PART III

I sought you Babylon and you were not.

It wasn't long before I was making preparations for a third journey. This time I decided to widen my horizons and take in some new places. I planned to go south from Tabriz to Baghdad, take in Kuwait, cross the Persian Gulf by boat, see Shiraz and Isfahan, take the northern route in Afghanistan, and come back from Teheran via Moscow. I went to the Intourist office in Regent Street and told the girl I intended taking a train from Teheran to Moscow. 'I don't think you can' she said. I persisted. She said that she didn't know anything about the trains from Teheran to Moscow, and that I would certainly not be given a visa for such a journey. I asked to be allowed to fill in an application form anyway. I had to pay for a night in a hotel in Moscow, she said, and transfer charges for escorts to and from stations. I had to produce a valid visa for Poland before they would issue one for Russia, and as for the ticket from Teheran, that I would have to get myself in Teheran. My passport went the rounds of various embassies, getting lost for several weeks at the Polish one. The Kuwaiti Ambassador phoned me up, asking for 'Missis Clare'. Why did I want to go to Kuwait? Pleasure? (he sounded incredulous) Did I realise that it was very dangerous for a woman to travel alone in that part of the world? - I said I had already travelled in the Middle East and India alone. Did I realise that it was very hot in Kuwait in the summer? I did. Oh, well, he supposed he would have to grant me the permit.

By 7th July I was leaving Tabriz for Kermanshah by TBT bus. We passed Lake Urmia (Rezaiyeh) on the right and soon came up with the first camels. South of Tabriz is a land of walled vineyards, poplars, and yakhchals -ice towers. At seven the next morning I was on another bus for Qasr Shirin. The landscape around Kermanshah was noticeably different from elsewhere in Iran - flaking exfoliated boulders and hills peppered with bushes and scrub. The houses appeared to be made out of some form of reed matting, with grass roofs. Sheep and goats wandered about in a flat valley as the road ascended into the pass. The road itself was remarkably good. At Qasr Shirin were palm trees, a sure sign of the proximity of Iraq. All the houses had Bad-girs (wind takers) which are like square chimneys let into the roof and whose function is to direct the wind, if wind there is, down into the house to cool the occupants. It was certainly hot, though not oppressively so. Kurdish women in beautiful velvet dresses and waistcoats hung with silver walked up and down the streets. Crossing the border appeared to be something of a problem, as relations between the two countries are not amicable, and few travellers cross at this point. The only thing to be done was to sit around at Qasr Shirin waiting until enough people turned up to hire a taxi. The taxi takes one to the Persian stamping out post, where the process is repeated. At the Persian border was quite a crowd of pilgrims either coming back from or going to Mecca. A busload of Arabs were having their passports checked, and though all the women were heavily veiled, they all possessed passport photos. The Persian border guards wondered politely why I was going to such a place as Iraq. They strongly advised me to turn round and go straight back to Kermanshah. As I walked off in the opposite direction they watched me pityingly. The Iraqi border guards, strangely enough, seemed to agree with their Persian counterparts. They were very surprised to see me and wanted to know what I was thinking of coming to Iraq, and in the hot weather. 'Here is not good for you' they kept saying.

For one dinar a minibus went from the border to Baghdad. The driver was a Turk who spoke some English and Farsi and had previously worked for the British, of whom he seemed to approve. We descended into the flat dry plains stretching west from Khanakin and punctuated by occasional clumps of date palms. At Ba'Quba we stopped for lunch at a little whitewashed mud house with Pepsi Cola signs. Here I learned my first few words of Arabic, mainly concerned with food, water and money. At four o clock we entered Baghdad. The Tigris was wide and bright, houses rose from the vertical banks behind high enclosing walls. Here and there were the blue and gold domes of mosques, and everywhere leaning palm trees. In the new suburbs the houses were all designed to withstand the heat with a style reminiscent of Le Corbusier and Chandigarh. Unlike the Persians in their drab suits, the Arabs all walked around in flowing robes and black and white dogtooth check head-cloths. The billowing black veils of the women, together with the oppressive heat and the architecture, reminded me more of Pakistan than anywhere else. Despite the office blocks and the traffic, Baghdad still resembled other eastern cities in one respect - the variety of its street wares. Baghdad special appeared to be a most delicious port coloured plum juice, sold by urchins beneath the cigarette hoardings from buckets with blocks of ice suspended over them on pieces of wood. Cakes and kebabs were also available, and some small boys were selling water at five fils a bowl, from earthenware pitchers.

I had no success in finding a cheap hotel in Baghdad. There was one, but it was already full to overflowing. So I went to the station and bought a ticket to Mosul, thinking I could take a quick look at Ninevah. I was interested to notice how many emancipated Iraqi girls were working as secretaries and receptionists in the echoing halls of Baghdad Station. One of them, discreetly headscarved, fetched me a glass of water as I was obviously overheated. The temperature in Baghdad was 108'F, which in itself was nothing unusual for me, as I well remembered reading the chemists' thermometer in Herat as 108' if not more, but this time I had come straight from cool (80' or 90') Tabriz to Baghdad in the space of twenty four hours, and the atmosphere of Baghdad was stiflingly humid compared to Herat. I suppose it was the climate too that reminded me of Pakistan- for the valley of the Tigris and the Euphrates is similar in many ways to that of the Punjab, the two fertile basins whose wetness engendered early civilisations, one at each end of the Iranian plateau. I drank far too much water, and was sick outside the station. In the Mosul train the air conditioning was out of order, and I collapsed in the corridor. Two Iraqi medical students, delighted to have this opportunity to practise their English, revived me with ice, applied liberally to my forehead and arms. The train itself, which had higher pretensions but shoddier workmanship than the German built Iranian ones, was made in Eastern Europe, like most consumer goods in Iraq. Unfortunately some of the instructions on leaning out of windows and so on were still in Czech or Serbo Croat or whatever. Armed guards patrolled the train and inspected our tickets at intervals.

In the heat of the morning we approached Mosul along the Tigris valley. Nomads were encamped below. I couldn't find a cheap hotel in Mosul either, and it was, if anything, even hotter than Baghdad. I therefore bought a ticket for the night train back to Baghdad, and meanwhile took a bus in the hope of seeing Ninevah. I had in my mind's eye the engraving of Layard's workmen uncovering the huge stone head at Nimrud. Nimrud also is not far from Mosul, but I had no guide book and there were none on sale. Frequent repetition of the word'Ninevah', however, resulted in my being led to one of the many commuter buses lined up in the main street, which some time later disgorged me at a row of shops on the edge of the desert. The sun was beating on my bare head like something solid, and although I could see the city walls and the Great Gate across the burning sands, I could not face walking over to them in the glare and the heat. I sat in the shade with the locals and surveyed them from afar. It was Friday, of course, so the museum was closed anyway. Back at Mosul I went for a brief walk in which I learned that Arab men, like Turks, spend a lot of their time sitting in cafes playing Tavla (Backgammon, Nard),though I imagine they call it something else. They didn't seem to want me in their all-male establishments, so I went and sat in Mosul station, which afforded some protection from the sun. The station porters came and talked to me - it didn't seem to matter that I knew no Arabic and they no English. They could see that the heat was bothering me, and one kindly old man went off to get iced water. When I had drunk the iced water, he went off again and came back with a bottle of Canada Dry, a glass, a hard boiled egg, bread and a quantity of salt. Two minutes later he was back again with a large chunk of ice. He crushed the ice by banging it on the stone floor, poured out some of the Canada Dry with some of the ice, and added half the salt. I must say I didn't fancy the concoction at all, but I did know I needed salt, and therefore steeled myself and drank it. The odd thing was, it didn't taste salty at all. Perhaps when the body needs salt the tongue's sensitivity to it diminishes? Later in the afternoon I went to Mosul Station Refreshment room for some soup. I ladled plenty of salt into the soup, and it tasted fine. I was already recovering sufficiently to take an interest in my surroundings, and Mosul Station refreshment room was magnificent. It was beginning to be apparent to me that the British had left their mark in all sorts of places. One of the strangest mementoes of British influence which amused me in Iraq, was that whenever one said 'Thankyou', people replied with 'D'mensh' or 'Menshnit'. It took some time for this familiar phrase to sort itself out of the jumble of Arabic and suddenly dawn on me.

By six thirty it had cooled down considerably, and as the sun was setting I went for another walk. Closer inspection of the local chai khanehs, or coffee khanehs, showed that the Arabs in their black and white check headcloths were playing not only tavla, but dominoes, draughts, and even chess. Melons, grapes and tomatoes were piled along the roadside in heaps. Wherever I walked children called their mothers to the door to see me - 'Look, a foreigner.' Most people obviously slept on the roofs here, as in Persia, the roof being cooler than the interior of the house. Beds were still out on the uneven levels, and I even saw a chai khaneh on a roof. In what might have been a building site or a bomb site arab children were playing naked, shouting and laughing round a tank full

of green water.

Back in Baghdad the temperature was up to 112'F, but by now I was getting acclimatised. The next place on my itinerary was Basra, but I decided to take a ticket only as far as Al Hillah first, where I could look at Babylon. At Al Hillah I left my rucksack in the station and went to explore the town. I still had some Turkish lira left from Turkey, and thought I might be able to change them here rather than in Iran. I found a bank, and presented the crumpled notes. But the clerk made a face when he saw them, and told me to try in Basra. I wanted to send some postcards home, so I asked for a Post Office, usually called PTT in those parts. A little brown eyed boy attached himself to me - 'I show Post Office', and hung around after I had bought the stamps until I gave him a bakhshish to buy some ice-cream. I met an Iraqi English teacher who wanted to practise his English, and insisted on taking me to lunch in a restaurant. My favourite Persian dish, Pilau Keshmesh, was proving to be more common in Iraq than in Iran, and indeed all Iraqi food was delicious. We had saffron rice with sultanas and chicken, and Leben or laban, which is the arab version of Doug (sour milk) but creamier and smoother. After lunch, I was taken home to see his mother. Their house was small, but had a cool courtyard. All the cooking was done in the yard, but they also had a television, made in Eastern Europe. Of course, they said, you must visit Babel. I was rather glad to have a guide after my experience at Mosul. The blue gate (the Ishtar Gate) had been restored, and was unimpressive. There was a museum containing various artefacts. Little cards proclaimed that they were, almost without exception, replicas. The originals were in the British Museum. There was a bookcase with some pamphlets in English, and I went over, expecting to find some sort of tourist guide to Babylon. Alas, they were all anti-Israel propaganda. The procession street was overgrown with weeds and spiny plants, and in a hollow among the palm trees was the lion of Babylon with no face left, gazing blindly across the ruins.

Here I saw a Frenchwoman and her young son, slung with cameras, and I think they were the only foreigners I saw the whole time I was in Iraq. Either they don't encourage tourism, or it wasn't the season. Back in Hillah, we went for a walk along the Euphrates. I thought it would be nice to dip my arm in the Euphrates as I had already dipped it in the Ganges, so I got into a little boat and was poled across by some little boys. The boat was attached to a rope which stretched across from one bank to the other, even so the current was strong enough to turn the boat endwise in midstream. On the opposite bank I was mobbed by hordes of children, and couldn't quite decide whether they were hostile or simply curious. Anyway I crossed back for safety. In the evening my Iraqi friend took me to an institution called the Teacher's Club, where we had more chicken and more leben, and then I took the night train for Basra. In Basra I went straight to the Rafidain Bank clutching my Turkish Lira, but it wasn't open till eight thirty, so I sat on the kerb watching the traffic until it opened. The clerk shook his head sadly and smiled when he saw what I had to offer. 'Perhaps in Baghdad' he said. He perked up when I produced some dollars, though, and was quite happy to change them for me. I had some very good coffee, wrote my postcards and posted them, and then took a local bus to Safwan, which is the Kuwait border post. At Safwan we were in the middle of the desert, and a hot wind was blowing the sand horizontally so that it penetrated everything. I had to wait until five more would-be travellers had arrived to fill up a taxi to Kuwait. There was no food on sale at the border, though there was of course the uhiquitous coca cola. I sat in the customs house and watched the sand blowing fiercely across outside. At the Kuwait border I was told that I needed a visa, but I had already made enquiries in London and found that I only needed a permit, as British subjects do not need visas. I informed the official, and he looked doubtful. However, he disappeared into a back room and consulted his superior, and came back apologising profusely. Of course British subjects do not require visas. How long had it been since a British subject had crossed this border I wondered?

From Safwan to Kuwait city was three hours' drive through the desert with virtually nothing except a petrol pump and some advertisement hoardings in between. Streams of fine sand were blowing across the road, the sky was a dirty white colour, and the sun was not visible. Sand got in through the closed doors and windows of the taxi and slowly filled up the creases in my rucksack. If I opened my mouth, I swallowed sand. My nose and eyes were full of it. It beat and buffeted the car like very hard rain, or hail. Visibility fell to ten or twenty yards, so we had to drive slowly. It was so hot that I had to keep taking drinks from the Taxi's iced water carrier, and holding ice to my wrists and neck. As I sweated, the sand stuck to my skin.

We stopped halfway to Kuwait to fill up at the petrol station, and when the car doors were opened one could hardly stand up against the wind. Towards Kuwait city were affluent suburbs, car factories and industrial plants. But all were deserted. Kuwait city was equally deserted - it looked like a ghost town. I asked for a cheap hotel, and was directed to the Hotel Damascus. However, the Hotel Damascus, though it looked a delightful place, was full. A Kuwaiti Arab in a dishdasha (the long white robe) rescued me. Seeing me in the street, he expressed surprise that anyone should be out in a dust storm, and took me to his home, protesting that it was only natural for him to offer me hospitality as I was a traveller and a visitor to his country. His family all sat round on the floor and looked at me, occasionally asking questions which he translated. Most of all, they were puzzled as to what I was doing in Kuwait. Why should I want to come to such a place, and in a dust storm? I had a shower and felt much better. The temperature outside was 115'F, but the house had a cooler, and the shops all had air-conditioning. Taking advantage of this fact, we spent the afternoon walking round the local supermarket. I was amazed by the variety of consumer goods on sale. They were imported from USA, England, and all over Europe. Outside the supermarket a hose with holes in it was keeping the grass verges green. I had expressed my interest in Arab apparel, and my Kuwaiti friend's mother fetched out one of his old dishdashas for me, plus a white gitra, or headcloth. The dishdasha was a most comfortable garment, and eminently suitable for the heat and the dust.

I had planned to take a boat across the Persian Gulf, having met someone in Iran the previous year who had done so and lived on fish pie and liked it. However, there were no boats to Abadan for a month, so I was left with the option of flying to Abadan or going back the way I had come. I didn't think I could face that desert drive a second time, so my Kuwaiti friend telephoned the airport and reserved me a seat on the night flight. I had never been in an aeroplane of any description before, so I felt quite excited. There were no student reductions, and the ticket cost five Kuwaiti Dinars, or about five pounds. At last I was able to change my Turkish Lira, and we drove out to the airport past the lights of the university. Arab businessmen were standing around in their dishdashas and gitras, and one or two obviously Persian men reclined on the blue upholstery. I was to fly Boeing 707 at 8,000 feet, the flight taking twenty five minutes. We were to leave Kuwait at twelve midnight, and arrive in Abadan at five minutes to midnight - there being a half hour time difference. The acceleration on take-off was a fantastic feeling, I thought, and could scarcely conceal my excitement though everyone else on board was obviously commuting. The lights of Kuwait receded below, and for a time there was only the moonlight on the wings as we crossed the Persian Gulf. Then the plane swung round and the lights of Abadan appeared, turning below us. At Abadan a loudspeaker was calling 'British passports first'. There were quite a number of oil workers coming in from Saudi Arabia on another flight, and many of them were British.

I slept on the grass outside the airport until four a.m., when someone came to water it and I had to move. I took a taxi into the centre of town and had some breakfast - eggs, mast, bread and chai. The man in the shop was most insulted when I tried to pay him, and only pressed more chai on me. We sat and talked. He shook his head when I said I had been in Iraq and Kuwait, and shook his head more when I described the weather in Kuwait. They had been having dust storms on this side of the gulf too, indeed it was still blowing to a certain extent, and I was glad of my dishdasha. 'Tufan-e-Khakh', he said, and sighed deeply. When I went out in the street small boys chased me, finding my clothes most amusing, and called out after me 'What is this, a man or a woman?' I went to a Hammam - a marvellous institution, the hammam. Persians don't have baths in their houses, except in the westernised areas, they go to the local hammam. For two Tomans one can have a shower, wash, and often have one's clothes washed too. Mine were washed, dried and pressed for me while I took my bath. Many hammams also sell soap, shampoo, coca cola and so on. I had lunch in a Pakistani restaurant - a rather dubious fish curry. There seems to be quite a thriving foreign community in Abadan, no doubt because of its position on the Gulf, and it is a sort of staging post for Pakistanis on their way to Europe. I actually found an English book in a little bookshop - a second hand copy of Hardy's Tess, which was expensive for three Tomans, but worth it as I had run out of reading matter. At three in the afternoon I caught the bus for Shiraz.

The Lion and the Lizard

They say the Lion and the Lizard keep
The Courts where Jamshyd gloried and drank deep:
And Bahram, that great Hunter -the Wild Ass
Stamps o'er his Head, but cannot break his Sleep.
-Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam tr.
Fitzgerald.

Between Abadan and Ahwaz the land was quite flat, with oil pipelines snaking about here and there.It was still very hot, but by this time I was positively enjoying the heat. The locals were complaining about it, which struck me as odd until I bought a paper next day and found that the temperature had been 125.6'F, which is hot even by Gulf standards. An engaging little news item told of oil workers affected by the unusual heat who went off their heads and couldn't stop laughing. After Ahwaz, the Zagros mountains rose abruptly in front of us, like a wall barring the way. At the foot of the mountains the whole desert was full of the beautiful curving shapes made by sand dunes and barchans, yellow, and shaded on the windward side. Almost before I knew it we had passed into the mountains, and on all sides were wierd rocks scoured by weathering, tilted beds of strata, peaks and cornices. The road was narrow and winding, and full of potholes. Oil pipelines followed our course for part of the way, but the effort involved in cutting slits in sheer rock faces must have been too great, for they branched off to the right. The road wound on along the edge of a precipice, and below the heaving mountains seemed arrested in mid-orogeny. Everywhere was the evidence of some great upheaval. Water made potholes and dry riverbeds hung in places where no river could run. Occasional traffic coming the other way had to be made room for, and consisted almost entirely of oil tankers. When we drew to one side to let the Shiraz-Abadan bus, covered in pink and green lights after the Iranian fashion in motor decoration, pass us, the drivers exchanged a few words on the state of the road further on. A reddish glow appeared over the hills ahead, and soon we were passing many flares, their heads blown sideways with fine tongues of flame. Some appeared to burn directly from the ground, others on tall chimneys. The whole area was lit up as by giant candles, even the mountains away to the left glowed in a flickering firelight.

