

• RICE FIELDS, KURRAM VALLEY.



THE MAHSUD MALIKS.

To face page 104.

by the merest chance that bloodshed was avoided, through the presence of mind of Major Dodd, the Political Officer, who threw up the rifle of a man who was about to fire. • This man admitted that he had not the faintest notion what the quarrel was about, and was grateful for having escaped the sword of Damocles in the shape of a blood-feud for the rest of his life.

CHAPTER VIII

THE POLICY OF NON-INTERVENTION

WITH the formation of the North-West Frontier Province was also definitely adopted the policy of non-intervention, or "conciliatory policy," which had been laid down for the guidance of the Government of India two or three years before by the Secretary of State in a comprehensive despatch of January 28, 1898. The kernel of this despatch was admitted by Lord George Hamilton in a later communication to be a "limitation of your interference with the tribes so as to" (quoting the despatch) "avoid the extension of administrative control over independent tribal territory." This policy, of which the advantages had been previously fully recognized even by Sir Robert Sandeman, the "moving spirit" and very embodiment of the principle of the "forward policy," was in reality no new departure from the practice of former Indian statesmen, since it had been, with the exception of the taking over of the Kurram Valley in 1892-93, consistently followed in respect of the whole frontier to the north of the Gumal. The reasons for which the forward policy came to be

adopted, with such admirable results, on that part of the frontier known as British Baluchistan were almost entirely unconnected with any immediate and pressing need of controlling the tribes on that border. It was the anxiety felt at the rapid advance of Russia in Central Asia towards the Oxus, and the strategical advantages which the possession of Quetta would confer on us in the event of a Russian war, that rendered imperative the subordination of mere expediency in local affairs to those larger questions which might turn the scale against us in a Russo-British world-struggle for the Asiatic continent. Had it not been for these insistent military reasons, Sir Robert Sandeman, as he admits in his memorandum of September 27, 1890, would have remained an advocate of the policy of non-intervention.

“As regards the extension of British control over the frontier tribes not subject to the Amir, I would urge that the policy of conciliatory intervention has been forced upon us. It is an absolute necessity that we should defend the Kabul, Ghazni, and Kandahar line in Afghanistan in case of war with Russia. Were this not the case I would be an advocate of masterly inactivity instead of conciliatory intervention, and I should consider it a mistake to make any attempt to include within our control the fringe of independent tribes which lie between ourselves and Afghanistan proper.”

With the disappearance of the Russian peril the forward policy falls to the ground.

That the forward policy has never seriously been put into practice in the North-West Frontier Province shows how early it had been recognized by the military advisers of the Government of India that, with the advent of the Russians on the middle Oxus, the *point d'appui* of a foreign invasion had shifted from Peshawar to Quetta, from the Khaibar to the Bolan Pass, and from the plain of Kabul to the desert wastes to the north-west of Kandahar. With regard to a Russian advance, it is now almost universally recognized that the Herat-Kandahar route is the only thinkable line. In British Baluchistan we hold the key to the situation, with Karachi as a base, Peshawar as a right, and Gwadur or Pasni on the Mekran littoral as a convenient left. The railhead of the Sibi-Quetta line is now at New Chaman, that of the Russians at Kushkinsky Post or Kushk, slightly nearer to Herat than New Chaman is to Kandahar. As all the world knows, materials are held in readiness at both places for building a railway to Herat and to Kandahar. The Russians could probably accomplish this in a shorter time than ourselves. That is all. Armageddon would then be fought in the northern part of the Helmand Desert, which lies in between.

Although the pertinacious advocacy of the extension of the principles of the forward policy to the frontier north of the Gumal is an hereditary trait amounting almost to monomania among the frontier military, yet it will be seen that in the

absence of any special reason, such as that which led to the permanent occupation of British Baluchistan, the arguments adduced in its favour were not held to be sufficiently cogent to warrant its application on the Pathan frontier. Here the danger of arousing the active animosity of the tribes-people, possibly precipitating a general frontier rising, is thought to outweigh any strategical advantages that might accrue from such extension *vis-à-vis* the Russian question. The tranquillity of the frontier, in short, dominates all other considerations.

As evidence of this may be instanced the refusal of the Government in 1904 to comply with the request of certain Orakzai tribes of the Shiah faith, like the Turis of the Kurram Valley, on the southern confines of Tihah, to be taken under British protection, their land to be administered as British territory. This refusal was given in face of the recommendation of the military advisers of the Viceroy, who professed themselves ready, on its adoption, to withdraw the regular troops from the Samana Ridge, and to replace them with tribal militia. At the same time this recommendation was accompanied by another, in which it was urged that the time had come when we should gradually extend our "close control" up to the Durand line (Parliamentary Papers, N.W.F., Cd. 4201). The refusal of the Government was actuated by their disinclination to risk kindling the spark of disaffection among the Afridi

tribes to the north, whose country would have been made—for them—unpleasantly accessible to British troops. Evidence of the feeling in Tirah against such a move was forthcoming in an unmistakable manner while the subject was still under discussion.

Instances where tribes have requested to be taken altogether under British control, in spite of their well-known love of independence, are by no means uncommon, and among these may be cited the Mahsuds, on all sides admitted to be the most independent and intractable tribe on the frontier.

At no time since the demarcation of the frontier by the Durand Mission in 1893 was so much care lavished on this portion of our Indian Empire as during the years of Lord Curzon's and Lord Minto's administrations. Not only were the frontier defences entirely reorganized, and the administration improved by the formation of the North-West Frontier Province, but this new policy, to which I have already alluded, was adopted towards the tribes. As an experiment this innovation was well worth the trial; as a *modus vivendi* it is as good as any that have been tried. And though it would be useless to claim for it that it has in any way provided the solution of the frontier problem, yet it would not be fair to attribute to it directly those regrettable incidents that have occurred since its inception. Many lessons and much valuable experience have been gained from it, which would not have been learnt

in the school of the forward policy. It has served more than anything else to throw light on Afghan intrigue, and to show which way the wind is blowing in our buffer State.

During the whole of the period mentioned not a single square mile of territory was acquired, and in the only expedition of importance this principle was set forth in the most emphatic terms by the British Government, that "neither immediately or ultimately, directly or indirectly," should there be any idea of annexation, and though attempts were made to improve communications by the construction of here a metalled road, there a railway, these have been either necessary for the protection or convenience of our troops or complementary to our defensive alliance with the Amir, and their construction has in every case been subject to the consent of the tribes through whose territories they pass. Furthermore, owing to some inexplicable change of policy at the India Office, in two cases where strategical railways were in course of construction these have been abandoned. These were the Kurram Railway, in which work never proceeded farther than the acquisition of the right of way and the construction of the station bungalow at Parachinar, which is now its only memorial, and, secondly, the Loe Shulman or Kabul River Railway, on which work ceased some three years ago.

By these conciliatory methods it was designed, in the words of Mr. Chirol, to "win over the tribes

by consent." The demarcation of the Durand line had left a bad taste in the mouths of the tribes on our side of the line. It was natural that they should fear that this was but the preliminary step to the occupation of their country—a feeling which the mullas were careful to stimulate with dark references to the fate of Egypt and the probable fate of Persia. It was thought that by calming these fears and by showing them that we had no designs on their territory beyond the exclusion of Afghan influences and the security of the persons and property of British subjects, we should gain the confidence of the tribes-people, and the raiding would eventually cease.

