint, the imprint of the desert, the brand which marks the nomad; and he will have within him the yearning to return, weak or insistent according to his nature. For this cruel land can cast a spell which no temperate clime can match.'

Of course, Thesiger was talking about Arabia, the Empty Quarter, the Rub al Khali. But the same is true of the other deserts of the Middle East, the Great Salt Desert of Eastern Persia, and the Dasht-i-Margo or Desert of Death which stretches from Kandahar into Baluchistan, and whose sands blow through the empty ruins of towns on the Helmand that were once full of trees and noisy with commerce.

So it was that in the summer of 1970 I set out for the second time. I wanted above all to see the Afghans again; Afghans in long robes and flowing turbans, Afghans drinking chai at Dilaram, Afghans laughing in Herat, Afghans praying in the desert at dusk with their shadows lengthening on the desert floor. I hitched through Europe, had a car crash on the Londra Asfalti just outside Istanbul, and spent a few days recuperating on the shores of the Marmara with my head in bandages before taking the boat to Trabzon. In Trabzon I stayed again at the Otel Samsun and was pleased to play a return game of Tavla with the old man who kept the books. I also managed to help some Americans from the boat who were having difficulty with their passports at the Iranian Consulate by reciting Saadi and Khayyam to the Consul. At Pirahmet I found that a hotel for tired truck drivers had been added on the floor above the Lokanta, and this was a great improvement on the shack with the hurricane lamp as it had clean beds. Between Erzerum and the Iran border I had a lift on top of a lorry that was taking a bride with her dowry to her new home, and stopped off at a little village where I was allowed to try my hand at threshing. It was much more difficult than it looked to keep balance on the threshing board and control the oxen at the same time. Ararat appeared on the horizon, and on the same night I crossed the border and slept in Macou, the first Iranian town. I was surprised to find that I understood quite a lot of what was being said in the chai khaneh, and amused the locals by saying Behesht (heaven) and pointing upwards, and Jahannam (Hell) and pointing downwards. They were a bit puzzled as to my religion, and so was I.

In Teheran I stayed with my friend Shirin, listened to recitations from the Shah Name of Ferdowsi, and got to know North Teheran. There was Pahlavi Avenue with its oriental plane trees, Takht-e-Jamshid (The Throne of Jamshyd) with the tree shrouded American Embassy and the antique shops, Takht-e-Tavous (The Peacock Throne), Karim Khan-e-Zand, and the Old Shemiran Road; and behind them all like a constant backcloth, the white capped peaks of the Elbruz. On August 25th I took a taxi down Pahlavi Avenue to the railway station. I managed to buy my own ticket and get my own student reduction without resorting to a word of English, and found a compartment to myself in the Meshed train. Unfortunately the guard, spotting my obvious foreignness, ushered in a crowd of European hippies just before the train left, saying 'You have Guests.' As we drew out of the station past the brickworks I went out into the corridor. The guard passed by and said 'Shoma narahat hastid? You are uncomfortable?' I said I was. He sent one of his subordinates to the end of the train for a bunch of keys, and they opened an empty compartment for me. 'Now you will be rahati rahati.' he said.

The golden domes of the Shrine of Imam Reza were visible long before we reached Meshed. I took a taxi straight to the Afghan bus depot, and found there was a bus leaving that afternoon for Taiabad. There were several assorted Europeans on the bus, and we all went to the Hotel Omid for the night. This hotel was a marvellous discovery. The name 'Omid' means Hope. At first it appeared to be only a restaurant, fronting onto the main street, but behind was a courtyard with a pool and fountains, trees, and mud domed rooms all around. It was possible to sleep on string beds in the courtyard itself, with quilts and mattresses. I was so taken with this hotel where I could sleep under the stars that I have always made a point of stopping at Taiabad ever since. We had supper in the restaurant Omid, and since they had only eggs our choice was limited. None of the other Europeans spoke any Farsi, though the French ones seemed to think that if they shouted loud enough in French everyone would understand them. Luckily I had made a special study of the various ways of cooking eggs in Farsi, so I was able to order to everyone's taste- so many hard or soft boiled eggs, fried or poached eggs, and so many omelettes. A fried egg is called 'half face', and eggs themselves are called 'chicken seeds'.

We all rose early, having been told that the bus was leaving at seven for Islam Qala. However, there was no sign of imminent departure. After several arguments with the driver, who kept saying he was going 'Now', we finally left at eleven. At the border I asked for Saderghi, but was told he was in Torbat Djam. The soldier who had cooked the stew came to shake hands with me. A new addition to the border was a little concrete hut on the right hand side of the road, with a curtained office for inspection of vaccination certificates, and an adjoining shop which sold coca cola from a fridge. There was talk of a proper asphalt road being built from Taiabad to Islam Qala, but as yet no sign of it. One of the soldiers pointed north and said that work had already begun, just behind that dune. While I was waiting for the rest of our party to have their certificates inspected I sat on the low wall beside the hut and

swung my legs in the heat and scanned the empty desert. Out of the heat haze a landrover appeared, and soon drew up at the concrete hut. Out stepped some English travellers, dusty and sunburned, and one of them came across to where I sat. 'Excuse me,' she said 'But don't you work in the Arts Cinema, Cambridge?' A small world indeed.

At Islam Qala I tried out my various phrases of Afghan greeting on the grave faced officials with the dusty ledgers. Mondenawashi - may you never be tired, Joorbashi - may you be strong, Zindaboshi - may you live long. This had the effect of getting our passports stamped in double quick time, we were only at Islam Qala an hour and a half. On the jeep to Herat was a giggling skullcapped Afghan youth named Mahmud, whom we immediately christened Marmalade. He was the 'fifth gear', the boy whose job it is to jump off and wedge a stone under the back wheel when the gears can't cope with a steep gradient. There being no hills on this trip, his principal occupation consisted of screaming in the driver's ear at regular intervals to prevent him from falling asleep. When the driver appeared to be awake and in no danger of dropping off, Marmalade spent his time in trials of strength with the Europeans in the back. It was unbearably hot. I sat on the tailboard with my feet dangling and watched the road coming out from under the jeep and disappearing into the desert. Halfway to Herat the engine spluttered to a standstill. We all piled out and stood around on the burning sand while Marmalade and the driver bent over the engine and conferred. Wild camels raised their heads to look haughtily in our direction, and continued grazing. The driver spat noisily to one side, and began tying various bits of the engine together with string. Afghans are surprisingly adept at motor mechanics, and Afghan buses run on an assortment of old tin cans, rubber bands and string in lieu of spare parts.

Five hours after leaving Islam Qala, we rose up out of the last dust bowl and saw Herat to the right in the Hari Rud basin. Soon we were driving down between the minarets. A string across the main street compelled us to make a detour behind Alexander's Citadel. It appeared that they were surfacing the streets of Herat. This was not the only disappointment. I had come back expecting to find the same Herat that I had fallen in love with the year before. It was not the same Herat, and I had some adjusting to do. One never steps in the same river twice. When I went to the Zendevanan, Aziz was no longer there. Someone had built a clay wall along one side of the busyard which partly obscured the view of the Citadel. The garden Bank with its trees and tables had disappeared, and been replaced by a square modern building in the New Town, with proper counters and an armed guard at the door. The two brothers who owned the Behzad and New Behzad Hotels in the main street, had built a new hotel called the Super Behzad on the corner opposite the Zendevanan. This had a fully flyproofed restaurant. Other hotels were still under scaffolding. I suppose the writing had been on the wall for Herat even before my first visit. How long will it be, I wonder, before there is a branch of the Hilton overlooking the lakes at Band-i-Amir?

Although Aziz was not at the Zendevanan, a striking young man with mongolian features and a blue cotton shirt which reached down to his knees, claimed to remember me from the year before. I took up residence in my old room, and was even provided with a mattress to sleep on. I spent my first day in Herat wandering around the bazaar photographing all the things I remembered, as if to preserve them in case they should all vanish. Behind Alexander's Citadel some men were making bricks with mud and straw, and others were busy building a house as fast as the sun dried the bricks. I couldn't help thinking of ancient Palestine, and Scripture lessons. To enter Herat is almost to step back into an earlier and kinder age, and one does not like to be reminded of the present by such outposts of progress as the new bank or the paving of the streets.

While I was wandering, I was spotted by an Afghan girl who took me by the hand and led me to her house. We went through a heavy wooden door in a mud wall, and emerged in a shady courtyard with trees and a central pool. The various female members of her family came out to look at me and feel my clothes and ask questions. Chai was made, and I admired the carpets -there was no other furniture apart from a few cushions. I photographed them - Afghans love being photographed and will run after you in the bazaar shouting 'Aks, aks' until you oblige. They asked me to come again and eat with them, but I never managed to find the house again. All the thick wooden doors with iron rings looked the same to me.

I went to visit the mosque. Herat mosque, turquoise and lapis lazuli tiles with a great ivan and two minarets, is reached either through a carefully laid out and much watered though still dry garden, or through narrow stone passages from the bazaar. I left my sandals with a row of others at the bright end of one of these passages, and walked into the courtyard with bare feet. Some boys were drawing water from a well in the centre of the court, by means of the usual rubber-tyre bucket. They gave me some to drink, and it was ice cold. The shadows of the twin towers fell across the worn flagstones, a beggar reclined in the colonnade, and one or two men stood apart and prayed. A school was in progress under the white walls, with small boys reciting in chorus from the Koran. A great copper cauldron with lifting rings and kufic inscriptions stood by itself in one corner of the courtyard. By standing on tiptoe one could just see the coins which had been thrown in for luck. Inside the mosque the walls were bare white stone, and hundreds of birds had made their nests in the rafters. An inscribed Ziarat stone worn smooth by the kisses of the faithful marked the resting place of some prophet or saint.

