

1-1-1909

Letters on the Baluch-Afghan Boundary Commission of 1896 (1909)

A. H. McMahon

Baluch-Afghan Boundary Commission

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Recommended Citation

McMahon, A. H. and Baluch-Afghan Boundary Commission, "*Letters on the Baluch-Afghan Boundary Commission of 1896 (1909)*" (1909). *Books in English*. Paper 44.
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LETTERS
ON
THE BALUCH=AFGHAN
BOUNDARY COMMISSION
OF
1896.

UNDER CAPTAIN A. H. McMAHON, C.I.E.

British Commissioner.

Written to the *Englishman* (Calcutta) and *Times of India* (Bombay) by their Special Correspondent
with the Mission.

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Englishman and the *Times of India*.

Calcutta:

PRINTED AT THE BAPTIST MISSION PRESS.

1909.

TO
M. G. M.
FOR WHOM AND AT WHOSE INSPIRATION
THESE LETTERS WERE WRITTEN
AND TO
THE TRIO
AT WHOSE WISH THEY ARE NOW
REPRINTED.

1896

E. H. M.

M. G. M.

M. J. M.

F. H. M.

1909.

10-29-74 gift A. Paul

The Baluch-Afghan Boundary Commission of 1896.

[FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.]

CAMP SPINTIJA, FEB. 2.

WHEN Sir Mortimer Durand visited Kabul in the cold weather of 1893, one of the results of his mission was the appointment of three boundary commissions to demarcate the frontier between India and Afghanistan, *viz.*, the Baluch-Afghan, the Aomar, and the Waziristan Boundary Commissions. The first named left Quetta on the 25th March, 1894, with Captain McMahon, C.I.E., as British Commissioner, and, after 15 months of considerable hardship, much hard work, and many delays, the Commission returned to India in June 1895, having completed the demarcation of the frontier as far as Gwazha.

The boundary between the southern portion of Afghanistan and Baluchistan remains to be settled from Gwazha as far as Koh-i-Malik Siah, a mountain which forms the meeting point of the boundaries of Afghanistan, Persia, and Baluchistan, and the Commission of 1896 has this task before it. The composition of the British Commission

is as follows :—Captain A. H. McMahon, C.I.E., British Commissioner ; Mr. G. P. Tate, Survey of India, with a survey party ; Captain H. F. Walters, of the 24th (Baluchistan) Regiment, Bombay Infantry, with 100 men of his regiment ; Lieutenant F. C. Webb-Ware, of the 7th Bombay Lancers and 25 sabres of the 5th Bombay Cavalry (Sindh Horse) ; and Surgeon-Captain F. P. Maynard, I.M.S., as Medical Officer and Naturalist. The British Commissioner is assisted by a native assistant, Mir Shumshah, Extra Assistant Commissioner of Pishin. The Afghan Commissioner, Sirdar Muhammad Umar Khan, arrived in Chaman on January 23rd, the same day that the British Commission assembled in Quetta and that Captain Walters left Chaman with the escort for Gulistan, there to await the arrival of the British Commissioner. Three busy days, the 24th, 25th, and 26th, were spent in Quetta collecting and arranging stores, transport, etc.

The weather in Quetta was most unusually mild for the time of year, and the hills round showed only a slight covering of snow. On the night of the 26th, however, the clouds that had been hanging about became heavier, rain began to fall, and by the morning of the 27th every hill round was covered with snow, reaching very low down ; the temperature fell fast, and the Commission left Quetta by rail under depressing circumstances as far as the weather was concerned. The new platform at the railway station could certainly

have given points to an Irish bog, and by the time all were aboard the floors of the railway carriages resembled a London street wood pavement on a wet day more than anything else. However, we were all in good spirits, had had our last look at civilisation, and were off at last, prepared for worse hardships than the temporary annoyance of tramping about a muddy station on a pouring wet day. Extremes of temperature and scarcity of supplies, food and water, are the principal "hardships" to be expected. Camping in snow at first with the thermometer below zero, and later on in the sandy desert with a temperature of 110° in one's tents, is not all beer and skittles. The beer at least is conspicuous by its absence; and in some places it will be necessary to carry large quantities of water and make long forced marches to get across the desert. As this is the case, everyone on leaving Nushki will be mounted, mostly on camels.

After a couple of hours run in the train Gulistan, a small station on the line to Chaman, was reached, and the Commission went into camp with Captain Walters and the escort, who were already encamped near the railway station. The hills of the Khojak range close by were covered with snow and a real keen north wind was blowing off them, tempered, however, by the sun which had come out. A short halt had to be made at Gulistan owing to the non-arrival of some stores and to the soaking of everything by the heavy rain;

but on the 29th a start was made, and Spintijha after a march of 19 miles was reached. After leaving the Fort of Gulistan on the left the road was a continuous ascent along the dried-up bed of the Landi stream until the Top Kotal was reached at an elevation of about 7,000 ft. From this the road descended by a very steep path about a mile long into Spintijha. The march was unmarked by any incident except that the hospital assistant enjoyed a spill from his spirited mule which, as he put it, "did make too much run" and give him too much trouble. Some of the camels were ten hours on the road. Spintijha is the proud possessor of one small mud Levy hut which is placed at the upper end of a sloping valley, and it derives its name from the existence of a large fine white volcanic rock with some smaller ones adjacent to it. These run along the line of the earthquake crack which has existed probably for centuries, but which was widely reopened in 1892, and has been traced from Murgha Chaman as far down as Shorawak, over 80 miles, by Captain McMahon. Its direction here is from north-east to south-west, and it apparently terminates in the latter direction in the desert. The remarkable feature of the country is that the hills to the east of the crack are composed of sedimentary rock while those to the west are igneous. The hills here are covered with southern wood and small game is fairly plentiful. As usual in this part of the country the cemeteries have their

tombs piled up with animals' horns. In one here there is an orial horn measuring 31 inches—quite a decent length—and on one grave is a fair-sized ibex's horn.

Shortly after arrival in camp the barometer began to fall rapidly, clouds gathered, and during the night rain and hail alternately fell, varied by a thunderstorm about 1-30 A.M., and severe squalls of wind, which put all tent ropes to the test and found some wanting. The minimum thermometer registered 33° ; not so low as at Gulistan, however, where all the irrigation water and the water in our baths was frozen each morning. On the 30th a halt was made and everybody tried, but most failed, to get warm. There were frequent squalls of rain and large-sized hail from morning till evening. Our doctor varied the monotony by rigging up the brand-new Bachelor soda-water machine. As a married and scientific man it was thought he was the one least likely to blow the camp up with his efforts. The machine is the first that ever burst (it is hoped that will remain a figure of speech!) into this silent land. If all the jokes made over the filling of the first three dozen soda were bottled up, there would be no fear of the supply of condensed gas running short. Anyhow, the operation was satisfactorily performed, and the consumption of soda and whisky rose in celebration of the event.

The night of the 30th was very wet again. Rain fell most of the night, but towards morning

it snowed, and by 10 A.M. of the 31st the whole camp was covered with a couple of inches of snow ; and snow-balling became the order of the day. In the afternoon sleet fell, and about tea time some ghostly figures rode silently into camp. They proved to be Captain McConaghey, Political Assistant at Pishin, and some levy sowars, and a very miserable ride up from Gulistan had they experienced. The next day—the 1st of February—began the month with glorious weather. In the morning everyone turned out “to shoot something,” a Briton’s highest ambition in French eyes, but a long tramp over the hills only resulted in a couple of chakore. Sirdar Muhamad Umar Khan, the Afghan Commissioner, has arrived at Gwazha—after some heavy marching—and demarcation will now begin. A meeting of the two Commissioners has been arranged for tomorrow.

DURBĀR AT WUCHDARA.

[FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.]

CAMP SPINTIJA, FEB. 7.

My last letter was despatched from Spintija where February 1st found us encamped and all arrangements made for the reception of the Afghan Commissioner in Durbar on February 2nd at Wuchdara, a small place about six miles away down the valley of the Wuchdara river, and about equi-distant from the Afghan Camp. We

had reckoned without our host, however. The weather clerk decreed otherwise, for during the night a regular hill storm of wind and rain came up and spoiled all the arrangements. Over an inch of rain fell, and at intervals during the night the dismal sound of the lascar's mallet was heard driving tent pegs home while the wind roared and the tents shivered. Morning broke to find the observatory tent half down and presenting a very dissipated appearance, while the Doctor Sahib was not forthcoming at all, being buried beneath his fallen tent. The reason of his taking things so quietly was found to be that, anticipating the catastrophe, he had stowed himself, bed, bedding and everything, under a huge macintosh sheet, and he declared that the only sleep he got during the night was after the tent had come down and held him prisoner. Fresh snow had fallen on the hills round and the Khwaj Amram (8,864 feet) had acquired a fresh thick snow cap, and so spoilt our chance of a picnic to its summit with the survey officer, who meant going there on business intent. Towards evening the weather improved and the night was clear and frosty, the thermometer registering 26·50F. The 3rd of February was a lovely day and so we rode down to Wuchdara and Captain McMahon received the Afghan Commissioner in Durbar. The mess tent, with a large shamiana in front of it, had been pitched ready, and in front of it waved the Union Jack with the Star of India.

A guard of honour of fifty rifles was drawn up in two lines facing inwards forming an avenue for the Sirdar to advance through, the twenty sowars of the 5th Bombay Cavalry (Sindh Horse) being drawn up to one side. Shortly after our arrival at 3 P.M., the Afghan Commissioner appeared with his party. The Sirdar dismounted and was met by the British party and received with a general salute. Captain McMahon, Lieut. Walters, and the Afghan Commissioner are old friends as they jointly demarcated the frontier from Chaman as far as Ghwazha—where we begin—last year, and the greetings were most friendly. Sirdar Muhammed Umar Khan is a fine vigorous old man of between 60 and 70. One says old because one knows he is, not because he looks it. His face is weather-beaten and his hair might be white if it were allowed; but his bearing is manly and upright and his laugh hearty, and the Sirdar could give points to many a man little more than half his age. He was accompanied by several influential maliks hailing from Kandahar and the banks of the Helmund river. The very friendly greetings over, we entered the Durbar tent and sat down; Captain McMahon on the right of the centre with his officers on his right, and the Sirdar on the left with the maliks on his left. The usual conversation ensued, and green tea (levély stuff if it didn't give one indigestion and a head), sweets (Peliti's best), and fruit were handed round, followed by smokes of all kinds, cigarettes being

apparently most appreciated. The conversation was carried on, of course, in Persian, with which the British Commissioner and Mr. Tate are well acquainted. The latter officer has travelled all over Baluchistan and Arabia, and comes across many old friends.