But the Pathan has always been an inveterate raider, and consistently hated and mistrusted us. Had we been able to exclude Afghan firebrands from Tirah, Waziristan, and the Mohmand country, success might have followed. For, in spite of the treachery, the cruelty, the avarice, and the cunning with which most writers have hitherto credited him, one cannot help feeling a pang of admiration for his high courage, often heroism, his powers of endurance, and his manliness—qualities which need but to be developed to make him into the splendid material of which the frontier militias can show such conspicuous examples. Here, one feels, is better stuff than the flabby down-countryman, with his timid effeminacy, and one who, could we but overcome this seemingly insuperable barrier of mistrust and misunder-

standing, would not be insensible to the benefits of ordered government, nor turn and rend the hand that gave it. For in their dealings with us they have shown themselves not always oblivious to the higher dictates of honour; but in many things the Pathan is a spoilt child, and must be treated as such. It would be foolish to judge him by our own standards of right and wrong. Murder to him is not a crime, but a creed; robbery a social duty. He fails to grasp the theory of punishment, though admitting its practice with sulky resentment. Childish in his mental attitude towards our parental corrections, he is apt to be suspicious of our kindnesses, and to attribute wrong motives to any leniency shown him. Philanthropy is lost upon him. It does not enter into his conception of the social virtues. To him might is right, and any clemency is put down to the score of weakness. A policy of "masterly inactivity" leads him to the conclusion that we are incapable of taking his country from him, and one of concession that we dare not. As this opinion gains ground among the tribes-people, so the danger of a rising increases. And so the raiding continues, and the cry goes up that the "conciliatory policy" is a leaky vessel. Whenever the disturbances show signs of abating, a judicious prod with the Afghan stick is sufficient to stir the smouldering fires of fanaticism, and to cause little fires among the mountains, which, if neglected, threaten to spread and to cause a vast conflagration. And this is, in fact, what has been

happening. There can hardly be any doubt that the activities of the fanatical Mulla Powindah among the Mahsuds, as well as the martial ardour of the Zakka Khel, and the rumours of conspiracy between the tribes north and south of the Kabul River, derive their motive force from Kabul. At the Mahsud jirga held at Jándola at the end of December, 1910, it was known that the Afghan Government had taken measures to keep themselves fully informed of its proceedings.

Disgusted by an apparently week-kneed policy of indecision, which forbids any firm grappling with the situation, and all unaware of the higher policy to which the local questions of the frontier must always be subordinated, it is hardly a matter for surprise that some voices are raised more and more as time goes on in favour of a reinitiation of the forward policy as the only solution of a very difficult problem.*

Looking at the question of moving up to the Durand line merely as a question of theoretical policy, and without regard to the situation at the present moment, both on the frontier and in India—in other words, to the fitness of the opportunity—there is much to be said on either side.

Viewed from the purely military standpoint, there can be no doubt as to the desirability of an advance. The only alternative involves a pusillanimous retreat, and the formation of a strong line of defences on what is known as the “inde-

* See note at end of chapter.

pendent border." Being at right angles to the Durand line, our present position violates one of the elementary rules of strategy. Should the internal condition of Afghanistan ever necessitate our intervention—a by no means hypothetical contingency—our only lines of advance are flanked on either side by presumably hostile tribes, demanding a force for the protection of communications altogether out of proportion to the actual fighting force employed. In the event of a border rising these isolated posts form a positive weakness, as they are easily cut off and have to be relieved. The siege of Chitral in 1896 and the burning of Laird Kotal in 1897 are cases in point.

It is evident that the Government realize the insecurity of these posts, since from time to time the question of evacuating the Wana Plain in Southern Waziristan is raised, and the retention of Chitral has already been condemned by expert military opinion. The cumbrous machinery by which we retain our hold on this remote stronghold is in itself a demonstration of the risks we run in this direction.

Opportunities, to be sure, have not been lacking had we intended to occupy the country. There is even reason to believe that a few of the tribes would secretly welcome our coming as a means to putting a stop to their blood-feuds, which in some cases have assumed such proportions as to threaten the extinction of whole clans, and that they would only make a small show of resistance, in order to

“save their face” and to satisfy their honour. As far back as 1880, when the Mahsuds sacked and burned Tank, at the supposed instigation of Shere Ali, the punitive expedition which followed in 1881 found the Mahsuds not inimical to a British occupation of their country.

But military opinion differs from political, and political opinion differs according as to whether its source is north or south of Tirah, which, running eastward as the country of the Jowaki Afridis to within fifteen miles of the Indus, cuts the North-West Frontier Province neatly into two. The nearer one approaches to the Baluchistan Agency in the south the more the methods of Sandeman find favour; but at the same time it is impossible to conceal the fact that the Kharbar is the pivot on which turns the frontier question, and that on its needs policy will be moulded and the event decided.

One of the most plausible arguments of the Baluch school is that the occupation of British Baluchistan has resulted in the complete pacification of that district. Deprecating the suggestion that the Baluch character is not so fiercely warlike as the Pathan, its votaries point out that north of the Sibi-Quetta line the Zhob Valley is, in point of fact, inhabited by Kakar Pathans. To clinch this argument the occupation of the Kurram Valley is cited. Where else in the province can one point to an open cantonment, as in Parachinar, only fifteen miles from the Afghan border, and fifty-seven from the nearest British fort—that of Thall,

where even the dak-bungalow is situated for safety's sake within the walls?

It cannot be denied that, as a result of taking over the Kurram, the valley now presents, in the material prosperity and friendly character of its inhabitants, a marked contrast to its independent neighbours. But it must not be forgotten that the Turis owe us a debt of gratitude for having saved them as Shia Mahommedans, from extermination by their surrounding enemies of the Sunni persuasion—Shinwaris and Orakzais to the north, and Khostwals to the south—and that it was at their express invitation that we marched up the valley. Moreover, by so doing there was no chance of raising disaffection in Tirah through a mistrust of our ulterior motives on the part of the Afridis. As for any comparison that Baluchistan may be thought to afford with the North-West Frontier Province, the differences between the two in respect of distance from the Afghan capital and of population per square mile contribute to render unreliable any conclusions based on inference from one to the other.

On the score of expense, too, serious objections can be brought, not so much on account of actual military expenditure at the time, but because the revenue to be derived from a tract of country which, when not desert, is poor grazing land, would never support the army of revenue officials necessary for its collection. True, there are forests in Southern Waziristan which might produce con-

siderable revenue, but these are chiefly owned by the Derwesh Khel Wazirs, a tribe to whom it appears we have virtually passed our word never to attempt to make them pay revenue. Thus the funds for running the administration would have to come out of the pocket of the already overburdened Indian taxpayer. Nor does irrigation hold out any prospect of converting independent territory into a "paying proposition," because, owing to the limited quantity of water available, for every new area put under irrigation, a similar area goes out of cultivation. It was calculated that if a scheme for irrigating 7,000 acres in Kurram—where taxes are nominal—were put into operation, a corresponding area in Bannu, which yields a considerable revenue, would be turned into a desert.

But there are even more pertinent objections to a forward movement being made, with which the perils of the moment are intimately connected. Were we to absorb independent territory, our administrative boundary would be conterminous with that of Afghanistan, and continual friction would ensue. Outrages committed by independent tribes can be punished according to British law or tribal custom without loss of prestige to Government; but such offences, when committed by Afghan subjects in British territory, constitute an act of aggression, and international issues are immediately thereby raised. The Amir would then no longer be able to shelter himself under the specious plea that he is no longer responsible for

outrages perpetrated in independent territory. Any untoward incident in that case would spell Habibullah's downfall, for he would stand between the devil and the deep sea. On the one hand he must live up to the agreements which his father made with the British Government, and which is the price he pays for our support; on the other he must face his brother, with the whole weight of a fanatical hierarchy at his back.

In short, were we to occupy independent territory we should inevitably be drawn into a war with Afghanistan—a war of far-reaching consequences, and a responsibility against the assumption of which all the canons of common sense combine to militate.

For in the present condition of India sufficient troops could not be spared for such an enterprise, and it is doubtful whether reinforcements from home could be counted on. Furthermore, a war with Afghanistan would alienate the 70,000,000 Mahommedans in India, on whose support we can rely, at any rate for the present, owing to their rivalry with the Hindu population. Then there would be the question of holding Afghanistan, which would constitute a severe drain on the Indian exchequer and immobilize some 30,000 troops. For this service Pathan troops could obviously not be selected, and it would probably be found necessary to increase their pay considerably before Sikhs or Dogras could be got to serve there.

It is now barely three years ago that we were

120 THE POLICY OF NON-INTERVENTION

saved, by the conclusion of peace with the Zakka Khel, from being involved in a combined rising of the tribes to the immediate north and south of the Khaibar, which, for reasons which need not be entered into here, would almost certainly have precipitated a war with Afghanistan. Practically the same thing occurred again in the autumn of last year, and this time the whole border from Chitral to the Takht-i-Suliman was looking to the Zakka Khel for a sign that was never given.