On my way back from the mosque I passed through the street of Old Clothes. In this curious street are sold the contents of the Oxfam bundles - second hand American and European clothes. They appear to be much in demand. Cast off American jackets and waistcoats look incongruous when worn over the loose pirahan and shalwar of the Afghans, as do cast off gold lame or pink chiffon dresses glimpsed under the enveloping chador. Aziz had still not appeared at the Zendevanan, but the blue shirted individual, who was called Jamahan, had fallen in love with me and taken to playing his flute outside my window at all hours of the night. I woke up at dawn one day to the sound of flute music. Below in the busyard, the Kabul Post Bus had just come in and was being unloaded. People were moving about with pots of chai, and the citadel was a rosy pink under the last faint stars. On the third day, Aziz came. He looked rather worn, and said that he had been ill but was now better. We drank chai together, and Aziz Da Soleh also came, though he didn't work at the hotel any more. The new boots wore red and white striped pyjamas and a skullcap, was also a Hazara with a round mongoloid face, and was called Nurelei Divane. 'Divane', which means 'mad', had been the addition of the hotel staff, as he was somewhat dim and teased continually by all and sundry. I immediately christened him 'Hendevaneh' (watermelon), to which vegetable his shaven head bore a striking resemblance. There was also a bright young boy called Mohammed Ismail who wore a grey pirahan and shalwar and a second hand grey waistcoat, and who looked after the samovar. Old Hashto was still there, and another sprightly old man called Adam Khan. Aziz took great delight in telling everyone how last year I had said 'Aseman Sabs' - the sky is green. We had a conversation on the subject of marriage. Theoretically Muslims are allowed up to four wives, but few can afford that many , and the King has set a fashion for only one wife. The karakul hatted proprietor had only one wife, though Jamahan of the blue shirt and the sighs had two. One was twenty three and the other eighteen (he was twenty), and he 'stole' them both. Afghan marriage can be a contract with bride price and dowry, or it can be a love match in which case the couple simply elope. Bride prices vary from 500 to 40,000 Afghanies, 10,000 being about average.

There was no cholera in Herat that year. There was also no ice, and though I walked up and down the main street several times I couldn't find the photographers' shop with the huge thermometer in the window, which I had looked at daily the year before to find out whether it was 108'F or 110'F. On my last night in Herat I couldn't sleep. At one a.m. I opened the doors of my room to let the cool breeze in. The citadel slept under the stars, and the courtyard was quiet. Down in the chai house a lantern was swinging, and Hendevaneh was sitting on a string bed ready to open the doors for the Kabul bus which was expected at two.

The Bani Israel

In Kabul I couldn't find the Sakhi Hotel on Jadi Maiwand, so I crossed the river from Old Kabul to the newer side and found a hotel on Nader Pushtoon Street, the street that leads from the King's Palace and the Khyber Restaurant to the Great Mosque and the Char Chatta Bazaar. Still retracing my memories, I walked along the river bank to see the Noon Gun. A notice had been placed at the foot of the path, and it read 'No Admition'. Naturally I ignored it, and was soon sharing my pomegranate with the old greybeard who fired the cannon. I had forgotten how shockingly loud and sudden the blast was. My Afghan visa had almost run out, but I wanted to stay longer in Afghanistan instead of going on to India. I decided to take the bus to Peshawar and there get a new visa. When we stopped at Torkham customs post, the entry to the Khyber Pass, a uniformed Afghan officer came on board to inspect our passports. He had the Afghan smile. He caught my eye, and when he reached my passport said 'I am very sick'
'Shoma mariz hastid?' I replied in Farsi, whereupon he told me that I didn't really speak Farsi, I perhaps knew a few phrases but that was all.
Customs formalities took some time, and it was hot, so the bus gradually emptied and we stood around by the concrete platform of the customs house. At last the bus was ready to leave. The sick officer was sitting on a low chair, smoking. On an impulse I went over to him and said 'Dar do ruz man inja meravam'- I will be here in two days.
'Bia inja', come here, he said, and took my hand. 'Tomorrow or the day after? By the Afghan Post Bus? I will wait for you.'

We were in Peshawar by two forty five. The Afghan bus driver and his mate had ascertained that I spoke Farsi, and had given me a front seat through the Khyber. Now they invited me for chai in the dusty old building which had been the Afghan Embassy the previous year but now, it appeared, was the bus depot. Housemartens were nesting under the doorway. They recommended the Salateen Hotel in Cinema Road, where I got a room with a shower for five rupees. I walked round the bazaar looking hopefully for some Indian sandals, as mine were falling to bits. However, as they explained to me, such sandals are not made in Pakistan, and 'Pakistan and India do not have trade relations.'
A rich Pakistani jeweller from Lahore took me to dinner at Dean's Hotel. We were the only customers, and were waited on by six Indian bearers in spotless white. The tablecloths were starched, and the menu was British Raj.
In the middle of the night at the Salateen Hotel, I woke to find a Pathan standing over me. He must have climbed in by the skylight. However, he was just looking, and when I sat up he took fright and went out by the door.

Peshawar, although in Pakistan, is still very much in Pathan territory. As Kaspaturos, Paskapuros, Purushapura and Peshawar it was formerly the capital of Paktuike or the Pathan homelands. Herodotus mentions Kaspaturos, and also mentions that the men who lived in those parts were the bravest of all in Asia. He writes:

> 'Of the greater part of Asia Darius was the discoverer. Wishing to know where the River Indus - the only river save one producing crocodiles - emptied itself into the sea, he sent a number of men on whose truthfulness he could rely, and among them Skulax of Karuanda, to sail down the river. These started from the city of Kaspaturos and the country of Paktuike, and sailed down the river to the east and the sunrise to the sea.'
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> 'In addition there are other Indians who border on the city of Kaspaturos and the country of Paktuike; these live to the north and in the direction of the north wind as compared with the remaining Indians, and their way of life is almost the same as that of the Baktrians. They are the most warlike of all the Indians.'

They are mentioned cursorily by Ibn Batuta as a troublesome tribe of highwaymen. More recent writers have extolled their bravery, their ability to look one in the eye, their honour and their ability to be 'true to one's salt'. An Indian saying runs 'Oh Gods! From the venom of the Cobra, the teeth of the Tiger, and the vengeance of the Afghan - deliver us.'
An Afghan saying runs 'The Rocks of Hind are pearls; the Rivers are wine; the Mountains are musk, but the people are pigeons.' There is also a saying which runs 'Trust a snake before a woman and a woman before a Pathan.'

Olaf Caroe, in The Pathans, writes

'For the stranger who had eyes to see and ears to hear, always as he drove through the Margalla Pass just north of Rawalpindi and went on to cross the great bridge at Attock, there was a lifting of the heart and a knowledge that, however hard the task and beset with danger, here was a people who looked him in the face and made him feel he had come home.'

Alexander Burnes felt very much the same:

'We were now fast leaving Hindoostan and its customs behind us. The dandelion had become a common weed. At Manikyala, we halted next door to a bakery, where the whole bread of the village is cooked. How much more sensible is this custom, than that every family should prepare it separately, as in India, and live in perpetual terror of defilement from one another. We were glad to be considered customers of the village oven. On our road we met a numerous body of Afghans..The sight of these people from beyond the Indus gave rise to many curious sensations. We wore their dress, and they knew us not; we received their salutations as countrymen, and could not participate in their feelings. Some of them would ask, as we passed, whether we were going to Cabool or Candahar; and from their looks and questions, I found many a secret and doubtful thrill pass across me... About fifteen miles from Rawil Pindee, we passed the defile of Margulla, and descried with joy the mountains beyond the Indus... We came in sight of the Indus, at a distance of fifteen miles. It could be traced from its exit through the lower hills to the fort of Attok, by the vapour which hung over it like smoke. As the water of the Indus is much colder than the atmosphere, it may account for this phenomenon... The people were now quite changed; they were Afghans, and spoke Pooshtoo. I was struck with their manly mien, and sat down with delight on a felt, with an Afghan, who civilly invited me to converse with him. I did not regret to exchange the cringing servility of the Indians for the more free and independent manners of Cabool. '

The frontier is full of legends, and memories are both long and short. An Afghan, asked about the ruins of Balkh, laid waste by Genghis Khan eight hundred years ago, says that it was a fine town until the Russians came. The charismatic John Nicholson, Political Officer for the North West Frontier at the time of the Indian Mutiny, and 'Hero of Delhi', is still remembered by frontier Pathans as Nikal Seyn, half god, half ogre. In his time he became the focus of a minor religion, his followers bowing down before the steps of his bungalow. Pathan mothers whose children will not go to bed still frighten them by saying Nikal Seyn will come for them. After the death of Lawrence of Arabia, it was rumoured in Afghanistan that he had not died at all, that this was merely a cover up. He was alive and well in the North West Frontier, disguised as a Pathan and riding a white donkey, spying for the British Government.

It must be evident by now that there is some confusion about the terms 'Pathan' and 'Afghan'. Pathan is the name given by the Indians, and hence by the British Army, to those tribes who live on the North West Frontier, on both sides of the Durand Line, who speak Pushto or Pukhto, and who generally call themselves not Pathans but Afghans. Afghan is the name given to all those who live in Afghanistan whether they be Pathans (Afghans) or Tajiks, Turkomans, Ouzbeks, Hazaras, Qizilbash, Aimaq, Kirghiz, Baluchi, or Nuristanis. The Pathans outnumber all the other ethnic groups, and form the ruling class. The Tajiks are basically Iranian peoples. The Turkomans, Ouzbeks and Kirghiz have brothers on the Russian side of the Oxus. The Aimaq are a Turkish tribe, and the Qizilbash are descended from Turkish retainers left behind by Nadir Shah Afshar in the eighteenth century. Their name comes from the red fezzes they originally wore - Kizil (red) bash(head). The Baluchis also live south of the border in Baluchistan, which is now mostly in Pakistan and partly in Iran. The Nuristanis are rather different. They are a blue eyed people who live in the mountain valleys north of Jalalabad. They were originally known as Kafirs (unbelievers) because they practised a primitive pagan religion. The Amir Abdur Rahman Khan converted them at sword point to Islam in the time of Queen Victoria, and their land was renamed Nuristan, or Land of Light. Legend has it that they are the descendants of the Greek soldiers of Alexander the Great, who passed through their valleys on his way to India. The Hazaras are mongoloid people who live in the central valleys of the Hazarajat. Their name means the 'thousands', and they are said to be descended from the armies of Genghis Khan.

As for the Pathans themselves, the legends concerning their origins have puzzled various scholars. They themselves claim to be the Bani Israel, the children of Israel, perhaps the lost ten tribes. Their oral & written tradition goes back to Abraham and traces their genealogy through King Saul, who, according to them, had a son called Irmia (Jeremiah) who in turn had a son called Afghana. It is written that the sons of Afghana did not go back to Israel after the captivity in Babylon, but went east, some to a place near Mecca in Arabia, some to the mountainous kingdom of Ghor, in the centre of what is now the Afghan Hazarajat. Through one Qais, of Ghor, who was the first to embrace Islam, is traced the genealogy of all the major Pathan tribes from the Shinwaris, Mohmands and Yusufzais to the Spin Tarins and the two branches of the ruling Durrani family, the Saddozais and the Muhammedzais. The largest and most warlike of the tribes is the Ghilzai or Ghalji tribe. The Ghilzais, whose focal point is Ghazni, are also said to be descended from Qais, but with an admixture of foreign blood, probably Turkish. The legend tells that a certain Shah Husain, of the Shansabani family, wandered east until he reached the Takht-i-Suleiman (throne of Solomon) mountain where the second son of Qais lived. Shah Husein fell in love with the daughter of the family, and she with him. The illegitimate baby that resulted was called Ghilzai. The foreign blood, whether it was Turkish or Tajik, seems to have been felicitous, for the Ghilzais were to conquer India in 1192, defeating Prithvi Raj and his Rajput soldiers on the field of Narain. Much later, the Ghilzais were so troublesome to the Amir Abdur Rahman Khan that he moved some of them to Maimana in the North, to live among the Ouzbeks and Turkomans.