We reached Shiraz at five in the morning, and I immediately went to sleep on a wooden bench in the bus office. Later in the morning, I looked for a cheap hotel and found one called the Behesht Shiraz (the Shiraz heaven). My bed was on the roof, which pleased me. I took a shower, changed, and went for a walk round Shiraz. I had lunch -rice with bitter cherries and chicken - in a Chelow Kebabi with white tiled walls, and slept all afternoon on the roof of the Behesht Shiraz.
On the following day I went to see Persepolis, or Takht-e-Jamshid- the Throne of Jamshyd. Set on a rock platform above the plain against a backcloth of vertical cliifs were the pillars and gateways so familiar from photographs. Lions devoured horses in bas relief, warriors and tribute payers from the furthest satrapies of the Empire lined the wide stairways. I climbed the cliff to Artaxerxes' tomb, cavelike and cold, with water marks on the walls. The caretaker, a little old man, was boiling water for chai in an old iron kettle on a brushwood fire. Two middle aged Iranian women from Teheran invited me to partake of their picnic lunch, cold fish wrapped up in layers of thin nan; and we sat halfway up the cliff eating and talking and looking down at the tents being erected for the coming celebrations.(2,500th anniversary of the founding of the Persian Empire by Cyrus the Great). Back at the Behesht Shiraz I sat on the roof and watched the comings and goings in a nearby open air mosque. Carpets were spread out for prayers and then taken in again. A new dome was being built with branch scaffolding, and the blue mosaic was half finished.

I woke at dawn to a marvellous soft sky dappled with cloud. The Mihantour bus for Teheran left from Sa'adi Avenue at five thirty a.m. We left Shiraz by the Qor'an Gate, and started climbing almost immediately over the AllahuAkbar Pass. A sign pointed off left to Pasaragadae and the tomb of Cyrus, but all I could see was a line of trees. We took breakfast soon after, in a walled Persian garden with pools and fountains. On the Isfahan road I looked out for Izadkhast, or Yezd i Khast, a castle on a rock which I had seen in photographs, but I must have missed it. However, we did pass through an amazing village in a hollow with an almost dry river bed, where all the houses were perched on top of the crumbling river cliffs, among a mass of strangely shaped boulders.
The road traversed a series of dry plains which could have been old lake floors, each enclosed by a ring of mountains. One of these plains was filled with golden wheat, a golden lake in which the hills and mountains appeared as islands and promontories.

The Zagros rose out of their own scree slopes like frozen waves about to collapse, all tending in the direction of the tilted strata. Some of the scree slopes resembled shelving beaches, and at times there was a white mist of dust like surf between the mountain fringe and the plain.

We lunched on Chelow Khoresht and mast at Shahreza, then went through Isfahan, 'nesf-e-jahan' (Half the world) without stopping. After Isfahan the ridges became sharper, rising from the surrounding plain like the backs of sleeping animals. Camels grazed and lifted their heads to watch us pass. At Qum, which is a holy city second only to Meshed, the mosque domes were dazzling. One large dome was decorated in blue, and two smaller ones were plain gold and plain blue. They were visible long before we reached Qum and long after we left it, and all this time the bus was full of chanting. We now entered a large plain encircled by mountains, with the sun low on the left so that the mountain range on that side seemed to have been cut out of paper. To the right a bright white band rather like a low vertical wall was in fact a salt lake. Ahead the road appeared the rise perpendicularly and disappear among the rocks. It was as if we were in a bowl. From the height of the rocks, the salt lake was misty with distance, like a ghost lake, the backcloth of the further mountains only dimly discernible beyond it, and a suggestion of the waves' shoreward impulse.
We stopped at a chaikhaneh which overlooked the whole valley behind us.
Over the pass, the land became volcanic again, the earth a dark almost purple colour. As the sun dipped, the mountains in the West separated themselves into infinite layers and the dividing distances ranged from brown to blue. The landscape altered again - here it was pale earth coloured hills with single lines of strata emerging from the soft earth in flat ridges, knotted underneath like the roots of some oriental tree. We passed one or two army encampments, then darkness had fallen and nothing more was to be seen until a brief glimpse of green and white lights on the horizon announced Teheran. This first glimpse disappeared behind rising ground to reappear some minutes later more spread out. As we entered Teheran I feared for our safety, as all the cars had green and pink lights with no distinction between front and back, so that one couldn't tell what was coming or going. Carts had no lights at all, and nobody bothered much with staying on his own side of the road. South Teheran was pervaded by the smell of mutton fat. I stayed at a cheap downtown hotel full of hippies - the Amir Kabir, as it wasn't a very civilised hour to ring doorbells.

While I was in Teheran I went to the railway station and asked in my best Persian for a hard class ticket to Moscow. I knew very well I was not supposed to travel hard class, but as it was half the price of soft class I thought I would at least try to get one. The ticket clerk sold me one for the 22nd Shahrivar (13th September) without query. I stayed a few days with Shirin, and then went on to Meshed. In Meshed I went to the Afghan bus office in the yard with melons and tethered goats, and bought a ticket to Taiabad. I also asked for a hammam and found an excellent one next to a timber yard at the end of the alley opposite the bus station. After my hammam I went back to the busyard and had something to eat. Some assorted Europeans were sitting around despondently waiting for the bus and looking somewhat travel worn.
'If you want a bath,' I said, 'There's a hammam up that alley where you can have one for two Tomans, hot and cold water.' There was a rush for the alley. When they came back, refreshed and impressed, they said they hadn't been able to find any serviceable water in their hotels, certainly no hot water. I explained that one only has to utter the word 'hammam' in any Persian village to be whisked off to one of these useful places, and they agreed that it was hardly necessary for hotels to have running water.

At Taiabad I stayed at the Hotel Omid, where all the staff remembered me and made the usual jokes about my Persian. I got a lift in the morning in a Paykan car (the national Iranian make), with an Iranian who was exporting sixteen Paykans to Kabul. It was rather bizarre crossing the desert in a convoy of sixteen Paykans, their red rear lights strung out before us along the road. It also meant that we spent nine hours at Islam Qala waiting for customs clearance. I asked for the Ra'is of Customs who had given us the rabab recital the previous year, but he was said to be in prison.
'Why?' I asked
'Something was lost from customs which should not have been.'
By twelve midnight we were in Herat. I asked to be dropped off at the Zendevanan, but it was all shut up, the heavy wooden gates locked and barred. The Iranian Paykan driver thought he should take me round to the Behzad, but while we were debating this point someone heard us from inside and the bolts were drawn. It was Aziz -
'Ah, Salaam' he said, 'I said last night that you would come.'

As usual, I had some clothes made, and in the evening I bought sultanas and had the cook in the Super Behzad make me pilau keshmesh. I went book hunting along the main street- one can usually find something second hand in a hotel, left behind by a previous traveller. But all the books they produced for my inspection were ones I had already read until I reached the last hotel on the corner and found a copy of Daniel Deronda. It seems rather odd reading Daniel Deronda while exploring North Afghanistan, which is what I proposed to do, just as it had seemed incongruous to be reading Swann's Way on a third class Indian train in 1969. In the summer of 1971 I got through the following list: Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles; James' The Europeans; Butler's The Way of All Flesh; Eliot's Daniel Deronda; James' Madonna of the Future and other stories; Pushkin's The Captain's Daughter; Michener's Caravans; Mann's Death in Venice & Tonio Kroger; Conrad's Lord Jim; Eliot's Middlemarch; Swinson's North West Frontier; Dante's La Vita Nuova; James' Portrait of a Lady; Hardy's Return of the Native; Forster's The Longest Journey. Actually, having one's reading list determined by the very limited availability of books along the route can be an advantage, as one reads all sorts of things one probably wouldn't have otherwise. In Kabul there are three bookshops which sell books in English and Russian as well as Russian books in Farsi and one or two home produced ones. They stock American Signet paperbacks, but for some unknown reason restrict themselves to about five titles, so that for example they have a whole shelf of copies of Fenimore Cooper's The Pathfinder, a whole wall of shelving devoted to Melville's Moby Dick and Dana's Two Years Before the Mast with one or two Washington Irvings or Nathaniel Hawthornes scattered about, and newly arrived cardboard boxes all over the floor containing several hundred more copies of the same titles. I never found out whether the apparent popularity of Melville and Dana was a reflection of the literary taste of a landlocked people, whether Kabul University was doing a course on American Literature, or whether the whole consignment had been yet another unwelcome gift of USAID, like the Soya Bean Flour.

I had bought a ticket for the bus to Maimana on Friday. On Friday morning therefore, I got up early to make the most of my last morning in Herat. Everyone at the Zendevanan was most worried that I was going by the northern route. They didn't consider it at all safe, and tried their hardest to persuade me not to go. Even the man at the Super Behaad said 'It is very dangerous for you'. However, the men at the bus office told me that a Swiss Professor and his wife, presently staying at the Herat Hotel, had also booked for the Friday bus.

The Well of the World's End

'Sweet to ride forth at evening from the wells,
When shadows pass gigantic on the sand,
And softly through the silence beat the bells,
Along the Golden Road to Samarkand.'

-James Elroy Flecker 'Hassan'

Maimana, traditional home of the Buzkashi and beginning of the Central Asian steppes, is about halfway between Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif in the valley of the Oxus. Mazar-i-Sharif lies about halfway between Samarkand to the north and Kabul to the south. The northern and southern routes from Herat to Kabul taken together form a circle, both routes being roughly equal in distance. However the southern route can be done in twenty two hours in a bus as it is surfaced all the way, half by the Americans and half by the Russians. The northern route takes five days by jeep. From Mazar-i-Sharif to Kabul has been surfaced by the Russians, who have also built the highest road tunnel in the world over the Salang Pass in the Hindu Kush. This route replaces the former route from Mazar to Kabul which went through the centre by way of Bamian Valley and the Shibar Pass.

We left Herat at five in the evening by the road of the minarets, but turned off right instead of left and headed for the Paropamisus. Apparently the name Paropamisus dates from Alexander's passing, and means 'higher than the ceiling of an eagle's flight', but it was formerly applied to the whole Hindu Kush mountain system, and now applies only to the lower western spur. There were numerous stops for prayers and chai. The good mussulman says his prayers five times a day, and my fellow travellers were obviously all good mussulmans. We stopped at a village I think must have been Karrukh - which I remembered for the headman who taught me about the stars on the road from Dilaram - and had a late lunch. There was only rice and mast in the village, no meat and no nan. Leaving Karrukh, we entered a gorge and for the next couple of hours we crossed and recrossed the river, driving straight down the bank and across the stones and boulders, then through the swirling water and up the opposite bank. Eventually we left the gorge and headed upwards to the pass. When we reached the top, bare and barren as the hills behind us, we could see right across the valley of Badghis to the mountains of Band-i-Turkestan in the distance. The northern slopes of the Paropamisus were covered with bushes and misshapen Juniper trees. Our first day's journey ended at Qala-i-Nao (New Castle) at four in the morning. We had covered about a hundred miles in eleven hours, passing no other traffic. Instead of a local caravanserai, however, there was a real 'Hotel', and we slept on the richly carpeted floor of the 'Salon' under a portrait of King Zahir Shah. Our driver was not thinking of leaving Qala-i-Nao until eleven the next morning, so there was time to walk around and buy peaches at eight Afs a Kilo. I sat on the wooden platform which is normal chai khaneh furniture in the North, and talked to the driver. He showed us the chai khaneh owner's pet mongoose which lived in a hole under the platform and was tied by a long string to the platform leg. We ate rice and mast again. There were no spoons, (chai khanehs on the southern route, though they have no knives or forks, have recently adopted spoons for the tourists), and this worried the Swiss professor and his wife until they got the hang of eating with one's fingers. There is quite an art to utensil-less eating. Afghans sit crosslegged on the floor, and eat (with the right hand, as they are Muslims and the left hand is unclean) from plates or bowls on the floor. Most foreigners raise the plates to their mouths and get rice all up their arms in the process, and the Afghans cannot think how it is that at their age they have not learned to eat properly. I had become quite good at eating Afghan style, and it was not uncommon, on routes where Europeans were, for me to collect a crowd of admiring greybeards all saying 'Ofarin, ofarin' and then looking across at the Europeans who had been asking for forks and telling them 'Look, she knows how to eat, why can't you?' One European I met got himself into trouble by eating with his left hand (he was left handed)- but at least he didn't suffer the same fate as three French campers I heard about. They had been sleeping, unknowingly, with their feet towards Mecca. An offended Pathan had come in the night, cut off the heads of the two outside ones, and left that of the one sleeping between them. What a shock he must have had when he woke up.

It wasn't until one in the afternoon that we started for Morghab. We passed several Kuchi encampments and mud villages before fording the Darya-i-Boom (Owl River) and crossing some low hills. Then we came suddenly upon the Morghab River (Morgh-ab means chicken water). It was quite full, unlike the Hari Rud or the Farah Rud further south. The driver told me that it went to Russia, and the Swiss Professor and his wife looked in their guide book and found that it did indeed lose itself in the middle of the Kara Kum desert, several hundred miles inside Russia. If it hadn't been for the desert it would probably have been a tributary of the Oxus, as we had now crossed the Indus/Oxus watershed, and were not to recross it until Salang in the Hindu Kush. Luckily, we did not have to ford the Morghab, at this point but the absolute lack of bridges and the knowledge that all these rivers were now at their lowest, made me wonder what life was like in these northern towns in the winter months when the passes were closed by snow and the rivers unfordable. They would be absolutely isolated from all communication. A line of low hills in the West marked the Soviet frontier. Just before we reached Bala Morghab we drew very close to the frontier, and the driver kept looking across and spitting, saying 'Shuravi' (Soviet). It was late evening, and some Kuchis stopped us. One of their children had fallen off a camel and needed medication. We reached Bala Morghab at eleven, and again there was a hotel with real beds. At all the towns we passed through in the north policemen met us and made sure we went to the hotel rather than the local caravanserai. This is because the headman of the district is responsible for any foreigners who get killed by tribesmen, so naturally he wants to make quite sure they are in no danger when they stop for the night, and get rid of them as soon as possible. We had covered another hundred miles in ten hours, skirting the Band-i-Turkestan mountains. It seemed that the further north we went, the cheaper things became. In Bala Morghab grapes were 2 Afs a Kilo, whereas in Qala-i-Nao they had been 6 Afs. Huge juicy melons, the ones Marco Polo thought were the best in the world, cost one Af each.

We left Morghab at eight in the morning, and passed through more cultivated land than we had hitherto seen, though there were still many Kuchi encampments. We had still passed no motorised traffic, but at a place where the side of the road was a steep incline, we stopped to allow some camels loaded with camel thorn to pass. One of the camels took fright and fell over the edge, and the camel boy had to loose its load before it could get to its feet again. It looked most put out, and stalked off in a huff. There is nothing a camel dislikes more than losing its dignity. For lunch I asked for abgusht (meat stew) which I could see was being served, but was told it was Sharwa. That was interesting, as soup is Chorba in Turkish and Shorwa in Arabic. This was not the only difference I noticed between Persian as spoken south of the Indus/Oxus watershed and as spoken north of it. Everyone in the north referred to cigarettes as 'Papyros', which is the Russian word. One of our prayer stops was at a spring, where sweet water bubbled from the ground and created a swamp of green weeds in the middle of the sand. Horses were grazing here, not camels, and very good horses they looked. At last we were in Central Asia, in the steppes, in Buzkashi country, in Turkestan. We reached Maimana, the main town of Fariab Province, at ten thirty, and supper, I was delighted to discover, was pilau keshmesh. We had covered the third hundred miles or so in fourteen and a half hours. I learned a few words of Pushto and Ouzbek/Turkoman over supper. In Pushto I could say 'I am a woman, you are a man' (in case there should be any confusion) and also the word for camel. In Turki I could say 'Where are you going'- Siz Kurga Ketasan. Ouzbek and Turki were virtually the same, and many of the numerals were similar to Turkish proper, though very few of the other words were. In the Salon of the hotel at Maimana were some Europeans, on their way to Herat from Mazar-i-Sharif. One of them, an English boy, was very ill with some severe form of stomach upset. A doctor came and I interpreted for him- luckily I had made it my business to learn the Farsi for 'vomiting' and 'diarroeah' and such symptoms early in my travels. While the doctor was there, I asked him about the cough which had been troubling me for some time. He diagnosed bronchitis, which made me laugh. I come to Afghanistan and get the disease of cold, wet Britain- bronchitis. He advised me to drink nothing iced, and not to go out in dusty weather. A tall order, seeing that the weather is always dusty in Afghanistan in the summer, and always hot enough to make iced drinks a necessity where they are available.

Soon after we left Maimana we came to a small village and found the villagers in the process of digging an irrigation channel right across the road. The driver got out and cursed them for fools, while I wondered how infrequent the Herat-Mazar jeeps were that the villagers should think of such a thing.

After much shouting, a flimsy bridge was constructed out of branches and a couple of logs. We all got out and jumped the ditch, and the driver, with great daring, drove across very fast, just reaching the other side as the whole contraption collapsed on one side under his back wheels. In Maimana we had transferred to another jeep, Russian made, with more than four gears. It soon became apparent why. The road became so bad that the driver chose to drive along beside it rather than on it. Where it was not eaten away with potholes, one side or other had fallen away leaving irregular cliffs along the middle. There were two possible roads marked on my map from Maimana to Shibarghan, where we could expect to meet surfaced road again. The thick red line went north to Andkhoi and then turned east. Another thin red line went east over the hills to Sar-i-Pul, and then turned north. We were following the Andkhoi road, marked as a major road, so I rather wondered about the condition of the minor one. We had to ford another river, not so full as the Morghab but deep and swirling in its central channel which we reached after a bumpy drive across the rocks. As we drove through the water, boulders slipped under us with an ominous grinding sound. The opposite bank appeared to rise almost vertically back to the road, but our jeep managed to mount it with no mishap other than wildly spinning wheels. We reached Daulatabad at about midday. Camel trains were passing through, and Turkoman women walked proudly through the streets, unveiled, wearing tall red head-dresses hung with silver gilt medallions. The red Turkoman carpets of Daulatabad are famous, and fetch high prices in the bazaars of Kabul. After Daulatabad the road became increasingly dusty. For some time the road was carved out of a sand hill, so that cliffs of sand rose on either side of us for ten feet or so, and there was not much room to choose our tracks between the ruts. At one point this sand defile widened slightly to accomodate a sort of sandcastle in the middle of the road, hung with shreds of material like a ziarat, or place of pilgrimage. I asked the driver whether it was the resting place of some saint or other, but he thought it commemmorated a battle. Soon after Daulatabad we left the Andkhoi road and drove off east across the rolling downs. There was no road of any kind, though tracks crisscrossed in all directions. Our driver appeared to know where he was going, and drove straight over hill after hill, dodging between the dried up tamarisk bushes. Each time we came to a hill, the jeep passengers, mostly Ouzbeks in brightly coloured chapans and huge turbans, would chorus 'another hill oh baradaran (brothers)' and then 'Yallah', stroking their beards. When we made it to the top with the aid of our extra gears,they would murmur a few words of thanks to Allah. The hills at first, though dry as tinder, were not completely devoid of vegetation. The tamarisk bushes gave way, however, to a kind of dry brown grass interspersed with wild wheat, which became increasingly sparse and sandy. I was riding on the tailboard of the jeep, as inside I had been thrown continually against the hard sides, bruising all my bones and getting a stitch in my side. I was smoking a cigarette, and was stupid enough to throw the end out behind us. All the Ouzbeks gasped with horror, and pointed out that I could start a fire. It was hot enough for spontaneous combustion, and with thoughts of a bush fire overtaking us from behind, I was quite relieved when we left all vestiges of grass behind. We were crossing a spur of the Kara Kum desert. Of course, we got hogged down in the sand on the first hill, despite the 'Yallah' and the stroking of beards. We all had to get out and walk up the hill while the driver and his mate dug away the sand and unbogged the jeep. The sand was scorching, and burnt my feet even through leather sandals.