After more tea, sweets, and smokes, the Durbar ended, the Afghan party leaving for their camp and we riding back to ours at Spintijha. The Afghan escort consisted of about a dozen mounted men, some of whom wore the Kandahar medal given by the Amir to his troops taking part in the fight against the Hazaras round about Kandahar in 1892. It is a silver medal a little less than a rupee in size with the Amir's arms (a musjid) on one side, and a Persian inscription on the other. The men wear them pinned over the right breast with a coloured string hanging down and looped up to a button of the tunic. Many of the men wore Russian riding boots, and it was noteworthy that not one wore spurs. Their uniforms varied considerably, from a khaki drill cut-away to London and North-Western guards' blue cloth coats, silver buttons and all. The head-dress of some ran to squat-looking khaki helmets with silver badges, assorted, while others looked smarter in the puggari and khula of the country. All were armed with gun and sword, also varying in pattern, but all no doubt being serviceable on occasion. The mounts were the best part of their turnout, and judging from our experience since

the Durbar their horses would easily ascend St. Paul's dome, to say nothing of Scaw Fell Pike.

On our return to camp we found Sir Naoroz Khan, K.C.I.E., Khan of Kharan, had arrived during our absence. The next day, Tuesday, February 4th, being also fine, Lieutenant Webb-Ware, Mr. Tate and Dr. Maynard set off soon after 10 A.M. to ascend the Khwaja Amran, the highest peak in the range, 8,864 feet high. Much of the snow of the preceding week had melted and it was thought it would be possible to ascend to the top, as proved to be the case. A ride of six miles brought them to the top of the Spintijha Kotal (wrongly called the Ghwaza Pass sometimes). The road runs along the bed of the Ishamhan nullah, which is dotted with the spine or pistacio tree. These are common all over the mountains, and at this time of the year present the most desolate, leafless, lifeless appearance. Later, however, they become green, and about August they yield an abundance of fruit. The largest seen on this ride up measured $9\frac{1}{2}$ feet in girth. This was a simple trunked one; many have four, five and six trunks, growing up into what look like one tree, and of course, would measure much more. Many of them may be seen growing out of what is apparently solid rock, and how they obtain nourishment seems a mystery. At the upper part of the valley are some vineyards, though at that time of year no one would recognise them as such. Chakore were fairly plentiful there.

From the Kotal the ascent was made, a guide of the country being obtained, and very useful he was. There was nothing difficult in the ascent except that the slaty shale was treacherous and the snow very deep in places. This was where the usefulness of the guide came in. He seemed to know by instinct where the drifts were—there was nothing in the appearance to tell often—and those who neglected his lead generally found themselves sinking up to their waists at once, if not deeper. The summit was reached about 3-30 P.M., and the cold was intense, but the view! Well, it was worth double the climb. As is well known, the Khwaja Amran mountains form a range of about 50 miles long extending from the Toba plateau on the north to the Shorawak plain on the south, and separating the Peshin plain on the east from the Kadanai plain in Afghanistan on the west. They are generally about 8,000 feet, but Khwaja Amran, on which the party found themselves, is 8,864 feet. Looking north they saw Chaman clearly, the fort and railway station about 28 miles distant; on the north-west the mountain sloped down gradually to the Kadanai plain, the foot slope being known as the Daman (from the Persian word meaning a skirt). Across this plain Kandahar could be indistinctly seen, 60 miles distant. Further west the Registan Desert was spread showing undulating and uninteresting, desolate and waterless.

To the south-west the range gradually sub-

sided to the Shorawak plain. To the south-east the Taka-tu mountain beyond Quetta stood out boldly, covered with snow, Quetta itself being hidden by a low range of intervening hills. On the summit of the Khwaja Amran is a ziarat or shrine, sacred to the memory of Khwaja Amran. He is said to have travelled about the country on a sort of seven-leagued camel, the marks of whose huge footsteps are to be found in different parts of the country. The grave is a very large one, forty-five feet long, suited to the enormous stature of the saint. Near one end of it is a sort of walled enclosure where the Doctor made a small cave in the snow, and with everybody's help managed to work the boiling point thermometer. Unfortunately there was too much haze about for the survey officer to take any observations, but he succeeded in taking some photographs, one being of the earthquake crack alluded to in my first letter. Whatever doubt one might have had about this being really an earthquake crack as seen at Spintijha was dispelled on seeing it from the top of Khwaja Amran. Its course could be clearly traced north towards Chaman and south towards Shorawak. Writing of earthquakes, a very pronounced short one was heard and felt during dinner in Spintijha on the same evening after returning. It was accompanied by subterranean thunder, but there was no return swell. On Wednesday, February 5th, demarcation was begun, five pillars being erected over a tract of

seven miles of frontier beginning at Khwajha. When the boundary has been agreed upon a hole is dug in the ground at an elevated spot selected, and a stone slab, with the letters B.A.B. and the number of the pillar cut on it, is fixed in position at the bottom of the hole by mortar. Stones are then piled on top of this until a cairn about 10 or 12 feet high is formed. This is whitewashed and the boundary pillar is then very evident from a long distance.

Demarcation was continued on February 6th. On February 7th a shoot had been arranged, and 8 A.M. saw us all in the saddle except the survey officer who had work to do in camp. The night before there had been $15\frac{1}{2}$ degrees of frost and the cold was very bitter and the sun very welcome as we rode down the Wuchdara river bed. After emerging on the Kadanai plain we changed horses and rode on to the Sargu hills, a total distance of 28 miles, over ground that was anything but good going. Some of it was what is known as *pat*—fairly riddled with rat holes over which we cantered—but most of it was stony plain, closely intersected with dried-up shallow water-courses, too broad to jump, which necessitated your horse walking down into and out of them again, tiring to the horse and annoying to the rider. The Sargu hills are composed of igneous rock, and stand up out of the plains a collection of comparatively low hills about five miles in circumference; small outcrops of the same rock run out from

them to the desert. They are striking in appearance, and with their black, desolate look remind one of Aden as seen in passing.

Near the hills the Afghan party met us and the *honk* began. A number of men beat across the hills towards where we were stationed at the opening of one of the gorges on to the desert. Oorial, markhor or chinkara were expected, but unfortunately none put in an appearance, probably because more beaters were required than were obtainable. Tiffin was welcome, and we started back at three o'clock, and on the way back we had some good coursing. Those who had been beating across the hills and our party, twenty including British and Afghans, spread out in line and slowly beat across the plain, four men at equal intervals marching about fifty yards in front with greyhounds called "tazis" held in leash. We had two excellent runs after hare, and in each Captain McMahon's celebrated hound Rufus distinguished himself. Getting off long after the tazis he quickly passed them; in each run he ran his hare to earth—staying beside the hole till we rode up, while the other dogs wandered about at fault. The runs were each over two miles, and so Rufus was pretty well tired out when we got back to camp at 8 P.M. after his run of fifty-six miles and the coursing thrown in. To-morrow the 8th we move to our next camp at Shista Sur, a short march of ten miles.

THE SHISTA AND LORA RIVERS.

[FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.]

CAMP SHILA KUCH, FEB. 16.

My last letter was sent off from Spintijha where the cold had been intense—so much so that the soda water froze at once on opening the bottles, and it was almost impossible to get any poured out before the contents became converted into a sort of snow-ice. Melting this was but poor satisfaction, as the soda was then found to have entirely lost its gas. The last day at this camping ground a dog died of pneumonia, while a horse belonging to one of the levy sowars died on the way back from the Sarju Hills, where we went on the 7th, 28 miles away.

On the 8th of February we marched ten miles over the Top Kotal—thus partly retracing our steps—to a place called Shista Sur at the head of the Shista river. Snow and hail fell most of the march and made the going, naturally bad, infinitely worse. At one tight place at the upper end of a steep nullah several camels came to grief, and Lieutenant Walters spent most of the day time with a working party literally shoving the three hundred odd camels we have with us over the hill top. Shista Sur is 6,440 feet, *i.e.*, higher than Spintijha, but, being sheltered, is warmer.

The next day, the 9th, we marched at 8 A.M. down the dried-up bed of the Shista River, 12

miles, as far as the junction of that river with the Lora river, Captain McMahon and working parties marching along the top of the hills erecting boundary pillars and not getting into camp until 7 P.M. This camp was picturesque, and looked very smart as laid out by Lieutenant Webb-Ware, Camp Commandant. The river Lora comes down from the north between high precipitous hills, and at this place is about fifty yards across. Its water, which is muddy, runs deep above and below the camp, but is fordable opposite it, where it is joined by the Shista river from the north-west. The latter river is at this season represented by a small rivulet of clear drinkable water, meandering down a broad dried-up bed of shale, the width of which shows its capabilities when in flood. On the left bank of the Lora is a high flat bank of sand, and on it the camp was pitched in British territory. On the right bank just below the junction with the Shista is another ground suitable for a camp. This is Afghan territory, and was left for the Afghan Mission Camp. Owing to some misunderstanding, however, they did not halt there, but camped some miles further along the frontier. The sand-bank on which our camp was pitched lies in the hollow of a semi-circular range of hills, at the foot of which the river makes a sharp turn to the right.

We were thus almost surrounded by precipitous, unscaleable hills about 800 to 1,000 feet high, and this, coupled with the lower level, viz., 3,680

feet, rendered the camp most delightfully sheltered and warm after the bleak exposed situation of the Spintijha ground. The scene as the working parties arrived in camp at 7 P.M. was one to appeal to the imagination. The troops in camp had lighted an enormous fire on the camp side of the river to light their comrades across the ford. This lighted up the mountains all round, and upon them the tents and moving figures of those moving about on the bank cast gigantic shadows. The *dols* and *seranais* of the Baluchis as they marched down the Shista river after their hard day's climbing and building, mingled with the cries of welcome from the camp, harmonised well, and as the men, having removed their boots and putties, waded across the ford with their rifles on their shoulders, the scene was one of the most picturesque imaginable.