However, the descendants of the three sons of Qais only account for some of the tribes. As Caroe says

> 'where are such famous tribes as the Afridis, the Khataks, the Orakzais - names which the word Pathan conjures up even to the newcomer? Where are the Bangash; above all, where are the Mahsuds and the Wazirs? What of the Khaibar, and Waziristan, and the hills of Kohat, and the Khatak dancers, whirling, sword in hand, around the fire beneath the stars? Are all these forgotten?'

The answer is that they have been added to the genealogies as an afterthought, as the sons of one Karlanri, who was a foundling. The legend tells that two brothers went out to the fields and came to a place where an army had been camping. One brother found a cooking pot (or an axe in some versions), and the other a baby. Since the one who found the cooking pot was childless, they swapped their finds and the child was brought up as Karlanri, of the tribe of Urmar.

Most people discount the Bani Israel theory now, mainly because Pushto is not a Semitic but an Iranian language. It is an interesting reflection on the character of the Afghans that despite their claim to be the Bani Israel, they had no hesitation during the war years in accepting Hitler's dictum that they were the original Aryans. This may, in fact, be nearer the truth. It is possible that the Afghans are descended from the various waves of Aryan invaders that came out of Central Asia and crossed the Hindu Kush to the plains of India. In particular, they are thought to be descended from the Epthalites, called the White Huns, who followed the Sakas and the Parthians. Some think that the Rajputs and Jats also are Epthalites, which is interesting when one remembers that the only time the Pathans met their match on the battlefield until the Afghan Wars was when they met Prithvi Raj and his Rajputs. Both were horsemen, and it is from Central Asia that the warrior on horseback comes. He fights with bow and arrows, and so did the Pathans until jezails and rifles took over. The Afridis, traditional guardians of the Khyber Pass, call themselves the Aparidai, and the name comes from the word 'horse'. Chinese ambassadors under the Han Dynasty came to Ferghana for their horses, and the seventh century Chinese traveller and pilgrim Hiuen Tsiang recorded an interesting legend about the four great rivers that have their sources in the Himalayan mountain system. The Oxus was said to flow from the mouth of a lapis lazuli horse, the Indus from the mouth of a golden elephant, the Ganges from the mouth of a silver ox, and the Yarkand from the mouth of a rock crystal lion. One of the tribes subdued by Alexander in the North West Frontier area was the Aspasii, translated by Strabo as the Hippasii, which would appear to indicate that Strabo knew the origin of the name in the Avestan Persian word for horse, 'Aspa'. The word is still 'asb' in modern Persian and 'as, aspa' in Pushto.

The man who first pointed out the similarities between the Rajputs and the Pathans and postulated the theory that they were both originally Epthalites was Bellew. Caroe records the following quotation from his works:

> 'In many ways the Rajput bears such a strong resemblance to the Higlanders of Scotland that one might seem to be reading one of Walter Scott's stories, with some trifling differences of names and costumes. They had the same reckless daring, the same loyalty to a chief they trusted, the same love of sport, the same readiness to take offence and quarrel among themselves when they could find no enemy to give them employment. After all these centuries the Rajput bearing remains what it was in their heroic age, something that marks him out from all other races; the poorest is by birth a gentleman, and therefore the equal of the greatest. To see a Rajput on horseback clattering through the streets that his ancestors cleared with the sword is to realize a scene from the legends when Prithwi Raj went forth at the time of year when Kings go to battle.'

And Caroe adds 'substitute Afghan for Rajput, and Ahmed Shah for Prithwi Raj, and the picture fits exactly. To complete the picture of the Pathan character we have the opinion of Mountstuart Elphinstone, who found the Afghans

> 'fond of liberty, faithful to their friends, kind to their dependents, hospitable, brave, hardy, frugal, laborious, and prudent; and they are less disposed than the nations in their neighbourhood to falsehood, intrigue and deceit.'

and a cameo from John Masters in which the English heroine of his novel meets her first Afghans in the North West Frontier at the outbreak of the Second Afghan War in 1879:

> 'Across the scrub-covered plain approached men with camels. The men had the faces of eagles and walked with a long, slow lifting stride. One of them looked up as he passed by. Anne smiled at him, expecting the salaam and the answering smile of an ordinary Indian wayfarer. But this was not India. The man stared her down, from pale green Kohl-rimmed eyes. He carried a long rifle slung across his shoulders; a woman, shapelessly swathed in red and black cotton, swayed on top of the camel that he led; a lad of fourteen walked behind the camel; the lad had no beard, but his stride was an exact imitation of his father's lilt, and he too carried a rifle.'

Much has been said about the honour of the Pathans, the pride they take in remaining 'true to their salt'. They have their own unwritten laws concerning this code of honour, which is called 'Pakhtunwali' or the way of the Pathans. The first law is 'Badal', revenge. A Pathan is bound to avenge himself for any wrong or insult he has suffered. This of course leads to blood feuds between families which may go on for generations, and which are usually traceable to 'Zar, Zan, Zamin', gold, women or land. The other laws are Mailmasti (hospitality), Ninawatai (Asylum), Tureh (bravery in battle), Meraneh (Manhood, chivalry), 'Isteqamat (Persistence, constancy), Sabat (steadfastness), Imandari (righteousness), Ghayrat (defence of honour and property) and Namus (defence of women). The code extends to battle, in which a Pathan will never kill or molest the enemy's women or children, nor will he kill an enemy who has entered a mosque or holy place so long as he remains within the precincts, nor will he kill an enemy who asks for quarter. Apparently the traditional method of asking for quarter is to fall down at the Pathan's feet and say 'I am your ox'. There is a famous legend concerning to law of Ninawatai, or Asylum. One day the Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, (also known as Mahmud the image breaker, ruled from Ghazni 998-1030) was out hunting. He soon saw a deer and gave chase. He wounded the deer with an arrow, but could not catch it. The deer ran into a tent, and the Sultan thought that at last he would have no difficulty catching it. However, he had not reckoned with the old Afghan greybeard whose tent it was. The greybeard came to the tent door and barred the Sultan's way. He reminded the Sultan that the law of Ninawatai compelled him to shelter the animal which had entered his tent. The Sultan flew into a rage and said 'Don't you realise who I am? I am your king, Mahmud of Ghazni.' The greybeard knew that in a case of Ninawatai he not only should give asylum to whoever or whatever entered his tent, but that he should also give his life in defence of the fugitive if necessary, so he stood his ground. He reminded the Sultan that if indeed he was the king, then he of all people should uphold the Pakhtunwali, the way of his people. Naturally Mahmud of Ghazni could think of no suitable reply to this, and went on his way.

A Wedding and a Funeral

On my second day in Peshawar I took a tonga to the new Afghan Embassy to ask for another visa. The Ambassador would not give me a Tourist visa lasting one month, but promised to endorse my Transit visa for two weeks. He told me to come back at half past three. I took a tonga back into the town and had potato curry in the Popular Cafeteria. After lunch I went for a walk round the bazaar, making frequent stops for iced banana milkshakes and iced mango milkshakes. There had been no ice at all in Herat, and I was ice hungry. Yate, the man who went on the Afghan Boundary Commission, has a few things to say about ice.

> 'After a hot journey of eight hours across the 'Put', we felt it our duty to try and do justice to the meal which the messman here had provided for us. A very few mouthfuls, however, sufficed to blunt the edge of an appetite dulled by the heat ... Happily ice and aerated waters were plentiful, and so, solaced by a peg and a cheroot, we retired. In this climate, indeed, ice, and not bread, may justly be styled the staff of life.' On another occasion, however, 'It appears that the 11th Bengal Lancers were provided with no ice. Even the officers were without ice. One of them described to us the magic effect which the sight of the word "Ice," written in capitals on the ice waggon which accompanies every mail train on the Indus Valley State Railway wrought upon him at Rohri, opposite Sukkur, on the Indus. As their troop train came in, the mail for Lahore was just leaving. Reclining hot and weary in his carriage, suddenly ice loomed before his vision. In a moment he was up and half out of the carriage, shouting "Ice! For God's sake, some ice!" There must have been a heartrending sincerity in the tone of his voice, for it penetrated to the soft corner of a native's heart, and he, mirabile dictu, rushed to the ice box and threw out a large block on the platform as the mail passed out of the station.'

Despite the ice, I felt miserable in Peshawar and wanted to be back in Afghanistan. All around me people were speaking Urdu, or perhaps Pushto, but no Farsi. I took to hanging around the tonga stand, because a couple of the Pathan tonga drivers spoke Farsi and were very pleased to talk about Afghanistan and how much better than Pakistan it was. One of these drivers took me back to the Embassy at half past three to collect my visa, and charged me very much less than I had paid previously. The Embassy staff were yawning and stretching and recovering from their afternoon siesta. In the garden was an Englishman from Eltham - how strange to hear the familiar South London accent here in Peshawar. He was driving his eighty three year old mother round Asia in a dormobile. They had been travelling for two years already, he said. There she sat, all in white, in the front seat, fanning herself with a grass fan.

The Afghan Post Bus left at nine the next morning. It had the same driver, so I was again given front seat treatment. At the Pakistan border post I was given free chai and free lemon barley by the two eleven year old boys who run the change money market and hold the lemon barley monopoly. The bus was going to be at least an hour clearing customs, so I walked through to Torkham to find my customs officer. He was sitting in the same low chair, still smoking. His face lit up when he saw me, and he sent a boy for chai. He introduced me to his uncle, the President of Customs, and then we went upstairs to get acquainted. On the stairs I discovered that his name was Rasoul. In a little room with a string bed, overlooking the road, in the still heat of the afternoon, I began my further explorations into the Pathan character. Flies buzzed, the room smelt of straw, and below voices rose and fell. Rasoul was a Ghilzai, from Ghazni. He had been educated in Kabul at the military academy, and spoke some English. He was sufficiently westernised to want to be a Kuchi and live nomadically, as so many Ghilzais still do, wintering in Jalalabad and spending the summer in the cooler heights of Paghman. He was proud to dance the Attan for me, the national Afghan dance which is danced by men, not women, to the accompaniment of drums and wild shaking of the hair. He taught me Afghan songs and pieces of poetry - his favourite was one which started 'Bahar e ma gozasht e', Our spring is past. He taught me to use the correct forms of address - may you not be tired, may you live long, may your shadow never grow less; to say 'Ba Maun e Khoda', go with god, when parting; and 'chashm' (by your eyes) in obedience to a command. But when, in a later year, we went to Paghman and stopped in the village to buy apricots, he would not sit down crosslegged with the villagers to drink chai. He had learned to sit on chairs, and thought it was backward to sit on the ground and eat from the ground.