It was late afternoon by the time we reached Shibarghan, and there were loud cheers as we drove onto the end of the new Russian built road that runs straight through to Mazar. How smooth and strange it felt, and how fast we bowled along! Shibarghan was full of Russian engineers living in little camps, extracting natural gas to send to Russia by pipeline. We stopped at a covered well to refill the steaming radiator and the water skin which we carried slung at one side of the jeep. A frog was sitting on the edge of the well, and the water looked decidedly murky, but I for one was thirsty enough to drink it. The Well of the World's End, indeed, complete with frog prince. At dusk we stopped for prayers by a chai khaneh, so while the other passengers were praying I went and had some chai. The driver came to collect me and asked me what I was doing. Drinking chai, I said, and then as five times daily prayers are called 'namas', I added 'Chai is khareji (foreigners') namas'. I had obviously made a good joke, as for the next hour at least they were repeating it round the jeep and chortling. I also made them laugh by commenting on the resemblance of one old Ouzbek with a pointed beard to

a goat. Another old man was wearing protective black goggles, and his eyes underneath them were very red and weak. As far as I could make out, he had suffered an illness caused, he said, by insect bites, and the insects lived in a river. The closest thing I could find in my handbook of tropical hygiene was blackwater fever. There were also two old Ouzbeks who looked like twins and acted like two year olds. All the way from Shibarghan to Mazar I and these greybeards did nothing but lark about and fall about with laughter. When we reached Mazar the usual police escort turned up to take us to the Mazar Hotel, a very grand if unfinished affair. All the rooms were taken, but a bed was put in the foyer for me. I was so tired I felt I could sleep for a week, but in fact I was too tired even to sleep, and just lay there with all my bones aching. In the middle of the night I was overcome by thirst and had to wake up the hotel boy for some cold water. I don't think I have ever felt so tired as after that boneshaking fourteen and a half hour ride from Maimana. Someone I met later who had travelled the same route said it was worse than crossing the Sahara, and he'd done that too.

In the morning, still aching, I went to look round Mazar-i-Sharif. The road outside the hotel led straight to the mosque, a gorgeous blue cluster of domes in the centre of the town. It was surrounded by grass, from which rose flights of white doves. There were several beggars in the vicinity of the mosque, which is the shrine of Hazrat Ali, whose remains are supposed to lie there, though they are also supposed to lie in several other places. On the roadside was a person sitting in a box, who appeared to be in a trance. The person was still there the following day, in the same position exactly, with his eyes open but unseeing. It was an unnerving sensation to look into those unseeing eyes and wonder whether they were all knowing or just dead. I also wondered whether he ate anything when nobody was looking, or whether he had in fact died sitting there and no one had bothered to take him away. In the bazaar I was buying some potatoes with red pepper from a street vendor when I heard 'Ah, Salaam Aleicum' from behind me. It was the two laughing Ouzbeks from the jeep.

One thing which should not be missed in Mazar is the ice-cream. All along the road to the mosque are little stalls where milk is poured into cylinders and turned round and round in ice and salt until it peaks. It is then doled out onto saucers and made to stand up in little cones. Rosewater is sometimes sprinkled on from silver ewers. Most of the Europeans were very wary of it, but I ate quantities, and I'm not dead yet. While in Mazar, I had, of course, to visit Balkh, mother of cities. The Swiss Professor and his wife from the jeep shared a taxi with me. At Balkh chai khaneh were some hippies trying to buy hashish. The chai khaneh proprietor offered me a choice piece of Bokhara hashish, shaped like a pontefract cake with the stamp of the Russian customs clearly visible. But I brought out my usual rejoinder to the cries of 'Missis, hashish' that follow one through the seedier sections of Afghan bazaars - 'Chars nemikesham, sar khali mishe.' (I don't smoke hashish, it makes the head empty.) Several greybeards sipping chai roared with laughter, clapped me on the back, and said 'Ofarin, ofarin.'

Balkh was once a thriving metropolis on the great silk route. One of the oldest cities in the world, it was known as 'Amu Il Balad', Mother of Cities. It is said that Zoroaster was born in Balkh in the sixth century B.C. It was in Balkh that Alexander the Great is supposed to have married Roxana. The philosopher and medical man Avicenna (Ebnesina) was also from these parts. In the seventh century A.D. the Chinese pilgrim Hsuan Tsang passed through Balkh and described the splendours of the Navbahar temple with its numerous monks and its statue of Buddha. By the end of the twelfth century, the area north of Balkh, including Samarkand and Bokhara, was ruled by Ala-ud-din Mohammed, the Khwarezm Shah. In 1196, a mongol chieftain called Temujin had been proclaimed 'King of the World', or Genghis Khan; and was already busy extending his empire. Genghis Khan wrote to the powerful Khwarezm Shah thus:

> 'Greetings. I know thy power and the great extent of thy kingdom, and I look upon thee as mine own much beloved son. For they part, know that I have conquered Cathay and also many nations of the Turks. My land is a mine of silver and a camp of warriors, and I have no need of more countries. We have a common interest, it seems to me, in promoting trade between our subjects.'

Unfortunately, the Khwarezm Shah did not pay much heed to the letter, and had one of Genghis Khan's caravans cut down. A second letter followed -

> 'Thou hast chosen war. What will be, shall be. Of what sort it will be, we know not. Only God knoweth.'

The son of Ala-ud-din Mohammed, Jalal-ud-din, fled south in the face of the oncoming hordes, trying his best to retain some vestiges of the Khwarezm lands, but he was the last of the Khwarezm Shahs, and in his wake was a trail of devastation and massacre.

'Chingiz Khan crossed the river and advanced on Balkh. The chief men of the town came forward professing submission and bearing all manner of tuzghu and presents. Whereupon, because a census had to be taken, he gave orders that all the people of Balkh should be brought onto the plain and numbered. But as Jalal-ad Din was still casting confusion and disorder into these regions and riding his horse onto the field of rebellion and contumancy, the Mongols could place no confidence in their professions of submission, especially in the case of Khorasan. And since the sea of the annihilation of lands and peoples was raging and the tempest of calamity had not come to an end, there was no possible wile whereby they might ward off disaster; and since Destiny held them captive, surrender availed them not, neither could they rely on submission and abasement; while to rebel was a deadly poison and an irremediable pain. Therefore Chingiz Khan commanded that the population of Balkh, small and great, few and many, both men and women, should be driven out on to the plain and divided up according to the usual custom into hundreds and thousands to be put to the sword; and that not a trace should be left of fresh or dry. For a long time the wild beasts feasted on their flesh, and lions consorted without contention with wolves, and vultures ate without quarelling from the same table with eagles.

Eat and rend, O hyaena, and rejoice in the flesh of a man
who had no one to help him this day.

And they cast fire into the garden of the city and devoted their whole attention to the destruction of the outworks and walls, and mansions and palaces. God Almighty hath said, 'There is no city which we will not destroy before the day of Resurrection or chastise it with a grievous chastisement. This is written in the Book.'

When Chingiz Khan returned from Peshawar and arrived at Balkh, he found a number of fugitives who had remained hidden in nooks and crannies and come out again after the Mongols' departure. He commanded them all to be killed and fulfilled upon them the verse, 'Twice will we chastise them'. And wherever a wall was left standing, the Mongols pulled it down, and for a second time wiped out all traces of culture from that region.

And their mansions shall weep for them, which were once
accustomed to glory.
We begun by gazing on them with admiration and ended by
gazing on them with astonishment.'

(- History of the World Conqueror)

When Marco Polo passed this way, half a century after the death of Genghis Khan, he observed

'Balc is a noble city and great, though it was much greater in former days. But the Tartars and other nations have greatly ravaged and destroyed it. There were formerly many fine palaces and buildings of marble, and the ruins of them still remain. The people of the city tell that it was here that Alexander took to wife the daughter of Darius.'

By this time the Mongol empire had absorbed most of Russia under the Golden Horde, and most of China under Kublai Khan. A century after Marco Polo, Timur, or Tamerlane, was crowned king in Balkh and went on to conquer the lands to the south. Timur, like Babur and the Moghul emperors after him, was a descendant of Genghis Khan, but he was a Barlas Turk not a Chagatai Turk. In 1403 Clavijo, in his Embassy to Tamerlane, wrote the following account of the lands around Balkh:

(After leaving Andkhuy) 'We were now meeting with these nomads on all hands, as they were wandering seeking pasture; we passing them as we travelled on our way, for the number of these Chagatays is immensely great... All these wandering Chagatay folk appeared to us with faces so burnt by the sun that for ugliness they might well have come straight out of hell itself...

The country side in these parts is a plain and the climate is very hot: hence those of his horde and troops who go with Timur on the march for the most part travel by night...

we had come that afternoon to halt for rest in the tents of certain of those Chagatays, and at nightfall we again mounted and rode on. The next day which was Friday by mid-day we had reached a village where we had our dinner taking our afternoon repose, and that same night found ourselves in a great township of which I have forgotten to note the name.(?Shibarghan)

'This formerly had been a famous walled city of immense extent, but now the wall had fallen to ruin, and very many of the houses within it were uninhabited, though we noticed that there were many fine buildings and mosques yet standing...
on the morrow they provided us with excellent horses for the road: and that forenoon we set out again, but all that day the wind blew so violently that we were often almost unhorsed. The blast was so hot as to seem to be fire. The road lay over sandy desert and this hot wind blew the sand over us so that we were at times blinded by it and at last began to lose our way... Then by God's mercy we at last reached a large village called Aliabad where we rested for the afternoon waiting for the going down of the wind...
That same night we again mounted and rode on, passing many small villages surrounded by their orchards, and by the Monday morning which was the 18th of August had come to the city of Balkh. This city is very large and it is surrounded by a broad rampart of earth which along the top measures thirty paces across. The retaining wall flanking this rampart is now breached in many places, but inside this last the city proper is enclosed by two walls, one within the other, and these protect the settlement. The area between the outer earthen rampart and the first inner wall is not occupied by any houses and no one lives here, the ground being divided up into fields where cotton is grown...
On Thursday the 21st of August we had come to the bank of that great river named the Ab-i-Amu as the Persians call the Oxus and this is one of the streams which flows down, it is said, from Paradise. It is here a league in breadth and the current is extremely strong. The river traverses a great plain and its waters are muddy.'

Some centuries after Tamerlane, when Alexander Burnes passed through on his way to Bokhara, only the ruins were left -

'Its ruins extend for a circuit of about twenty miles, but present no symptoms of magnificence; they consist of fallen mosques and decayed tombs, which have been built of sun dried brick.'

In the nineteen thirties the Germans told the Afghans that Balkh was the original home of the Aryan race, and King Amanullah decided to build a new city there, now known as Wazirabad. He tried to encourage settlement, but the people much preferred to stay in Mazar, ten miles away, where the climate was healthier and where Hazrat Ali lay under his turquoise domes.

With the aid of the Swiss Professor's guidebook, we found the ruined Timurid mosque quite close to the chai khaneh. Its ribbed dome had fallen away at the back like a broken eggshell, and apart from the coiled blue pillars on either side of the arch, little else remained. This was the shrine of Khoja Abu Nasr Parsa, built in 1461 after Timur's death. We had read somewhere that the remains of the archway of the Navbahar palace which had perished under Genghis Khan's attack still survived, but though we walked down several avenues of shady oriental planes in search of it, we didn't find it. Instead we walked across the cotton fields to the ruined walls of Balkh. Roughly circular, maybe a mile across, they encircled a waste of dry weeds. We climbed up and sat on the rough mud wall where fragments of blue Islamic pottery were still to be found. In the spring, they say, a carpet of flowers springs up inside the walls. But no longer are they filled with human sounds, either of the living or the dying.
Below the walls on the outside was the sound of reedcutters swishing and splashing and calling to one another. A camel train passed below the ruined aqueduct, and the camel bells sounded tinnily. The cotton fields spread away to the horizon. We walked through some fields of pale yellow melons, looking for the Zoroastrain fire altars. We thought we had found one, but it turned out to be a brick kiln. We met an Afghan cutting melons and bought one massive specimen from him for a few Afghanis. On the way back to Mazar the taxi driver pointed out the two Zoroastrian fire altars flanking the road. We passed another ruined town which he said was the result of the Anglo Afghan wars.

A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush

One morning I made my way to the bazaar on the other side of the mosque for the bus to Kabul. Bread was broken over the engine and handed out to the beggars who congregate round buses. They usually receive a few coppers from the travellers who are thus assured of a safe journey under the protection of Allah. The road from Mazar to Kabul has traditionally been over the mountains to Bamian valley, then over the Shibar Pass at 9000'. Now that the new road has been built by the Russians it is possible to go from Mazar to Kabul in about ten hours, over the Salang Pass in the Hindu Kush, which at about 11,000' is the highest road tunnel in the world. An apocryphal story concerning the Salang Pass illustrates the truth of the statement that in the Aid Race between U.S.A. and Russia it is not the Russians nor yet the Americans who are winning, but the Afghans. Apparently the Russians agreed to put up half the money for the road and provide the engineers if the Afghans would put up the other half. When the road was finished, an envoy was sent from Moscow to collect the papers and the Afghan half of the money. All the documents and money had been stored in a certain house, and on the eve of the Russian envoy's arrival the house mysteriously burnt down. Of course, no one knew anything about it, and the Russians had to go without their money.

At Tashkurgan we passed the road for Kunduz, Faizabad and the province of Badakhshan where the lapis lazuli comes from. We turned south and headed for the Hindu Kush. After Pul-i-Khumri the road began to climb steeply, and soon we were in the mountains. We stopped for lunch at a little kebab house built into the hillside and straddling a fast running stream of ice cold water. We ate kebabs and nan, while the bacha dipped old coca cola bottles into the stream for us to drink. After some of the water I had been drinking in the north, it was like white wine. At the summit of the Salang Pass we entered the tunnel, emerging periodically to stretches of road protected by concrete avalanche barriers. It looked to be a magnificent piece of engineering, though some say it was built too high and will soon crack up in the extreme cold of Hindu Kush winters. I felt chilly although it was summer, and wondered what the temperature was. A fellow tourist had a thermometer and we ascertained that it had fallen to 77'F. After the heat of the Oxus plains this was cool enough to require a pullover. Patches of dirty white snow still clung to shaded hollows on the higher slopes. We had crossed the Oxus/Indus watershed, and as we came down we came on villages whose houses were of wood rather than mud, perched on the cliffs in the manner of Nuristan and Kashmir. We stopped by the river for namas on the way down, and were presented with huge wicker baskets full of sweet mulberries, freshly picked from the trees that lined the road. At Charikar the bus driver stopped so that we might all buy ourselves new pocket knives. Charikar is famous for two things, its knives, and the massacre which took place there when the British, in revenge for their own losses in the Khurd Kabul Pass, slaughtered all the males over puberty and raped most of the women.

In Kabul I spent a few days with Rasoul, and then bumped into a friend from Cambridge in the street. She was staying with a friend in the American Embassy, and invited me to join her. There followed an interlude in which I breakfasted on pancakes and maple syrup, listened to the Pathetique and the Appassionata, dined on Mexican tortillas and whisky sour from the commissary; and read about Kuchi migrations, stoning to death of adulterous women in Ghazni, jeep journeys in the Dasht-i-Margo, and British Embassy amateur theatricals in the snowbound Kabul of the forties, with wolves howling outside the compound.

My American Embassy friends were planning a trip to Bamyan and Band-i-Amir, and I was invited along. A few days before we planned to set out, a strong warning was circulated to all Embassy staff not to leave Kabul. Two women, one an American medical worker, one an Australian, had driven up to Karga Dam in their car to admire the view. It was dusk, and they were on the far side of the lake. Something had startled them and made them start the engine, and the American woman who was driving had been shot through the open window by a tribesman on the hillside. She had said 'I think I've been hit', and then died, landing the car in the ditch. The Australian woman had been grazed by the bullet but managed to get back safely. Apparently incidents like this are quite common at this time of year, when tribesmen are coming in to Kabul from all over the country for the Jeshn. We therefore decided to leave anyway, and one morning set off in a Carry All driven by one Ghulam Sakhi. We left Kabul by way of Charikar, and then turned off the Mazar road to the left into the Ghorband valley.

The road was stony and narrow, and several times we stopped while Ghulam Sakhi and Karim, our Afghan servant, changed the tyres. While they sweated under the engine I dangled my hands in the shallow Ghorband river and tried to catch the fishes that darted about, or let the tiny green frogs walk up my arms and jump off. We crossed the Shibar Pass at 9,240', and were once again on the northern side of the Indus/Oxus watershed. On the other side of the Shibar poplars grew along the Bamyan river, and behind the river rose a red sandstone cliff surmounted by the ruins of an eroded castle built of the same red rock. It was Shahr-i-Zohak, once a flourishing fortress town, long since destroyed by Genghis Khan as an act of revenge for the killing of his favourite grandson Mutigen in 1222. Passing to the right of Shahr-i-Zohak through a narrow defile, we entered Bamyan valley proper.