Owing to the Afghan Mission having marched so far ahead and to discussions about the boundary, some days were spent in this camp. All the drinking water had to be brought across the Lora from the Shista river; so Lieutenants Walters and Webb-Ware and their men set to work and constructed a bridge across the Lora. It was of stone piers at either side, with a trestle bridge in the centre, and very useful it proved. The weather during the five days' halt here was variable, two fine and three wet days being put in, the rain being partly hail and sleet. The negotiations referred to ended in a Durbar held

by Captain McMahon in our camp on the 14th, at which Sirdar Muhammad Umar Khan and all the maliks attended, and with the aid of green tea, sweets, etc., much good work was done and rapid progress made. After the Durbar the Afghans were shown the soda-water machine at work, and though too well bred to show any surprise or incredulity at the result, I fancy the whole thing was regarded as one more bit of *jadu* to be added to the list of magic already worked by the Feringhi, such as the heliograph, the telegraph, etc. Very naturally one man asked if it were boiling before taking hold of the glass in which the soda was fizzing.

On the 15th the camp marched down the bed of the Lora river 22 miles to Shila Kuch, which is a place at the northern end of the Shorawuk plain in Afghanistan—a sacred place, too, judging from the size of the cemetery near the camping ground, and the care with which it is tended. The march was a heavy one, as the ground was stony and the river had to be forded backwards and forwards forty times. The day before the march had unfortunately been wet, so the tents were very heavy; and although starting at 8 A.M., it was 5 P.M. before the camels began coming in, and 11 P.M. before the last arrived in camp. The Afghans had started before we did, and making a forced march camped some miles further down the plain. As the camp marched down the river, working parties went along the crests of the hills demarcating as they went.

Talking of camels and their unholy ways, one day at tiffin, the Cavalry officer told us a story of an *unt* he once had the honour of riding which was given to buck-jumping. This highly respectable, in other respects, quadruped bucked first his nose-string off, then he bucked his crupper off, then he bucked his saddle off, leaving the uncomfortable sahib sitting on his hump, while finally, continuing the motion, both sahib and hump were bucked off on the ground, and the beast went off rejoicing, leaving the rider a sadder and a sorer man. Still sorer, if not more humped, he seemed when we received his true story with loud smiles, which was distinctly unreasonable as we really believed every word of it. Who would not after much experience of these touching animals and their gentle ways, "contrairy" though they be, always wanting to get up when required to be sitting down, and insisting on lying down—in water for choice—when you want them to get up? The said Cavalry officer was a heavy loser by this habit on the march down the Lora, though the camel's little peculiarity was not entirely to blame. One of his camels sat down in the river, and left his kit about six hundred rupees less valuable than it was at the beginning of the march. Such losses are what one anticipates, however, and are borne quite philosophically—by the rest of the party.

A Pasteur Institute is sadly needed at Shila Kuch. During breakfast there was a wild horoosh,

and a mad dog rushed through the camp knocking down one man, and biting him and another badly, besides some dogs, on his way. He was promptly followed up and shot. The dogs of this country are not to be despised. They are bigger and sturdier than our sheep dogs. Their ears are cut off and the stumps buried in their long hair. They have plenty of pluck, too. On enquiry we found that there are so many mad dogs about here that the people carry swords to be prepared for them—their only reason for carrying them, of course! They do not seem afraid of their bites, as they have a *ziarat* especially kept for those who are bitten to visit. The consumption of a pinch of the earth there is an infallible preventive of any ill-effects after a bite from a mad dog. To such people a Pasteur Institute would be a superfluous luxury and its statistics perhaps misleading, seeing that all treated by the *ziarat*-earth system do so well.

The earthquake crack, mentioned in one of my previous letters, appeared to end here, though we may come across it again. After being traced over 100 miles it descended the slope over the eastern side of the lower end of the Kwajha Amrân range and apparently ended in the Lora river. We expect to reach Nushki on the 19th or 20th. Major "Roddy" Owen, D.S.O., will join the Mission before then, and Captain McConaghey and Lieutenant Benn will probably meet us at Nushki and see us fairly started into the Desert.

HOW KAREZES ARE MADE.

[FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.]

CAMP SIAH SANG, FEB. 29.

On February 17th the Mission split up into two parties; one, with Captain McMahon, Mr. Tate, and Captain Walters, proceeded along the crest of the Sarlat range demarcating with the Afghan Mission, while the main camp, with Lieutenant Webb-Ware and Dr. Maynard, marched along the Shorawuk plain on the west of the same range of hills. The camp at Shila Kuch, where my last letter was sent off, was situated on the left bank of the Lora river where it splits up into several channels which lose themselves on the Shorawuk plain. On the opposite bank of the Lora were the rapidly diminishing granite peaks of the Khwaja Amran range. The main camp marched to Sahib Zadakibi, 30 miles over a level plain, sandy for a good part, but showing signs of extensive and rich cultivation, numerous fields being laid out and many irrigation channels being provided with water mills for grinding wheat constructed from the Lora, in addition to the usual *karezes*.

We have now seen the last of these *karezes*. They are very interesting and ancient methods of obtaining water. Baluchistan in general suffers from want of water, and its rivers cannot be relied on except during a few months in the year

when either heavy rain or melting snow converts their dry beds into roaring torrents. At such times the people run off the river water into channels constructed for the purpose, from which their fields are irrigated, and tanks are filled at the same time to form a reserve supply. Where no river water is obtainable and hills are near, *karezes* are built. A water seer decides that water will be found at the foot of a certain hill. He is seldom wrong, though uprovided with the divining rod investigated by the Psychical Research Society. Here a well is dug, and from near the bottom of this a tunnel is made in the direction of the place where water is required. A second shaft is sunk to meet this tunnel, which slopes gradually downwards at a varying distance fifty to a hundred yards or less from the first shaft. In this way is constructed an underground waterway communicating with the surface by a series of wells passing from the foot of the hills to the plain, and along it is conducted fresh water that in the hot weather remains cool and undergoes practically no loss from evaporation. As the earth is excavated it is piled up round the margins of the wells, and a *kareze* can always be told by the line of crater-like openings running down from the hill to the plain. Such *karezes* are common round Quetta, and have been in use from very ancient times. They are common also in Persia, and are there known under the name of *kanaats*. They form the favourite homes of pigeons, and

some fairly good shooting, like trap shooting, may be obtained by disturbing the pigeons on ahead, *e.g.*, by throwing stones into the *karezes*.

In Shorawuk there are very few of these structures, the water, as already stated, being drawn from the river and from wells. These wells—few in number—are inclined and very deep, 150 to 200 feet, and are mostly dry at this season. The inhabitants of Shorawuk, which is Afghan territory, are Baretchis. The country is a long alluvial plain, intersected by the branches of the Lora river, lying between the Sarlat range and Shorarud on the east, and the Registan, or Sandy Desert, on the west. Nushki lies to the south. The district is remarkably fertile and full of game of all kinds. Shortly after leaving Shila Kuch a large fort was passed on the right. It was quadrangular with pentagon towers, one at each corner and one at the middle of each side—eight in all, and was built of sun-dried bricks and mud. It was partly in ruins—the Lora river having proved its worst enemy and washed a channel right through it. The inhabitants had lived in snug little houses built up against its outer walls, and the roofs of their houses formed a roadway round the inside of the walls and high enough up for the defenders to fire through the loopholes. Each tower was hollow, and contained an upper storey with an arched roof of sun-dried bricks placed on edge and arranged in a quadrilateral pattern. The lower storey was dug

into the ground and made an underground chamber for storing food, ammunition, etc. Several villages were passed on the march, and instead of the black blanket tents in which the nomad tribes hitherto met with live, these villages were large and prosperous-looking collections of permanent mud houses. The houses resemble in shape the gipsy tents one sees in England—oval and rounded huts—but instead of being of cloth and black like our gipsy tents, they are made of a sort of *chatai* foundation of red tamarisk “leaped” over with mud. The effect of this is that the village cannot be easily distinguished on the khaki-coloured plain; indeed you often are close on a village before discovering it.

Our doctor had a great time of it, going into the villages hunting for sick. When the people found he was a hakim, they crowded round his horse and insisted one and all on having their pulses felt! It soon appeared that they regarded him rather in the light of a “try-your-strength” machine, and they refused to budge until their strength had been registered. When he gravely pronounced them in turn either *takra* or *kamzor** they yelled with delight, congratulating the man in the first case and jeering at him in the second. Whether amused or not, however, the people kept him very busy for the next ten days while he halted at camp Sahib Zadakili, as sick came in to the

* ‘Strong’ or ‘weak.’

tune of forty or fifty a day, marching in many miles to get a dose of medicine or an operation performed. Their gratitude was expressed by stroking his coat and gently touching his chin, where, in their opinion, his beard ought to be! Just before reaching that camping ground a large *pukka* building was passed, the only *pukka* building in the district. It is a tomb erected by the side of a large cemetery and a tree, the only tree for miles, to the memory of some saint. Its *mullah*, who is evidently a very holy man, was brought into camp in state for medical treatment. There was some very good shooting near this camp, duck of all kinds, teal, grouse, pigeon, etc., being plentiful. Many “*taloor*” (lesser Indian bustard) were seen—as many as fifty in a day—but they were wild, and only one was obtained, which fell to Lieut. Webb-Ware’s gun. Foxes were also plentiful, and the marks of panthers were seen. The climate had changed considerably, and the contrast between the midday temperature (70° — 80°) and night (32°) was marked, resulting in a little sickness.

Meanwhile the demarcation party had marched 24 miles to Iltaz Karez on the crest of the Sarlat range, near which place the Afghan party was also encamped. Considerable difficulties were encountered in delimiting this bit of frontier, and it was only by the expenditure of a large amount of tact, time (ten days), and patience that the negotiations ended as successfully or as soon as they

did. Some idea of the labour involved may be derived from the fact that before the thirty miles in question was settled Captain McMahon and his party rode, walked, and climbed over two hundred miles of country. Already, indeed, in the short time we have been out a hundred miles of demarcation has been accomplished. The climate on the Sarlat range during this period left much to be desired. It was not a bad camping ground, but there were frequent hill storms, and bath and basin water was frozen solid every night. It was difficult for three men—not to mention several dogs!—to keep warm in a Field Officer's Kabul tent (used for a mess) even with two stoves going. Needless to say the sufferings of the troops and followers from the cold were greater; but as is always the case, this intense cold, combined with lots of hard work, kept them all in excellent health. The party marched 18 miles on the 27th February and joined the main camp at Sahib Zadakili, a severe sandstorm raging during the whole day and giving us a foretaste of the whirlwinds for which the desert is famous.