In the evening we had dinner on the roof of the customs house with the President of Customs. It was served by a pleasant youth called Daoud, and consisted of rice, stew, doug (sour milk with mint, a very refreshing drink), and melon. Torkham is situated between two hills with brown scree slopes, on one of which is a kind of fort lit at night by a string of lights. In the evening radio broadcasts floated over from Pakistan. I wanted to go for a walk in the hills, but Rasoul said it was dangerous because there were snakes and tigers. After dinner the President laid out his prayer mat diagonally on the roof and prayed. Daoud brought out his string bed and erected his mosquito net under the stars. Rasoul told me that we should all wait until the President decided to retire before doing so ourselves.
In the morning we breakfasted on green tea and cake. The sun was already strong and cars were coming through. We went down to the customs house and sat watching the French turning up in their deux chevaux with no visas and having to be turned back. Apparently there were more French tourists this year than any other nationality, but many of them had been arriving at the border with no money and asking for ten afghanies to eat with, or arriving after dark when the border was closed and having to be given beds for the night. We went for a walk in the jungle beside the road, and sat and talked with the armed Pakistani border guards for a while in a clearing under the trees. On the way back Rasoul had a fight with one of the other customs officers who seemed to think I should be shared out among them. Rasoul was due for leave in Kabul, and said that I should go on ahead. He wrote a letter to a friend of his who kept a hotel in Kabul, and gave it to me to take. He came as far as Jalalabad with me, telling me about the time when he was in a jeep near Sarobi and saw a tiger come out of the rocks and stand watching him.

In Jalalabad the heat was intense. When the temperature goes above a hundred, the heat becomes something almost solid, a presence which one feels all over one's body, which touches everyone regardless of caste or creed, and through which one is touching everyone, so that no preludes are needed for love or war. A local bus was going to Kabul. Painted inside and out with scenes of mountains and lakes, and held together with string, it was already crammed with chickens and people. It looked as though it had been made out of old packing cases, some of which still bore the legend 'Karachi, In Transit' or 'Made in Japan'. Just after Jalalabad we stopped at an army post in a garden full of lemon trees. We stopped again in the gorge so that the driver could wash his face in the river and admire himself in the lid of his snuff tin. All Pathans carry little round tins with mirrors in the lid, made in Pakistan. What the tins contain exactly I never found out. It is a thick green powder which is not sniffed but put under the tongue.
As we climbed towards Kabul it grew cooler. Along the road were innumerable black goatskin tents - the tents of the Kuchis.

In Kabul I tried to find the hotel whose address Rasoul had given me. A helpful Pathan boy from Landi Kotal offered to show me the way. 'Landi Kotal is not Afghanistan, it is not Pakistan, it is Pashtunistan' he kept saying. I went to the Khyber Restaurant for dinner and to see who was in town. A Persian man came over and greeted me -'Salaam, khanom'. He had seen me in the Afghan Embassy in Teheran. Now with his wife and three children he was on his way to Peshawar, where he was Principal of the school of Farsi studies. We discussed the differences between Farsi as spoken in Persia and as spoken in Afghanistan, and laughed about the Afghan word for potatoes 'Kachaloo', which means bald-headed in Iran. I was feeling rather weak and sick, and woke up very early the next morning. The water had not yet come on, so I lay in bed and read Robinson Crusoe until the familiar one fingered piano tune that opens Kabul radio in the mornings floated up to my window and told me that people were up and about. I walked across the river to Jadi Maiwand to buy some film for my camera, and went into a chemist's to enquire for something for my stomach. The chemist told me he had once been a doctor in London, and had chai brought for me. I had some new sandals made for me by the river, changed my remaining Pakistani rupees into Afghanies, and waited for Rasoul to arrive. The hotel man, who knew Rasoul, telephoned Torkham who said he had gone to Jalalabad. Jalalabad said he had gone to Laghman on government business. In the evening the hotel man took me in his car round the Shahr-i-Nau or New Town, pointing out items of interest such as the new cinema and the house of former Prime Minister Daoud (the same Daoud who ousted King Zahir Shah after my last visit), and then up to Karga Dam where penniless hippies sleep in the moonlight. Below were the lights of Kabul and the barking of innumerable dogs.

Next day there were rumours about of cholera in Ghazni. I met a man from the Tourist Office, another friend of Rasoul's, who was once editor of the Kabul

Times and went on a course for journalists in London. He had some story about the man who had been teaching the course, who had assumed that he was a Pakistani and spoken about him collectively with the other Pakistanis on the course, whereupon he had stood up and announced 'I am an Afghan, and therefore better than all of you.'
In the afternoon Rasoul came . We spent two days in virtual hibernation, only emerging for meals of hot kebabs with chilis. On the evening of the second day we went to see the first Afghan film, at the Pamir Cinema on Jadi Maiwand. It was a compilation film, by three different directors, and rather bloodthirsty. I couldn't understand all of it. One of the episodes was called 'Shab e Jume', or Friday eve (i.e. Thursday night). Rasoul informed me that Shab e Juma is traditionally the night when all good Afghans make love to their wives, as the following day is a holiday and they can all go to the public baths. We visited Kabul University and talked to the Ustad of literature, the British Council where I used the library, and the British Embassy which is an amazing place right up above the city on Parwan Mina with a gravel drive, lashings of white paint, lawns, and notices saying 'To the Tennis Courts'. We also went to have tea with a French lady doctor, a friend of Rasoul's, who had a lovely house with a shady garden on the outskirts of Kabul. She kept a fierce dog, as do all foreigners in Kabul, and Afghan servants and a nightwatchman. In the bazaar I noticed some sacks of corn with 'Provided by the people of the U.S.A. In Transit to Kabul, Afghanistan' stamped all over them in gentian ink. However, it was not the corn which was a gift of the U.S.A., but Soya Bean Flour. Nobody had wanted the Soya Bean Flour, so they had tipped it out and used the sacks.

Torkham phoned one day to say that there were many trucks going through, and could Rasoul please return with all haste. I took the Herat bus, and ate walnuts to console myself. Nomads were moving in the desert. In one caravan I counted seventy camels, plus donkeys and sheep. The nomads do not ride their camels, they walk beside them, and carry any young lambs or children too young to walk. We stopped for lunch in Ghazni, Rasoul's home town. The main part of the town was on a huge mound behind us, said to be a labyrinth of narrow passageways into which I never penetrated. We had lunch in a kebab house below the walls, where several trucks were already drawn up. It was stiflingly hot, and the flies were so thick about us that it was difficult to eat without swallowing them. I had long ago given up trying to keep the flies off my food altogether, content simply to brush them away from each mouthful. They haven't changed since Yate was here on the Afghan boundary commission:

> 'Does one take a meal? They buzz ravenously over his face, hands and food, and in their reckless greed meet a sudden death in a cup of boiling hot tea... On horseback, beneath a tree, inside a tent - wherever man is, there is the fly in myriads.'

Ghazni was once the centre of much learning. Ferdowsi, Persia's greatest poet, wrote some of his Shah Name or Book of Kings here, at the court of Mahmud of Ghazni, the Image Breaker. This was nearly a thousand years ago. When Ibn Batuta passed this way Ghazni was already in ruins. The Ghaznavid dynasty was glorious but short-lived. Founded in 977 by Sabuktigin, a Turkish mamluk, it flourished under Mahmud, and ended in 1150 when Ghazni was sacked by Alauddin Jahansoz, the World Burner. Seventy years later it was sacked by Genghis Khan.

After the first afternoon chai stop, in the heat of the day, we came up with a wedding party. 'Aroos, aroos' shouted the bus passengers - a bride. Crowds of Kuchis in brightly coloured clothes were surging all over the road ahead, and the bus slowed to a standstill. The women were literally wearing their wealth - silver coins were sewn all over the breasts of their dresses, and they wore solid silver bracelets, necklaces and nose ornaments. One of the older women led a camel piled high with cushions, on which sat a very young girl almost entirely covered with a patterned cloth. Her little feet dangled on each side in turned up slippers. 'Aroos, aroos' sighed the bus passengers. Some of the women were beating tambourines, and a little in front of the procession were the men, dancing the Attan, shaking their heads around so that their black hair flew about in time to the music.

The Arachosian Plain was scored with dry river valleys cut deeply into the valley floor. Erosion is so rapid that the channels themselves have developed miniature dry river valleys in their beds. The mountains, standing at a little distance, were sheer and bare, topped with scree of which a dusting slipped down in places.

We reached Kandahar in the late afternoon, and went in search of kebabs. The kebab shops, like the chai khanehs, are dark tunnels leading off the road, with central gangways between carpeted platforms on which the men sit crosslegged eating rice and sheeps' brains. In summer, the chai khaneh is cool. In winter, when the plateau freezes and wolves come down out of the mountains, hot coals are placed under the platforms so that the eaters may sit in comfort and warmth, rather in the way the Russians sleep on their stoves. A funeral passed while I was eating my kebabs. The body was wrapped up and carried shoulder high on a string bed. Only male mourners follow the body to the mosque. In the space of a few hours I had seen a wedding and a funeral. I was becoming acutely conscious of the business of life and death going on around me. In Afghanistan the whole business seems so much more simple and obvious than it is in England. Everyone has their own place in society, nobody is a mere cog in a machine working but not knowing his function. Perhaps that was why the Afghans always seemed so happy.

In Kandahar we had to leave the relative comfort of the Afghan Post Bus and transfer to the Musa Wardak Bus for the next stage of the journey. The driver positioned his bus close alongside the Musa Wardak bus, and boys climbed up onto the roof and started throwing our luggage across. There was an English boy on the bus who had a sitar he had brought all the way from Delhi. Naturally he was anxious that they might drop it, and he asked me if I could explain to them to be careful with it. Not knowing the word for fragile, I shouted up to the boys that the long, odd shaped bundle contained eggs. They all thought it was very funny, and pointed out that if it did contain eggs they would have been turned into an omelette long ago.
Leaving Kandahar we passed through an area of strange mountains rising sheer and alone out of the plain. One close to the road was a sugar loaf shape. Dusk fell over the desert. Camels grazed, calm and meditative, raising their heads to stare at us as we passed. The mountains now were worn and ragged, moving along like herds of plesiosaur. As the sun set in a rosy dust over the Dasht-i-Margo, we stopped for Muslim prayers. The sand was soft to the touch. Approaching the Khash Rud, we smelt water, and crossed the dark river gleaming faintly in the starlight. Where the Khash Rud crosses the road is the Dilaram caravanserai, which means Heart-peaceful. The next sweet water after the Khash Rud is the Farah Rud, which means the River of Gladness. At Dilaram we had rice with meat and aubergines. The Tilley lamps cast giant shadows among us while the agile waiter ran about serving everyone. After the meal a boy came round with ewer and basin so that we might wash our fingers, then I was offered a puff at the Ghaliam or bubble pipe, which I declined. A child with a burn on his foot where a cinder had fallen, seeing that there were Europeans on the bus, came and presented himself for medication. Another came with a badly blistered hand wrapped in a dirty rag. The bus was not full after Dilaram, so I slept in snatches on the seat. The desert was empty except for the occasional lights of Kuchi encampments.