Bamyan valley lies between the Hindu Kush and the Koh-i-Baba (Grandfather mountains). Even in the heat of summer it is a wealth of poplars, maize, lucerne, green cotton and yellow mustard, protected on all sides by barren rock walls. Situated strategically along the trade route from Samarkand to Peshawar and Taxila, it became a meeting point for the Graeco Bactrian and the Mauryan Buddhist cultures. It must have seemed an ideal place for meditation and contemplation, and when the Chinese pilgrim Fa Hsien broke his journey here in about 400 A.D., he reported a settlement of at least a thousand Buddhist monks. These were the monks who carved out the whole cliff face into a honeycomb of little cells, and built the two Buddhas which still stand, though mutilated by the Mongols and others. Buddhism had been the prevailing religion all over Afghanistan , but with the invasions of the White Huns and the subsequent division of the land into Sassanian Satrapies, it began to disappear. Only Bamyan, protected from the outside world by its mountain walls, remained a Buddhist stronghold. In 827 a Korean traveller reported that although the Arabs had by this time subdued the Sassanians, they had not pentrated the cold mountain heights. It was not until 970, when the Turks Alptigin and Sabuktigin marched south from Balkh and took Bamyan from its Buddhist ruler, going on to found the Ghaznavid dynasty at Ghazni, that Buddhism finally vanished. The first Muslim dynasty to rule in Bamyan was the Shansabanid dynasty, founded by a brother of Ala-ud-Din Jahansoz (the world burner) whose chief claim to fame was that he sacked Ghazni before Genghis Khan sacked it.

We went up to Bamyan Hotel, an imposing Russian built edifice with a corrugated iron roof, built on a kind of natural rock platform in the centre of the valley. Sweet williams and burning bushes lined the paths, and the latest addition to the tourist amenities was a cluster of Mongol Yurts, circular felt and wattle tents, with electricity. An American Peace Corps boy was working here, helping to modernise the hotel, while his wife was teaching in the village school. We had brought them some supplies from Kabul, but he was not at the hotel, so we had to drive across a couple of potato fields and some drainage ditches to the corner of the sun-baked Qala where they lived. They had two rooms up some rickety mud stairs, and another room in which they kept chickens. They had tried keeping a camel in the garden, but the beast had ruined their vegetable plots and had to be sold. After giving them the latest news from the outside world, we drove down the river to pitch camp in a wood. Some Afghans came and watched us setting up our camp, and said 'If you stay here you will die.' One or two hunting-minded members of our party waved their guns around casually. In the night I lay awake listening to rustling grass and snapping twigs and remembering the story of the French campers. However, the night passed without incident, and we were up early and breakfasting on bacon sandwiches and coffee. On our way to visit the Buddhas we climbed up to Shahr-i-Gholghola. This is a ruined town on a hill, whose name is variously translated as 'City of Silence' or 'City of Screams'. As we climbed the steep winding paths that were once busy streets, we passed the ruins of houses whose inner rooms were still intact, and picked up many blue glazed shards. The fort at the top commanded the whole valley, and it must have been impregnable with the steep approaches and the walls that originally surrounded it. Shahr-i-Gholghola was once the seat of Jalal-ud-Din Manguberti,the son of the Khwarezm Shah who first aroused the wrath of Genghis Khan and turned his attentions south of the Oxus. When Genghis Khan arrive at Shahr-i-Gholghola, he laid siege to the city, but failed to break in. According to the legends, Jalal-ud-Din's daughter Leila Khatun fell in love with Genghis and told him that if he threw straws into the river, the point at which they stopped and spun round would show him the source of the city's water supply. With the water cut off, it was not long before the city surrendered. Genghis had Leila Khatun stoned to death, however, for betraying a father he said was too good for her.

With our pockets full of bits of Islamic pottery, we made our way across the fields to the Great Buddha. It stands 176' high, and appeared to have been carved out of conglomerate. Frescoes were still visible round the head. We climbed up inside the cliff, through the honeycomb of monks' cells. Sitting on the Buddha's topknot, I could see over the whole valley, with Bamyan Bazaar below ringing with the hammers of the tinsmiths, and a curious pattern in the potato fields as if the planters had been influenced by their own carpet designs. Although the Buddha's smile remained, he no longer looked out with me over Bamyan Bazaar, for the upper half of his face had been blasted away long since. Hsuan Tsang, writing in 632, describes the Great Buddha as follows:

'To the north-east of the royal city there is a mountain, on the declivity of which is placed a stone figure of Buddha, erect in height 140 or 150 feet. Its golden hues sparkle on every side, and its precious ornaments dazzle the eyes by their brightness.

To the east of this spot there is a convent which was built by a former king of this country. To the east of the convent there is a standing figure of the Sakya Buddha, made of metallic stone in height 100 feet.

Two or three li to the east of the royal city there is a reclining Buddha entering into Nirvana, which is more than 100 feet in length.'

The reclining Buddha is no longer to be found, it has vanished with the gold leaf that once covered the Great Buddha.

'Fen-Yen-Na. (Bamyan) This kingdom is about 2000 li from east to west, and 300 li from north to south. It is situated in the midst of the Snowy Mountains. The capital leans on a steep hill, bordering on a valley six or seven li in length. On the north it is backed by high precipices. It produces spring wheat but few flowers or fruits. It is suitable for cattle, and affords pasture for many sheep and horses. The climate is wintry; and the manners of the people are rude and uncultivated.'

Another account, by a Chinese pilgrim who preceded Hsuan Tsang by two hundred years -

'The country is in the midst of the Onion range. The snow rests on them both winter and summer. There are also among them venomous dragons, which, when provoked, spit forth poisonous winds, and cause showers of snow and storms of sand and gravel. Not one in ten thousand of those who encounters these dangers escapes with his life.'

A snakelike ridge five miles west of Bamyan [illegible] Ajdahar, the dragon killed by Hazrat Ali.

Leaving Bamyan valley behind us, we drove over the Nil Pass towards the north west. The hills here were criss-crossed by caravan tracks, and rounded and grassy rather than bare and rockstrewn. The grass, however, was dry and brown and windswept, and it was with a shock that we suddenly saw the lakes of Band-i-Amir below us. The water of the lakes was as intensely blue as any mediterranean holiday poster. Another half hour's bumpy ride brought us down to the level of the main lake. It was enclosed in steep sided walls formed of calcareous deposits like a natural dam, hence the name Band. The water was ice cold, greeny blue at the edges with coral like weeds floating near the surface. A few feet from the rim the bottom appeared to drop suddenly and the water became a deep dark blue. No one knows how deep the lakes are, they haven't yet been sounded. The water is so clear and pure one imagines it must come from subterranean springs. The lakes must have seemed miraculous to the first settlers in this barren waterless region, and various legends have grown up concerning their origin. Some say they are the footprints of Hazrat Ali, others that Ali built them for the Amir Berber of Balkh, using an assortment of unlikely materials such as mint (for Band-e-Nane) and dried cheese balls (for Band-e-Panir). It seems surprising that no settlement of any size should have been founded here to take advantage of the supply of fresh water, but I suppose this is because of its inaccessibility. There is a village of sorts further down the valley, and the ruins of mills below the main lake show that someone used the natural cascade of water over the dam to advantage. There is also a ruined mosque beside the main lake, no doubt dedicated to Ali.

We reconnoitred for a camp site, and found one between two of the lesser lakes, on a gypsum platform. The higher of the two lakes must have been Band-e-Nane, for it could only be reached through a jungle of bushes and wild mint. We hired three bachas to porter everything down the steep slope from the clifftop. As we set up camp it was growing cold and very windy so that pitching tents wasn't easy. The pegs wouldn't hold in the gypsum, so we had to pile rocks on them. A local fisherman sold us some beautiful fish taken from the lakes, which we cooked and ate for supper. They were something like large brown trout.

The night was bitterly cold. I haven't been able to find out the exact altitude of the lakes at Band-i-Amir, as on my Bartholomew's map they appear to be in the wrong valley altogether. We were high enough for sleeping bags to offer no warmth at night, and the air was thin enough to allow the sun's rays to burn us by day. We also had to boil eggs twice as long as lower down, and undoubtedly if we had contemplated making cakes would have had to add twice as much flour.

I was up early, shivering uncontrollably, and made up a fire. Two of our party inflated a rubber dinghy and went fishing, but with no success. The bachas reappeared at nine with horses which we had asked for. We settled at two hundred Afs per day for these animals. After breakfast I went out rowing in one of the dinghies. The rocks which towered over the lakes in stack formations were so deeply eroded as to look like old brickwork. The water was very blue, and apart from the lapping of the oars and the cries of birds nesting in a stack, there was no sound. The great brown speckled fish swam about silently below me. Later on I took one of the horses and tried to find a way through the wild spearmint up to the next lake. Waterholes in the tangle of mint ruled out routes that had looked possible. The horses had no saddles or stirrups, just horsecloths, and no proper bits or bridles either. However, they could be induced into a canter with no trouble though they didn't seem to know anything about trotting. Afghan riders don't trot, or if they do they don't rise because they usually don't have stirrups. Saddles, when used, are built up in front and appear to be made partly of wood. Stirrups are invariably very short.

Two Hazara children tending sheep by a pool of shallow water talked to me in Farsi. They used 'aré' rather than 'Balé' for yes, a usage I had only heard in Teheran. The Hazaras who live in this central plateau area, the Hazarajat, are supposed to be descendants of Genghis Khan's armies, and whether this is true or not they are certainly mongoloid in appearance. In Kabul one sees them as servants or porters, and they are generally looked down on by the Tajiks and Pathans. They speak Farsi rather than Pushto, and are Sh'ite Muslims like the Persians; most Afghans being Sunni Muslims like the Arabs. The younger of the two girls tending sheep was twelve, and told me she was married to a man of thirty. They asked for medicine for sore eyes, but unfortunately I had none to give them. After lunch I took Karim, our Afghan servant, and we again tried to find a way through the mint and up the steep calcareous deposits, running with rusty overflow from the higher lake. This time we got up to the second and third lakes, leading the horses up a kind of natural staircase under an overhanging cliff. Eventually we came to a lake full of reeds and divided by a grassy strip, about two yards across, from the third lake. This last was shallow and full of calcareous lumps and small bushes. There was no further path for the horses, so we turned back. My horse didn't want to come down the staircase, and it took quite a lot of coaxing and pushing before we got down again. Back on the platform, I made the mistake of going swimming in one of the shallow pools. The water of the main lakes was so icy that no one could have stayed in for more than half a minute, but I thought the shallow pool would have been warmed by the sun. I came out shivering uncontrollably. At the same time I found I had been burned by the sun - usually I brown slowly but don't burn at all - and my arms ached from rowing while the insides of my legs were sore from riding. I passed a most uncomfortable night, unable to sleep or to get into any position which was not painful.

On the morning we were due to leave Band-i-Amir, we were up at five huddling round the fire. The Bachas came at six with an ox and a donkey to porter everything up the cliff. The ox was more trouble than it was worth- it had to be beaten and almost pushed all the way up. Back at Bamyan Bazaar we had eggs and potatoes in the chai khaneh, also nan with apricot jam. We decided to take the other road back to Kabul, going over the Hajigak and Unai Passes instead of the Shibar. This route is shorter, but the passes are higher and more difficult. Hajigak is the site of quite large coal and iron ore deposits, but they have not been mined because of the difficulty of transportation. We passed many Kuchis on the move, and stopped innumerable times to change tyres. At Hajigak summit, 10,665', we could see the whole Koh-i-Baba range extending on either side and covered with snow patches, with Shah Foladi at 16,872' towering above us. The Unai Pass was not so steep, but I had a strong sensation that here we were at the centre of everything. I had a vague idea that I had read somewhere that according to the Avesta the centre of the world was about here. On one side was the source of the Hari Rud, the river which waters Herat. At Farakhulm, not far to the south west, was the source of the Helmand, that great river which once nurtured

a desert city at Lashkari Bazaar, now in ruins,the province of jackals and scorpions. At Sar Cheshme, just below the Unai Pass, the Kabul River runs out from the rock and flows east through the Suleiman range to Pakistan. From Sar Chashme to Maidan the road was shaded by many trees. In Maidan we talked to some Hazara children. A small boy carrying his little sister knew some English, which he had learned in the Maktab or village school.

Thirty kilometres out of Kabul we hit the asphalt road, and it was like stepping on the land after a long rough voyage. It was already dark, and as we entered Kabul we began to hear rumours among the lighted shops at Charikar and in the chaikhanehs. Rumour was that the dollar had been devalued. This worried me just as much as my American friends, as I carried all my money in dollars. It was days before the position of the dollar became clear, and during this time the bottom fell out of the black market. I therefore delayed my departure for India until such time as I could get a better rate in rupees for my dollars. It was while I was waiting in Kabul that an earthquake rocked the city. Only a small one, it nevertheless caused fires to break out in timber yards and bath houses. I was in bed at the time with fever, and when my bed began to move at two a.m. I thought it was all part of my slightly delirious state.

City of Dreadful Night

Nicci, the friend I had bumped into in the street and gone to Bamyan with, wanted to go to India. She had not been before, however, so we decided to go together at least as far as Delhi. We left Kabul early one morning by the Post Bus. As the road dropped down towards Jalalabad the heat increased, but when I remembered how hot it had seemed before in the Jalalabad valley, it seemed merely warm in comparison to the Persian Gulf. In the Kabul Gorge the river was very low. We stopped at the first checkpost just beyond Sarobi and sat in a green garden of orange trees. Whereas before they had only had a well with a rubber bucket at this checkpost, they had now installed an icebox with coca cola. At Torkham one of Rasoul's friends invited us to lunch, which turned out to be some rather dried up liver and kidney kebabs, then we crossed over to Pakistan. We managed to get a lift on a yellow painted lorry with landscapes all over its sides. From the box we had a marvellous view of the Khyber Pass, the air being clear not dusty. At Fort Jamrud we entered the flatness that begins at the foot of the Khyber and continues, tilting slightly, all the way to Calcutta and the Bay of Bengal. At Peshawar Cantt Station we took the Khyber Mail to Lahore, and tried to sleep on the floor. All night we were pestered by Pakistanis, who kept treading on us with their horrible flat sandals and at six a.m. started kicking us and poking us, shouting 'Stand up, now is not sleeping time.'

In Lahore we waited for the border bus that was due at ten, or eleven, or twelve, or possibly one - opinions differed. It arrived at 11.40, and we asked to be allowed to travel on the roof as there was obviously no room inside. However, it seems that rooftop travel is not allowed in Pakistan, so we crammed in as best we could among the mass of bodies bulging from the doorway. A woman crushed next to me kept digging me in the ribs with her sharp elbow and talking to me in Urdu of which I understood not a word. At Ganda Singh Wala, the Pakistan border, we refreshed ourselves with Lassi and biscuits. A line of porters in grey or blue shirts were crossing the border with baskets of hay on their heads, a man with a long whip supervising them from behind. Apparently all lorries wishing to cross the border have to be unloaded on one side and reloaded on the other, the scrawny porters carrying everything across on their heads. At Hussainiwala on the other side of the branch the Sikh officials seemed noticeably more intelligent than their Pakistani counterparts and had more of a sense of humour. They fed us on grapes, and handled our British passports with reverence, confiding in us about those dreadful Americans who 'are helping Pakistan' with arms and aid. We took a cycle rickshaw across the Sutlej bridge. Green parrots and striped hoopoes fluttered in the bushes, and the trees arched over us. It was someting like going into the Palm House at Kew. At Ferozepore station the concession office was closed so we had to pay full fare to Delhi. We had some excellent fish in the refreshment room- had it come from the Sutlej? In the Ladies Only Compartment we met an American woman who was writing a programme for the education of the deaf in Afghanistan. She was going to have to learn Farsi and Pushto first, but for the moment she was seeing India. A man at the station had told her that in Ladies Only compartments one could occupy a berth without making a reservation, so we did too. I changed into my dishdasha and took the upper berth, that is to say the luggage rack.

In Delhi we took a scooter wallah to Mrs Colaco's on Janpath Lane, and actually got beds there. Mrs Colaco's is a famous establishment, and therefore usually full. Naturally my first action on returning to a pork eating part of the world was to go to Connaught Place and eat pork. However, the Milk Bar, the Indian Coffee House, and all the other restaurants had been closed by a waiters' and hotel workers' strike. The waiters were sitting outside on mats playing cards, while the door handles were draped with red flags and slogans. We eventually found a place called the 'Committee for the Change of Food Habits', where they were serving such delicacies as baked beans on toast. In the afternoon I bought a fresh supply of paperbacks, and Nicci left for Agra. I stayed another night under the whirring fans at Mrs Colaco's, then went to the station to catch a train to Calcutta. When I got there I discovered that trains for Calcutta only go from Old Delhi Station, so back in the scooter wallah and another hair raising drive in and out of the traffic to Old Delhi. At Old Delhi station I tried to buy a ticket, was first directed to various wrong places, finally found the right ticket queue but found that the clerk wouldn't sell me a ticket. Just as I had arrived at the head of the queue, the hour for his lunch break had struck, and although his replacement hadn't arrived he was quite adamant about not selling tickets in his lunch break. There was a long queue behind me, and as time passed and the replacement still did not arrive, the queue began to get angry.

Businessmen with attache cases and babus in white dhotis waved their umbrellas at him, and it looked as though a riot might develop. However, the replacement arrived and everyone settled down. By the time I had got my ticket there was barely time for breakfast in the refreshment room, and I had to hire a red shirted porter to carry my heavy rucksack on his head. There were no seats left of course, and no Ladies Only compartments either. I didn't think I could stand all the way to Calcutta, there wasn't even room to stand properly, but luckily someone made room for me on the edge of a seat. A little girl of about four came into our carriage soon after we left Delhi, playing the sticks and singing not quite in tune. The passengers started to laugh, and when I asked what she was singing they said
'Oh, very romantic songs, very romantic.'
She was very persistent in her demands for money, and very successful, as who could resist such an appealing face?

The landscape of grass with clumps of trees dotted about was oddly reminiscent of English parkland. However, in the morning we had come to a land of water. Jute platers strode about up to their waists in it, and boys poled dugout canoes among the coconut palms. This was Bengal, and I remembered the proud little boy in Pather Panchali reciting the passage about 'long live the land of Bengal'- Jai Bangla Desh. We soon drew into Calcutta, and there was Howrah Bridge, teeming with people. I took a rickshaw to the Red Shield hostel, and for the first time saw the rickshaws familiar from old photographs of the east- those pulled by a man on foot rather than a man on a bicycle. This was the land of tiffin and gharries and solar topees, chota pegs and Bengal Club Chutney; and from here one could go on to Burma, Thailand, Malaya, Macou, China. Green oranges called sweetlimes, pinnapples, sugar cane, custard apples and other exotic fruits whose names I didn't know were on sale at all the street corners. Green coconuts were being split open with axes for the passers by to drink from, and buffaloes rooted in the gutter among the shells. At little stalls sour limes were being squeezed and mixed with sugar cane juice for thirsty shoppers, the sugar cane being pressed through iron cogwheels.