Whatever mistakes have been made in the past, it will be seen, with this knowledge to guide us, that our duty lies, not in "rattling the sabre," but in backing up the "man on the spot," whose efforts are at this moment directed towards staving off the explosion which all are agreed must come sooner or later, and, in the meanwhile as far as possible minimizing the effects of an evil, which it is impossible to root out, well knowing that in the hold we have over the trade-routes into India we wield a weapon less dangerous than "cold steel," but of proved efficiency.

NOTE—*Vide* article in the *Globe* of October 15, 1910: " . . . The situation has now become intolerable, and the condition of the frontier to day is a disgrace to any civilized nation which pretends to rule and give security in an alien country. What we have now to ask ourselves is whether it is not time for us to reconsider our frontier policy, and to advance our administration gradually up to the Durand Line . . . "

The reader may judge for himself what reliance may be placed in this exponent of frontier policy, who, a few lines farther down, refers to Dir and Upper Swat as among those districts that have already been taken over by the Administration.

CHAPTER IX

A CRUISE IN THE PERSIAN GULF

It had been my intention to return to England via the Persian Gulf and the Baghdad-Aleppo route, and with this object in view I sailed from Karachi on February 9 in the British India s.s. *Dwarka*, fast mail for Muscat, Bushire, and the head of the Gulf. Fate, however, decreed otherwise, and a month later I found myself once more in Karachi. Early on the morning of the second day out the high Arabian tableland which backs the Sultanate of Oman inland came faintly into view in the offing, and an hour or two later we steamed slowly into Muscat Harbour, past H.M.S. *Fox*, one of the cruisers engaged in the gun-running blockade. With the customary salute of three guns in honour of the Sultan, we came to anchor opposite the solitary gunboat which constitutes the Sultan's navy. An hour later, from the veranda of the British Consulate, I watched the *Dwarka* steam away for Bushire, while far away to the north a tiny panache of smoke on the sky-line, showed where the "slow mail" was labouring on her way to Jask, on the opposite Persian coast.

The little cove of Muscat, with its tiny town huddled together at the base of the cliffs, is a picturesque and compact little place. On either hand, overlooking the town, rise the twin castles—last remnant of *Albuquerque* and the Portuguese dominion—with their serried tiers of cannon pointing in every direction. Some of these, on a visit to the more easterly castle, called Fort Jellali, proved to have the five bezants of Portugal emblazoned on the barrel, while others had the monogram G.R., and are the remains of the armament of a British “74” presented to a former Sultan by the East India Company. The western castle is fast falling into ruins, and quite recently a large mass fell away from the wall of the central keep, which now presents a similar appearance to the “gesprengte Turm” of Heidelberg. The Constable of Fort Jellali is a Subadar in the Sultan’s bodyguard. He was an aged man, and excused himself from accompanying me over the castle on the plea of asthma. I asked him if he would allow me to take his photograph, but this he also declined, on the ground that he was not in uniform. On the eastern face of the castle—that is to say, on the seaward side—the ground slopes away to a sally-port at the foot of the hill. From above a long line of whitish cliffs can be seen stretching away to the south-east, with never an inlet or bay, to the heights of Jabal Akhtar, in the dim distance. Far below, a dhow is beating up the coast in the teeth of a strong breeze, and in imagination it is easy to conjure up the

scenes of bygone times, when Muscat was the home of piratical slave-traders and corsairs, sweeping the seas from Cape Mussen^dam to Ras-el-Hadd. For all that, the Portuguese castles give a curiously European air to the scene, as of the Western Mediterranean. One could imagine almost that the castle were inhabited by Knights Templar, and that the pirates were the Moorish corsairs of the African main.

At the back of the town rise barren and pointed peaks of no great height, quivering in the heat, and each surmounted by a watch-tower. These watch-towers are found to be needful in case of any sudden attack by the nomad Bedouins of the interior, an occurrence by no means infrequent in former years. At night-time the watchmen in these towers keep up an incessant chant in a minor key, calling from one to the other a mournful refrain, which produces a curiously melancholy effect when heard for the first time. It is this mournful chant and the still tropic night of Muscat that constitutes the individual charm of the place, and it is that which comes into my mind as I look back to the week I spent there.

The streets and bazaars of Muscat are narrow and dirty to a degree, and peopled with the most hideous specimens of humanity that I have ever seen. Ordinarily the men are wiry and of an unmistakable Arab strain, but the women—at least, those that are to be seen in the streets—are of negro or Suaheli origin, with flat noses, thick lips, and an

oily and repulsive appearance. Whether from personal vanity or from sheer compassion towards the unwilling spectator, they wear a black mask or visor, which still further contributes to their terrifying ugliness. The inhabitants live chiefly on fish and dates, a large quantity of which is imported from the opposite coast of Mekran. Tunny are caught and offered for sale on the beach, where by midday may be seen a festering heap of ichthyological remains, sweltering under a swarm of flies.

The town itself is surrounded by walls, there being two gates on the landward side: the Little Gate, which leads nowhere in particular, and the Great Gate, which leads through a pass to the neighbouring village of Mattarah, about three miles up the coast. Mattarah is the commercial quarter of Muscat, and from thence all the caravans start for the interior of Arabia. Muscat is unapproachable from inland except by this route. To gain the town from the side on which the British Consulate is situated, it is necessary to pass through a gate over which is still a banner with the word "WELCOME" in large letters, which was put up on the occasion of Lord Curzon's visit to the Gulf in 1903. These three gates of the city are always locked at night, for fear of a Bedouin raid.

As the centre of the arms traffic in the Gulf, Muscat naturally bristles with rifle depots and stores. The Custom House quay is seldom unencumbered with cases of rifles and ammunition, while every other shop in the bazaar is a rifle-shop



MUSCAT.



LANDING AT BAHREIN.

To face page 124.



There is a certain amount of humour in a situation in which a British cruiser is actually at anchor in the harbour, with a dhow loaded to the water-line with rifles and ammunition almost within a cable's length of her, a Custom House quay fairly crowded with large wooden crates containing the same, and a bazaar simply bursting with arms and ammunition. But the laugh is on our side, and I am credibly informed that, owing to the thoroughness displayed by the blockading squadron, there are now in Muscat itself at least 200,000 rifles and probably 3,000,000 rounds of ammunition for which a market cannot be found. Prowling through the town one day, I entered a house, and was shown upstairs by an obsequious chuprassi to an upper room, where an Arab was sitting at a roll-top writing-desk, directing the operations of two servants, who were packing up box after box of Indian rupees, ready for being despatched to Karachi. I appeared to have chosen a busy time for my visit, but made myself known as an English traveller wishing to see as much of Muscat as I could. I learnt that my interlocutor was Ali Musa, the agent for Messieurs Goguyer Frères, the principal arms-traders in Muscat. Ali Musa is an Algerian, and we conversed in French. He told me that *les affaires* were not progressing as satisfactorily as *dans le temps*, owing to the watchfulness of the blockading squadron. He hinted, however, that the trade was not yet at an entire standstill by any means, and that secret channels of egress existed, which were being devel-

oped, and which would prove troublesome to us in the future. After this he became more reticent, and I took my leave. On the whole there is little hostility to Englishmen in Muscat, whose inhabitants take a sportsmanlike zest in outwitting us if they can, taking defeat with good grace and a smile, which tells that they do not consider themselves to have had altogether the worst of the game. A friend of mine told me that one day he went into the bazaar to buy a rifle, but that the vendor refused to sell him one, saying, "If you want rifle, you go and get him out of sea." This, of course, had reference to our practice of "dumping" captured rifles overboard.