We reached Herat by four fifteen a.m., and I was chilled through and shivering. I made a solemn vow never again to travel in the desert with my sleeping bag roped to the top of the bus. Herat was quite unrecognisable in the dark with all her shops shuttered and her streets quiet. We stopped in some kind of bus yard, but my sense of direction failed me and I couldn't remember having seen such a yard before. There was no one to unload the baggage, so we had to shiver on the seats until dawn. Orion was arching over the yard, and the moon just past the half. At dawn people began to walk about on the roof and throw things down. I picked up my rucksack and walked off to get my bearings. The road which had looked so strange in the night proved to be none other than the main street, and the Zendevanan was a few hundred yards away. Aziz, Adam Khan and Ismail were up and about, and we drank chai. Hendevaneh had gone off to Kabul with his tin box of possessions. At the Tourist Office, another new addition to the main street, I asked about quarantine. They assured me there was none in force.

That night I ate dinner in the Zendevanan as a guest of eight Pathans from the North West Frontier and Landi Kotal. (Landi Kotal is not Afghanistan, it is not Pakistan, it is Pushtunistan). There was a slightly curried stew of meat and potatoes, a salad of tomatoes and onions sliced in lemon juice, and nan still hot from the oven. Everything was in large bowls in the middle of the floor, and we sat round and dipped in with our nan or our fingers.
Recitations of Persian poetry followed - like the Turks and the Persians, the Pathans are great lovers of poetry, and strong men do not deign to weep at a nicely turned line. One of the poems was by an illiterate apple seller called Wali Tawof, who lived in Kabul around 1780 and fell in love with the son of a minister. It began with the line

'Those drunken eyes of yours have snared and decieved me', and went on to compare the red apple offered up by Wali Tawof to his own heart soaking in blood.

I went down to the bazaar one afternoon to have some more clothes made. I bought several metres of Russian made green and white striped cotton which was popular wear on both sides of the border. Most of the cotton was Russian made though some poorer quality cotton was Afghan and some garish designs Pakistani. The Russian cotton cost twenty five to thirty Afs a metre, the Afghan twelve. I took my material to a Tailor in the archway of a covered reservoir, where beautiful leather saddles and whips were also on sale. He measured me with the usual lengths of knotted cotton and told me to come back at six. In the covered bazaar I bargained for a green velvet embroidered waistcoat, and got it for 120 Afs. A wine velvet skullcap caught my eye, but the man whose stall it was on had gone home. It was only five afghanies, according to the other stallholders. 'That's all right,' they said, 'Take it, and come back tomorrow with the five Afs.' Back at the Zendevanan I took a shower by Tilley lamp, from an old petrol tin with holes punched in the bottom. Because this was to be my last night in Afghanistan, I changed into my new Afghan clothes - long black cotton skirt, green shirt and waistcoat, and red skullcap. When Aziz saw me, he said 'Ofarin, ofarin' (Bravo) and explained that I was wearing the Afghan national colours. He taught me a rhyme to go with my apparel:
'Bayrakh e mah chi khoob ghashang ast,
Siah wo sorkh o sabs e rang ast'
(Our flag which is so beautiful, is black and red and green in colour.'
I went round the bazaar reciting this and caused a great deal of amusement. Then, as it was my last night, I decided that nothing would do for supper but my favourite food, so I purchased a cucumber and some top grade sultanas, and repaired to the Super Behzad where I recited my ditty to the kitchen staff. I asked them to fry the sultanas with the onions, mix the same with rice, and serve it with chicken. The cucumber they chopped into mast(Yoghourt). This done, I feasted on Pilau Keshmesh and Mast o Khiar, my favourite Persian dish. The proprietor of the Super Behzad had a radio, and he allowed me to tune in to the BBC World Service News in Persian. It was easy to understand and lovely to listen to - all the a sound were deep, as spoken by well educated Persians. As far as I could make out, they were talking about hijacked planes in the Jordanian desert. They were saying that all the passengers had gone to Amman, women and children first, and were now in the Intercontinental Hotel, and all but forty would be freed. In Venice a whirlwind had killed thirty and wounded twelve - that sounded odd - perhaps I had misunderstood? A Russian dancer had defected to England. There followed a complicated discussion on Economics in which literally the only word I understood was Ekhtesad- Economics. I felt a pang of patriotism listening to the announcer say 'This is London'.

Back at the Zendevanan I told Aziz I would be back the following year, but he shook his head sagely and said 'Sal Ayande, Ki Zende, Ki Morde?' This is an Afghan proverb meaning Next year, who will be living and who dead?
I woke at five and watched dawn over the citadel. As soon as the shops could reasonably be expected to be open, i.e. about six, I wandered down the road to pay my five Afs to the old man. He offered me chai, but I had a bus to catch, so I declined. This time it was a comfortable Iranian minibus that took us. We first made a detour to a carpenter's shop in the direction of the mosque to collect two chairs for the Tourist Office just opened at Islam Qala. We came upon the minarets from a different direction, and on this side they had more blue fragments still clinging to the straw coloured mud.
Between Herat and Islam Qala is a series of shallow basins, so that one always expects to rise out of a basin and see the trees and buildings ahead. The Hundred and Twenty Days' Wind was strong, and we could see white dust storms like shining layers of cloud on the desert floor. Sand was encroaching fast on the road. At one point soldiers were busy shovelling it back in the face of an oncoming dune. As the Hari Rud turned northward through a gap, far clumps of trees marked a settlement of some kind. Beyond that was Russia, Turkestan, and the Kara Kum desert traversed by the wide Oxus.

Islam Qala with its trees and square buildings was visible, like a mirage, for a long time before we reached it. I only had to utter a few Afghan greetings and mention the name of the President of Torkham customs, to have my passport and that of the English girl I had been talking to, stamped immediately. Chai was brought, and then the Ra'is (President) of Islam Qala customs invited us into his office. A dwarf of a man, he was an accomplished

Rabab player and treated us to some infinitely sad Afghan music. The Rabab is a stringed instrument and is played with a bow. I prefer it to the Indian sitar though it has less range and versatility. A servant brought rice and stew (Chèlow Khoresht) with lemons and melon. By the time we had eaten our fill, the bus was ready to go.

'The spider spins her web in the Palace of the Caesars,
The owl hoots in the halls of Afrasiyab.'
-Ferdowsi

Light of the Aryans

At the place where I had spent an afternoon the previous year eating Army Ration cheese and trying to get water out of the Great Salt Desert, there was now a tarmac road almost completed, and at the border were new concrete buildings and new staff. Just before Taiabad we passed the remnants of the quarantine camp, and then a brand new road stretched away in the direction of Torbat Djam. At Taiabad we had to wait some time while the customs officers painstakingly went through every item of luggage looking for hashish. I got into conversation with an Austrian working for Sino British in Thailand. There was no bus until seven the next morning as the five p.m. bus was full of Pakistanis on their way to Europe, land of opportunity. The Austrian was late for a conference in England and had to catch a plane in Meshed, so he bribed the driver to squeeze him in. The Tourist Office man at the Taybat Inn had recieved a circular in French from the Turkish Minister of Tourism saying that all those whose cholera & smallpox vaccination certificates were more than six months old (smallpox ones are supposed to last two years) would be stopped at the border. He wanted it translated into English for display on the wall.

I went to sleep at the Hotel Omid, under the stars, and a little boy remembered me from the year before. He told everyone that then I could only speak 'cam cam Farsi' i.e. just a little, and wasn't it a marvel that I could now speak it perfectly? In the morning I found that the seven o clock bus had mysteriously filled up in the night, so I had to wait for a later one. Back at the Hotel Omid a waiter wrote the following in my notebook:
'Safer kardi, safer dur kardi; do cheshme bandera kur kardi.
Safer kardi, safer dur kardi; delamra khaneye zambur kardi.'
Which being translated reads: You made a journey, a long journey, you made my two eyes (lit. the two eyes of your slave) blind; you made a journey, a long journey, you made my heart the house of a wasp.

In Meshed I found that all the buses for Gorgan and Teheran were fully booked for two days. I was offered a seat on the Wednesday bus for twenty five Tomans, but when I returned after comparing prices at all the other bus offices, it had gone up to twenty eight Tomans. The bus office was lined entirely with cut glass mirror work, A mullah in brown sitting waiting for his ticket had 'Superfine, Made in England' stamped on the inside hem of his robes. Feeling frustrated by the press of the crowds and wishing I hadn't left Afghanistan, I learned two useful phrases: Joosh Nazan (don't boil) and Khoon Sard Bosh (be cold in blood). I wrote in my diary that day 'Iran is like an onion that one peels and peels trying to get to the heart - but there is no heart.' I had a touch of flu, and I went to sit in Meshed Park to absorb the failing warmth of the sun and think about the incompatibility of East and West. When I eventually boarded the Teheran bus, the price had fallen to twenty seven Tomans. We left in the evening, and I fell asleep in my seat. I woke suddenly somewhere in the desert where the road crosses a spur of the Kuh-i-Shah-Jehan (Mountains of the King of the World). The bus had stopped, and just ahead was the bulk of something with lights, tilted at an angle. It was another bus, crashed. People were moving about in the dark, but after a few words with them, the driver started up again. The road was very bad - dust and stones and enormous potholes, winding over the mountains in close hairpin bends. Apparently the driver of the crashed bus had fallen asleep at the wheel. Our driver, therefore, decided to stop at Bojnurd and sleep for three or four hours before going on to Teheran. It was about one a.m., and the bus passengers were not very pleased with this arrangement. They debated whether to go to a hotel or sleep in their seats, there were further arguments about prices, and finally they decided to stay on the bus. I took my sleeping bag and laid it out on the pavement under an overhanging shop front. During the night it poured with rain from the Caspian. How strange it seemed to hear the comforting sound of rain after such a long time rainless.