On the 28th February a short march of 13 miles over the Shorawuk plain brought us to Siah Sang on the northern part of Nushki. We shall probably leave here in a few days, and expect to reach Chageh, on the further side of the Lora Hamun, early in March.

Lieutenant Benn, from Kalat, will not be able to meet us in Nushki as we hoped, and it is now

unlikely that Major "Roddy" Owen, D.S.O., will join the Mission as was expected when my last letter was sent off.

A VISIT TO NUSHKI.

[FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.]

CAMP GHAZECHAH, MAR. 9.

My last letter was despatched on February 29th from Siah Sang at the southern end of Shorawuk. On March 2nd we moved across the Lora river once more, a short six miles' march, to reach a camp with a better water-supply and to be nearer the demarcation work which was going on fast. Foxes are fairly plentiful, and we have had more than one really good run ;—one that Rufus ran to earth was a particularly fine specimen, much bigger than his English brother, and in very fine condition. No wonder either seeing that game is so abundant you can hardly move without putting up enormous flocks of imperial sand grouse, while in the south of Shorawuk the lesser Indian bustard has been much more plentiful than he was in the north. He possesses all the wiliness of his big brother, and is at the same time less conspicuous, so that our bag was small. The only way to shoot him is to gradually circle round nearer and nearer him, hidden behind a camel : even that ancient practice is likely to fail unless you get one or two birds alone, as otherwise there is sure to be some outlying bird that gives the rest warning.

It was at this camp—Papring—that the news reached us of the 24th Baluchistan Regiment (Bo. I) being ordered to Mombassa; indeed they embarked at Karachi the day after the news came. Captain Walters and the men of the 24th with us are of course very disappointed not to see active service, and they are all the more so as the later received news that the strength of the regiment is to be made up from another regiment takes away their hope of joining as soon as this Mission is ended. One cannot have everything, and the men were very lucky and glad to come on the Mission. It is very natural to feel disappointed. Two such good things do not come together every day.

As this camp was the nearest we should be going to Nushki, which lies well within Baluchistan, and so removed from the boundary. I was anxious to see the place. I arranged to go with a convoy, including two sick, who were being sent back to India, rejoining the camp at its next halting place. Nushki is a district lying between Shorawuk on the north and Kharan on the south, having Chageh on the west. The inhabitants are Brahuïs and Raksharia Baluch. The place derives its importance from the fact that it is on the Kafila route from Persia and Seistan, etc., to India. It was a twenty miles march, the road lying over sandhill ridges, which have apparently blown in from the desert over the underlying *pat*. You climb ridge after ridge of soft fine sand crossing

perfectly level *pat* in between—ideal camping grounds if there were only water. It is a big *if* though, and if it did not exist Shorawuk would be an ideal agricultural district, and would doubtless attract the attention of the ubiquitous General Booth, as in such a country there would be every opportunity of pacifying and ploughing at the same time. Hindu Nushki is the proud possessor of very fine tamarisk trees. The bunniahs seem to have a good time of it and are numerous—forty to fifty shops in all—and prosperous. It was quite strange after spending weeks among the Baretchis to see the difference between their sombre clad women and children and the crowds of gaily dressed children and scarlet *sari'd* women moving about in the first village we came to where the Hindu bunniahs dwell. For Nushki is not one village but a collection of villages. In the one mentioned dwell Mussulman and Hindu peacefully together, and the village is a collection of mud houses similar to the one I described in Shorawuk in a former letter. The other three villages are very different—they are forts, *pukka* built, with little loopholed walls and towers. The villagers are not above having a little—a very little—fight with each other when they have nothing else to think about. Just now the Boundary Mission occupies their attention, and the heads of the different fort villages sank their differences and came in together in the most friendly manner to pay their respects

to Captain McMahon. Very fine-looking old men they were, too, and judging from the strikingly handsome warlike appearance of their numerous sons it will be a long time before they prefer talking to doing. A large trade is carried on in Nushki by the bunniahs, who act as middlemen, buying from the Kafilas (caravans) coming in from Kharan, Mekran, and Seistan, and forwarding the goods on to India. *Ghi*, wool, dates, and dried fruits generally form the principal portion of this trade, but *dhurris* called "tuppers" are also brought in from Kharan and Seistan and some are tasteful in design and colouring, though the majority seen were badly blended mixtures of purple and pink and other hideous combinations. I rejoined the camp at Chandan Band—24 miles off—the next day, March 5th. This place is so called because one Chandan Khan built a *band* there and damned up the rain water, thereby producing a series of fine lakes which contain water all the year round, and which have converted what was almost desert into most fertile country. As the lakes have tortuous and deep narrow creeks running off them, however, it makes a matter of moving 200 yards as the crow flies into one of a two or three miles' detour.

We have come across traces of the Afghan Delimitation Commission of 1884 which camped at this place. The duck and geese were simply swarming in the lakes, and as I rode into camp a perfect bombardment seemed to be going on in

every direction, and the birds were having but a poor time of it. Our larder gained weight. On the 6th we marched 24 miles to a place called Ziarat Syed Mohmud Zaru, fairly in the desert at last and our water troubles beginning. It is a most flourishing ziarat, and the reason points that should any caravan refuse to contribute to the shrine, some of its camels are sure to die promptly. There were but few camel skeletons lying about all the same. Perhaps few travellers have the temerity to refuse the Mullah's demands. There were a few wells which were soon emptied by the two camps (British and Afghan), but as the wells refilled in about six hours no serious difficulties occurred. On the 7th we marched 18 miles through desert to Kani, mostly over sandhills, but towards the end of the march crossing a branch of the Lora Hamun. Hamun means a lake, but here it consists of a dried salt marsh about four miles across, the experience of crossing it being very like that met with in Scinde and some parts of the Punjab, viz., a snow-white plain caused by the efflorescence, with a blazing sun overhead. The camp at Kani lay near some low black-looking hills of trap rock called Zardkoh and possessed three wells about 20 feet deep with three or four feet of water in them. One contained fairly good water, one was nearly empty, and one literally stank of sulphuretted hydrogen, and its water was quite yellow. When the inhabitants, to whom the wells belong, go away with their flocks grazing,

they fill up the well with brushwood ; and thus the stagnant water decomposes. It took us some hours cleaning the well out to get the water fit to drink, and Lieutenant Walters rigged up the Norton's tube wells to help out the water-supply, striking water at about 20 feet, the same depth as in the wells of course. The contrast between our arrangements and those made by the 1884 Mission, and the fact that they were marching rapidly through the desert to get to their destination work whereas we are demarcating through the desert, are interesting. They had wells and tanks dug before starting, at intervals all across the desert at great expense, in addition to which the Afghans sent caravans of water-carrying camels to meet them. Owing to the exigencies of demarcation work it is impossible to reckon with any certainty on our taking any particular route, and it is therefore impossible to make elaborate arrangements of that kind beforehand for increasing the water-supply at places on ahead. We have to make the most of what we find. We carry with us a very large number of *pakhals* and *mus-sacks* for carrying water when necessary, and have also two Norton tube wells. Even with these precautions it will probably soon be necessary for our party to split up into two. The water to be found in the neighbourhood of the line on ahead being only sufficient to supply a very limited number of men, and then only at very distant intervals. Owing, moreover, to the requirements

of boundary demarcation we cannot always follow routes which, from the existence of water along them, are used by those who travel in these parts. Even by those routes, as may be seen from the hardships experienced by Sir C. Macgregor and Captain Lockwood in 1887 (the latter officer dying, apparently, as the result of them), crossing this desert is not an easy matter. Again, one cannot depend too much on the information given by those few officers who have visited this desert. The conditions vary so greatly from season to season and year to year.

No two years are alike in rainfall climate, no two travellers' accounts agree exactly, and what is true therefore one year may prove very different another. This year has been a bad one all over India, and up here, too, for rain, and so our difficulties are likely to be more serious than usual. They would have been graver still but for the rain which fell while we were in the hills, and which, if not enough to supply us with drinking water, was at any rate sufficient to assure us of fodder over a good part of the route. We halted at Kani one day, and on the 9th marched 15 miles across the main portion of the Hamun to Gaze-chah. The rivers in this thirsty country do not behave like ordinary rivers. They are not allowed to, the land is too thirsty altogether. Instead of running down to a sea-coast and emptying themselves into the sea, as well-behaved rivers should, they are attracted and sucked dry by sandy deserts.

Thus the Lora river along which we marched so long, ends, after ploughing on its way through the plains of Shorawuk and Nushki, in numerous streams which are at once lost in the sand except when the river is in flood. It is the area thus flooded occasionally which is known as the Hamun, and this Lora Hamun is about 25 miles long by six broad. Just now it is one vast flat plain of alluvial soil (*pat*) with not a blade of green stuff on it anywhere and almost as level as a billiard table. Strange to say there had been a shower of rain in the night, and instead of its usual white salt efflorescent appearance, it presented a uniform drab colour, and the absence of clouds of sand and dust made crossing it much pleasanter than usual.

While the camp marched straight to Gazeerah, 15 miles, we made a detour of about 25 miles south, reconnoitring, and were rewarded, in one way at all events, by having a grand three-mile gallop after some chinkara. They were too fast for our dogs, however, and we had to give it up. We also killed a fox, one of the Registan variety, after a short run. These and a few lizards were the only living things we saw. By the way, catching lizards is no mean sport, and for hard exercise beats butterfly catching. At Gazeerah we had to dig for water and use tube wells also. The first water obtained was awful stuff, just like thick black slimy bilge water and stinking quite as bad. Sir Charles Macgregor has realistically described

the drinking water of the "God-i-Zirreh," the Hamun of the Helmund river which we shall see quite enough of shortly, and his account is so applicable to what we are already enjoying, that I give it you here. In his "Wanderings in Beluchistan" he says: "And such water it was. Ugh! The remembrance of it will stick to me till I die. There are certain things I never forget; one is a particular powder an aunt used to give me at Portobello, when a child, and I am sure another will be this water. It might have some recommendation to people who are suffering, for I am sure it would cure as many things as Hunyadi Janos is said to be good for, and I am sure constipation, singing in the head, indigestion, heart-burn, etc., would not have a chance against it. An enterprising chemist who introduced 'Zirreh' water with a recommendation from some eminent physician, would soon realise ample returns, and the villa and one-horse chaise would no longer be castles in the air for his imagination. If any one should wish to save themselves the trouble of going to Zirreh to fetch it, I think I could give a recipe which would taste something like it. Take, then, the first nasty-looking water you can find, mix salt with it till you make it taste as nasty as it looks, then impregnate it with gas from a London street lamp, and add a little bilge water; shake vigorously and it is ready for use. N.B.—The test of its being sufficiently nauseous is that after drinking you cannot even speak for a second or two."