To the courtesy of Major Trevor, the British Chargé d'Affaires in Muscat, to whom I also owe a debt of gratitude for his kind hospitality to me, I owe it that I was received by the Sultan, and, though it was impossible to touch on any subject however remotely approaching political questions, or those connected with gun-running, yet sufficient was said to convince me that a very real value is placed on the continuance of friendly relations between Muscat and the Government of India. The Sultan received us at the door of his palace, and led us upstairs to a room on the first floor, overlooking the harbour. On a black-and-white marble floor, in the middle of the room, was an oak table, on which stood a globe of the world, to which he frequently referred in the course of our conversation. Round the table were a few chairs,

and a divan ran the length of one wall, which was decorated with steamship notices of the North German Lloyd and other lines. On a shelf stood two enormous "beaked" coffee-pots, of the kind usual in the Gulf. Presently the Sultan rose and conducted us into an adjoining room, and proceeded to put on an embroidered robe of State, which I gathered he had worn at the time of Lord Curzon's visit a few years before. This apartment was furnished in a more Oriental style than the first, the walls being decorated with mirrors and coloured glass. On the table was an emu's or ostrich's egg, several shells, and numerous European novelties and knick-knacks, and in one corner was a telephone, connecting the palace with two Portuguese forts. The Sultan is a middle-aged man, inclining to stoutness, with a manner in which dignity and bonhomie contend for the mastery. The following day I happened to meet him again in the bazaar, taking a morning's stroll with his Court. He was dressed in a Norfolk jacket and wide, baggy trousers, and wore a turban. He had just been inspecting his stable, which consisted of a number of well-bred Persian horses picketed in an open space in the town. As there is no possibility of riding, or even exercising, them in Muscat, it is difficult to see for what reason they are kept, unless it be that in every Arab there is implanted the love of horse-flesh.

The little European community that is condemned to pass a few years in Muscat consists of

a French, an Italian, an American, and a British Consul—there is not yet a German Consulate—a British telegraph-master, a British doctor, and the agents of one or two trading firms. Lawn-tennis is the only form of recreation which it is possible to obtain, and the little colony meets in the evening for a set or two, to which the cruisers in the harbour contribute sometimes a welcome addition in players. Lunching one day on board the *Fox*, Captain Hunt showed me afterwards an ingenious invention which he had contrived for fishing at sea while under steam. It was an automatic device for taking up the strain on the line when a fish was caught, and obviated the necessity of keeping a constant watch on the line. By a system of weights attached to the line, which had been rove through a block at the masthead, a fish of, say, twenty-five pounds would raise a shot of approximately the same weight, with a rush halfway to the truck, and would be brought up gradually by the second weight attached farther down the line coming into play. Should a fish of 100 or even 150 pounds weight be hooked, the weight would be thus automatically increased, as the successive shot were raised from the ground, until a sufficient drag had been produced. The strain caused by hooking a large fish while steaming at ten knots would otherwise probably snap the line. With a large spinning-bait tunny of 50 or 60 pounds had been caught, but the possibility of catching a shark had necessitated the employ-

ment of shot of an aggregate weight of 250 pounds.

The phosphorescent effect produced at night by the presence of the red Sargasso weed* in the harbour of Muscat was sometimes very beautiful, and the light was occasionally so strong as to throw a glow over Fort Jellali up to the very battlements. The weed appeared to drift in from the open sea when the wind set from the Indian Ocean.

Having spent just a week in Muscat, I sailed on a Monday in the slow-mail for Jask, where we stayed long enough to permit of my lunching on shore with Colonel Whyte and the officers of the detachment of the 117th Mahrattas, who are stationed there for the protection of the Indo-European telegraph-line and the new "wireless" installation, by which the cruiser squadron are kept informed of the movements of suspicious dhows. Landing at Jask, as at all other points along this narrow and shelving shore, is rendered difficult by the dangerous surf, which beats constantly on the beach even in the calmest weather. It is necessary to anchor some distance offshore, and then back down the boat astern till near enough in to jump ashore. The steamer, of course, cannot come within two miles of the shore, but anchors in Jask

* I am not aware of the proper scientific name of this plant, though the reader, if he wish, could decide for himself approximately by consulting the list of seaweeds found on the island of Henjam, given at the end of Floyer's "Unexplored Baluchistan."

East or West Bay according to the direction of the wind.

The importance of Jask lies in the fact that it is the point where the threads of three cables, one overland telegraph, a local telephone system for the telegraph-huts, and the invisible threads of the "wireless," are gathered together in the hand of a superintendent, who is also the Political Officer.

At the time of my visit Jask presented the appearance of a miniature Ladysmith. On every hand sand-bag forts, surrounded with an inextricable network of wire entanglements, met the eye. Sand-bag forts also blocked the entrance to the main building, and more barbed wire. The whole cantonment was surrounded by a veritable zareba of barbed wire, from the middle of which two flagstaffs rose to the height of 150 feet from the ground. On the top of these more wire. From the neighbouring building an intermittent tearing noise indicated that the "wireless" was working. It was as if some gigantic bumble-bee had been caught in a labyrinthine spider's web, and was making efforts to escape. And this all because some 900 Afghans were on their way down from the north to bend the Baluch Sardars and the Arab "nakhudas" (skippers) to their will.

From the top of the telegraph building Old Jask is visible, the residence of the hereditary Mirs of Jask, and behind this, again, the arid coast range. The present Mirs of Jask, Mir Mustapha and Mir

Hoti, have gone down a bit in the world, and their more powerful neighbour, Mir Haji of Sakui (of whom more anon), wiped out Old Jask some years since. In summer the continually drifting sand raises a curtain in front of the coast range, so that nothing can be seen farther than a mile from Jask, and for all one can see, Jask might be situated in the middle of a vast plain as flat as a billiard-table.

We weighed anchor towards evening, with an addition to the cargo of several drums of barbed wire, so as to enable the Consulate at Bandar Abbas to put itself into a better position for defence against the expected onslaught of the Afghans.

While still on the subject of radio-telegraphy, it is an interesting fact that with a daylight radius of 300 miles it is impossible to communicate between Lingah and Muscat, though at night Bombay may sometimes be called up from Lingah, a distance about three times as great. It is said that one night Bombay refused to speak with Lingah, because they were "talking with the West Coast of Ireland." Whether there is some formation in the rocky promontory of Cape Massendam which interrupts the current is not known, but the wireless operator on the P. and O. *Salsette* told me he "could generally" speak to ships at the head of the Persian Gulf from the entrance to the Gulf of Aden—that is to say, across the whole extent of the Arabian plateau, a

distance of over a thousand miles. This is, of course, only possible at night-time.

It was impossible to land, either at Bandar Abbas or Dibai, the two next ports of call, and all the impression of them I retain is of a faint ribbon of palm-trees some four miles away, and an invisible line of sandy beach. Close to Bandar Abbas are the islands of Qishm, Henjam, Larak, and Hormuz, the last of which gives its name to the straits in which it is situated. On the eastern end of Larak are the remains of yet another Portuguese castle. At the western extremity of Qishm is the shallow harbour of Basidu, which has been used as a coaling station for the sloops and pinnaces of the blockading squadron. It is, however, too shallow to admit of the larger cruisers coaling there in comfort, and since the rest of the island belongs to Persia, there seems to be a general consensus of opinion that it would benefit all parties concerned were we to give up the harbour of Basidu in exchange for the small island of Henjam.

Dibai is situated on what is known as the "pirate coast," and is ruled over by one of the seven "trucial" chiefs, so called from the fact that after the suppression of the slave-trade they entered into treaty engagements with the British Government. The remaining trucial chiefs are those of Abu Thabee, Shargah, Ajman, Umm-al-Gawain and Ras-al-Kheyima. It was at Dibai that a landing-party from the *Hyacinth* was fired on on Christmas Day, while searching for concealed arms.

This led to the bombardment of the town, and the punishment of its chief. It is thought that the trouble began through the employment of a strategy of the natives, by which, under plea of removing their women-folk before the search, the arms were also removed at the same time, a trick which had succeeded more than once before.

The majority of the passengers on board were pearl-merchants returning from India, where they had been to dispose of their yearly output. The next port being Bahrein, and their destination, we were looking forward to being able to walk about the decks once more in comfort. I think we were justified in feeling a certain pleasure at their departure, since there were only about three of them who owned first-class tickets, the rest being slaves and acquaintances, who battered on the hospitality of the pearl magnates, and spread their carpets under our very feet as we walked the decks. Remonstrance with the captain was in vain. We were told that it was the company's orders that the Arabian passengers should be shown every consideration. And this they were, even at the expense of European travellers. We could only be thankful that we were not on board the same steamer on her way down the Gulf a few weeks later, when every flat surface that could be termed a deck would be crowded out with Arab horses and Arab horse-dealers.