On the following day it rained and I had a streaming cold. I saw a march, of people from a district a hundred miles away that was flooded. They had no food in their villages, so they had marched all the way here and were now chanting in front of Government House surrounded by lines of police with batons. Their leader, a man with long hair and a beard, was leaping around encouraging them, and many of them carried red flags. A man watching told me
'They are protesting because they are getting no relief from the Goverment'.
'Oh', I said, 'Will they get it now?'
'No they won't'.
Meanwhile the trams went on passing and repassing with their human cargo hanging from the sides, and the double decker buses swayed under their load. I bought a slice of pineapple and munched it. Beside the tramlines a tent had been set up containing an exhibition on Bangla Desh- this was before the war, when it was still East Pakistan in all but aspiration. There were photographs of the freedom fighters at work, and of the refugees and the atrocities already beginning. For twenty five paisa I purchased a copy of 'The People', subtitled 'The Only English Language Newspaper from Bangladesh', published from Mujibnagar. Inside were more photographs of refugees, an article on warfare in the mango swamps by a Mukti Bahini freedom fighter, and a very funny satire entitled '3 Faces of Yahya' from which I quote-

'Yahya: Hamid, you are such a bloody good friend that you always understand me more than anyone else. I am really fond of beautiful things, beautiful places and beautiful women. But since I took over as you bloody President, I had to be busy for all my time with all rubish works of the Government. I couldn't even have one hour time with a beautiful woman during last four days.

Hamid: Peerjada, it is really too much that you are keeping Yahya engaged all the time only with work....

Yahya: Peerjada, I must tell you frankly I don't like all bloody protocal measures in my movement. I have to go to certain places to meet my girl friends where I can't take the bloody pilot jeeps with siren. I have to go there secretly. So, you must relax all these usual protocal measures. I would like to go to these places, in a chevrolaet car only with two plain dressed security guards.'

Crore = 10 Lakhs
Lakh = 100,000

A headline on another page read 'Evacuee influx exceeds 74 Lakhs.' I always forget how much a lakh and a crore means, I think a lakh is ten thousand and a crore a hundred thousand, or it might be the other way round. Either way, 74 Lakhs is too many refugees to be piling up just outside an already overcrowded Calcutta.

In the Red Shield hostel was a girl who had just returned from working in Barrackpore refugee camp, administering eye drops under the aegis of CARITAS, a Catholic organisation. At her recommendation I walked down Park Street, past the old British cemetary, to see Father de Souza and offer my services. Next Morning at six I was taken in a van to Mother Teresa's orphanage, where we loaded the van with great cauldrons of curry and rice and bundles of cotton saris and dhotis. Mother Teresa's sisters of charity wore white saris with blue borders, and sat reciting their Hail Marys all the way along the road. They were charming people, and not at all bothered by anyone else's faith or lack of it. We were bound for Salt Lake camp, just beyond Dum Dum airport. On the way we passed a wedding procession with pipes and drums. At Salt Lake we passed through empty sectors of land where the refugees had originally been housed. This land had been cleared of refugees by court order because the owners wanted to build houses on it. We soon arrived in a sort of extended village of hastily contsructed huts with deep drainage channels on either side of the road bridged by planks. Children ran out and followed the jeep. Most of the shacks were built of bamboo with black plastic roofing, as was the main hospital building with its hospital smell. Here people were lying on webbing beds or on the floor, labelled as to diagnosis and treatment. A small child stood unsteadily in between the beds, thin and potbellied, with a strange expression on its wizened old man's face. A man like a skeleton crouched on one of the beds looking sad. We were introduced to the doctors. The medical section appeared to be very well organised, with all sorts of supplies including a new compressed air vaccinator for cholera vaccine, that had not yet been used. Queues outside the hospital tent waited patiently for their diagnosis.
Across the camp was a tank in which people were bathing. We talked to some local people living on the edge of the camp, in particular an Anglo Indian man who was very pleased to be able to talk to a British person, and sent his servant scrambling up a coconut palm to knock down coconuts for us to drink. There was thunder and black monsoon clouds building up to the east, but no rain as yet. I wondered what the already muddy ground would be like after a few rainstorms. The drainage ditches were banked up with sandbags, but it seemed rather like a hopeless gesture in the face of the coming monsoon. All the refugees had little plastic cards without which they could not obtain their rations. This was to stop destitutes from Calcutta from coming in and taking advantage. The ration queues were immensely long, stretching right round the camp, every person carrying some kind of tin bowl. Various notices dotted around the camp in Bengali gave advice and admonitions, and a loudspeaker warned the refugees not to use soap when washing in the Tank as it made the water muddy. Some of the people were living in huge concrete pipes, and here the women were washing clothes in puddles and beating them on the ground. A stream of refugees was passing back and forth along the road that led into the camp. Some enterprising Bengalis had already started trading with whatever articles they had managed to bring with them.

Back at the Hospital area we went round the various 'wards', some tents, some bamboo huts. In the delivery ward one woman was unconscious. She was full-term, but there had been no signs of labour, and she was fixed up to an intravenous drip. The sisters told us that most of the babies are born at night, and of course most don't need to come to the hospital as young peasant girls don't usually suffer complications in childbearing. There was an average of three births a day, and the death rate was about two a day. The camp already had 150,000 refugees, and more were arriving daily.
In the next tent was a very young girl with a newborn baby that wouldn't suck. Another woman had newborn twins, and they were very tiny. In another tent were the dead bodies. Two dead children who must have been about four and five looked as though they were just sleeping, arms thrown out and feet curled up. Another ward contained the cholera recoveries, no new cases having been reported for some days. The commonest ailments were pneumonia and dysentery. In the tent for the dying, the sisters were administering barley water and glucose water. There was a very old man who had been near starvation and could keep nothing else down. An old woman with cropped hair and shrivelled breasts was too weak to turn over and kept crying out in Bengali for something. A skeleton of a man lay on another bed too weak to brush away the flies that crawled on his face. The sisters come every morning and wash the aged dying who have lain all night in their own dirt because

no one else wants to bother with them. The Indian doctors are too busy with more interesting cases. 'Sometimes they die fifteen minutes later' explained one of the sisters - 'One old man, we were washing him, and he just expired.'

Back in Calcutta there was no water at the Red Shield, and a procession of Government employees with red banners was demanding higher pay. A General Strike had been planned for Thursday, so I decided to take a train to Madras on Wednesday. To obtain my concession ticket to Madras I had to go to a place called Eden Garden. This was a large dim hall, like most Indian government offices full of ancient desks stacked to the ceiling with papers. I wondered if anyone had ever read them, and whether there would be such a sea of useless writings if we, the British, hadn't given the Indians bureaucracy. Kipling said 'Western education is an exotic plant. We brought it out from England exactly as we brought out the ink-bottles and the patterns for the chairs. We planted it and it grew - monstrous as a banian. Now we are choked by the roots of it spreading so thickly in this fat soil of Bengal.'

The Madras Mail was due to leave at 18.35. The water was back on at the Red Shield, so I took a shower and went to Hogg's market to buy food for the journey. Thirty six hours without a restaurant car, or so I had been told. I managed to get some bananas, except that they were called plantains; and a currant loaf. There were several rickshaw wallahs who used to stand around all day outside the Red Shield looking forlorn, so I hired one of them to take me to the station. I thought I would see more of Calcutta from a rickshaw than from a taxi. It was about an hour's walk to Howrah for a rickshaw coolie, so we left early. It was raining steadily, and he put up a kind of canvas hood and apron on the rickshaw. At a busy junction in the centre of Calcutta rickshaws were evidently not allowed, as an angry policeman in blue shorts came and pushed us back in the face of the oncoming multitude brandishing his baton. Another rickshaw wallah had quite a fight with him, and crowds gathered to watch. We crossed Howrah bridge, where the pineapple sellers were noisily hawking their wares. Below lay the Hooghly, flat and grey under a monsoon sky, and docks and factories extending along her banks as far as the eye could see.

Howrah Station refreshment room had fish on the menu - I hoped it wasn't from the Hooghly. A porter kindly told me which part of the surging crowd I should stand my ground in if I wanted to be opposite the Ladies Only carriage when the train came in. The compartment, when it drew alongside the platform, proved to be locked. Eventually another porter came and unlocked it, and I secured a luggage rack for myself. A vendor came round with one and two rupee food parcels. I bought a two rupee one, which proved to contain one hard-boiled egg, one potato cutlet, bread and butter, and another banana. Although the man in the railway booking office had assured me the train went via Nagpur, we soon came in sight of the sea, and followed the coastal route south. I was hungry, and by Thursday lunchtime I had eaten all my food. Happily, a conductor came round to offer lunch, Western Style, for six rupees. This was served at eleven a.m, which is the South Indian lunch hour; and consisted of cold soup, chicken in sauce, runny jelly, and cold coffee. The landscape by now had altered to one of red hills and green trees, the palm trees having a very strange appearance as if their tops had been cropped. They looked more like makeshift telegraph poles than trees. Circular low thatched huts appeared from time to time, all under a dark lowering monsoon sky. I was hungry all day. I tried various fried things from station vendors, but they weren't very inspiring. The dreaded chai-garam in buckets, however, had given way to coffee as we came further south, and very delicious coffee it was. Afraid of losing my desirable upper berth, I stayed there all day, and as there wasn't room to sit up comfortably, spent all day lying down. I was reading Swinson's North West Frontier. I woke up several times in the night with backache caused by sleeping in one after another of the only three possible positions on the hard narrow shelf. The village women squatting on the floor below me were very beautiful, with brown breasts and brown shoulder blades under their cotton saris, and gold rings in their noses amd ears. A little girl had nothing on at all apart from a string around her loins with a gold medallion.

At five a.m. on Friday morning I woke to find the train standing somewhere on the outskirts of Madras. It was still dark. I changed out of my dishdasha, which I had taken to wearing at night on Indian trains to take the place of a sleeping bag (too hot) and to avoid having to wake and sleep in the same clothes. I cleaned myself as far as possible with spit and paper handkerchiefs. I undid and replaited my hair - it was generally impossible to comb it without actually washing it, and both in the wind and dust of Afghanistan and the sticky heat of India I usually wore it in pigtails or up, to keep it from getting too matted. It changed texture completely after going to India with me, and has never been the same since. I can see why Indian women smother themselves with coconnut oil and suchlike. By the time the train moved off, the carriage was reeking of wet nappies, and babies were crying. We pulled into Madras station at six.

Flesh of the Sun's Flesh

I had been given an address to stay at in Madras, so I took a cycle rickshaw to Lloyd Road, asking the rickshaw driver to go by way of South Beach Road so that I could see the Indian Ocean. Flowers, some like giant gladioli, lined the sea front. Boats with upturned prows were beached along the waterline. This was not just south India, this was a different place altogether, this was Tamil Nadu. The streets were clean and empty after Calcutta, the whole atmosphere was more stimulating and less oppressive than elsewhere in India. The people were different, more alert and alive. Perhaps it was the sea air. Coffee shops were everywhere, and the smell of coffee grinding followed us down the road. At Lloyd road preparations for a wedding were in progress - a bamboo annexe was being built on to the front of the house. I was taken to the house of a friend, Tara, who was the headmistress of the local school. After lunch I went to the Tourist Office and tried to change some money, but the black market rate was very low and the rickshaw driver wanted commission. On the way back I got lost in the little side streets of the Bazaar, but while a crowd gathered round the rickshaw driver, all offering helpful advice no doubt, a girl appeared and said 'Are you the lady from Mrs Chari's?' It was Tara's daughter, Kavita, coming home from school. I had a shower and was shown how to put on a sari. I started to learn a few words of Tamil from Kavita.

On Sunday I took a bus from the Tourist Office for a tour of the nearby temples. There was a Canadian girl aboard who had been working on a nutrition project in Lucknow. The road was good, and we passed numerous thatched huts and more of those ridiculous palm trees that go up straight for so many feet and then terminate in a little tuft. They looked like worn out bottle brushes. At Kancheepuram we saw the temples of Shiva and Vishnu. There were tanks, columns, carvings, and a very ancient mango tree that nullified all one's sins if touched. An elephant resident in the temple had the V shaped Vishnu sign on its forehead. There were chariots for parades, painted and carved all over with snakes and elephants and birds. In the tank fishes crowded to the surface to be fed, and steps led down for bathers. We were not allowed into the inner sanctum, this was reserved for Hindus. From Kancheepuram we went on to a place with an unpronouncable name where there was a famous hill. A pair of kites were supposed to come to the top of the hill every day at the same hour to be fed by the priest. They were supposed to be two sages, flying in every day from Benares on their way to Rameswaram. We had to take off our sandals to climb up the endless staircase, and the ground was truly scorching, so I stayed down in the village and had coffee in a coffee shop. The coffee is poured from one stainless steel cup to another at a height, to cool it. Many people were eating rice concoctions from plates made of green leaves stitched together. We went on to Mahabalipuram on the seashore, had lunch in the Tourist Lodge, and then went to see the shore temples. I paddled in the sea in my sari. Some children came along selling shells they had picked up. Here was my chance to try out my Tamil and see if it was understood. They offered me a shell. 'Eneka Vendam' I said (I don't want). They were delighted, and gave me a whole handful of shells free. One of the children, a little boy, knew phrases in all sorts of languages including Russian - he had picked them up from tourists.

Tara and her family wanted me to cook them an English meal before I left, so I went with Kavita to a market at the end of the street and bought any vegetables I could recognise, including something I hoped was spinach. I had myself tasted a new food at Tara's house - shark - though they didn't tell me until after I had eaten it.

On Tuesday I caught the Link Express to Delhi, getting an upper berth again in the Ladies Only compartment. A stencilled notice in English and Hindi, but not Tamil, read

LESS LUGGAGE
MORE COMFORT
MAKE TRAVEL A PLEASURE

Every time we came to a station we stopped for half an hour or so and there was the chaos of people getting on and off, porters with tin trunks on their heads, vendors shouting their wares and so on. I bought something called a curd bathi from one of the vendors. It consisted of a sort of cake of rice and yoghourt wrapped up in a leaf and containing very hot black seeds. A man from the catering department promised to bring me dinner at eight thirty in the evening, but it never materialised, so I went to sleep without any. I woke at Nagpur around seven a.m., and the catering man appeared with Western Style breakfast - eggs, toast and tea. The train was relatively empty after

Nagpur. One of the women made a hammock for her baby by slinging a piece of cloth between two upper berths, and the train kept it rocking. The women all called each other sister, which reminded me of the old men in the jeep from Maimana to Shibarghan shouting 'Another hill O Baradaran'. After dusk we reached Bina, and there was intermittent lightning, silent and persistent. A dark breast of clouds filled the sky, in impalpable bands like the bars on waterwashed sand. One or two large ragged trees against the darkness gave the impression of being windswept despite the stillness of the air, a stillness presaging a storm. Lightning flickered again on the shorelines of the cloud. Ahead, a group of lights were suspended against the low flocked clouds in the area of persisting light. Some fifteen minutes later it was completely dark, and the train was moving in a blackness in which nothing was discernible. The storm broke. Fierce rain came in at the windows, tremendous flashes of sheet lightning lit the area. I, wanting the rain to touch me, opened the door on the lee side and stood listening to the rain, trying to make out the dividing line between sky and land, then a flash illuminated the whole scene and I saw we were crossing a river, lurid silver below. At the next station the cries of the chai vendors were muffled on the dark platform. Small glows came from fires in samosa stalls.

There seemed to be two rival factions of catering staff of the train - one brought me vegetable curry for lunch, the other eggs and toast. Being hungry I ate both. At four they both turned up with coffee but bumped into one another so one went away. At eight thirty in the evening I had vegetable cutlets and bread and butter, and made them into sandwiches to disguise the taste of the chillies. Both factions came separately with bills, and both demanded 1.50 rupees for the biscuits I had with my coffee. As I had only had one packet I argued with them. A man travelling in the first class and speaking better English came and intervened, and ended up by giving them three rupees to divide between them and inviting me to come and have a drink later. That night the carriage was empty but for three women and myself. A railway official came and told us to lock all the doors on the inside. Why? He seemed to think that people would climb in during the night and steal things or perhaps murder us. We locked the doors, but it meant that at every station people were beating on them and clamouring to be let in. It struck me that the bars on Indian train windows were perhaps not to stop people falling out, as I had thought, but to stop them getting in. However, it wasn't until quite recently when I read John Masters' book The Deceivers, which is about thugs and thuggee, that I had second thoughts about that train ride through central India. The thugs were followers of Kali, the black goddess who thrived on human blood, and they used to fall in with parties of travellers and then ritually strangle them at an opportune moment. They operated mainly in the area between Jhansi and Nagpur. Thuggee, like Suttee and other traditional customs, was'abolished' long ago, but who knows whether there are not still a few devotees who practise the art of the handkerchief with a coin knotted at one end, for Kali.

At Delhi I went to take a shower in the first class Ladies Waiting Room, and the Ayah asked to see my ticket. I explained that I had just arrived from Madras and given up my ticket at the barrier. It was raining hard in Delhi, and quite cool. I took a scooter wallah to the Pakistan High Commission for my road permit to cross into Pakistan. This was just before the Bangla Desh war, and lines and lines of Pakistanis were queueing up to get out before war overtook them. Strangely enough, the man writing out permits remembered me from 1969. In Connaught Circus the waiters' strike was over and I had pork chops in the United Coffee House. The Canadian girl from Madras was there, on her way to Benares, and an American boy en route for Kathmandu. A German boy on the platform at Delhi station waiting for the Ferozepore train said he had been able to get his Afghan visa at the Embassy that morning in one hour flat. Perhaps I should have got mine in Delhi too instead of waiting till Peshawar, but I had remembered the Delhi Ambassador as being rather unsympathetic. The train was only one hour late. We made for the three tier sleeping accomodation as a station official had told us reservations were not necessary, but this was not true and we were turned out, by which time the rest of the train was jampacked with no room even for standing comfortably. On the train we met an Iranian man- he was very pleased to be able to speak Farsi as he had been ill in Bombay for the past six months. At Ferozepore the ticket inspector came on board, and in the press I had lost my ticket. An argument ensued, with all those on the platform crowding round to stare until I got so angry I tried to shut the window down on their poking fingers. The inspector said I should pay twenty two rupees for my fare from Delhi, although in fact the lost ticket had only cost me twelve rupees eighty five paisa. Eventually he settled for thirteen rupees, ten of them Indian and the other three Pakistani as I had no more Indian currency. Disgruntled, I got on the bus that was taking us to the border.