At about five the driver's mate appeared from somewhere and started up the engine. It was still dark. The Persians divide the morning into different stages. Sahar is the period between midnight and dawn and especially just before dawn. Aftab Nazade is before sunrise, and Sefideye Sobh (lit. white morning) early dawn. As we drove on through the rain sahar became sefideye sobh, and it was well into sobh (morning) before we stopped at Chaman Bid, which means the meadow of the willow. Despite its name, Chaman Bid was a desolate place, high, exposed and windswept in the raised centre of a broad valley. The cold was intense as we made our way from the bus across the

scattered stones of the soon to be built Teheran-Meshed highway, to a chai khaneh for bread and white cheese and chai. After Chaman Bid the landscape became progressively more treed. We passed through the Shahinshah's private forest or jangal. The great bowls of greenery are filled, so they say, with leopards, tigers and wolves. We lunched at Shahpasand, which means'pleasing to the Shah'. There were several Kurds from Kermanshah on the bus. The Kurdish women wore magnificent clothes - long purple and crimson skirts, embroidered velvet waistcoats sewn all over with silver coins, and fringed silk scarves. A Kurdish girl who looked about ten was being taken as baggage, that is to say, she had no seat and paid no fare, like all children on Iranian buses. However, the conductor looked her up and down and said to her mother 'Khanom raft', she is almost a woman. They settled at fifteen Tomans for her fare, though she still didn't get a seat. It was still raining intermittently, and black clouds lowered over the southern hills. After Gorgan the Caspian appeared, a sullen grey band on the northern horizon. The Caspian littoral is a different world from Iran south of the Elbruz. It is overgrown with pampas grass and sub tropical vegetation. The rainclouds come in grey from the Caspian and break on the faces of the Elbruz, and with them they bring a grey air of old Russia that still lingers about the decayed resorts and the humid caviar fisheries. The waters of the Caspian are pale and tired, one imagines them lapping along faded sands where blind porphyry hotels sit, shuttered and curtained, gazing blindly toward Astrakhan.

We passed another accident - a twelve year old boy killed by a truck, and his mother hurrying along the road from the village crying loudly with her face lifted. By Amol it was dark again, and here we turned south to cross the mountains. We stopped to eat under Damavand, and then at midnight the bus passengers jogged me awake saying 'Teheran.' There it was, a lake of lights spread below, and somehow it felt like coming home.

When I first came out this way the only impression Iran made on me was as a place I would rather not go back to, where the people were inexplicably obstructive, and where everyone wore dingy western clothes and looked, as Robert Byron said, like decaying railway porters. However, my growing knowledge of the Persian language was accompanied by a growing tolerance for, if not understanding of, the foibles of the Persians; and a growing feel for what lay behind their culture. Regarding the Persian character, James Morris says

> 'Foreigners frequently find something inexplicable about the Persians. They are a gifted, civilized and exceptionally charming people, but hard to catch. Their processes of thought are not apparent to Western minds. Old Persia hands used to say that if you asked a Persian which was his left ear, he would put his right hand behind his head and point it out from behind.... Miles and miles from anywhere in the Persian desert one day I saw two respectably dressed middle aged men riding bicycles with bright panniers across the horribly corrugated surface of the sand. "What on earth are they doing?" I asked my Persian companion. "They are cyclists," he replied.'

and Robert Byron:

> 'Another kink in the Persian mind is a mortal jealousy lest the Afghans should steal a march on them in the matter of Westernisation. On hearing I have been to Afghanistan, the educated Persian draws a deep breath, as though to restrain himself, expresses a polite interest in Afghan welfare, and enquires with feline suavity whether I found any railways, hospitals or schools in the country. Hospitals and schools of course, I answer; all Islam has them; as for railways, surely steam is old-fashioned in a motoring age. When I told Mirza Yantz that the Afghans discussed their political problems frankly, instead of in whispers as here, he answered: "Naturally; they are less cultured than we Persians."

and the imaginary traveller Paul de Saint Galley in Madame Pakravan's book Le Prince Sans Histoire:

> 'I shall never see this bizarre people again, nor their poverty, their idleness, their irritating irony and their feverish curiosity - a strange people, that I have nevertheless come to love.'

Who are the Persians? The Old King, Reza Shah Pahlavi, besides forcing his people to wear western suits and cloth caps and look like decayed railway porters, also changed the name of his country from Persia to Iran. The word Iran comes from the genitive plural 'Aryanam', that is, Land of the Aryans. The first records we have of Aryan peoples on the Iranian plateau are of the Medes and the Persians. When the Assyrian king Shalmanesar III (858-824 B.C.) invaded the plateau, we know that he first invaded the territory of Parsua, which was to the west of Lake Urmia near present

Anatolia, and then the land of Mada to the south east. An inscription of King Sargon II (722-705 B.C.) mentions one Dayyaku, who was the founder of the Medean Dynasty with its capital at Ecbatana, present day Hamadan. Ecbatana was then known as Hangmatana, meaning 'the meeting place', and had seven surrounding walls after the Babylonian pattern. Even before these records, however, there were Aryan tribes on the plateau, probably as early as the eleventh century B.C. During the eighth century B.C. the plateau was troubled by invading Cimmerians and Scythians from the north. Dayyaku was succeeded by Cyaxares I (Uvakhshtra) in about 714 B.C. Cyaxares in his turn was succeeded by Khshathrita, and under his rule the Persians were vassals of the Medes. In 625 B.C. Cyaxares II defeated the invading Scythians, and with the aid of the Babylonians who were in revolt, also defeated the Assyrian Empire. Ninevah fell in 612 B.C. The Hebrew prophet Nahum had written 'The chariots shall rage in the streets, they shall justle against one another in the broad ways: they shall seem like torches, they shall run like lightnings... Ninevah is laid waste: who will bemoan her?' The destruction of Ninevah was so complete that she never rose again. What did the Medes in their infancy destroy? A civilisation already mature, whose fruits were lost until Layard dug them up in 1839. A whole literature, including the Epic of Gilgamesh, which preceded Homer by at least one and a half thousand years, was consigned to oblivion when the scholarly library of Assurbanipal, King of the World, King of Assyria, was buried beneath the rubble of Ninevah. When the Persian Empire was emerging, how many centuries had passed since Adad, Lord of the Storm, 'smashed the earth like a cup' and caused the Great Flood. How many centuries had passed since Gilgamesh walked under the stars and Enkidu cried aloud in Uruk 'I have come to change the old order, I am he who was born in the hills.' How many centuries had passed since Gilgamesh pledged himself to fight the forces of evil for Shamash the Sun God, wept over the death of Enkidu his brother, and went east in search of eternal life? 'Gilgamesh travelled over the wilderness, he wandered over the grasslands, a long journey, in search of Utnapishtim,(Noah) whom the Gods took after the deluge; and they set him to live in the land of Dilmun, in the garden of the sun; and to him alone of men they gave everlasting life.' On his way to the land of Dilmun Gilgamesh had to fight with lions in the passes and endure twelve leagues of thick darkness under the mountain of Mashu. When he emerged in the garden of the gods where the grapes were carnelian and the leaves lapis lazuli, and walked by the edge of the sea, Shamash saw him and said 'You will never find the life for which you are searching.' Siduri, the woman with the golden bowl who sits at the edge of the ocean, said to him 'Why is despair in your heart and your face like the face of one who has made a long journey? Yes, why is your face burned from heat and cold, and why do you come here wandering over the pastures in search of the wind?...Let your clothes be fresh, bathe yourself in water, cherish the little child that holds your hand, and make your wife happy in your embrace; for this too is the lot of man.' But Gilgamesh said 'How can I be silent, how can I rest, when Enkidu whom I love is dust, and I too shall die and be laid in the earth for ever.' Eventually Urshanabi the ferryman took Gilgamesh across the waters to the land of Dilmun. eastward of the mountain, and Utnapishtim the Faraway said to him 'There is no permanence. Do we build a house to stand for ever, do we seal a contract to hold for all time? Do brothers divide an inheritance to keep for ever, does the flood-time of rivers endure?'

While the power of the Medes was growing, while they were taking Assyria and Elam, the Persian Dynasty had been as follows: Theispes (Chishpish), King of Anshan, whose father was Hakhamanish (Acheamenes, hence the Achaemenian Dynasty), had a son called Cyrus and another called Ariaramnes. At his death the kingdom was divided between the two sons. Cyrus (Kurush) took the title Great King, King of Anshan. Ariaramnes took the title Great King, King of Kings, King of the Land of the Persians. Here we see the first use of the title King of Kings, which is Shahinshah. In 600 B.C. the two halves of the kingdom were reunited under the son of Cyrus, Cambyses I (Kambujiya). Cambyses married the daughter of the Medean king Astyages (Ishtumegu), successor of Cyaxares, and their son Cyrus II was to unite the Persian and Medean kingdoms. This was Cyrus the Great, called Kurosh-e-Kabir, founder of the Persian Empire. Cyrus built a new capital at Pasargadae, defeated and imprisoned Astyages in 550 B.C., and made Medea the second satrapy of the Empire. In the years that followed Cyrus conquered Hyrcania, Parthia, Areia, Drangiana, Arachosia, Sogdiana and the region between the Oxus and the Jaxartes. He subjugated Margiana and Bactria. He built extensive irrigation systems and fortress cities including Marakanda, which is present day Samarkand. In 539 B.C. he captured Babylon and freed the Jews who were in exile there. His Empire stretched from the Tigris to Ferghana, from the Caucasus to Baluchistan, and his

soldiers patrolled the four quarters.

At about the same time as Cyrus was extending his Empire, the following Soldiers' Song was written under the Chou Dynasty in China:

What plant is not faded?
What day do we not march?
What man is not taken
To defend the four bounds?

What plant is not wilting?
What man is not taken from his wife?
Alas for us soldiers,
Treated as though we were not fellow men!

Are we buffaloes, are we tigers
That our home should be these desolate wilds?
Alas for us soldiers,
Neither by day nor by night can we rest!

The fox bumps and drags
Through the tall, thick grass.
Inch by inch move our barrows
As we push them along the track.