The value of the pearl-trade of the Bahrein Islands appears to be steadily on the increase, and

there seems to be an opening for some enterprising British firm to send an agent there annually. The figures, which are to be found in the Consular Report for 1910, are as follows :

1907-08	£285,400
1908-09	£140,000
1909-10	£420,667

The drop noticeable in the figures for 1908-09 is no doubt due to the financial crisis of that year in America, which reacted on both the American and British markets.

About seven miles inland from Bahrein are the ruins of an ancient civilization, thought at one time to be of Phœnician origin. It was even suggested by some that this place might be the cradle of the Phœnician race. Having the whole day in front of us, we determined to land and ride out on donkeys to this burial-ground. Our donkey-ride began sooner than we had expected, for the beach shelves down so gradually that it is impossible to get a boat within 50 yards of the shore, and after bumping over hard sand for a little way, we rode ashore on donkeys. With good trotting donkeys we did not take long to reach our destination. The track led through mile after mile of shady date-groves, till at last we came to the open salt-plain. Continuing some time over this, we came to another village, over which we could see the rounded tops of innumerable tumuli or barrows. Those nearest the village appeared to be larger than the rest ; but there must have been

several thousand of them, for they stretched away to the horizon, and, going back by another way, we came upon another field of them. A few of them were excavated some years ago by Professor Theodore Bent, but so little was found in them that it was not thought worth while continuing the excavations. Inside the mounds are large burial-chambers, some of them extending to a considerable depth underground, and constructed of enormous blocks of white limestone, roughly hewn and fitted together, forming what I believe is termed "cyclopean architecture." Dr. Budge is of opinion that they belong to a civilization vastly anterior to that of the Phœnicians, or, indeed, even to the *Sumerian or Accadian Empires of the Euphrates Valley*. "And God planted a garden eastward in Eden. . . ." "Es lasst tief blicken."

From Bahrein we made for Bushire, and had again to undergo the discomfort of landing from the steamer at a distance of four miles from the shore. It is impossible for the British-India boats to enter the harbour of Bushire without touching ground, and since this is imperative to enter the Shatt-al-Arab, it is thought advisable to do so as little as need be at other places of call. A snapped propeller is not an easy thing to replace in the Persian Gulf, not to mention the cost of a bronze blade, which runs into hundreds of pounds. It is generally agreed that the situation of Bushire is such as to destroy any hope of it ever growing much beyond its present importance. The Karun

on the one hand and Bandar Abbas on the other are two competitors whose rapid expansion will in the long run stifle the trade through Bushire. Its situation on an island, and the extensive dredging that would be necessary to convert its harbour into a safe anchorage for large steamers, are the two largest disadvantages against which it has to contend. The eventual tranquillity of the Southern Persian trade-routes is only a matter of time, but the trade of Ispahan will find a better outlet through the Valley of the Karun, that of Yezd through Bandar Abbas. There remains, therefore, but the trade of Shiraz.

At the time of my visit to Bushire, the Shiraz road was considered to be so unsafe that permission was refused to travellers wishing to proceed into Persia by that route. I remembered having read of the British "note" to Persia on this subject in the Reuter's telegrams at Port Said on my way out in October, and the incredulous surprise with which the news was received. The "note" still formed a chief topic of conversation, and it was laughingly said that an enterprising traveller, whose life was to him of no particular importance, might easily earn the lasting gratitude of his country by becoming the sacrificial calf, over whose dead body British troops might justifiably march to Shiraz to restore the tranquillity of the road.

The European Consulates at Bushire are for the most part situated at such a distance from the town that it is hardly a matter of surprise that

in times of disturbance it becomes necessary to land troops from war-ships for their protection. In the centre of the town is the palace of the Darya Begi, or Governor of the Gulf ports, and in the harbour lies the *Persepolis*, the one battle-ship of the Persian navy. About three miles along the coast to the eastward are the Russian and German Consulates. Behind these, a little way inland, at Sabsabad, is the bungalow of the British Resident in the Persian Gulf, Colonel Cox. Yet farther inland, and equally isolated, are the bungalows of the Medical Inspecting Officer for the Gulf, and of Mr. Consul Chick and Mr. Birdwood, whose hospitality I had the honour of enjoying for two days.

Had I continued my journey in the "slow mail," I should have had an opportunity of visiting the harbour of Koweyt, about which, until recently, as the "only possible" terminus to the Baghdad Railway, there has been so much discussion. This theory has, however, been recently exploded, since it is now generally recognized that the dredging of the bar at the mouth of the Shatt-al-Arab is within the bounds of practical engineering. It is said that were Koweyt to be made the terminus of the Baghdad Railway, it would still pay the steamship companies to load up half bulk in Basra and the rest in lighters outside the bar, as is done at present.

Proceeding again from Bushire in the "fast mail," we passed the Turkish fort of Fao, at the mouth of the Shatt-al-Arab, at the same time bumping over the bar, and steamed up the Shatt-

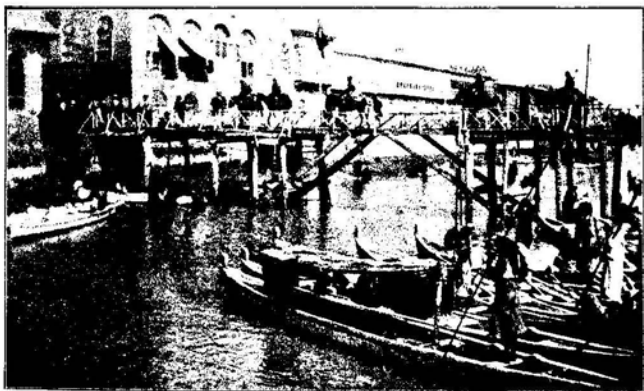
146 A LAUNCH IN THE PERSIAN GULF

al-Arab, between wide banks covered with date-groves. These groves are among the richest in South-Western Asia, and extend for a mile or two on either bank. Behind them the land becomes low and marshy, and behind this, again, is the limitless desert. On the right bank as we steamed up to Mohammerah floated a mirage, as of mist rising from off a lake. As far as Mohammerah and the mouth of the Karun, which here debouches at right angles into the Shatt-al-Arab, the eastern bank is Persian territory. From Mohammerah we went forward in Messrs. Lynch's launch to Basra, preceding the steamer by a day. It is not an uncommon thing for the launch to be fired on on its way up to Baghdad, and, though we saw the dents in her funnel and sides, we were fortunate in escaping the attentions of any riparian marksman.

From the Shatt-al-Arab branch off many canals at right angles, and on one of these, at about a mile from the river, is situated the native town, with its tortuous bazaars. Along its banks are the dwellings of the richer inhabitants and the few Europeans whose business necessitates their presence in Basra. On the river itself are the docks, wharfs, and quays of the shipping and trading firms. The appearance of this canal is picturesque in the extreme, and might be termed an Oriental Venice without prejudice to the latter. Up and down this waterway with amazing swiftness ply the long narrow native craft, propelled at each end by a picturesque savage, hardly less willowy in form than the punt-pole



THE GRAND CANAL, BASRA.



THE BRIDGE OF SIGHS, BASRA.

To face page 138.

which he so deftly wields. Halfway towards the native town is a wooden bridge, constructed of balks of timber lashed together. When I first beheld it, a small cavalcade of Bedouin cavalry was slowly making its way across it, their dirty garments contrasting ill with the Saracenic grace of their horsemanship. The yellow house behind, with its brilliant cobalt blinds, cast warm zigzaggy shadows in the water below.