If any of your readers think they would like to sample such nectar, I have no doubt we can carry a little back with us ; indeed, it will be advisable to do so if only to prove that we are not all like Pagett, M.P. Bad as such stuff is, it is very precious, and when treated with alum and filtered seems to be harmless ; it is scarce, however, and its scarcity may lead to both our camps being split up and only a small party of each going with Captain McMahon and the Afghan Commission to Koh-i-Malik Siah, the main camps making for the Helmund river. The solution of the difficulty or any other route possible for our party, whatever it is, will be the subject of my next letter.

HOW HUNGER WORKS.

[FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.]

CAMP ROBAT I, MARCH 25.

After leaving Gazechah on March 11th we marched to Lijji Talao, 15 miles, almost due south along the western limit of the Lora Hamun. Lijji Talao is a delightful spot on a stony plain which slopes up to the Chageh hills about four miles away to the north-west. From these hills a stream of good water runs down across the plain between artificial banks and ends in a small tank or *talao* by the side of which we encamped. To find such abundance of good water was a great treat after our late experiences though naturally

a shock to one's notions of what a desert should be. On the march midges were troublesome, and settling on horse and rider drew blood freely ; giving us a foretaste of the midge and insect plagues of Seistan, where they are said to be so bad that the horses have to be stabled in underground dark chambers, and when taken out for use their bellies have to be wrapped up with blanket. This is one of the reasons why we shall probably have to leave our horses behind and ride camels.

We halted two days at Lijji Talao to enable Captain McMahon to visit the Shibian Pass and to demarcate across the hills. The Shibian Pass is between 3,000 and 4,000 feet, and in the middle of scenery wild and desolate in the extreme. The central valley of these hills has not been explored before, and Captain McMahon is of opinion that it probably represents an old volcanic crater—a not unlikely thing, judging from the configuration of the country and the nature of the rocks around. The valley measures about 10 by 12 miles, surrounded by a fringe of granite peaks about 7,300 feet. It is not unlike Babaghar behind Fort Sandeman. On the road up to the pass a cave was passed which is said by the natives to have been formerly inhabited by a huge dragon which was slain after a great fight by the saint whose shrine is close by. At this camp it became evident that Sir Naoroz Khan's men (about 200) were running short of supplies, which was want of

management, as Kharan was not so very far away, and signs were not wanting that the Afghans were in a similar predicament. This, however, was not their fault. The supplies, which were to have been sent from the Helmund to meet them at Chageh, had not arrived. One of the Afghan escort asked one of ours how it was we always had lots of supplies, they had not, and the people would not sell to them. "Oh!" said our sepoy, with an air of superiority, "we're all right, Muk-munn (McMahon) Sahib always makes a very *pukka bundabast* we can go on for months." The knowledge that this is so has a good effect in accelerating demarcation, and introduces an element of sweet reasonableness into the deliberations. Hunger is a really potent factor in this world. Owing to the presence of plenty of water here game was abundant, and the specimens collected numerous. This led to an amusing *contre-temps*. The "pachyderm" as the taxidermist is called with a levity not at all suited to his appearance or importance—is in the habit of sending game birds that have been shot, over to the mess kitchen after removing their skins. Whether the length of beak and leg of some stilts sent him confused him or not we don't know, but at the next meal a nauseous dish containing stilts, hawks, owls, teal, shovellers, etc., was served, and the pachyderm ran a nearer share of being slain and added to the dish than he ever had before. The cook could hardly be blamed for not recognising

a hawk or any bird minus its head, tail, wings, legs, and skin !

On the 14th we marched 28 miles to Duganan, going round by Chageh to see the place. Though it is the headquarters of a large district at present held by the Afghans—but to become part of Baluchistan as now demarcated—it is merely a small mud fort, which, when we reached it, we found to be held in great force ! Three men showed their noses and about six inches of their rifles over the wall of the one tower the fort possesses, and were not overwilling to answer questions. There is a fine tope of large tamarisk trees close to the fort, which reminded one of an English orchard. From thence the road led over a sloping, very stony plain, upon which we had a short and fruitless hunt after a fine buck gazelle up into the Chageh hills to Duganan, where we camped on an elevated basin (3,500 ft.) surrounded by jagged black hills on ground showing signs of old cultivation, but now covered by long dry grass. At night this same grass got on fire, and but for the wind being light this Mission would have come to an untimely end. As it was, the whole escort turned out and only succeeded in stamping it out when it had reached within a couple of yards of the store godown, where all supplies were lying. No sooner had this fire been got under than another blazed up on the other side of the camp—started by the camel-men's cooking fires this time, and this was put out also with some

difficulty. Strange to say the camels didn't seem to mind, and stood staring at it blazing within a few feet of their noses without moving. The order, then had to be given for all fires within the camp to be put out, and with extra sentries the night passed without any further alarms occurring. If the tents had been burnt—and they make splendid if short-lived bonfires—as well as the supplies, we should have had to ignominiously retrace our steps.

On the 15th we marched 20 miles to Gargarok, or rather to a camping ground two miles beyond it, in the bed of the Mazari stream. The scenery was wild and beautiful in its ugliness. Ragged topped, precipitous, black mountains towering a thousand feet above us most of the way, never a living thing except a raven to be seen anywhere. On the 16th we crossed the Mazari Kotal, 4,900 feet, and then marched along a stony plateau 14 miles to Barabchah, 4,500 feet. No rain had fallen there for two years or more; there were some brackish springs—so by way of celebrating the arrival of the Mission a thunderstorm came on shortly after we reached camp and rain poured down. It was lucky this did not happen while we were at the preceding camp Gargarok, as being in the narrow bed of the stream, a gorge in fact, the only camping ground with water, the camp would have been washed away to a certainty, as the igneous rocky crags surrounding it could not absorb water, and the gorge sides and bottom

showed what torrents must at times fill it. These said crags assumed fantastic shapes in places. In one the rocks stood piled on one another, and outlined a figure which was a cross between a Sphinx and a Buddha. In another there was a pedestal like a cairn built by man, and on it was an erect square stone pillar ten feet high, the whole looking exactly like one of the landmarks the people of the country are accustomed to build to mark either the road or the water-supply. The storm at Barabchah was a severe one, and several tents were blown down, while the camels were much delayed on the road and the baggage suffered somewhat. Thunderstorms occurred at 4-30 and again at 10 P.M., and about an inch of rain fell. This was most satisfactory, and as the storm was apparently not entirely local, it should simplify our crossing the worst part of the desert considerably by increasing the amount of water available. The three days' halt at Barabchah was most welcome after the long marches of the preceding weeks. On the 17th the Eed festival was celebrated, and civilities were exchanged between the British and Afghan Commissioners in the shape of trays of sweets, fruit, scent, etc.

On the 18th our long expected sports came off, and were most successful. A piece of ground near the camp had been cleared, a half-mile race-course marked out, a shamiana erected on a rising bit of ground as a grandstand, and an excellent programme provided. The events were a mile flat

race ; tent-pegging, in which the Ressaldar of the Sindh Horse and a Pishin Levy Sowar distinguished themselves greatly, the pegs having to be placed edgeways and then the riders standing up in the saddle, in order to decide the winner, who proved to be the Ressaldar ; camel race ; pony race ; wrestling on foot and on mules, which was very amusing. The form of wrestling known as " ski " was good, too. It resembles our game of hop and push somewhat. It is essentially the game of the camel-men who come from the Ghilzai and Maroof country. Two men face each other, holding up one foot by the great toe behind the back with the opposite hand, and then hop round each other, closing when they see their chance, and each trying to throw the other. The throw is not complete until the man thrown leaves go of his toe, and the winner must retain hold of his own toe after the throw. The Chupatti race elicited roars of laughter. The men had to run 100 yards, light a fire, prepare a chupatti, cook it, eat it, and then run another 100 yards. As there is always a good deal of humbug in the race, such as bagging each other's firewood, spilling the flour, etc., one wily kahar cooked his *atta* some distance away from the rest, thinking to score thereby, but he was still vainly trying to light his fire when the race was won, and it turned out that the rest had brought rags soaked in kerosine oil, which explained how quickly they got their sticks into a blaze. Of course the

chupatties were bolted raw really, but the kahar created so much amusement by his frantic efforts to produce a blaze and took the laugh so good-naturedly that Captain McMahon gave him a special prize. The sports wound up with a Kuttack dance round an enormous bonfire, and everyone, in high good humour declared that no sports could have been better, and passed a vote of thanks to Captain Walters and Lieutenant Webb-Ware for getting them up. The British Commissioner very kindly gave the prizes. An interesting and characteristic feature was when the sun set. The Afghan Commissioner and his whole party then left the shamiana and said their evening prayers kneeling in three rows a few yards away, returning when they had finished.