All the way from Istanbul east rumours had been circulating about the latest formidable addition to the Indian customs post - a woman, whose special function was to search female hippie bodies for concealed hashish. However, she turned out to be very friendly. 'So you like Indian dress?' she said, smiling, and fingering the hem of my sari. And that was all. Not even my rucksack was searched. Not that I had any hashish, but there is nothing more frustrating than having all one's things turned out and thrown around when one has so carefully packed them.

In Pakistan, the customs officer wanted to see all my currency. I emptied my bag of odd coins all over his desk. He was most interested in the Fils and Deutschmarks, Rials and Kurush, and wanted to know what they were all worth. He fancied the only one of any value, the five deutschmark piece, for his collection. Could he have it? I was afraid not- how did he expect me to eat in Germany? There were a couple of Austrians trying to cross the border, but the passport officer hadn't heard of Austria, and kept trying to write it under Australia. One of the luxury buses, which had been rumoured to exist, but of which I had never before seen an example, was waiting to transport us to Lahore for two rupees seventy five paisa. I sat on the step drinking cups of hot milk from a stall while waiting for the driver to appear, and then slept most of the way to Lahore. The station porters at Lahore were only offering seven rupees to the dollar, which was not good. As it was Friday, the concession office was closed and I needed more Pakistani money than I had for my ticket. I tried to change ten dollars in the bazaar, but everyone was extremely furtive, and nobody offered more than seven, so I took a taxi through the green and pleasant cantonment area to the Intercontinental Hotel. They changed it for me at the tourist rate of eight point three, which wasn't at all bad considering the bank rate is only four.

While I was waiting for the Khyber Mail I had a British Raj dinner in the station refreshment room among the potted palms. I had bought a copy of the Karachi newspaper 'Dawn', and read it over my coffee. Among various intriguing headlines such as 'Chicken War Probe Ordered', '719 Bad Characters Arrested', 'Editor held for House Trespass', I came across a long article headed 'THE MESSAGE OF ISLAM: The Meaning and Place of Jihad in Islam.'
Jehad is religious war, war against the infidel, in which the good Muslim knows that provided he kills as many infidels as he can he will go straight to Paradise when he himself is killed. The writer of the article was evidently stirring up battle lust for the coming Bangla Desh war.

> 'Jihad is a must for Muslims. They must struggle in the way of Allah. This struggle, in fact, is the essence of Islam. Without it, the Muslims would neither achieve success in this world nor would they earn the pleasure of Allah in the Hereafter.
> It is the spirit of Jihad that provides the noblest motivation to a believer.If he loses this motive power, he loses his raison d'etre as the member of an ideological fraternity that has been created solely for the purpose of propagating the message of goodness and eradicating evil in all its manifestations.
> Describing this basic mission of the Muslims, the Quran says:
> "Ye are the best of peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong and believing in God."
> Evil, as everybody knows, is a force. It is always backed by a Godless system. Once established as a way of life, it strikes roots deep under the social, political and economic moorings of the society. It creates its own vested interests in all walks of life. These vested interests fight hard to maintain the evil-saturated status quo. This is so because it is a matter of their own life and death. If the status quo is disturbed by the forces of goodness, it would been the death of the wrong system. Wrong, therefore, abhors Right. Darkness is afraid of Light. The forces of Kufr (disbelief) and Shirk (polytheism) dread the onward march of Islam.' - and so on, in the same vein, for 28 column inches.

The Khyber Mail, when it arrived, was impossibly full, with people pushing and fighting to get on without letting anyone off. Porters were using their tin trunks as battering rams. Everyone was treading on my toes and pushing and shoving and poking and hitting, and the noise was a deafening babel as people tried to make themselves heard above the voice of the train itself. I must say I acquired a lot of respect in the east for the system which taught me, at nursery school, how to behave in such situations. The Ladies Only compartment was full of tribeswomen from Karachi - Baluchis, I think. They wore colourful clothes and spent most of their time companionably picking lice out of each others' hair. Halfway to Rawalpindi a man got on and tried to make room for his wife, and in doing so trod on my sandal and broke it.

When I protested he said 'You have done this yourself.'
At Rawalpindi most of the passengers got off, and I was at last able to get a whole luggage rack to myself and sleep most of the way to Peshawar.
When I woke we were crossing the Indus at Attock, back in Frontier country.
It was in the region of Attock that Jalal-ud-Din, escaping from Genghis Khan, galloped his horse over the hundred and fifty foot cliffs and swam the Indus to safety:

'When he (Genghis Khan) reached Ghazna he recieved tidings that Jalal-ad-Din had departed from thence a fortnight since with the object of crossing the Indus. He appointed Mama Yalavich to be basqaq of Ghazna, whilst he himself pursued Jalal-ad-Din like the wind which drives the clouds, until he came up with him on the banks of the Indus. The Mongol army cut off the Sultan's front and rear and encompassed him on every side; they stood behind one another in several rings in the shape of a bow and made the Indus like a bowstring. Chingiz-Khan ordered his men to exceed themselves in battle and to endeavour to take the Sultan alive. Meanwhile Chagatai and Ogetei also had arrived from Khorazm. The Sultan, for his part, seeing that the day of action was arrived and the time of battle, set his face to combat with the few men that were still left to him. He hastened from right to left and from the left charged upon the Mongol centre. He attacked again and again, but the Mongol armies advanced little by little leaving him less space to manoeuvre and less room to do battle; but still he continued to fight like an angry lion.

Whithersoever he spurred on his charger, he mingled
dust with blood.

Since Chingiz-Khan had ordered them to take him prisoner, the army were sparing with their lances and arrows, wishing to execute Chingiz-Khan's command. But Jalal-ad-Din was too quick for them and withdrew. He was x brought a fresh horse, and mounting it he attacked them again and returned from the charge at the gallop.

Like the lightning he struck upon the water and like the
wind he departed.

When the Mongols saw him cast himself in the river they were about to plunge in after him. But Chingiz-Khan prevented them. From excess of astonishment he put his hand to his mouth and kept saying to his sons, 'Such a son must a father have'.

When Isfandiyar gazed behind him, he descried him on the
dry land on the far side of the stream.
He said: 'Call not this being a man - he is a raging
elephant endued with pomp and splendour.'
So he spoke and gazed thitherwards where Rustam went
seeking his way.

To be brief, all of Jalal-ad-Din's army that were not drowned in the river were slain by the sword. His wives and children were brought before Chingiz-Khan, and as for those that were male, down to the very sucklings, the breast of death was put to the mouth of their lives and they were given to nurse to Ibn-Daya, (the Crow) that is, they were thrown to the carrion crows.

It is hard for us that Ibn-Daya continues to examine that
to which the tear-ducts are joined.

Since the riches and wealth which the Sultan had with him consisted chiefly of gold and silver coin he had given orders that day for all of it to be cast into the river. The Mongols sent in divers to bring up what they could out of the water.
This event, which was one of the wonders of Destiny, fell out in Rajab of the year 618 (Aug-Sept 1221). And there is a proverb which says, 'Live in Rajab and thou shalt see wonders.'

Pearl of Pearls

A thicket of summer grass
Is all that remains
Of the dreams and ambitions
Of ancient warriors.
- Basho
('The Narrow Road to the Deep North')

In Peshawar I had to change some money into Afghanies, and I got 100 Afs for fifteen rupees, which virtually meant that the ten dollar bill I had changed in Lahore was now only worth five. The tonga driver who took me to the Afghan Embassy was a Pathan, and understood Farsi. He said that the rate should have been 100 Afs for twelve rupees. The Afghan Ambassador gave me a visa valid for thirty days which was nice, but I had a train to catch for Moscow and wouldn't be needing it anyway. I bought a ticket for the Afghan Post Bus leaving at seven the next morning, and then, as I didn't fancy the Salateen Hotel in Cinema Road, went back to the Ladies Waiting Room of Peshawar Cantt. Station. I had a shower and sewed up the hem of my skirt. Some Pakistani women were waiting for a train, and found me most intriguing. They kept touching me and asking questions. I couldn't understand much Urdu, but some of the words seemed to be the same as in Farsi or Hindi, and as far as I could make out they wanted to know: Was I married? Did I have children? Was my skin white all over? Did I use something to whiten it? Why didn't I have any children? Was there something wrong with me? and so on. I got fed up with their curiosity and went for a walk round Peshawar. In an Arts Emporium I found a Ghazni cup of the kind they sell in Kabul for 50 Afs, but the proprietor was charging 38 rupees for it and swore it was Persian. I had dinner in Green's Hotel under British Raj photographs and oil paintings. When I walked back to the station it was already dark. Behind the ragged trees was a bright curded silver patch of sky - the moon must have been full somewhere out there. Tongas were standing with oil lamps lit, and a row of scooter wallahs were parked along the roadside, their foil decorations picked out by the lights from the kebab shops. As I walked along the road I passed from areas of light and voices and smells into areas where the darkness was a part of the incessant noise of crickets and the shadowed presence of the trees. The bright rim of the moon appeared behind a cloud, further to the right hung a star, angrily red. The clouds parted until the whole disc of the moon was visible, bright and as though cut out of paper. As the moon slid behind the black ragged edge of another cloud, the solid cloud masses seemed to separate like so much pulled cotton. I crossed the bridge and one or two tongas trotted by. The lightness in the sky now and the way the clouds were ranged suggested wind. By the time I reached the station the moon was floating free, seemingly reflected in the sky, not as in a mirror but as in a sheet of smooth metal. An old man with a white beard, presumably the caretaker, asked me by sign language whether I intended sleeping in the Ladies Waiting room. I indicated that I did, and this seemed to be all right with him. I slept on a string bed under the fan, and in the morning gave him a bakhshish.

Walking down to the old town for the Afghan Post Bus, I noticed for the first time the names above the shops. They were all Pathan tribal names- Shinwari, Wazir, Yusufzai, Durrani. This last is the name of the royal family of Afghanistan. The Durrani tribe, originally the Abdali, is divided into seven subtribes, including the subtribes of Saddozai and Mohammedzai. All the kings of Afghanistan since the first king, Ahmed Shah Baba, have been either Saddozais or Mohammedzais. The present ruler of Afghanistan, Daoud, although he does not call himself King (Padeshah), is nevertheless a Mohammedzai Durrani. The history of Afghanistan as a nation state really only begins with Ahmed Shah Baba, the first Durrani, in 1747. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, to quote Caroe,

'Kabul remains attached to the Mughal Empire of Delhi, where Aurangzeb was still upon the throne. Kandahar, lost to the Safawis of Persia by Shah Jahan in 1649, stands in spite of every Mughal effort as the frontier city of the Shahinshah of Isfahan towards India. The vale of Peshawar, the mountains of Roh and all the low lands between the Sulaiman range and the Indus are still nominally within the Mughal frontiers, but Mughal writ runs uncertainly even in the plains and does not extend to the hill tracts. Even main lines of communication, such as that through the Khaibar, are continually subject to interruption, and regular administration, with all the details of the Mughal revenue system, hardly reaches beyond the towns and lands adjacent to the highways. Peshawar itself is nominally part of the Mughal province of Kabul, under a Deputy Governor.'

With the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, the Mughal Empire broke up and the Marathas began their rise to power in India. The East India Company was already established in various parts of India, though it was not until the Battle of Plassey, ten years

after the accession of Ahmed Shah to the throne of Afghanistan, that India really became part of the British Empire.

In 1739 Nadir Shah, the 'Napoleon of Persia' invaded India and occupied Delhi. After a nine-hour massacre in which the streets ran with blood, Delhi was systematically looted. In the following year Nadir Shah reached Kandahar on his way back, bringing with him the Peacock Throne of Shah Jahan, the crown jewels of the Moghuls including the Koh-i-Nur diamond, clothing, furniture, priceless illuminated manuscripts, three hundred elephants, ten thousand horses, ten thousand camels, and fifteen crores of rupees in cash. By autumn Nadir Shah had reached Herat and was picking up volunteers from the Abdali, hoping for loot. He went on to take Samarkand, Bokhara and Khiva before returning in 1741 to Meshed which he made his capital. In the following years Nadir Shah became so cruel and suspicious that his followers turned away from him and began to devise ways of getting rid of him. Nadir had already had his own son Raza Quli blinded in case he might be getting ambitions above his station, and in 1747 he decided that his officers were planning to assassinate him. He gave orders to Ahmed Khan, a young Abdali Afghan who was in command of the cavalry while his elder brother Zulfiqar Khan campaigned in Mazanderan, to arrest them all. Unfortunately for him, the supposed plotters got wind of the counter plot and not wishing to be executed struck on the night before they were due to be arrested. Nadir's decapitated body was found lying in the tent by his Abdali bodyguard. Ahmed Khan and four thousand horsemen made their escape while Nadir's followers were looting the camp. Ahmed had already lifted much of the royal treasury including the Koh-i-Nur diamond, the 'mountain of light', which Nadir had worn on his sleeve.

Following Ahmed's flight from the Persian camp, the chiefs of all the Abdali clans were summoned to a jirgah just outside Kandahar. For nine days they sat in debate, trying to choose from among their number a chief to rule over that eastern part of the Persian Empire which is now Afghanistan. Eventually a dervish known as Sabir Khan got up and said 'Why all this verbose talk? God has created Ahmed Khan a much greater man than any of you; his is the most noble of all the Afghan families. Maintain, therefore, God's work, for His wrath will weigh heavily upon you if you destroy it.' When Ahmed Khan hesitated, the dervish placed sheaves of wheat in his turban and crowned him Padeshah, Durr-i-Dauran (Pearl of the Age). This title Ahmed himself changed to Dur-i-Durrani, pearl of pearls, and the Abdalis have since been called the Durranis. Ahmed Shah had ambition, charisma and intelligence, but he also had luck. On the day before his arrival in Kandahar, a treasure caravan had arrived from India with more loot bound for the Persian court. Ahmed Shah took possession of the entire caravan, and its escort of Qizilbash soldiers also joined him. They were probably the ancestors of the present Qizilbash community in Kabul.

Ahmed and his men had some opposition from the Ghilzais, but before the end of the year Ghazni, the final Ghilzai stronghold, had fallen; then Kabul, Peshawar, and Attock on the Indus. The Moghul governor of the Punjab fled Lahore, and Ahmed Shah with twelve thousand men advanced unopposed into India. The crown prince of the Moghuls at that time was also called Ahmed Shah. The two Ahmeds met in battle at Manupur, and the Moghul defeated the Durrani. Ahmed retreated to Kandahar, where he had to execute his nephew Luqman Khan who had been left in charge and had declared independence. In the following year, 1748, Mohammed Shah the Moghul Emperor died in Delhi, and the crown prince succeeded him. He immediately appointed one Mir Mannu, the man who had been responsible for the defeat of the Afghans, as Governor of the Punjab. However, in November Ahmed rode down out of the hills for the second time and Mir Mannu, getting no help from Delhi, submitted. The Moghul Ahmed was forced to cede all the lands west of the Indus, while Mir Mannu remained as Governor for the Afghans. The Pathan Khans of Dera Ghazi Khan and Dera Ismail Khan with the Brahui Khan of Kalat also swore allegiance to Ahmed Shah as he rode back through their territories.

In the same year Ahmed Shah rode with twenty five thousand men to Herat, which was still under Persian rule, laid siege to the town, and after nine months succeeded in taking it. He then marched on Meshed, capital of Khorasan, and laid siege to that town. The ruler of Khorasan was the sixteen year old Shah Rukh, already blinded by a rival, grandson of Nadir. He surrendered to Ahmed Shah who was so impressed by his courage and charm that he allowed him to continue as ruler of Khorasan. At Nishapur the Afghans were defeated, and returned to Herat. However, in 1751 Ahmed again invaded Nishapur. He had a cannon cast on the spot, capable of firing a projectile of five hundred pounds. The cannon exploded at the first shot,

but served its purpose as the city fathers were so frightened by the noise and the damage that they surrendered immediately. Still smarting from their previous humiliation, the Afghans massacred the inhabitants and looted the town. Ahmed Shah returned to Kandahar, but sent an army north to conquer the lands beyond the Hindu Kush. The Turkomans of Asterabad, the Ouzbeks of Maimana, Balkh and Kunduz, the Tajiks of Badakhshan and the Hazaras of Bamyan all accepted Ahmed Shah as king. A third invasion of India was necessary at this time because Mir Mannu had taken advantage of Ahmed's absence in Persia to go over to the Moghul once more. The Afghans were victorious again, and Ahmed sent an army to take Kashmir.

In 1753 Mir Mannu died, and the Moghul appointed his three year old son as Governor of the Punjab. Various nobles fought amongst themselves for control, and Mughlani Begum, widow of Mir Mannu, who ruled from her bedroom 'with caprice and created disorder and anarchy', became regent. In 1757 Ahmed Shah invaded India for the fourth time, taking Lahore and Delhi. The new Moghul Emperor Alamgir II was allowed to remain on the throne in return for recognising Afghan rights to Kashmir, Punjab and Sind. Ahmed's son Timur was appointed to Lahore, and given a daughter of Alamgir's in marriage. Timur, neither a warrior or a poet, watched helplessly as the Punjab revolted around him. The Sikhs attacked Amritsar, the Governor of the Doab called on the Mahrattas for support and drove the Afghans out of Lahore in 1758. At the same time the Brahuis and the Baluchis in Kalat declared independence. Instead of wasting time and energy mounting a campaign against Kalat, Ahmed allowed it to remain self-ruling provided that the ruler Nasir Khan would agree to supply men in time of war and not shelter Ahmed's enemies.

Altogether Ahmed invaded India eight times. Twice he destroyed Amritsar, holy city of the Sikhs, but as the Sikhs learned to wait until his armies retreated and then harass them with guerilla tactics, and the Indians for their part grew stronger with the encouragement of the British in Bengal, Ahmed's forays were less and less successful. Ahmed's death left the Sikhs masters of the Punjab, and his various battles with the Marathas left the way open for the British. One or two of the further regions claimed independence, while others were claimed by the Amir of Bokhara, Murad Beg. Kandahar and Bokhara agreed to accept the Oxus as the boundary between their dominions in 1767, and then, with disease eating away his face so that maggots reputedly fell into his drink, Ahmed Shah went to the Sulaiman mountains to die. He was one of a line of warrior poets -

'Whatever countries I conquer in the world,
I would never forget your beautiful gardens.
When I remember the summits of your beautiful mountains
I forget the greatness of the Delhi throne.'

He is still remembered with affection as Ahmed Shah Baba (father), the king who was approachable by the poorest; and lies in a tomb in Kandahar on which is inscribed the following: 'The King of high rank, Ahmed Shah Durrani, was equal to Cyrus in the business of ruling.'