Basra now boasts an hotel owned by a Greek, and at this we put up. With its untidy and scrupulously dirty "patio," it was not unlike a Spanish "posada" of the meaner sort. It was in no sense a pleasure to stay there, and we were glad we had some tinned Bologna sausage to fall back upon. Our spirits were, however, kept up by a party of three French engineers on their way to Aleppo. The doyen of this trio was accompanied by his wife, a charming lady. She, on hearing of the horrors of existence in Baghdad, declared with simulated horror that nothing would induce her to go a step farther. Her husband had surely mistaken his vocation, for in a deep base voice, evidently trained, he sung snatches from the opera with a wonderful pathos of expression. When he switched off into a less serious vein, his companions joined in with melodious tenor and alto.

The bazaars of Basra, though more extensive than those of any Gulf port I had yet seen, did not present any particularly new feature. The town is occupied by a Turkish garrison, and it would be

difficult to imagine a tougher or more truculent-looking set of soldiers than these. It was with some little surprise that, on passing a group of three or four soldiers, I heard the familiar greeting "May you never be tired!" uttered in the Pushto tongue. A rather laboured conversation elicited the fact that these were Afghan and Pathan sepoy who had enlisted in the Turkish army. I cannot now remember from which part of the frontier the latter hailed, but I rather think it was from the Yusufzai side. The Afghans were Kabulis, and, since the Afghan army is trained by Turkish instructors, there is nothing so very remarkable in the presence of these Afghans in the Turkish army.

Instead, now, of continuing my journey to Baghdad, the possibility of an expedition being despatched to Mekran led me to retrace my steps to Karachi. Nothing of importance occurred on the return run, and the voyage, which had taken three weeks up the Gulf, was now accomplished in five days. However, on arrival in Karachi it appeared that there was no likelihood of such an expedition being sanctioned in the immediate future, and, since I was not due in Bombay till March 24, I set off to visit Lahore, Delhi, and Agra, with an account of which I do not intend to bore the reader.

CHAPTER X

GUN-RUNNING IN THE PERSIAN GULF

HITHERTO I had only had an opportunity of observing the effect of the gun-running on the Pathan tribes of the North-West Frontier. But during my cruise in the Persian Gulf, of which in the last chapter I gave a short narrative, I was enabled to learn considerably more of this interesting subject.

About the middle of February it began to be rumoured in various quarters that a large body of Afghans, numbering, it was said, 3,500, had been concentrating for some time past in the neighbourhood of Bampur, a town in Persian Baluchistan. The presence of Afghans in Persian Baluchistan was not in itself remarkable, since it is in spring that the Ghilzai traders visit the Gulf, on their way back from India through Afghanistan to Central Asia. But the gravity of the situation was to be found in the temper of the invaders, and, according to rumours that were current, their intentions were of the most warlike nature. They were reported to be contemplating a repetition

of the outrage on the Central Persian Telegraph-Line of September, 1910, when four miles of wire had been cut up. An attack, under the leadership of Mir Barkat Khan, late Governor of Biyaban, on one or other of the small posts that have been established for the protection of the Indo-European Company's line at such places as Chahbar, Jask or Bandar Abbas, was also feared. Mulla Khair Mohammed of Karkindar in Karwan, commonly known as the "Khalifa Sahib," was also stated to be advancing at the head of a following of upwards of 200, accompanied by a wandering derwesh of "mystic powers."

Among the Afghan tribes none have benefited more by the arms trade, nor enjoyed greater facilities for embarking in this traffic, than the Ghilzais. These, besides being themselves the purchasers of large quantities of rifles, have gradually acquired almost a monopoly of the carrying trade in arms. Owing to the hostility of the Persians of Kerman, to the vigilance of H.B.M. Consul-General in Meshed, and, more recently, to the presence of a Gurkha regiment in Robat, the routes followed by the arms-caravan have of necessity been gradually narrowed down to an area indicated by an isosceles triangle, of which the apex is roughly at the Helmand Lake, and its base between Lingah on the west and Chahbar on the east. From the apex of this triangle the caravans cross the Afghan frontier to Bandar-i-Kamal Khan, on the Helmand River, thence along its banks to

Girishk, whence they branch off to Kandahar and Ghazni, the country of the Ghilzais.

This powerful and warlike tribe, the backbone of the Afghan nation, and our old enemies at Maiwand, is divided into two sections, of which the nomadic "Powindahs," or warrior-merchants, constitute the wealthier of the two. As traders between Hindustan and Khorasan (Herat, Bokhara, etc.), they are accustomed to fight their way through their hereditary enemies of the Mahsud and Waziri borders. They visit India during the cold weather to barter the merchandise that they have brought from Central Asia, leaving their families and their herds of camels in vast encampments on the banks of the Indus. It is estimated that 50,000 of them pass yearly through Dera Ismail Khan. They command a considerable credit among the Hindu bannias of Peshawar, Lahore, Delhi, and even Calcutta and Bombay. When the rapid development of the arms trade opened up an additional and more profitable field for trading, the Ghilzai merchants were not slow to seize the opportunity, and for some years now have had commercial relations with the principal arms-dealers of Muscat.

But it is to the second and more stay-at-home section of the Ghilzais, known as "Jais," or settlers, that the Afghans who had invaded Persian territory belonged. Though by no means so wealthy as the Powindahs, they, too, had invested large sums of money in the arms trade. The Sultan of Muscat, however, discouraged these

144 GUN-RUNNING IN THE PERSIAN GULF

Ghilzai traders from coming in person to Muscat, fearing that it would prove prejudicial to his relations with the British Government, through whose instrumentality alone the Beduin tribes of the Omani hinterland are kept at bay. But in spite of this restriction, such was the confidence of the Ghilzais in the Muscat dealers that they continued to pay their money down, in the full certainty that the rifles would be duly delivered on the Mekran coast. The Muscat dealers undertook, in fact, to engage the dhows and make all arrangements for running the guns over to the Persian side, where, in their turn, the Baluch Sirdars found camels and acted as intelligence agents in the interests of the Ghilzais. The arrival of cargoes of rifles, watched for and marked by the Baluch Sirdars, was duly notified to the Afghans, who, owing to the lack of forage for their beasts near the coast, as well as to the need for secrecy, were expectantly waiting some ten or fifteen miles inland. When the coast was clear, they came down, loaded up the rifles, and the long march inland commenced, each successive chief through whose territory the caravan passed taking his toll.

Among the Baluch Sirdars of Persian Mekran the most indefatigable in the interests of the gun-runners has been Mir Barkat Khan, Governor of Biyaban up till the time of his capture in March, 1910—a man of more spirit than the majority of his race, and one who has presumably

reaped a substantial harvest from his enterprise. So great, indeed, at one time was his activity as to cause the Persian Government anxiety as to the preservation of their authority in this district. He was in consequence one day spirited away on board the Persian cruiser *Persepolis* by the Derya Begi, or Governor of the Province of the Gulf Ports, who had been sent by the Persian Government for this express purpose.

Last August, however, he managed to effect his escape, and returned to Biyaban at an opportune moment for those engaged in the traffic, for the disorganization caused in the plans of the gun-runners by the vigilance of British cruisers in the Gulf of Oman had brought the trade to a standstill. Not only had dhows which had left Muscat been compelled, after a severe chasing, to put back to their port of departure to evade capture, but the "nakhudas," or Arab skippers, owing to the increased risk, refused any longer to run guns across on the same terms as before. The arrangement hitherto adopted had been the payment of a third of the value of the dhow to her owner by the Afghan trader, with an undertaking to pay up the remainder in the event of the ship being captured or otherwise lost. The nakhudas now demanded payment in full, as dhows were becoming scarcer and scarcer every day. In this condition the Afghans were unwilling to acquiesce, having no guarantee of the good faith of the nakhuda. Even Barkat Khan, with all his influence, proved unable

to induce them to resume their occupation, and was also in consequence himself a loser.