On the 19th another halt—not wasted as boundary pillars were being built and marked. We marched on the 20th part over hilly country, the last few miles over sand hillocks, coming gradually nearer and nearer the remarkable Koh Malik-do-Khand, which we have seen for the last 50 miles at intervals; a double-peaked lofty hill, seen sometimes red, sometimes grey according to the light, but always towering head and shoulders above all other hills. As we approached camp a thunderstorm accompanied by hail and rain burst over it, and the *Koh* became hidden behind the advancing wall of sand which preceded the storm. Our camp was on the left high bank of the Robat stream, which contained a small amount of water meandering

through a bed of green grass looking like bog, on which were not a few Brahminy duck and snipe. The next day (22nd) I visited the Koh Malik-dokhand about six miles away to our north. It is a curious shaped hill, as its name implies; the double-toothed hill is its literal translation, and if you imagine that the tooth is inverted you have a very good idea of its appearance. One of the peaks, the easterly one, is pointed, the westerly one being flatter, blunter, and lower; but the most striking feature of it is its inaccessibility. The sides are as steep as the walls of a house, and drop from the summit 7,322 feet—almost sheer down to the plain, 2,500 feet below, there being no *daman* or foot slope to speak of. The hill is composed of granite mostly red, but some grey, and the rock is either perfectly smooth or cut into vertical fissures. It is said to be unscaleable, and none of the five or six Europeans who have previously visited this part of the world have been able to climb it. One of our party got up about a thousand feet and then had to climb down—literally. Still it must be possible—with ropes or ladders perhaps—as there is said to be a *ziarat* on the top, and we could see a heap of stones on the top of the blunter peak, which looked like one. Even so, another *ziarat* has been built near the foot for the benefit of those—the majority, I imagine—who dare not face the perils of the climb. No signs of animal life were to be seen on it, though the nearest hills contain ibex and

markhor, and on a huge boulder at the foot I found several crude but perfectly recognisable sketches of ibex scratched on the stone. On the plain at the northern aspect are several outcrops of red and white marble, and some three miles further north is a hill, the top of which is covered with a similar layer—about four feet thick—of marble. It is of fine quality, and the Amir is said to send for it to Kabul and Kandahar, for adorning public buildings, etc. It is beautiful marble certainly, and it is curious that none of it is to be seen on the *Koh* itself. At the northern foot is a bubbling hot spring said to possess medicinal properties. It is nasty enough. Robat is the place where final preparations had to be made to cross the worst part of the desert. The difficulties to be encountered are so great that Captain McMahon has decided to divide up the camp and only take with him a very limited number of men and animals, the Afghan Sirdar doing the same. The latter's camp is better off now as some supplies were awaiting them here sent down from the Helmund. The main camp will remain at Robat while we march on to Koh-i-Malik Siah; after completing the demarcation, we shall rejoin at Robat or thereabouts and march back to India as rapidly as possible, as the season is getting late to be camping out in this desolate country. My next letter will probably be sent off from Koh-i-Malik Siah, which is about ten or twelve marches from here.

TRAVELLING UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

[FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.]

CAMP GODAR-I-SHAH, APRIL 12.

As already mentioned in my last letter Captain McMahon decided on only taking a small party on with him across the remaining portion of the desert from Robat to Koh Malik-i-Siah. This was in consequence of some of the marches having to be made without any water but that carried with us, and of the heavy going for the camels, both factors making it next door to impossible to travel with a large camp. The same reasons led to Sirdar Umar Mohammed Khan reducing his escort to 16—sending the rest off to the Helmund. Our party on leaving Robat on the 26th of March consisted of Captain McMahon, Dr. Maynard, Mr. Tate, with 20 sepoy of the 24th Baluchistan Regiment, a survey party and others, bringing our strength, including Sir Naoroz Khan's people, guides, camelmen, etc., up to 150 men with about 200 camels. Captain Walters and Lieutenant Webb-Ware who were to remain with the main camp, and would spend their time not unprofitably in reconnoitring, accompanied us on the first march out to Soru about 22 miles, bringing with them a party of the 24th to build pillars on their way back to Robat. We have certainly had the most extraordinary luck as regards weather; coming in a season of drought we expected

great heat and every kind of misery. I can't say that we have entirely escaped them, but up till the date of leaving Robat we had had very good weather and an occasional storm with rain had most unexpectedly given us a comparatively cool climate to travel in. After two days' sandstorms it was a great relief to see great clouds rolling up towards evening, and a real good thunderstorm with rain came on about 8 P.M., helping to increase and improve the water, brackish in the stream alongside of which we were encamped. Next morning we said good-bye to those returning to Robat and marched—all mounted on camels—to Darband, 30 miles. The first seven miles led us along the dry stony bed of the Jelajil river. Leaving that, the remaining 23 miles were across sandhills alternating with gravel plains, the sandhills predominating and rendering the marching very heavy and impossible to any animals but camels. Luckily owing to the rain of the previous evening the track of those who had gone before was easy to follow, and little sand was blowing; still even so the wind and sand caused the tracks in places to soon become obliterated, and it made one realise the difficulties attending marching in the desert under ordinary conditions. The 1884 Mission used a plough to mark the track from Nushki to the Helmund. The people of the country—who must exist in small numbers, though we never see them—use broken bushes to mark the routes across the sandhills and heaps of stones on the

gravel plains. The sandhills are mostly round topped, and have a height varying from 10 to 200 feet. The majority are steep on their north-east slopes, more slanting to the south-west, from which direction the prevailing winds blow. Here and there are bushes of *targuz* affording good camel grazing. Anyone who has travelled from Liverpool to Southport along the coast railway will have a good idea of their appearance on a small scale, as the sandhills round about Crosby and Formby on the north side of the mouth of the Mersey are not unlike them. The gravel plains—called *dasht*—between the sandhills, are quite a feature of the country. They vary in size from a few square yards to hundreds of square miles, but are all more or less level and flat. They are presumably the original country appearing here and there where sand has not overspread it. This is borne out by sections visible on the banks of the Jelajil river already referred to, where gravel is overlaid by sand. Of course, the sand is constantly advancing and tending to cover up the *dashts*. The rate at which this occurs is not known, nor in this desolate and deserted country is it of much importance, but in fertile Shorawuk it is, and there the inhabitants say the Registan or Desert advances over their plain at the average rate of a yard a year.

DIGGING FOR WATER.

On arrival at Darband we found several wells,

all filled up except one, in which the water was like sherry in colour—quite a pleasing variation from the peasoup and gas liquor hitherto met with.

The latter we were presently favoured with on clearing out two other wells ; after baling out the wellfull it is marvellous, however, what decent water you get after a time, bad though it may be at first. As our baggage camels were a long time coming in, one well was dug out with the help of a soup-plate and a mess *degchi*, and at another it was a treat to see Sir Naoroz Khan, K.C.I.E., digging hard with his fingers, while his servant heaved out the sand with a horse's nose bag. I have certainly never seen such willingness, even eagerness, to work evinced by everyone as is shown when it is a question of digging for your water or going without. Some of the wells are cut down through rock, but some are through sand and are made with wooden logs at the sides—from which fact the place derives its name *Dar*, wood, and *bund*, closed. It is not a village, of course, there are no villages or inhabitants ; it is simply a flat spot in the sand at a comparatively low level where water has been struck—and water is more precious than pearls in this country—and where the nomads bring their flocks to water in their wanderings. They have a habit of filling up a well with sand and sticks on leaving the place, which is very annoying. It is said to be done to prevent anyone settling down, as if such a thing were likely !

As the heat was getting greater, and as with such long heavy marches the camels were not getting enough grazing, we began night-marching on leaving Darband. The solar radiation thermometer registered 187° the day we were there. So on the 28th we halted during the day and marched at 8-30 P.M. We had to carry water with us as there was none for the next fifty miles, and we carried about 50 camel loads of the precious liquid in pakhals and mussucks which had been soaked in, and carried partly full of water for weeks past to keep them fit for the purpose.

Although it was full moon the night was cloudy at starting, and so fires were lit on elevated bits of ground by the advance guard and guide to show the paths. About 10 P.M., however, the clouds cleared up, and in the brilliant moonlight no more fires were necessary. The desert resembles India in this respect that it looks most beautiful when you only partly see it. Sunlight reveals its ugliness. Moonlight and starlight throw a glamour over the blemishes, and one can but admire it—even as a desert. The track led over a rising sandy plain towards the Koh-i-Sultan range of mountains and then skirted along about two miles from their northern foot until we reached Nildak, 25 miles, and halted there about 2-30 A.M., the camp arriving about 4-30, until which time we bivouacked and enjoyed a good sleep. Why the place should have a name Heaven only knows—there was absolutely nothing to mark it

from the rest of the desert. On the way we passed the Afghan Camp which had marched during the day. All were sound asleep, and no one challenged us.

The Koh-i-Sultan hills are striking in appearance. They are extremely irregular in outline, desolate and black looking except where sand has blown up the hill sides as it has in many places, though not to such a height as we saw it near Gazezhah, where it reached and hid the hill for quite a thousand feet above the plain.

In one place there is an almost vertical rounded column of rock or monolith fluted on its sides and 300 feet high. In some aspects, it looks like a lighthouse (in the moonlight) and in others like the leaning tower of Pisa. It is a natural formation. Further on near the western end of the range where we encamped, there is an enormous piece of rock sticking up from the hill-line, shaped like the dome over the safety valve of a steam engine, and just alongside it is a deep wedge-shaped depression in the hill line; in fact, it looks just as if some one had cut a slice out of the hill, dumped it down alongside, and just rounded the top. The rock is known as Koh-i-Kansuri, and Macgregor likened it to a Sphinx.

Although the Koh-i-Sultan range looks so uninviting, it is visited annually about March by Kakars and Babars who come down from Kandahar with Kafilas to collect assafœtida, sulphur and dyes which are found in the hills. They carry water-melons with them to take the place of water.

IN MACGREGOR'S FOOTSTEPS.