Ahmed Shah named his son Timur as successor, but although Timur had much of his father's personal charm he was far too interested in his harem to accomplish much of note. He moved the capital from Kandahar to Kabul and so made himself unpopular with the Pathans. The Mohmands and the Afridis together plotted to put another king on the throne in his place, and he hid in a tower of the Bala Hissar at Peshawar while his Qizilbash guards fought them off. He died in 1793 at Kabul, probably from cholera, leaving thirty six legitimate children to fight it out between them. Timur Shah is buried in an unfinished tomb beside the river in Kabul.

In 1798 Napoleon invaded Egypt, and dreamed above all of restoring French prestige in India. He sent a mission to Persia to Shah Fath Ali Shah, and a M.Jaubert tried to persuade the Qajars to take Georgia from the Russians. In 1807 the Persians were defeated by the Russians at Arpatch. In the treaty which followed, Persia lost more territory to Tsarist Russia and lost faith in the French. The British resident in Basra offered the Qajars 120,000 rupees and a quantity of diamonds from George III to fight the Russians. In 1809 the British sent Mountstuart Elphinstone to Peshawar, winter capital of Shah Shuja al Mulk, with a treaty for Shuja to sign. The Russian drive to the east had already begun as early as 1734 with movements in Kazakhstan. In 1813 under the treaty of Gulistan Persia lost all the Caucasus to Russia and agreed to withdraw her warships from the Caspian. In 1826 a Persian army led by Abbas Mirza Qajar and helped by British advisors tried to regain part of the Caucasus but failed.

Meanwhile in Afghanistan, Zaman Shah, fifth son of Timur, had taken over the throne in 1793. The British maintained a sizeable army in Oudh under Sir J.Craig,

in case of an Afghan invasion of India, though Zaman Shah was too preoccupied with revolts in his own territory to do more than advance to Lahore and retreat. The Barukzai Kandahari Sardars alternately supported and threatened Zaman Shah, until Zaman Shah had them all executed. Fateh Khan, eldest son of the executed leader of the Barukzais, joined Zaman's rival brother Mahmud Khan in Herat, of which town he was governor, and between them they succeeded in overthrowing and blinding Zaman Shah. 'Oedipus-like, the deposed Shah wandered friendless through Central Asia and ultimately to India.' The British took pity on him and pensioned him off to spend the rest of his days in exile at Luddhiana. But Mahmud Shah only held the throne for three years before another brother, Shuja Mirza, took it from him and imprisoned him in Kabul. Fateh Khan came to Mahmud's rescue after six more years, taking Kandahar and forcing Shuja to flee to India where he joined his blind brother Zaman at Luddhiana. On his way to Luddhiana, Shuja had stopped off at Lahore to ask Runjit Singh for aid. Runjit Singh , the Lion of the Punjab, was an astute and wily man, who, given the governorship by Zaman Shah, built up a strong Sikh nation from a few marauding bands, formed an army, and was later to prove as dangerous to the Afghans as the British. Runjit agreed to help Shuja if the latter would give him the Koh-i-Nur diamond. Shuja refused, but after being incarcerated without food for a time he agreed. Runjit got the Koh-i-Nur but changed his mind about helping Shuja to regain his throne.

Meanwhile Shah Mahmud was deposed by the Barukzai Sardars who had first blinded their brother Fateh Khan and then cut him into pieces. Mahmud fled to Herat and appealed to the Persian Shah for protection. He died in 1829, probably poisoned by his own son Kamran, who in turn ruled Herat until he was assassinated by his vazir Yar Mohammed. With him ended the dynasty of Ahmed, for he was the last of the Saddozais to rule in Kabul. The youngest of the Barukzai brothers, Dost Mohammed, was in 1837 crowned in Kabul, not as Shah but as 'Amir al Muminin' or leader of the faithful. By all accounts Dost Mohammed was an intelligent man, popular with his subjects, and a good ruler.

Bokhara Burnes and the Lion of Lahore.

'Four things greater than all things are,
Women, and Horses, and Power, and War'
-Kipling

At about the time that Dost Mohammed took over the throne of Kabul, Alexander Burnes set out on a journey up the Indus, ostensibly to find out whether or not it was navigable for trade purposes, but really to feel out the lie of the land and the intentions of Runjit Singh and Dost Mohammed. A Sindi Holy Man, seeing the boats pass him on the Indus, said 'Alas! Sind is now gone, since the English have seen the river, which is the road to its conquest.' He was right, for fourteen years later General Sir Charles Napier annexed Sind for the Company. Burnes arrived in the dominions of Runjit Singh, and presented the Sikh with some dray horses. Everyone was suitably impressed by their size and compared them to elephants. Runjit took to Burnes immediately, perhaps because Burnes, a Scotsman, could keep up with him in his drinking orgies. Runjit Singh had succeeded his father as a Sikh chieftain at the age of twelve. He had obtained the governorship of Lahore from Zaman Shah at the age of nineteen. He had never learned to read or write, but by all accounts managed his affairs quite well without the skills. He had lost an eye, and was described by Miss Eden as 'exactly like an old mouse, with grey whiskers and one eye.' Burnes described his encounter as follows: 'While stooping to remove my shoes at the threshold, I suddenly found myself in the arms and tight embrace of a diminutive old-looking man - the great Maharaja Runjit Singh.' The most popular oriental despot ever, Runjit Singh was at the same time strangely humane at a time when the Amir of Bokhara was throwing visiting Europeans into pits stocked with specially bred reptiles. He never executed criminals, preferring to chop off and arm or a leg and let them go, a living warning to their fellows. A member of the 1838 mission to Lahore noted in his journal:'His executions are very prompt and simple, and follow quickly on the sentence:one blow of an axe, and then some boiling oil to immerse the stump in, and stop all effusion of blood, is all the machinery he requires for his courts of justice. He is himself accuser, judge, and jury; and five minutes is about the duration of the longest trial in Lahore.'

Burnes visited the exiled Shah Shuja at Luddhiana, but was not impressed: 'I do not believe the Shah possesses sufficient energy to seat himself on the throne of Cabool, and that if he did, he has not the tact to discharge the duties of so difficult a situation.' For the British were beginning to think that as Shuja was the rightful king, they should get together with Runjit Singh and replace him on his throne. Ironically, when Dost Mohammed asked the British for aid in recovering Peshawar, which the Sikhs took just after Burnes had passed through on his mission to Kabul, Lord Auckland's excuse was that the British policy was one of non-interferance.

In 1831, Burnes again set out from Delhi, this time for Bokhara. He spent some time with Runjit Singh, hunting and drinking, and with Sardar Hari Singh forded the Indus by elephant in emulation of a previous exploit of the Maharaja. At Peshawar Burnes and his party were entertained by the Afghan ruler of Peshawar, Sultan Mohammed Khan, who surprised them by being 'not the illiterate Afghan whom I expected to find, but an educated, well-bred gentleman, whose open and affable manner made a lasting impression upon me.' In Kabul they were even more impressed by Dost Mohammed, who asked them many questions on all subjects from rhinoceroses and steam engines to the state of the people in China and how the British revenues were collected. Burnes continued to Bokhara, returning by way of Persia. In 1836 Dost Mohammed's army defeated the Sikhs near Jamrud and killed the great Sikh General Hari Singh, but the Dost was too cautious to follow this victory up by taking Peshawar.In 1837 Lord Auckalnd sent Burnes to Kabul to negotiate between the Dost and Runjit Singh over Peshawar. As Burnes travelled towards Kabul, a Persian army was approaching Herat, still ruled by Kamran. With the Persians was a regiment of Russian troops, led by one General Sampson. A British subaltern named Eldred Pottinger, of the Bengal Artillery, happened to be in Herat when the siege started, and organised the fortifications. This confrontation was the beginning of the 'Great Game', a bizarre buzkashi played for the next hundred years between the Russian Bear and the British Lion, with Afghanistan as the goat.

In December 1837 a Russian agent known as Captain Ivan Vitkevich arrived in Kabul with letters from the Russian ambassador in Teheran and an unsigned one supposedly from the Tsar. While the Dost hesitated between Russian and Britain, Vitkevich called on Burnes and left his card. Burnes invited him for Christmas dinner, and the two parted in good spirits. Both were to die

violently within five years.The Dost favoured Burnes, and told him all his conversations with Vitkevich, though he also told the latter about his negotiations with the British after Burnes had left. The siege continued in Herat, and the Heratis were reduced to eating horseflesh.

In 1838 things began to hot up. Count Simonich appeared at the Qajar camp with more money and Russian advisors. Petersburg continued to issue assurances that they had no designs on Herat, while the British got more and more jittery over Tsarist intentions. In June Lord Auckland sent a force to occupy the island of Karrack in the Persian Gulf, so threatening the Qajar rear. At the same time he sent a mission to Runjit Singh with the purpose of drawing up a treaty between Runjit, Shuja and himself. The mission, which included William Hay MacNaghten, spent a pleasant summer hunting, gorging themselves on spiced quails, and trying to avoid Runjit's drinking parties. They were also allowed the pick of Runjit's Kashmiri dancing girls, and shown his 'Amazons', a regiment of women whom, he professed, he found it very hard to discipline. News of the siege at Herat prompted the following conversation between Runjit and one of the mission:

> 'Reports had been received the day before that twelve thousand Russians were on their march to assist at its reduction. Runjeet Sing was very much excited, and could talk of nothing else. "What number of troops does the Emperor of Russia keep in pay?" "Are they good soldiers?" "Can the English beat them?" "Can the Sipahis beat them?" etc., etc. I told him that the French had often beat them, and that we had beaten the French quite as often. "If they wished to invade India, what number of men could they bring across the Indus?" "Fifty thousand would be the smallest number they would attempt an advance with, and probably one hundred thousand would be sent." "What should you do if they were actually to attempt such an invasion?" "Join your highness with thirty thousand British troops, which, with seventy thousand of your Sikhs, would be quite sufficient to drive them back again." "Wah, wah, so we will." "Do you wish them to come?" "Of course I do; it would be burra tomacha, " (great fun.) "So do I," he replied, "I am sure we could beat them. Have they much money?" "No; very little." "Then there would be nothing but fighting; no plunder?" "Certainly not." He looked very sulky for a few moments, and then giving a deep sigh, said, "Perhaps it will be better if they do not come, after all;" and his anxiety for the advance of the Russians appeared to have diminished considerably.'

The treaty, when finally signed, though it is doubtful whether the wily Runjit ever intended to help at all, was a 'Treaty of Alliance and friendship executed between Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Shah Shuja-ool-Moolk, with approbation of, and in consent with, the British Government', and Shuja was to rule again in Kandahar and Kabul in return for recognition of Sikh control over the Punjab and the North West Frontier.

> 'The Maharaja will yearly send to the Shah the following articles, in the way of friendship: 55 pieces shawls, 25 pieces muslin, 11 doopullahs, 5 pieces of kinbaub, 5 sirrums, 5 turbans, 55 loads of baret rice, peculiar to Peshawar... When the Shah shall have established his authority in Cabul and Candahar, he will annually send the Maharajah the following articles; viz. 55 high bred horses, of approved colours and pleasant paces, 11 Persian scimitars, 7 Persian poniards, 25 good mules, fruits of various kinds, both dry and fresh, sirdars or musk melons of a sweet and delicate flavour (to be sent throughout the years), by way of Cabul River to Peshawar;grapes, pomegranates, apples, quinces, almonds, raisins, pisters or chestnuts, an abundant supply of each; as well as pieces of satin of every colour, chogas of fur, khinbabs wrought with gold and silver, Persian carpets, altogether to the number of 101 pieces.'

In August Colonel Charles Stoddart, later to die horribly in Bokhara, delivered an ultimatum to the Qajar outside Herat. The British would consider the occupation of Herat a direct threat to India. In September the Shah went back to Teheran and the siege ended. The Russians recalled their ambassador from Teheran and Vitkevich from Kabul. The unfortunate Vitkevich, on asking for an audience with Count Nesselrode to find out why he had been recalled, was told that the Count 'knew no Captain Vickovich, except an adventurer of that name, who, it was reported, had been lately engaged in some unauthorised intrigues in Caubul and Candahar.' He shot himself. The end of the siege meant that there was no longer any justification for the British to go to war. However, a conference was held at Simla, and Auckland, supported by McNaghten, decided to proceed. In November 1838, despite much opposition from the newspapers and in England, the Army of the Indus camped at Ferozepore. Runjit Singh not only refused to send an army, but would not allow the Army of the Indus to pass through his territories. This meant a roundabout march through Sind and Baluchistan, with much

skirmishing, and difficulty in obtaining supplies. In March of 1839, however, the Army reached Quetta, and shortly after passed into the lands of the Kandahari sardars, occupying Kandahar without a fight. They spent two months in Kandahar and lost many men through fever and dysentery. The day after General Sir John Keane led his troops out of Kandahar towards Ghazni, Runjit Singh died.

> 'His four wives, all very handsome, burnt themselves with his body, as did five of his Cachemerian slave girls. Everything was done to prevent it, but in vain. The four wives seated themselves on the pile with Runjeet Sing's head upon their laps; and his principal wife desired Kurruck Sing, Runjit's son and heir, and Dheean Sing, the late prime minister, to come to her upon the pile, and made the former take the Maharajah's dead hand in his own, and swear to protect and favour Dheean Sing as Runjeet Sing had done; and she made the latter swear to bear the same true allegiance to the son as he had faithfully borne to his father. She then set fire to the pile with her own hands, and they are dead - nine living beings having perished together without a shriek or a groan. Dheean Sing threw himself twice on the pile, and said he could not survive his master, but was dragged away by main force. You have no idea what a sensation the poor old man's death has caused.'

In August, after defeating the Afghans at Ghazni, the British arrived outside Kabul. The Dost fled north, where he had the misfortune to be imprisoned by the infamous Amir of Bokhara. Shah Shuja was greeted by an ominous silence as he rode into Kabul to reclaim his throne. It was obvious that the British would have to stay if he was to hold it for any length of time. MacNaghten decided to maintain a British garrison in Kabul, and accordingly further troops were sent up from India under General Sir Willoughby Cotton. The troops occupied Kandahar, Kalat-i-Ghilzai, Ghazni, Jalalabad, Charikar and Bamyan, while some explored further afield. Quetta and Ali Masjid in the Khyber Pass were also occupied to secure lines of communication. Macnaghten seemed quite oblivious of the hostile atmosphere, and had his wife sent up from India, complete with servants and crystal chandeliers. Other families followed, and soon there were more camp followers in the cantonment at Kabul than troops. The British began to think they were in India, indeed some said they were, as the North West Frontier was now the Hindu Kush. They held dinners and dances, amateur theatricals, and horse races in which the local chiefs also competed. When the lake froze over the army smiths were employed making ice skates, to the wonderment of the Afghans who had never seen such things before. Many of the men were captivated by the Afghan women, and this led to ill feeling in the town. [Necessity, they say, is the mother of invention and the father of the Eurasian.]

Meanwhile, the Dost had escaped from Bokhara, and came south, gathering Ouzbeks to his banner. MacNaghten said 'The Afghans are gunpowder, and the Dost is a lighted match.' While the Dost said 'I am like a wooden spoon, you may throw me hither and thither, but I shall not be hurt.' He was defeated by the British at Bamyan, whereupon the Ouzbeks left him, but he went on to Kohistan and gathered another force. This time he defeated the British between Kohistan and Kabul, but instead of taking advantage of the nervousness thus caused, he rode into Kabul with one companion and surrendered himself to MacNaghten. All the officers who met him were most impressed with his character, though Shah Shuja wanted to execute him and was most put out when MacNaghten gave him a safe passage to India.

In August of 1841, Alexander Burnes remarked to his munshi, Mohan Lal, 'that the time had come for the British to leave the country.' MacNaghten on the other hand wrote that 'the country is perfectly quiet from Dan to Beersheba.' It may have been quiet, but it was a quiet full of rumours and plots. Cotton was replaced as commander by General William Elphistone, senile, gout ridden and totally unsuitable for command even in peaceful circumstances. In October Mohammed Akbar Khan, the Dost's favourite son, arrived in Bamyan from Bokhara, and the tribes poured in to join him. Sale's brigade moved from Kabul to Jalalabad with the intention of clearing the passes in preparation for a retreat, but found them blocked by Ghilzais and had to fight every inch of the way. On November 2nd, the storm broke:

> 'Last night a party of Kohistanees entered the city; a large body of horsemen were also seen proceeding towards the city from the road that leads by the Shah's camp behind Siah Sung. This morning, early, all was commotion in Cabul; the shops were plundered, and the people were all fighting. The Shah resides in the Bala Hissar, and his guns from that fortress were constantly firing; the Affghans in the city were doing the same from six in the morning.'

Alexander Burnes lived in a house in the bazaar, and although his munshi and his Afghan friends and servants had pleaded with him the day before to take refuge in the cantonment as trouble was brewing, he would not hear of it. He was murdered in the riot. Two British outposts fell, and a Gurkha regiment was massacred at Charikar. For two months there was sporadic fighting, and the British in their indefensible cantonment known as 'the Folly of the Plain' were more or less in a state of siege. Confused reports reached them that Burnes was alive and being held for ransom, that Shah Shuja was behind the revolt; that Nott's brigade was coming up from Kandahar to relieve them, that Sale's brigade was returning from Jalalabad for the same purpose, and that more troops were coming from India. None of these reports were true. Lady Sale was one of those in cantonments, and used to go up onto the roof, keeping behind the chimneys to escape the bullets 'that continually whizzed past me', and from that vantage point watch the fighting.

> 'The Afghan cavalry charged furiously down the hill upon our troops... No squares were formed to receive them. All was regular confusion: my very heart felt as if it had leapt to my teeth when I saw the Afghans ride clean through them. They looked like a great cluster of bees, but we beat them and drove them up again.'

Later battles were less successful - the habit of forming squares, though useful against cavalry, was no good at all against marksmen shooting from the heights. During one lull in the fighting occasioned by negotiations for a retreat, the people of the town came out to the cantonments:

> 'In the evening there was a great crowd of Afghans; some hundreds of them, all armed to the teeth, round the cantonments. They came in the most friendly manner, saying all was settled, jung-i-kalus. The men of the 44th went out of cantonments amongst them unarmed, were shaking hands with them, and receiving cabbages from them.'

The Afghans had begun to suspect MacNaghten of double dealing - he had indeed been signing treaties left right and centre. They laid a trap for him, telling him that they would sieze one of the chiefs and then take the Bala Hissar. He fell in, and was murdered by Akbar, his mutilated body afterwards being hung up in the Shor Bazaar. Eldred Pottinger, the 'Hero of Herat' took over negotiations, and a new treaty was signed allowing the British to retreat unmolested through the Khurd Kabul Pass to Jalalabad and Peshawar.