The naval measures that resulted in this state of affairs are briefly as follows: The Omani and pirate coasts of Arabia are watched by cruisers, and the departure of dhows is communicated immediately on receipt of the intelligence by wireless telegraphy to Jask, whence the information is passed on to "boat-cruisers" that are stationed along the coasts of Mekran and Biyaban at the most likely landing-places. These boats contain an officer and from six to a dozen bluejackets, and are visited fortnightly by the cruisers to which they belong. Their occupants are frequently sniped from the shore, and when a strong "shumal" (north-west wind) is blowing, the only alternative to riding out the gale in very uncomfortable quarters is the hazardous venture of landing up a creek and accepting the risk of being fired on. Cruisers search dhows in Persian waters, in accordance with an agreement entered into with the Persian Government, but not in Muscat territorial waters, since it is suspected that the captured rifles, when returned to the Sultan, find their way back into the possession of the dealers. Precautions have also to be taken against any gun-running dhow getting through from Hodeidah or other Red Sea port. Information is generally available as to the presence and whereabouts of any large number of camels in the interior, which very often furnishes a clue to the place selected by the nakhuda

for running the cargo. It is, however, not improbable that camels are collected in one place as a blind, while the rifles are being landed at another point.

Whether the continuance of the blockade will eventually have the effect of killing the trade altogether is a point on which it is difficult to form any opinion. Myself I do not think it will, and short of some definite arrangement with the French Government and with the Sultan of Muscat, by which the abrogation may be effected of the treaties which give to certain subjects of the Sultan the right to fly the French flag, and to the French and other nations the right of free trade with the port of Muscat, the presence of a cruiser squadron in the Gulf will remain necessary to check the traffic. For so long as these treaty rights enable the Sultan, without forfeiting the support that we afford him in his dealings with the Beduin tribes of the interior, to permit a trade which he knows to be contrary to our interests, but from which he is reported to levy a large sum in import duties, so long will he be in the enviable position of being able to "eat his cake and still keep it." Rumours have been afoot of proposals from the French Government for the relinquishment of these rights in return for the cession of a certain British possession in West Africa. Such a sacrifice, however, would hardly seem "worth the candle," and as things stand at present our only lever with the Sultan is his fear of a second sack of Muscat by Beduin invaders.

148 GUN-RUNNING IN THE PERSIAN GULF

The traffic, nevertheless, has been greatly reduced. The constant harassing to which dhows have recently been subjected has undoubtedly caused many of the dealers in Muscat to transfer their business to other quarters, or to shut up shop altogether, owing to actual or imminent bankruptcy. Muscat is, of course, very closely watched, and quite recently in the harbour was to be seen a dhow, with 2,000 rifles on board, that had twice essayed without success to run through the tightly drawn cordon. This has led to an attempt to form depots farther up the coast. By this the additional advantage would be gained of being able to put straight across the Gulf of Oman at its narrowest part, instead of having to work laboriously up the coast (by night, so as to benefit by the off-shore breeze) before getting a fair wind. Depots were also probably formed on the pirate coast within the Persian Gulf. No doubt Dibai was one of these, though the punishment that was meted out to its sheikh will probably deter the remaining trucial chiefs from emulating his example. At present suspicion centres on Sohar, a port about a hundred miles north of Muscat, as a possible depot, the rifles being conveyed secretly from Muscat.

On the refusal of the nakhudas to continue operations as before, the Ghilzais demanded that the money they had on deposit in Muscat, as security for the guns they had caused to be ordered, should be refunded to them. This the dealers

refused to do, saying that they must take the value out in rifles. Indignant at the loss of their money, it is not to be wondered at that, taking matters into their own hands, they should invade Persian Mekran in force, breathing threats of violence to all and sundry who should oppose their progress, intent on bringing the nakhudas to reason, and with the avowed intention of cutting the telegraph-line and of driving the "kafir" into the sea. Any chance there may at one time have been of Mir Barkat—who periodically used to apply for an increase in the already liberal allowance granted him for the protection of the line—coming in, vanished with the news that the Afghans were about to place themselves under his leadership. It looked as if the wave of indignation which had swept over the North-West Frontier in October, and spent itself in impotent fury along the Afridi border, were now about to break again on the low sandy shores of Persian Mekran.

CHAPTER XI

THE DASH ON BINT

"The ubiquitous tendency to territorial expansion, which is so marked a feature in European States of the period, results in a corresponding contraction of the ground free equally to all; and as this narrows there cannot but be increasing jealousy of every movement which carries with it a threat of exclusive control, whether by acquisition or by predominant influence, especially if the latter depend, not on fair commercial struggle in open markets, but upon the alien elements of military and political force."—CAPTAIN MAHAN: *Problems of Asia*.

It was not till March 30 that it was known that the Government had decided to send an expedition against these invaders of Persian territory. News had, indeed, been received that a small telephone-hut somewhere between Jask and Chahbar had been wrecked, and the telephone clerk forced to fly for his life. But beyond this nothing further, as far as it was known, had happened, although the Afghans had by this time moved down by easy stages towards the coast, and were occupying a line of country just south of Bint (a town midway between Bampur and the coast) stretching away westward towards Bashakard and Biyaban.

The reluctance of the Government to send an

expedition to Mekran may possibly be attributed to the anxious jealousy with which any forward movement on our part in Southern Persia is looked upon by Russia and Germany, the former because she has interests there herself, and the latter because she has none. This feeling of jealousy is admirably appreciated in the quotation from Mahan's "Problems of Asia" which I have placed at the head of this chapter. The secrecy with which preparations were made and the operations conducted was commented on in the following words by Mr. Lovat Fraser in a paper on "Gun-running in the Persian Gulf," read by him before the Central Asian Society on May 17.

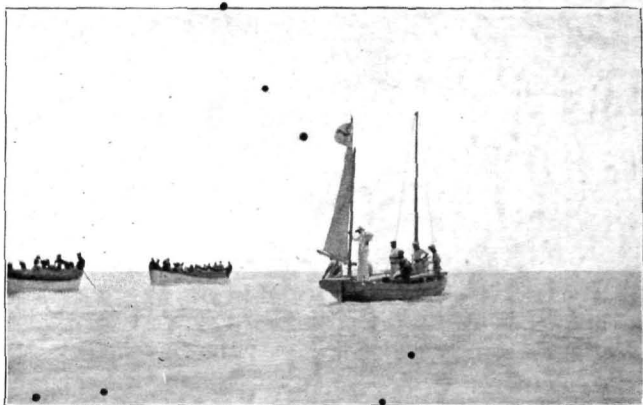
"You cannot mobilize a squadron and an expeditionary force and start out to conduct warlike operations, and then ask the rest of the world to be kind enough to look the other way."

The apparent leisureliness of the movements of the Afghans, and the fact that, with the single exception of the molestation of an isolated line-guard, no outrage had been committed, could not be taken as an indication that their warlike temper had been exaggerated. Their very numbers served to negative such an assumption. Moreover, small accessions to the Ghilzai host continued to make their appearance. The circumstance that the departure of the main body from Afghanistan had been known as early as in October, 1910, and the fact that they had frequently halted for weeks at a

time in places where good pasture was available was held by many to be a sign of their deliberate intention to procure rifles at all costs, the more so since the month of May is the last in which it is possible to return over the waterless desert which now lay between them and the Afghan frontier. Only the year before the returning arms-caravans had suffered the most terrible privations and unmentionable hardships through having postponed till too late their return journey.

Realizing at last that the Ghilzais had in fact "come to stay," the Government on March 30 issued orders for the mobilization of a small force to proceed to the coast of Mekran, under the command of Rear-Admiral Sir Edmund Slade, K.C.I.E., Commander-in-Chief of the East Indies Squadron. The landing force was to be under the command of Colonel Delamain, D.S.O., 123rd Outram's Rifles, who had led a similar expedition up the Gulf the previous year, and consisted of the 104th Wellesley's Rifles, with two machine-guns, under the command of Major A. P. Stuart; the 32nd Mountain Battery, under Major Williamson Oswald; the 19th Company Sappers and Miners, and two sections of Field Ambulance—in all about 1,000 men.

On April 6 the naval Commander-in-Chief transferred his flag from H.M.S. *Hyacinth* to H.M.S. *Highflyer*, which had arrived two days before from England, and on April 7 the transports *Hardinge* and *Northbrook*, escorted by the *Highflyer*, steamed out of Bombay Harbour. As we



A "BOAT-CRUISER."



COLONEL W. S. DELAMAIN AND STAFF.

To face page 152.

passed the old flagship, flying her paying-off pennon, her gallant crew, who had borne the burden and heat of the day, and were now to return to England, gave us three cheers, which came faintly to us over the water.