Nothing happening during the day we left Nildak at 8 P.M. on the 29th, after all the baggage, reaching Amir Chah at 2-30 next morning, the baggage not getting in until 8 A.M. The first fifteen miles took us over an undulating stony plain, and the fires every mile or two were most useful as it was cloudy. Then we had six miles over sandhills to which anything we had yet seen was mere child's play. They were not sandhills in the ordinary sense of the word, *i.e.*, not composed mainly of sand, but it was really mountainous country covered more or less deeply with sand. Our path led through long and deep valleys partly filled with soft fine sand blown into steep ridges. They were flanked by volcanic hills, some of which were completely buried in sand, and therefore were roundtopped, while others still showed their ragged black peaks above the flood of sand which will assuredly overwhelm them in time. On first entering the sandhills we came across numerous pieces of pumice stone in the hollows. Useful as such an article would be in Baluchistan—most Baluchis need scraping badly—I fear it must be at a discount, judging from the unscraped and unwashed condition of them all. As we have had to do with a scrape lately and go minus the wash, we gladly availed ourselves of the neglected supply of pumice stone to help us in the process. After laboriously climbing up and crossing a kotal covered with deep sand, we descended, and the

last mile along the stony bed of a dry stream brought us into Amir Chah—the only place with any water for 50 or 60 miles on either side of it. The difficulties of the march may be judged from the fact that on riding camels (real flyers some of them, but having to suit their pace to that of the rest and of the guide) the first fifteen miles took $2\frac{3}{4}$ hours, while the last seven (six over sand) occupied $3\frac{3}{4}$ hours, and we had to dismount and flounder along ourselves part of the way. Needless to say the baggage camels, though only carrying half loads, were done up, and we halted a day to rest them and replenish our stock of water before proceeding to Unalaf—two marches to the next water. Amir Chah (Amir's well) is a small spot where the hills have not yet been quite swallowed up by the sand, and where there is an old well, on top of which the Afghans were carefully sitting, having arrived the previous afternoon; this did not matter, however, as there were three other wells dug by some of our men, sent on ahead for the purpose by Captain McMahon, a week ago. The hills all round are black and forbidding looking, and not far off to the east is the crater of an extinct volcano. Amir Chah is the place where in 1877 Sir Charles Macgregor and Captain Lockwood, who are the only European officers who have ever been here, buried most of their kit in the sand, and started off with some supplies (chupatties and dates, I believe, they lived on) and a few skins of water to try and reach Shah

Godar on the western end of the Gaud-i-Zirreh. They succeeded in their attempt after nearly perishing for want of water and added considerably to our knowledge of those inhospitable regions. Our prospect of following Macgregor's example and living on chupatties seemed likely to become a reality as owing to a muddle either in Quetta or on the road out, expected replenishments of mess stores had not arrived. We left Robat on short commons, the sheep that were to have started with us being also left behind there by some mistake. At Amir Chah we considered ourselves lucky to obtain an old buck goat, and gladly ate its nauseous abominably flavoured flesh as it was probably the last fresh meat there was any chance of our getting until returning to Robat in two or three weeks' time. Just before reaching Amir Chah we passed a *Kafil* carrying dates from Jalk to the Helmund. They were quite astonished at our paying them for dates as they said the Afghans had reduced their loads to about half without giving them anything in return.

On the 31st we halted as already stated, and Captain McMahon rode out or rather climbed out to build a pillar 15 miles north of the place across sandy mountains. On his return in the evening we marched 28 miles to Zeh across more sandhills and dasht. This gave Captain McMahon 16 hours, and nearly 60 miles on a camel with a couple of hours' rest only for dinner. No water at Zeh, and next night we marched 20 miles to Drana

Koh, where we found a plain of *pat* surrounded by sandhills on three sides and black rugged mountains on the south, while there was a large pool of muddy saline rain water, most acceptable to the camels who had not drunk for nearly the last 50 miles, and to ourselves also.

GUIDE'S IDIOSYNCRASIES.

One could write a volume on the vagaries of guides anywhere, but the guide of this country is *facile princeps* for downright irritating stupidity. When you have done 20 miles out of what may turn out eventually to be a 30-mile march, you ask him how far the place is. Quite near, he says (he always says that). How near? Over the next sandhill. Is it further on or further back? Oh, much further on (that's if he likes the spot where he's being questioned). Is there water there? There's lots of sand. Is the sand in between extensive? There may be no water there. How many hours' march further is it? Perhaps ten hours. All his answers are given in that unpleasant voice alternating between a senile treble and feeble base which many Baluchis affect, and which gives you the idea—a quite correct one—that he doesn't care whether it is 10 or 50 miles further than he thinks. To the same question asked five times at intervals he'll answer "yes" twice and "no" three times.

From Drana Koh we marched 26 miles on the evening of the 2nd of April to the head of a stream

in the Kacha Koh, three miles north-west of Mualaf, the place where the Afghan Sirdar's guide took him by mistake. It was a long march, and several things delayed us. Just outside camp, where we tried to leave the Survey Officer (who was to follow on next day) in a state of "jumps," as a viper had been killed during the day in the next tent, and we had given him a choice collection of stories just to cheer him up, we heard a loud hissing under a bush, and dismounting from our camels we killed a beautiful horned viper (the fourth within a few days) 25½" long. Then it was a very dark night, and shortly after starting some of the party lost the track, and we had to halt and light fires, etc., to get them on. The most effectual means of doing this next to the fires is, perhaps, the Baluch halco. It is really very like the Australian "cooey," beginning with a low tone, rising slowly with a crescendo and ending in a shrill yell. A third delay arose from finding camel-men asleep and having to waken them. It is a common event for a camel-man to fall asleep just off the track, his camels going on their weary way alone or grazing as suits them best. No wonder either when you think of the hard and excellent work these men do, marching on foot all night, 10 to 12 hours, and taking their camels many miles out of camp all day grazing, they may well be tired.

The last four miles took us up from the gravel plain along the winding bed of a hill torrent, till

near its upper end we came across a deposit of alluvial soil and a spring of water, called Saindak, and encamped there. The soil was coated with white efflorescence, and the water was saline, but there was some *green* camel grazing, and after stones and sand for so many days it seemed an abode of bliss, and that in spite of its temperature, suggesting Hades rather than Elysium. During the heat of the day, while nearly everyone was asleep after the night's march, a wild ass ran through the camp. During the previous day's march the Afghan camp had a curious experience. As they marched along the open plain not far from the foot of the hills certainly, they heard a roar and found themselves quickly surrounded by rushing water which nearly washed them away. There had been a thunderstorm in the afternoon in the hills, which was the cause. In the afternoon we climbed a high peak near the camp and about 2,000 feet above it, and had a most splendid view as a reward for our perilous climb, for such it was up the precipitous shaly sides of the difficult hill. To the north was desert with the immense dry salt Hamun known as the Gaud-i-Zirreh stretching white and desolate 100 miles from east to west and 40 miles from north to south. On its farther side the high banks of the Helmund river were plainly visible. To the east we saw the desert we had just crossed, and to the west more black rocky ranges we were still to cross; while to the south and south-west lay Persia, as

black, dull, and uninteresting from that standpoint as anything we had seen. Uninteresting except for the view we got of the Koh-i-Tuftan, an active volcano 12,680 feet high, which lay to our south-west. It is a double-peaked hill, and stands well above everything else on the horizon; smoke was issuing from it at the time. At this camp we heard that the Perso-Baluch Boundary Mission under Colonel Holdich had stopped at Jalk, and returned from there to India by a convenient and well-watered route through Kharan and Kalat. We were much disappointed as we had been looking forward to meeting at the end of our respective boundaries and sharing the *simkin* we have been treasuring up for the occasion. We shall now have to drink to the memory of the Perso-Baluch Mission instead, and build the last pillar by ourselves.

Numerous wild asses were seen near Saindak, and I got up at 3-30 A.M. to try and shoot one, but was disgusted to find, after sitting over the water for some time, that some survey camels had passed along the nullah just before my arrival, on their way to the detached survey camp. These must have frightened the asses away as several were seen making for the *Dasht* early that morning.

SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION.

The water at Saindak looked all right and only tasted slightly saline, but it was full of sulphate

of magnesia and acted well up to the reputation that salt so deservedly has. We left Saindak on the afternoon of the 5th of April, ascending the dry bed of a stream, crossing the Kotal and descending along the gravel *daman* of the hills 21 miles to Kartakar. Just after starting an incident happened that confirmed the solar radiation thermometer, which showed 203° . The wretched instrument is only graduated to 200° and can only rise to 205° , so it must burst before long. The incident would hardly be believed were it not that your special correspondent is like George Washington and cannot tell a lie. A strong smell of burning was noticed, and then Captain McMahon's coat burst into flames on the side nearest the sun. We shouted, and he tore it off and threw it on the ground—just in time, too, as a greater part of the left side was burnt right through and the waistcoat and riding breeches were also burnt. Now he was not smoking, and the matches he had were in the right-hand pocket in the shade, the only thing on the left being a small bottle for collecting specimens and a letter. The language in the letter was not inflammatory, and we can only think that the bottle focussed the sun's rays and set him on fire. Perhaps X rays may be necessary to explain it, and it may be a hitherto undiscovered quality. Any way fire and sun seem to be the great enemies of the Mission. I told you of how our camp was nearly burned down at Duganan, and now again fire nearly did for our

Commissioner. At Kartakar the Afghans received some more supplies from the Helmund, and the Sirdar very kindly sent us over some sheep, besides a deer, which his men had shot. It was the first fresh meat (excepting the horrible buck goat) which we had seen for eight days, and was most welcome after nothing but an occasional slice of melting bath chap varied by a sardine. Indeed, to vary the monotony we had composed the following menu for a feast on arrival at our destination, a menu composed of the very best obtainable: Consomme Tortoise au terre à la Chageh. Reg Machli, sauce à la beetle d'eau, echis carinata avec pain roti, Desert raveu roti avec petits pois de Tamarisk. Fricasee de lizzard. Compote de mouches; glace à la Registan. Dessert—date stones, pistacio galls. We reckon that a bill of fare calculated to make the mouths of the most fastidious water.

A flight of locusts passed over the camp in the evening just before starting. We must add some of them to the menu. Leaving Kartakar the guides again played the fool, and led us over an unnecessary high kotal with difficult going for camels, to Kacha, a small halting place by a stream of good water. From there we should have gone on direct to the Koh Malik-i-Sialk, but to satisfy the Sirdar who wished to see where the boundary passed with reference to Godar-i-Shah, the place from which I write, we came round by it instead of going direct, and then coming back by it. We left Kacha at 3 P.M. on 8th April with

the Afghans and descended the *daman* of the Kumbha Ist, halting in the plain about 9 P.M. for dinner. A sandstorm was raging to our west, and the air became so full of sand that the guides lost their way, and we had to halt and bivouac until 5 A.M. Rain fell during most of the night. Half an hour after we had started, again a terrific (no other word describes it) sandstorm came on just as we entered the sandhills. A wall of sand advanced across the plain, and with a rush and a roar was upon us; in less than a minute we were battling with it; eyes, nose, ears were choked with sand. A perfect hurricane blew, against which the camels could barely make any headway, and one could not see more than two camel's lengths in any direction. The guides lost their way naturally, and when the storm stopped, as it did in three-quarters of an hour, were completely at sea as to their whereabouts. Steering by compass, however, we hammered away across the deep sand for 12 miles, encountered a second more moderate sandstorm, but with rain and hail about 8 A.M., and finally sighted the old ruins which mark this place, getting into camp about 10 A.M.

LOST IN THE DESERT.