Cyrus the Great, Kurosh-e-Kabir, died in 529 B.C. The next king was Cambyses who attacked Egypt, then ruled by the Pharaoah Psammetichus III. After Cambyses came Darius or Daryush, who built Persepolis. At this time the religion of Persia was Zoroastrian, based on the conflict between good and evil principles. The elders were the Magi. The force for evil was known as Ahriman, and is depicted in bas reliefs at Naqsh-e-Rustam as being trampled underfoot by the force for good, Ahura Mazda, the Wise Lord. The Persians believed in the divine right of kings, so that Darius took his authority from Ahura Mazda, and held the royal 'farr', a sort of halo. Herodotus tells us that Darius' Empire was made up of twenty satrapies extending from India to Egypt. They all paid tributes in grain, gold, horses, slaves and so on. The centre of the Empire, Persis, paid no taxes at all. It was Darius who first fought with the Greeks, and was defeated at the Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C. Darius' tomb at Naqsh-e-Rustam bears the following inscription:

'A great god is Ahura Mazda who created this excellent work which you see, who created peace for mankind, who endowed Darius the King with wisdom and strength. Saith Darius the King: By the desire of Ahura Mazda this is my nature: to that which is just I am a friend, to that which is unjust I am no friend. I do not wish that the weak should suffer harm at the hands of the powerful, nor that the powerful should suffer harm at the hands of the weak. Whatever is just, that is my desire. The follower after falsehood do I detest. I am not vindictive. If anything raises up my anger within me, I restrain myself with reason; I am master of my emotions. Who works for me I reward according to his work. Who does ill I punish according to the ill he has done... If one man speaks ill of another, I do not give him credence until he has provided proof. If a man acts to the best of his ability, I am satisfied... If you wish to see and hear what I have achieved, seek for it in the home and in the army. These are my qualities of thought and understanding.
If you would now think, 'How many are the lands that Darius the King possessed?', gaze on the figures that adorn the throne and you will see and you will come to know how far the lance of the Persian man penetrated..'

By 330 B.C. the Achaemenian Empire had collapsed in the path of Alexander the Great. The Achaemenid kings were forgotten, and their ruined tombs and cities were given the names of legendary kings and heroes. The tomb of Darius is known today as 'Naqsh-e-Rustam', pictures of Rustam. Persepolis is known as Takht-e-Jamshid, the throne of Jamshyd. In 323 B.C. Ptolemy ascended the throne of Egypt. In 312 B.C. the Seleucid Dynasty was founded, based eventually on Antioch, but the far eastern provinces of the Empire were difficult to govern from there. Parthia again gathered strength under Arshak, chief of one of the tribes. By 138 Mithradates had regained control of Gedrosia, Drangiana and Areia, had taken Babylon, and revived the King of Kings title. By 115 B.C. the Parthians were again masters of territory stretching to the Oxus, and therefore the Silk Route. Mithradates II recieved ambassadors from the Han Dynasty wishing to trade, and it was at this time that ostriches were introduced to China from Babylon and peaches to Persia from China. The ambassadors came from the court of Wu-ti, sixth emperor of the Han Dynasty, who came to the throne when he was only sixteen, and who wrote the following poem:

Autumn wind rises; white clouds fly.
Grass and trees wither; geese go south.
Orchids, all in bloom; chrysanthemums smell sweet;
I think of my lovely lady; I never can forget.
Floating-pagoda boat crosses Fen River;
Across the mid-stream white waves rise.
Flute and drum keep time to the sound of rowers' song;
Amidst revel and feasting sad thoughts come;
Youth's years how few, age how sure!

The route from China to Persia lay across the Gobi and Takla Makan Deserts, and through the Central Asian steppelands, the lands of the Hun and the Tartar. Here nomad chieftains ruled over their own kingdoms, and as they were always warring one with another it was not easy for the caravans to pass unmolested. One of Wu-ti's generals, General Su Wu, had to leave his wife and travel through Central Asia. He wrote on leaving:

Since my hair was plaited and we became man and wife
The love between us was never broken by doubt.
So let us be merry this night together,
Feasting and playing while the good time lasts.
I suddenly remember the distance I must travel;
I spring from bed and look out to see the time.
The stars and the planets are all grown dim in the sky;
Long, long is the road; I cannot stay.
I am going on service, away to the battle-ground,
And I do not know when I shall come back.
I hold your hand with only a deep sigh;
Afterwards, tears - in the days when we are parted.
With all your might enjoy the spring flowers,
But do not forget the time of our love and pride.
Know that if I live, I will come back again,
And if I die, we will go on thinking of each other.

General Su Wu was captured and kept prisoner in the land of the Huns for nineteen years, together with his friend Li Ling. At the end of that time they were both set free but Li Ling would not go back with him:

I came ten thousand leagues
Across sandy deserts
In the service of my Prince,
To break the Hun tribes.
My way was blocked and barred,
My arrows and sword broken.
My armies had faded away,
My reputation had gone.
My old mother is long dead.
Although I want to requite my Prince
How can I return?

At the same time as General Su Wu was in captivity, a Chinese lady called Hsi-Chun was sent to be the wife of another nomad chieftain, the king of the Wu-sun nomads. He was an old man, only saw her once a year, and could not speak her language any more than she could speak his:

My people have married me
In a far corner of Earth;
Sent me away to a strange land,
To the king of the Wu-sun.
A tent is my house,
Of felt are my walls;
Raw flesh my food
With mare's milk to drink.
Always thinking of my own country,
My heart sad within.
Would I were a yellow stork
And could fly to my own home!

During the two centuries that the Han Dynasty ruled in China, the Roman legions were also carving out an Empire and patrolling the four corners. In 36 B.C. Mark Antony was in Armenia, appealing to Cleopatra in Egypt for supplies of warm clothing. At about the same time the northern legions were invading Britain, the faraway tin island that Herodotus had such difficulty in believing in. In 58 A.D. Artashat, the capital of Armenia, was destroyed by the legions. In 72 A.D. the forbears of the present day Ossetes passed through the Iron Gates into the Caucasus, where they still live. In 115 A.D. Trajan sailed down the Tigris and took Ctesiphon, the

Persian king Khosroe fleeing for his life but leaving, in his haste, his golden throne and his daughter to fall into Roman hands. In 136 A.D. the Ossetes attacked Parthia, but were beaten back. In 163 the reorganized Roman legions retook Artashat and also Seleucia. All this time the Persians had been trying to shake off Parthian domination, and in 212 they succeeded under Ardashir of the family of Sasan, supposed descendents of the Achaemenids. So began the Sassanid Dynasty. Ardashir recaptured Babylon and Ctesiphon and revived the title King of Kings. Under the Sassanids Iran was still the crossroads between China and the Graeco Roman area. Sassanid society was divided into castes much as Hindu society still is, the priests, warriors, administrators and common people. Not only the caste system betrays the common Aryan ancestry of the Iranians and the Indians, many of their gods were comparable too. Ahura Mazda, the Wise Lord, had been the prime god of the Achaemenid Kings, but they also worshipped Mithra, god of light, and Anahita, goddess of waters, and several others who all have counterparts in the Hindu religion. The Persian months take their names from various genii of the Zoroastrian Pantheon: Farvardin (Fravardin) from the men's guardian angels, the Fravashi; Ordibehesht (Urdvahisht) from the archangel Asha, upright law; Khordad (Khvardad) from one of the ameshaspenta (immortal holy ones), integrity; Tir from Tishtriya, which is Sirius the dog star; Mordad (Amurdad) from immortality, another of the ameshaspenta; Shahrivar from the Archangel of the Kingdom; Mehr (Mihr) from Mithra; Aban from Anahita; Azar (Adur) from Fire; Dei (Dadhv) from the Creator i.e. Ahura Mazda; Bahman (Vahman) from good thought, another of the ameshaspenta; and Esfand (Spandarmand) from holy submission, a protective archangel.

A latin historian records the correct title of the Sassanid kings as 'King of kings, companion of the stars, brother of the sun and moon.'
Under the Sassanids there was intermittent war, first with the Romans, then with the Arabs, then with the White Huns. King Shahpur I took the Emperor Valerian prisoner. King Shahpur II fought so well against the Arab invaders that he was also known as 'Wrencher of shoulders'. King Vahram (Bahram) V was the king immortalised in poetry and legend as fond of hunting wild asses. It was he who summoned bands of Luti, or gypsies, from India to entertain him at his court. It was of him that Omar Khayyam wrote (in Fitzgerald's translation)

'And Bahram, that great Hunter - the Wild Ass
Stamps o'er his Head, but cannot break his Sleep.'

Under the later kings of the Sassanian period invasions of White Huns from the north became more frequent. In 531 Chosroes I defeated them finally, but only because the Turks were now beginning to move in behind them from the region of the Altai mountains. It was in the reign of Chosroes that the Turkish peril began, the legendary opposition of Turan and Iran, each facing the other across the wide waters of the Oxus. It was also during his reign that chess was introduced to Persia, and 'Nard' or backgammon.

In 651 the Sassanid Dynasty ended with the Arab invasion and the coming of Islam. Under the Arab Caliphates trade increased, rice was grown on a large scale and became the staple food of Iran as it is today. Citrus fruits and cotton were also introduced. The Ghaznavids were ruling in Ghazni, their influence extending into India. Ferdowsi composed his Shah Name, or Book of Kings, in which he told of the legendary kings Jamshyd and Feridun, of the beginning of the struggle between Iran and Turan, of the white haired Zal brought up by the Simorgh (a mythical bird), of the heroic deeds of his son Rustam including the tragedy of Sohrab and Rustam in the continuing Iran/Turan opposition, of Siyavosh and Key Khosrow and the Turk Afrasiyab, of Zardosht (Zoroaster) and Esfandiyar, of Sekander (Alexander the Great), Ardashir and the Sassanids, Shahpur and his war with the Romans, of Bahram Gur and the Khaqan of China, and of Khosrow and Shirin. It must have been galling for Ferdowsi to have to dedicate his great epic of conflict between Iran and Turan to Mahmud of Ghazni, who was of course a Turk. It is said that Mahmud only paid the poet in silver where he had promised gold, but on hearing a couplet recited repented, and sent a caravan of riches to Ferdowsi's village. As the caravan entered the village Ferdowsi's funeral cortege was leaving it.

With the coming of Islam the golden age had passed, but not without trace. Olaf Caroe, in The Pathans, said

'Again and again, when moving in what may be called the Iranian world, I have been struck by the conviction that the influence of Persia over all these lands is a much deeper, older thing than anything which springs from Islam.
There is indeed a sense in which all the upland in Asia from the Tigris to

the Indus is one country. The spirit of Persia has breathed over it, bringing an awareness of one background, one culture, one way of expression, a unity of spirit felt as far away as Peshawar and Quetta. He who has caught that breath has won to the heart of the mystery, and he will not forget.'