The heat in Bombay had been pretty bad, but it was nothing compared to the stifling air between-decks. Both transports were packed to overflowing with men, mules, stores, and kit. The mules, of which there were about 230 on either ship, were stabled along both rails of the main deck, while the sepoys occupied the forecastle and the lower boat-deck. Shortly after starting we were startled by a furious trampling of hoofs on the deck, accompanied by the curious vocal noise of the mules, which is a cross between a neigh and a bray. Investigation resulted in the rescue of a sheep which had got under the hoofs of a mule, and but for timely succour would in a little time have been trampled to death. The removal of the sheep produced a monotonous void in the mules' daily round, until it was discovered that the wood of which the stalls were built was saturated with the most excellent salt. From that date onward "crib-chewing" became a favourite occupation, and by the time the expedition reached Bombay once again the mules must have been in debt to the Government of India for a considerable amount on the score of dilapidations.

On the fourth day after leaving Bombay a narrow yellow line bounded the horizon to the north. The

coast between Chahbar and Jask affords but an open anchorage, and consists of a low, sandy, surf-beaten shore, backed a short distance inland by a series of difficult parallel mountain ranges running in a general direction north-west to south-east. Behind these we suspected that the Ghilzais were encamped. The villages along this coast are all well-known landing-places of the gun-runners—Gabrig, Sadaich, Rapch, Galag—the last of which was given out as our landing-place. It is situated about one mile up the eastern branch of the Rapch River, just inside an inconvenient bar. This river is one of the few perennial rivers along this coast.

At ten o'clock on the morning of Monday, April 10, the *Highflyer* and the *Northbrook* dropped anchor off the mouth of the Rapch between two and three miles from the shore, and the latter began immediately to disembark troops. It was some time before the *Hardinge* arrived, as she had dropped some distance behind owing to the fact that she was burning "country coal"—i.e., Indian coal. A pilot launch was sent off to discover the best place for landing at that state of the tide, and on the way to the shore fell in with a patrolling "boat-cruiser," whose hirsute occupants, Ulyssean in aspect, hailed the boat with offers of assistance in finding the channel. The tide being at that hour somewhat low, it was found impossible to cross the bar, and so the landing had to be effected slightly to the eastward of the mouth. Hour after hour the launches came and went, each

with its "tow" of three ship's lifeboats, until by three in the afternoon the *Northbrook's* complement formed up on the beach, and marched off to camp at the date-grove at Galag, one mile inland. The *Hardinge* had not been so lucky, for a stiff breeze springing up in the afternoon interrupted the landing, which was not completed until the following morning. The mules were landed in lifeboats from which the thwarts had been removed. On arrival in shore a cordon of sepoy was formed round the boat, from which the mules leapt into the water. The mules, on gaining terra-firma, were allowed one long roll in the sand, to take off the stiffness of their cramped positions on board—a diversion which they appeared thoroughly to enjoy—and were then loaded up preparatory to marching. The landing costume of the men, as may be seen in the photograph, was of the scantiest description; and very necessary it was, too, since the boats could rarely approach within seventy yards of the shore. The *Highflyer* also landed a contingent of Marines under Major Herriot, R.M.L.I.—handy men, every one of them, and already well versed in "Gulf lore." Blankets and "grub" were scarce that night at Galag, and most of us slept as we were on the sand.

The next day a tiring march in the heat of the day through a scrub desert brought the vanguard to a well, surrounded by an iron fence, from which all drank greedily, regardless of filters, and by evening the whole force was encamped about twelve

miles inland at the telephone-hut at Rapch, the scene of the murder in 1897 by Baluchis of Mr. E. Graves, one of the Indo-European Telegraph Company's superintendents. Here the column was met by Sirdar Saiyid Khan of Geh, a semi-independent chief whose authority extends over the greater portion of Persian Mekran, a man with whom our relations have been on a friendly footing for some years past on account of the telegraph-line which traverses his territory, for the protection of which he receives a small subsidy.

At Galag the column had been met by Mr. E. G. Gregson, who had succeeded Colonel Malleson on special intelligence duty in the Persian Gulf in 1909, and whose intimate knowledge of all frontier questions, and personal acquaintance with the principal characters, notorious and otherwise, in gun-running circles, fitted him in a peculiar manner to accompany the expedition in the capacity of Political Officer. In a conversation with the latter and with Captain Craufurd, D.S.O., Gordon Highlanders, Intelligence Officer at Jask, the Sirdar readily agreed to lend his good offices on our behalf in inducing Sirdar Islam Khan of Bint to co-operate with us in the extinction of the arms traffic by excluding Afghans from his country. A letter in this sense was accordingly despatched to Sirdar Islam Khan, notifying him of the landing of the force, and requesting him, under the authority of the Persian Government, to come in, with the object of arriving at some solution of the situation. This

interview took place in the Sirdar's camp at Rapch, where, under the shade of a giant tamarisk, a few rugs had been spread, on which the Sirdar reclined with his son. Two negro slaves handed cool water in a shallow brazen bowl, but out of our saddlebags we produced some chocolate and a sparklet siphon, which surprised and delighted both father and son. Saiyid Khan in appearance is a man of fifty years of age, with the dark complexion of the true Baluch, and a melancholy expression in his dreamy eyes, which is accounted for by the fact that he is an opium-smoker. His son, a cheerful boy of ten or twelve years of age, rode with us several marches.

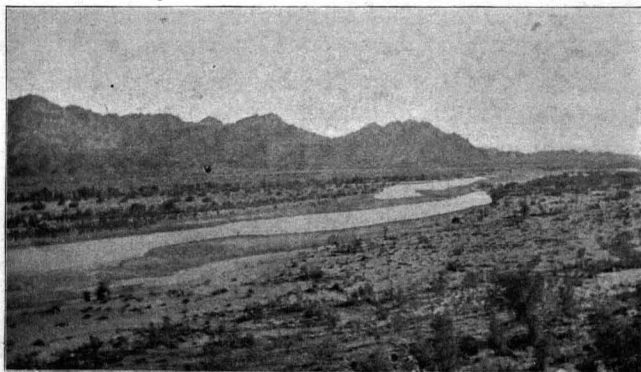
The experience of the previous day had convinced Colonel Delamain that the heat would not permit of day-marching, and henceforward all marching was done either by night or in the early morning. Except when night-marching, camp was therefore always broken before even the dawn was faintly perceptible in the eastern sky. At Rapch we were fortunate in obtaining about thirty camels after a slight palaver with their owners, who had driven them off into the scrub, thinking that they were to receive no payment for them. This settled, the column marched twelve miles to Chikai Bund on the Rapch River. Troops marched well, giving evidence of the exceptional mobility of the force, whose transport had been cut down to one blanket (4 pounds) for officers and half a blanket (2 pounds) for the men, no tents being allowed. The country

traversed consisted at first of a tamarisk jungle, which later gave way to a gradual ascent over a stony plain, until the range of Zaur came into view. The route then dropped down once more into the bed of the Rapch River to the oasis of Chikai Bund on its left bank, about three miles from the entrance to the defile between Zaur and Chikai. Here a halt was made for three days; while mules were sent back to the coast for six days' extra rations. Up till now not a sign of life had been noticed. Except for deserted tracts of desert, surrounded by ditches, which appeared to have been subjected to a half-hearted attempted at cultivation, there was nothing that could have been termed a field. But as we entered the rich oasis of Chikai Bund, a herdsman was perceived driving off his cattle, and on the following day we caught a glimpse of a white-robed form high up on the opposite hillside, apparently scanning our position with interest. Karkindar lay now almost due west of us, and a short reconnaissance was made in this direction, in the hope of finding traces of the "dushman" (enemy), Karkindar being the home of Mullah Khair Mahommed, who was known to have collected a small following. Nothing came of it, however, beyond the establishment of helio communication with the coast.

On April 12 news arrived that Sirdar Islam Khan was already on his way down from Bint, in answer to the summons that had been addressed to him. On the following day one double company, under



SEPOYS LANDING THEIR KIT AT GALAG.



VIEW OF THE RAPCH RIVER AT CHIKAI BUND.

To face page 158.