PMRA On January 6th, 1842, with snow several feet deep on the ground and temperatures below freezing, the retreat began. Naturally the tribesmen up in the hills were no respecters of treaties, and fired on them all the way despite Akbar's attempts to call them off. Some say that while Akbar was calling to them in Persian to stop firing, he was urging them on in Pushto which the British did not understand. Those that were not shot or hacked to pieces perished in the cold, and out of a force of 16,500 only one man actually rode in to Jalalabad 'to tell the tale'- the famous Dr.Brydon. The force that left Kabul consisted of 4,500 fighting men, 690 of those Europeans, 2,840 Sepoy infantry and 970 sepoy cavalry; the remaining 12,000 families and camp followers. A few sepoys and twenty Afghans of Shuja's force reached Jalalabad. Thirty five officers survived as prisoners and were later rescued, as were fifty one other ranks, two civilians, twelve women and twenty two children. About two thousand sepoys and camp followers were found begging in Kabul, frostbitten, when Pollock returned with the avenging army.

In February Lord Auckland was replaced as Governor General of India by Lord Ellenborough, as the Whigs had been defeated by the Conservatives. General Nott was still in Kandahar, Sale's brigade at Jalalabad girding for a siege, and a pile of frozen bodies marked the last stand at Gandamak. Earthquakes in the spring levelled the fortifications at Jalalabad so that they had to be rebuilt, and shook the walls of the fort where Lady Sale and the other women and children were held. On April 5th Shah Shuja was murdered, but by this time the army of Major General Pollock had succeeded in forcing the Khyber Pass for the first time in history. They reached Jalalabad on April 16th, defeated the Ghilzai at Jagdalak on September 8th and Akbar's army at Tezeen a week later. On September the 18th they camped on the plains of Kabul:

> 'The British Army now camped in the valleys was far larger than any the Afghans had yet seen... Streets of tents as far as the eye could see, and masses of men in scarlet coats and black shakos paraded and marched in every direction. Brass helmets flashed in the sun, guns peered from every corner of vantage.'

Istalif and Charikar were razed to the ground, the Great Bazaar was destroyed, and the prisoners were recovered. Nott's brigade having arrived from Kandahar, the whole force returned to India and celebrations in Ferozepore.

Night Train to Moscow

In Kabul I bought roubles on the black market at five to the dollar - very cheap considering that the official rate is 0.9 to the dollar. I took the Afghan Post Bus to Herat and bought myself a furry pustin to keep out the Russian winter. To augment my dwindling resources I also sold my sleeping bag, water bottle and shoes to a seedy little curio shop whose windows were festooned with snapshots of the curio dealer's European 'friends'. It reminded me of the Missing Persons board in the Khyber Restaurant, or the Beatles collection in the window of the sitar shop in Delhi. Snapshots are, of course, a poor Western substitute for the printed visiting cards that everyone east of Istanbul hands round, collects, or swops as English schoolboys swop cigarette cards. In the street I bumped into one of Rasoul's friends from Kabul, the karakul hatted owner of the Faiz Hotel, just back from a business trip to Baghdad. He insisted on taking me to the house of his relatives in the residential suburb of Herat, where I spent the evening cooking potatoes over a primus stove on the floor, by candlelight. Back in my room at the Super Behzad, I missed my Swiss Army Knife. I could remember peeling the potatoes with it, and can only suppose that one of Faiz' numerous relatives had taken a fancy to it.

At five in the morning came a knock on the door. The Hotel bacha had just unbarred the doors to the day's arrivals from Kabul, and now ushered in Nicci, back from her tour of India. We took a Qaderi transport bus to Taiabad the same day. At Islam Qala a stringent baggage check was in progress in the customs hall. Massive bales of merchandise lay on the smooth mud floor waiting to be opened and picked through, while their owners squatted dispiritedly beside them and smoked, or else strode about looking black and stroking their bandoliers. Officials pored over dusty ledgers and argued with the would be traders and each other, while the hundred and twenty days wind ruffled papers and clothes and stirred up the dust. A couple of unfortunate travellers were having their rucksacks turned upside down and all their valuables spread out on the floor. I avoided the same fate by joking with the customs man about my bride price being 100,000 Afs. A bandoliered bystander seemed interested, and turned his kohl rimmed eyes my way, but the customs man laughed, waved us on, and we went out into the sun to sit and kick our heels in the dust while the rest of the bus was cleared.

At Taiabad I told them my bag was 'por az chars', full of hashish, whereupon they laughed and told us to go. I had thought of spending the night in the Hotel Omid, under the stars, but a dust storm was raging so we took the first bus to Meshed. Just as the bus was leaving a friend of Saderghi, the camp commandant, came and knocked on the window.
'I come from Saderghi. He is very upset not to see you last year. He come often from Torbat Djam to see you here, but you don't come. He is very sad.'
The heat in the bus was oppressive while the dust storm kept up its fury, but by the time we reached Meshed it had cleared and the fields of sunflowers were quite still in the sun. We found a hotel just off the central circle, and took beds on the roof. I went as usual to sell some blood in the Bank-e-Khoon, but I had lost two stone in weight during my time in India and passed out on the couch. They gave me something on a sugar cube to revive me. I asked what it was and they said'Tantoor', which I didn't understand. When the white coated doctor came in to see how I was he translated it as Valerian.

Someone said that all the trains to Teheran were full for twelve days ahead, but we didn't seem to have any trouble getting tickets. We arrived in Teheran with a couple of hours to spare before the next train left for Tabriz, so we made friends with the Railway Police and sat in their office eating sandoviches. Nicci was going only as far as Tabriz on the train, and then by bus through Turkey. I was going on to Moscow via Julfa, with my wrongfully purchased hard class ticket and my illegal roubles. We decided to dine in style on the train, and left our wooden seats for the air-conditioned dining car. Dusk was falling over the red desert as I laboriously translated the arabic script of the menu and ordered soup and cutlets. By the time the soup arrived, a sort of consomme flavoured with lemon juice and accompanied by wafer thin bread folded up like table napkins, the red and green mountains were fading fast on either side. The ice clinked continually against the side of the water jug. It was evidently going to be a leisurely eastern meal despite its western pretensions.

It was dark by the time our cutlets arrived. The Menu had said they came with chips (spelt cheeps in arabic script), but I can only suppose Iranian railway chefs are trained in America. They were potato crisps, and no more satisfying than the paper bread. Eventually we made our way back to our compartment, where fat Iranian mothers were tucking up their children under the seats and clearing away the remains of gargantuan picnic suppers. Although it was dark outside except for the moving lights from the windows, the sound of the train moving through the desert told of bare rock and sand and not trees or human habitation. It was as if we were all part of some long inordinate striving in the face of the void.

We woke to the luminous waters of Lake Rezaiyeh, the morning sun shading the steep islands. At eight thirty a.m. we drew into Tabriz, the 25th Shahrivar station gleaming in the sun. Almost all the passengers got off here, and I said goodbye to Nicci. My only fellow travellers after Tabriz were a few railway workers going to Julfa, a man from the Russian Embassy in Teheran with his family, going home on leave, and a Polish student who had been skiing in the Elbruz. The train veered north through a landscape littered with burnt out tanks and volcanic debris. Just after midday we drew into Julfa station. The train stopped and a guard came round and told us not to leave the train until Iranian customs had been round. Julfa is a town which appears to have been sliced in half by the Irano-Soviet border, and has grown apart into two separate towns, Julfa on the Iranian side and Dzholfa on the Russian. Between the two halves runs the Araxes River, several hundred yards of raked earth, and a succession of barbed wire fences. The Persian Julfa consisted of a couple of streets and a post office, to which place I took a walk after the customs inspection, and where I posted some postcards. There was no sign of activity at the station, so I stood and talked Farsi with the railway workers. I was feeling rather nervous because of my illegal roubles. I had hidden them inside two pieces of card with currency conversions typed on them and covered in plastic. After a while, the Iranian train backed out of the station and reappeared on the other side of the platform, while two Russian coaches came in from across the border. A delegation of Russians in military uniforms stepped out, and I started to chain smoke. We were told we could now board the Russian coaches, and a woman from Intourist inspected our tickets. Seeing mine was hard class, she explained that there were only 'Myagki' or soft class coaches. She didn't speak English, or any other European language, and I was having great trouble expressing myself in Russian. I could understand what she said, but try as I might the answers always came out in Farsi. The Russian from the embassy in Teheran had to interpret for me. I apologised for having bought the wrong kind of ticket, pleaded ignorance, and did my best to cultivate an innocent expression although the currency card was burning a hole in my pocket. She said I would have to pay the balance, but of course I didn't have enough declarable money. Eventually she said that I would just have to travel soft class on a hard class ticket, and endorsed it to that effect.

Not having eaten since the cutlets and chips of the previous evening, my stomach was beginning to rumble. I asked the Iranian guards how long they thought it would be before we were allowed to continue our journey. They only shrugged. I had no food with me, there was none on the Russian train, and none in Julfa as far as I could see. The catering staff of the Iranian train took pity on me and suggested cutlets, which I ate sitting on the steps of the Iranian train. It was late afternoon by the time a driver arrived for the Russian coaches. I collected my things and installed myself in my luxurious soft class cabin. For the first time in months I would be sleeping between sheets and blankets. There was also a carpet on the cabin floor, curtains at the windows, heating and air conditioning, a radio, and a little bookstand containing items of an enlightening nature printed in English, German and Farsi. At the end of the carriage was a huge samovar in a cupboard, presided over by the conductor. We crawled out of Julfa station at a snail's pace, and crossed the brown Araxes and the raked earth. Soldiers stood to attention along the bridge and saluted the train. Almost immediately we stopped again, in Dzholfa station. The Intourist woman reappeared, with a currency declaration to be filled in in triplicate. She and a colleague inspected my baggage, turning over each item very carefully, and making a separate pile at one end of the bed of all my books and bits of paper. They then told me I could repack everything except the books and papers, and sent for another Russian to inspect them. He didn't find anything subversive, though as he didn't seem to speak English either it must have been rather difficult for him to decide.

Somebody said the train wouldn't be leaving till 2.10 a.m. We all went to the ticket hall to get our passports stamped and buy a few official roubles. There was actually a restaurant in the station, though it looked like a renovated Nissen Hut and served only kebabs, black bread, and a vinegary wine. The Russian diplomat who spoke Farsi invited me to be his guest. Everyone got very drunk, and it was after midnight when I climbed into bed in my cabin. I woke as the train gave a lurch and started moving. My watch said 3.10, but of course I had forgotten the hour time difference. I fell asleep again and woke in daylight feeling very thirsty after the wine. I ordered a glass of chai from the conductor for two kopecks. Through the window I could see a snow capped volcanic peak, but from my map I couldn't make out whether it was my old friend Ararat from the other side, or its Armenian twin Aragats. It reminded me of a story I once heard about Kim Philby. Apparently before he went over to the other side he used to have a large photograph of Ararat in his room. What nobody noticed was that the photograph was of Ararat from the Soviet side.

At 7.45 we arrived in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, and were told we had four hours to kill while our carriages were joined to the rest of the Moscow Train. The Polish student had been to Yerevan before and knew a good breakfast place, so I went with him. When we got lost on the way, he asked the passers by to direct us. They looked blank and appeared not to understand Russian. Whether they really only spoke Armenian or whether they were demonstrating their national pride I couldn't tell. However, we found the breakfast place- the Restaurant Armenia - in a central square with fountains, a statue of Lenin, and Palace of Culture type architecture. We had an excellent breakfast of buttered eggs, bread and jam, chilled apricot juice en carafe, and Turkish coffee. Yerevan itself, apart from the odd red slogan and the children in red Pioneer scarves, looked much like any town in Turkey. There were the same slums, the same dirty canals and ramshackle houses with quilts hanging out of their windows. Yerevan station was a most imposing building with a spire, a high vaulted roof, arched windows and potted ferns. By the time we left we had collected a long string of hard class coaches and a restaurant car. Some oversight on the part of the authorities had placed the latter at the other end of the train from us, so that every time we wanted to eat we had to make our way through carriage after carriage of hard class three tier sleeping accomodation. If the motive behind the refusal to allow me to travel hard class had been to prevent me from seeing how the other half lived, it had failed miserably. The Hard Class of the Soviet Railways appeared to be less comfortable than the third class of Indian Railways, though considerably cleaner and less crowded. The people, of course, were not crammed on top of each other shouting and screaming like a carriagefull of Indians. No. They were sitting in little groups playing chess. I can confirm that this aspect of Russian propaganda is actually true - Russian peasants and workers do seem to spend a lot of time sitting around playing chess. Take away the chess boards, however, and they could have been Turks as they unwrapped their parcels of bread and white cheese and passed them round.

While I was discovering how the Soviet half lives, we were passing through the Caucasus. Wooded hills and gorges on either side made me think of Tolstoy and Lermontov and Tartar aouls. I wished for a branch line to the right. I had left Teheran on Monday afternoon, it was now Wednesday morning, and we would not be reaching Moscow until Friday evening. The restaurant car had very little to offer in the way of a varied diet for the next few days. As far as I could make out the average Russian lives on a diet of steak and fried egg or macaroni, and eats either of these two dishes indiscriminately for breakfast lunch and dinner. Cocoa and biscuits were also served, and these were much more palatable than the rubbery macaroni or the tough steak topped with a leathery egg that must have been cooked the day before. An Armenian woman doctor and her small son shared my cabin as far as Sochi, after that I was alone with my books and the view. On Thursday we came up with the Black Sea coast. The water was just as steely as it had been on the Turkish side. In the afternoon we came to a part of the coast which had been colonised by the health resort business, and fat Russian women were disporting themselves on a narrow strip of pebbles between the railway line and the sea. We left behind the great rampart of the Caucasus the same night and entered the flatness around Rostov-on-Don.

By Friday there were definite signs of autumn outside. The sky was grey, and it was raining. When we stopped at stations Russian women in rubber boots and muffled up to the ears came with buckets of red apples and sold them to us through the windows. Cold air washed in with the apples.

Later that day we arrived in Moscow- full of inward looking houses and grey with cold. It was still raining. I scanned the platform for the compulsory Intourist guide I had paid for to 'transfer' me to my hotel. No one appeared. As the office in London hadn't told me which hotel I would be staying at, I had to find the Intourist head office and ask. Painfully conscious of my imperfect Russian, I braved the Metro. It was easy enough - a five kopeck piece in the slot and you can go wherever you want. Everyone was most helpful, and plump Russian matrons kept stopping me and telling me I would catch my death of cold, walking around in Indian sandals with my toes exposed to the elements. They didn't have to tell me - even with my sheepskin pustin wrapped round me I was frozen. The officials at the Intourist Office were most put out by my unguided arrival, and sent for a black limousine to take me to the Hotel Berlin. I had only paid for one night, but one night included a sheaf of coupons - meal coupons and tour coupons in case I wanted to visit the sights. My flimsy meal coupon that evening provided me with a sumptuous meal in the hotel restaurant - borscht, caviare and beef stroganoff.
My bedroom was magnificent, but icy. In order to have a hot bath I had to find the concierge of my corridor and get her to unlock the bathroom. Everything was cold marble, like the metro, and though the water was fairly hot the air certainly wasn't.

I woke up with a streaming cold. My train was not due to leave until seven that evening, so after my breakfast of baked eggs and yoghourt in the hotel restaurant, with fountains playing and cupids cavorting on the ceiling, I went out to see the sights. Instead of using my coupons and having a guided tour, I wandered around for a bit, marvelling at the Russian habit of eating ice creams in the street in winter and wondering vaguely why bootlaces were being sold on street corners. There didn't seem to be anything inspiring on at the local cinema, though Uncle Vanya was advertised as coming soon. I walked round Gum department store and watched the Russians queueing for bread, bought a couple of illustrated childrens' books, and then joined the queue to see Lenin. As I got to the mausoleum, the soldier on guard reproved me for having my hands in my pockets. There wasn't much to see after all, as we had to keep moving, except that his ears (Lenin's, that is) were remarkably pink. On the way back I visited St Basil's and thought of Ivan the Terrible and the speaking skull, and somebody offered to buy my Afghan coat and asked if I had any chewing gum.

At the appointed time I was sitting in the Hotel Foyer beside the gigantic stuffed bear waiting for my Intourist guide to show up and 'transfer' me to the station again. Nobody came, but I didn't worry too much. By this time I was used to people saying seven and meaning eight, or nine, or even later. At around eight I made my way to the desk and asked whether I would have to wait much longer. The receptionist was horrified. 'Why didn't you tell us before? Now your train has certainly gone.'
It was a Saturday evening, and although there was another train on Sunday, my visa was only valid until the time the Saturday train crossed the border into Poland. The visa issuing office was closed on Sundays, and therefore I would have to wait until Monday. Naturally Intourist would pay for the extra nights at the hotel. I was handed another sheaf of coupons.
I actually used one of my tour coupons the following day, and got to see Moscow University as well as the Kremlin and the Novo Dyevichy cemetary.
By the time I left on Monday my Russian was beginning to come back to me, and I even had a conversation of sorts with the hotel porter. He had a radio on which he used to listen to Mozart in the evenings, and I had taken to sitting in the Foyer listening in.

My compartment as far as Warsaw was shared by a Russian doctor who for some reason was convinced that in England it is forbidden to take photographs out of train windows. Nothing I could say would disabuse him of this idea.
I didn't see much of Warsaw as we passed through in the night. Up as far as the Polish border with East Germany we had a stand-up Polish buffet car attached, in which I paid about two dollars in weightless Zlotys for a slice of cold meat and a gherkin. After that we had no restaurant car at all, and couldn't buy anything from station platforms as we had no local currency. Luckily a kind old lady in the next cabin who had been visiting her son in the British Embassy in Moscow had come supplied with large bars of black market chocolate. And if I thought that the inept machinations of Intourist had been left behind I was wrong. They had forgotten to include in my book of train coupons the one which took me from Berlin to the East/West German border. At two in the morning I was woken up by an armed border guard who discovered the mistake and insisted that I pay the missing part of the fare. I refused. He went out into the corridor and I heard him say to the conductor 'Helmstedt must er zuruck gehen'. I had visions of being shunted back and

forth between Helmstedt and East Berlin for the rest of my life, but the border passed without incident. We arrived at the Hook of Holland at lunch time on Wednesday, and after twenty four hours on nothing but chai and a few cubes of chocolate, everyone made for the restaurant on the boat, only to be told it would not open until half an hour out of the port.

The train journey from Teheran to Moscow had taken 96 hours, and from Moscow to London 53, making just over six days for the whole journey, which compares favourably with the Istanbul route if you happen to be in a hurry.