With the coming of Islam also came a change in the language. The old Pahlavi was overlaid with many Arabic words in much the same way as our language assimilated Latin and French words. The Chinese influence was still strong, and growing. A saying attributed to the Prophet Mohammed runs 'Search after knowledge, even as far as China.' Indian works had already been translated into Pahlavi, as had the Psalms. After the Arabs came the Seljuks, who were Ghuzz Turks. It was during the Seljuk period that the 'Old Man of the Mountains' or the Great Propagandist lived in the fortress of Alamut with his Assassins. After the Seljuks came the Mongols, and then Timur, who shattered the Golden Horde and destroyed Moscow before turning his attention to the south. In 1398 Timur entered Delhi, in 1401 Baghdad, then he took Syria and marched against the Ottomans. It was at this time that the poet Hafez composed his famous poem 'If that Turkish Shirazi girl would take my heart in her hand/I would give for the Indian mole on her cheek Bokhara and Samarkand'. It is said that Timur summoned Hafez to ask him why he was so careless of the two greatest Timurid cities. Hafez appeared, dressed in rags, and Timur said 'After all the trouble I've had conquering the world to make Samarkand and Bokhara what they are today, you want to throw them away on a mole', to which Hafez is supposed to have replied 'It is because of my generosity that you see me like this, all in rags.'

After the Timurids came the warring dynasties of Turks, the Kara-Qoyunlu and the Ak-Qoyunlu (Black sheep and White sheep) who later moved on to the land that is now Turkey, between the Ak Deniz and the Kara Deniz (White Sea and Black Sea). The main enemies of both the Timurids and the Ak Qoyunlu were the Ottomans on the west and the Uzbeks on the east. By 1500 the Uzbeks had taken most of Central Asia from the Timurids, and the Turkish speaking Safavids were ruling in Iran. The Safavids were a kind of religious brotherhood, preaching the 'Twelve Imam' branch of Shi'a Islam, and claimed Arab blood, though they were more probably Kurdish. The Safavids shaved their beards and their heads, but grew very long moustaches. Their army was made up of Turkish nomads from Azerbaijan, traditionally seven tribes, the Shamlu, Rumlu, Ustajlu, Tekelu, Afshar, Qajar and Zulqadar. The Ottoman Sultan was afraid that the subjects of his Empire might rebel, as many of them were Shi'a rather than Sunni muslims like himself, and sympathetic to the neighbouring Safavids. He therefore had forty thousand Shi'ites massacred on the grounds that they were Safavid spies. The Iranians remain Shi'a to this day, the Arabs and Afghans Sunni, though as an Afghan saying has it,
'Guftagu-yi-kufr-wa-din akhir bi kuja mikashad? Khwab yak khwab ast, bashad mukhtalif ta'birha...
This chatter of heathendom and faith, where does it lead in the end? The dream is one dream, though many and various be the interpretations.'

The most famous of the Safavids was Shah 'Abbas, who was a contemporary of Philip II of Spain, Elizabeth I of England, Suleiman the Magnificent of Turkey and Akbar the Great in India. He moved his capital from Qazvin to Isfahan, and his splendid court was known in the west as the 'Grand Sophy'. European travellers marvelled at the sumptuousness of the court at Isfahan, where many beautiful buildings were being put up under Shah Abbas. He moved a large community of Armenians from Julfa to Isfahan and also diverted the Silk Route through Isfahan and Bandar Abbas where formerly it had passed through Armenia. After the death of Shah Abbas, the Safavid Dynasty fell into disarray, and in 1722 the Afghans invaded Iran and captured Isfahan. The Afghan Mirwais had already visited Isfahan and noted the weakness of the Persian rule - Caroe says 'It is from this time that there begins a tradition which still holds - every Afghan regarding the Persian as degenerate, and every Persian looking on Afghans as rude and boorish'. On entering Isfahan the Afghans invited all the notables to a lavish banquet. One hundred and fourteen of the cities' most prominent citizens came, only to find the Ghilzais posted in the gardens with swords ready.

There followed a period of anarchy, war, inflation and high taxation. An inscription on the doorway of the mosque of Vanand at Nakhchavan dated 1733, reads 'Because of the famine and distress of this unhappy time, the people were in hell, for in the course of a single year the village of Vanand and others in the neighbourhood were three times invaded and laid waste, and many believers, both men and women, were either killed or led into captivity, while other servants of God were dispersed, crossed over the river Araxes, and settled on lands on the other side. In those days of an unfortunate conjunction of the

planets, even trade came to a standstill.'
The man who put things to rights was an Amir of the Turkish Afshar tribe, called Tahmasp-quli, later called Nadȯr Shah. He made himself general of the Persian armies, defeated both the Afghans and the Ottomans, and recaptured Azerbaijan and Georgia. On Noruz (New Year's Day) of 1736, Tahmasp-quli assembled all the governors and important people of Iran on the plain of Mughan in Azerbaijan. There being no king, he asked them to elect one. Naturally they chose him, and naturally he refused at first but finally accepted, taking the name Nadir Shah. Nadir Shah went on to take Kandahar, where the Afghans had risen against Iran, and then on to India where the Moghul Empire was in decline under Aurangzeb. Nadir Shah took Ghazni, Kabul, Peshawar and Lahore, defeated the Moghul troops near Delhi, and entered Delhi in 1739. He carried back to Persia with him the Moghul treasure, which included the Peacock Throne (Takht-e-Tavous) and the Koh-i-Noor (Mountain of Light) Diamond. Nadir Shah, son of a shepherd, has been called the Persian Napoleon. Ambitious he was, and also ruthless. It is written that wherever he went he put up towers of heads. In 1747 he was assassinated by some chiefs of his own tribe, the Afshars. In the chaos that followed, with Qajars, Afshars, Afghans and Safavids fighting for power, the thirty year reign of the good Karim Khan-e-Zand who sought no title higher than regent, stands out. His capital was Shiraz, which he restored.

After the death of Karim Khan-e-Zand came the Qajar Dynasty. The Qajars, like the Afshars, were among the seven Turkish tribes who had supported the Safavids. The first Qajar to sieze power was the Eunuch Agha Mohammed Khan, and it was he who moved the capital to Teheran. Agha Mohammed was succeeded by Fath Ali Shah, renowned mainly for his long beard and his vast harem. It was during his reign that ambassadors were first exchanged between Persia and France, and Persia and England. Georgia and Armenia were lost to Russia, and an incompetent minister also promised that Persia would maintain no ships on the Caspian, saying 'We are not ducks that we need the waters of the Caspian'. The Qajar Dynasty is remembered as being decadent. It was also a period of increasing westernisation, consumer goods being brought in via Trebizond from Europe. In 1907 an Anglo-Russian agreement divided the country into two halves, the north under the influence of Russia and the south under the influence of the British. The Persian army, which had been useless against British Indian sepoys or Russian regular troops, was improved in 1879 by the addition of a Cossack Division with Russian instructors and officers. It was from this cossack division that the new ruling house was to come. In 1921, Reza Khan, a cossack officer, carried out a coup d'etat. He marched on Teheran and took the title of Pahlavi, by which he wished to signify a return to the old order, a continuity with the ancient Iranian glory. Iran had been ruled by Turks almost continuously since the end of the Sassanid period, it was now back in Aryan hands. Reza Shah was a stern reformer. When he went round inspecting the westernisation of villages in the provinces, a truck would precede him. The truck contained western clothes. At each village the schoolchildren were dressed in western clothes, lined up along the main street for Reza Shah's approval, and then off went the clothes to the next village. When he went to inspect work on the Trans Iranian railway, a locomotive had been derailed and was on its side by the track. The workmen tried feverishly to get it upright again before Reza Shah's arrival, but found the task impossible. They buried it. Here is Robert Byron on his first day in Persia:

> 'I remarked to Christopher on the indignity of the people's clothes:
> "Why does the Shah make them wear those hats?"
> "Sh. You mustn't mention the Shah out loud. Call him Mr.Smith."
> "I always call Mussolini Mr.Smith in Italy."
> "Well, Mr.Brown."
> "No, that's Stalin's name in Russia."
> "Mr.Jones then."
> "Jones is no good either. Hitler has to have it now that Primo de Rivera is dead. And anyhow I get confused with these ordinary names. We had better call him Marjoribanks, if we want to remember whom we mean."

He forbade the photography of camels, as camels were backward. Like Ataturk, he purged the language of Arabic loan words, inventing new ones where necessary to replace them.

The present Shah has been one the throne now for more than thirty years, and his full title is Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, Aryamehr (Light of the Aryans), Shahinshah (King of Kings) of Iran. Vincent Monteil, writing a decade ago, said 'Iran is strewn with the ashes of the past. Many races, religions, and civilizations have passed over its soil, and all have left their imprint. To all outward appearance, the pyres and the altars of the Magi are extinct.

But in this land the fire of the wise lord is smouldering still. The wind has only to rise...'
I am inclined to think it has risen.

That summer in Teheran I lay on my back on the Turkoman carpet in the house of my friend Shirin (a Qajar) on Avenue Karim Khan-e-Zand, and listened to Albinoni for a whole afternoon. I was music starved. They wanted to take me to the Golestan Palace to see the crown jewels and the Peacock Throne, but I couldn't face it. I did go to the bazaar and look at the samovars, though. On Monday 21st September I took the train for Tabriz. The guard unlocked an empty compartment for me, and I read Moby Dick while dusk fell over the passing Elbruz. I went to the air-conditioned restaurant car for dinner, had soup tasting strongly of lemon, and read all the Imperial Iranian Railways notices on the walls while waiting for my cutlet and vegetables. The Persian word for railway is 'Rah-e-Ahan' which means Iron Road. At Tabriz I went straight to the bus station, talked Turkish to the locals, and bought a ticket for Bazargan on the Turkish border - 'Place of departure, Teheran Gate, opposite the asphalt factory. Travellers for Macou and Bazargan, opposite the Machine Makers.' At Bazargan I felt sad to be leaving the Persian speaking area. The Iranian customs men took me into the Tourist Office and gave me gaz (nougat) and a poster of Damavand. It was dark by the time I crossed over to Turkey. I took a jeep for Dogu Beyazit, where I spent the night in the decrepit hostelry. The Erzerum bus was due to leave at 5.30 a.m. so there was no time for breakfast, I bought a few grapes to eat on the way. Some musicians in the back seat of the bus started up as soon as we left Dogu Beyazit - they were playing Turkish drums and an instrument which sounded something like bagpipes without the drone. We stopped here and there to pick up passengers. At one point a track curved over the hills to meet the road, and in the distance were figures. The bus driver stopped to wait for them - a girl in bright blue and purple clothes riding a horse while her husband and a boy walked beside her. She dismounted and put on her black charshaf while her husband negotiated a fare with the driver. The boy cantered back up the track into the distance. The land was bleached, rolling hills with the morning shadows among them. A river, channelled and cut into separate streams, flowed dark blue along the pale ground between flat shingle banks and pads of turf. Some men were loading relcalcitrant sheep onto a lorry. We passed the occasional lone horseman - Ak Qoyunlu or Kara Qoyunlu?