After 31 miles of about the worst marching we have had yet, baggage camels straggled in all day and some were nearly lost altogether. The Survey Officer had marched 20 hours before us, and though he had had better weather, his difficulties

had also been great, and three of his men were reported missing when he reached his camp five miles farther on than ours. Two of them were picked up by some of our camel-men after 48 hours' wandering about the desert, and were in the last stage of exhaustion. They had given it up, and sat down to die, worn out by hunger and thirst, when found. It turned out that they and the third man who was still missing had laid down on the march to have a sleep. When they awoke no one was in sight. They wandered about hour after hour, and finally gave it up. The third man, a camel-man, 20 years of age, refused to give up, set off by himself, and they didn't see him again. They apparently never saw the big fires which Captain McMahon had had lighted in various directions to attract them, nor did any of the half dozen search parties sent out come across them. They were only accidentally found, nearly dead, by some camel-men out grazing and brought in by them. The third man was just about given up when he reached camp on the evening of the fourth day, having had nothing to eat all that time. He had come across tracks and gone back to Kacha. Obtaining a fresh supply of water there he set off again, and this time managed to hit off the right way and come in thoroughly done up. On arrival he ate nine big chupatties and drank nearly a small *mussuck* full of water, being none the worse for it. Mr. Tate's guide was so done up on the march that he could hardly speak and had to be brought

in on a camel. He began with the symptoms said to afflict such sufferers in the desert, said he saw camel tracks, and swore there was plenty of water near, which he could see plainly. Other men swore the same, and all wanted to go off to it. Luckily the Survey Officer had ascertained from him which stars he was steering by and did guide himself, insisting on all the men keeping together and disregarding the illusory water and towns, etc. One can imagine no more horrible death than that from being lost in this desert country, and the coming in of these three wretches reminded one of Sir Edwin Arnold's lines :—

“ for there had ridden in
 Across the burning yellow desert flats
 An aged man haggard with two days' drouth.
 The water skin swung from his saddle fork
 Wrinkled and dry; the dust clove to his lids
 And clogged his beard; his parched tongue and black
 lips
 Moved to say, “Give me drink,” yet uttered nought,”
 etc.

Godar-i-Shah is the far point to which Sir Charles Macgregor and Captain Lockwood reached. They are the only Europeans who have ever been here and none have ever been beyond. It is a few miles west of the Gaud-i-Zirreh. We find that the Hamun is not empty and dry, as we thought, but still contains water, the remains of the overflow from the Helmund when it last came down in flood in 1884. Its water is intensely salt. Godar-i-Shah is a place of note in ancient history. It was known—not under that

name of course—to the ancient Greeks and to the Arabs, and Alexander visited it. It consists of three distinct places all close together, Gumbaz-i-Shah, Godar-i-Shah, and Kala-i-Makhsud. In two of them there are ancient ruins—some like old forts, and some more like temples, while some are evidently tombs. We picked up some curious and pretty bits of pottery in one of them. In one there is a celebrated Ziarat, and on it were not only horns of different kinds, but fossils such as we saw at Saindak, pottery, flamingoes' wings, and stones curiously shaped like large pestles. The water is in a large lake, in the bed of the Shelag river, which runs through this part of Seistan northwards to the Seistan lake or Hamun, into which the Helmund river empties itself. It is salter than brine, and the water in wells dug near it is also saltish. To be in camp here, therefore, as we are at an altitude of 1,200 feet only, with the maximum shade temperature 105° , and with salt water to drink, and flies and creeping things innumerable to eat, is a truly delightful state of affairs. We have to put up with it, however, until the question of boundary here is decided, when we go on to the Koh Malik-i-Siah now in sight, and only about 30 miles off, and finish demarcation.

We are in a state of anxiety about one of the native surveyors and his party who left us six days ago to do some surveying and rejoin us the next day or in two days at latest. No news of

them of any kind has since been received, nor can the search parties sent out find them.

My next letter will, I hope, tell you how we finished the work of the Mission and commenced our return to India; and I sincerely hope to be able to say the missing survey party has returned safely.

“THE LAST PILLAR.”

[FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.]

CAMP ROBAT II, MAY 2.

My last letter was finished at Godar-i-Shah on April 12th, where the boundary was still being discussed. I think I said that the water there was salter than brine. As an instance of this I may mention that on bathing in it one's whole body burnt as if it had been a mustard bath, one's lips smarted, and one could not open one's eyes for several minutes after the bath for the severe pain. Moreover one's hair stuck out in fantastic spikes, and after two baths one's towels, when dry, might have been rough starched, they were so stiff, and they crackled when bent, nor were they of any further use except to act like nutmeg graters. Pumice stone became a superfluous luxury. If you don't believe these simple statements of facts, take some sea water, concentrate it by boiling until as thick as syrup,

and then try bathing in it. You will have the benefit of the real Godar-i-Shah brine, without the discomfort attendant on a journey to that never-to-be-forgotten health resort. We left the place, reluctantly, of course, but hiding our feelings tolerably well, on the 13th, and started on our last outward bound march at 4 P.M. Just before leaving, the missing surveyor and his party turned up, after being lost seven days. Their guide had deserted them, and they had wandered about day after day looking for us, covering altogether something like a hundred miles in their wanderings. They had only two days' rations with them, and so were soon hard up for food, though of water luckily they found enough. They ate one of their camels and lived on that and any roots they could find. Though done up, only one man became really ill, from dysentery, and they may think themselves lucky to have escaped a horrible death. It was a 32-mile march from Godar-i-Shah to Robat at the foot of the Koh-i-Malik Siah. Robat of course was the name of the place where we left the main camp, so we will call this Robat II. Robat means a serai or fortified post, in this country generally the former. At the time of the Mohamedan Revival Robats were built as fortified posts and held against those of other religions. A residence of four or five years in one of these seats of danger was a sure passport to Heaven.

The first few miles of the march were along the

dry sandy and in places dangerously boggy (our Commissioner's camel sank into such a place up to its girths, and we again ran a chance of losing him) bed of the Shelag river, then across sandhills, and as soon as we emerged from these on to a gravel plain we halted for dinner. After dinner one of the Sirdar's retainers came over and played to us on the *Robab* and sang. It is a five-wire stringed instrument not unlike the mandoline, and the player uses a piece of hard wood to produce the notes. It is tuned more in accordance with our ideas of tone intervals than is any Indian instrument I know, and indeed the Afghan music altogether is more western in its composition and therefore more pleasing to our ears than Indian music. Their bugle or rather trumpet calls are distinctly musical and harmonious, and this artist's singing, barring his shrill nasal intonation, was good. He is considered quite the best player and singer in Afghanistan, and is said to perform every piece of music known. He certainly knew everything we wanted, and (still unlike the Indian singer) did not wish to give us more than two or three hours of it, though for that period he required no pressing. Two of us I fear slept through some of it, but still, unlike most musicians who are really unreasonable in this respect, he seemed to take that as complimentary to the soothing effects of his love-songs. It was. Being an artist he, of course, is not bound by ordinary mortal's rules of dress. This is true of Afghans evidently

as of æsthètes. His pale blue *khula*, set rakishly on one side of his head and his lavender clothes, the belt covered with silver buttons and carrying weapons of all descriptions, harmonised well with the fiery love songs he poured forth one after another (without stopping). The scene, as we sat or lay round a huge camp fire under the stars, was picturesque, and one to be remembered.

We resumed the march after this rest and reached Robat II after crossing an extensive gravel plain, rising gradually up to the foot of the hill which, in the shape of a semi-circle, form the southern and western boundaries of Seistan. Robat II is a small spot on a river containing a small stream of clear water which issues from between the Larkoh and the Malik Siah range. On its banks are flat deposits of soil upon which we found a small patch of wheat growing, and of course there is the inevitable Ziarat. The Koh-i-Malik Siah is disappointing, and we have a distinct grievance against it. Our feelings have varied towards it. Starting full of wonder as to its appearance, etc., we grew to respect it as we found out the difficulties of the journey. The stories we heard of it made us admire it. From constantly hearing and talking of it an affection for it grew up in our breasts. When we found it never seemed to get any nearer we began to dislike it. Five days at Godar-i-Shah made us loathe it, and now we find

it not only unworthy of all our wonder, respect, admiration, affection, and dislike which we have lavished on it (with sundry language, good and bad), but an absolute fraud in every way. It is not a respectable mountain (Koh) but a hill; it is not black as its name implies, but red rather; and it is not even in the place that has been assigned to it, but has moved itself away from that site, absolutely without permission from the Government of India. Without permission from three Governments one might say, as it is the place *Where Three Empires Meet* (with apologies to Mr. Knight), or to be more correct, where two kingdoms, Persia and Afghanistan, and our empire—the British—meet.

However, we had to make the best of it and ascend it, fraud or not. On the 15th, therefore, we set off to explore the country, and had a hard day of it doing forty miles and climbing 3,000 feet before we got back at night. First we visited the Ziarat of Malik Siah which is in the dry bed of a stream, on the western side of the range of hills known by the same name, and on the main caravan route from Seistan, Meshed, etc., and to Jalk and Gvadur the most excellent road we have yet seen. The Ziarat is held in great repute, and is neat and well tended by passing devout Mussulmans; there is no resident attendant. The tomb, within a double enclosure, is covered with pieces of white alabaster, and measures about 20 × 5 feet. There are many decorations but few horns, and at one

side, judging from the numerous marks of blood and the putrid smell, sacrifices must be frequently made. Another feature of the Ziarat is a hollow stone at the head of the tomb containing muddy water, into which the pious Mohamedans with us dipped their fingers and then touched their foreheads. The actual Koh-i-Malik Siah is quite a small hill, fairly dark coloured, but with much red clay about its base, at one side of the Ziarat. We next ascended to the highest point of the range of the same name about 5,000 feet, and from there obtained a fine view of the surrounding country. To our south and rear was the Lar Koh rising considerably higher; to our west and south-west were the desolate mountains of Eastern Persia, to the east stretched the Desert, with the Gaud-i-Zirreh glistening in the sun, while to the north was, what interested us most, the country of Seistan spread out before us, and a part of it hitherto unexplored by any Europeans. It is flat, with here and there a low hill, and though sandy in places, it is said to have a rich clayey soil with abundance of pasturage, and to be well wooded with tamarisk. The history of the province is intimately connected with that of Persia. The name Seistan is said by Ferrier, a French officer in the Persian army, who visited part of it in 1845, to be derived from the word *Saghis*, the name of a wood growing abundantly there much used in Persia for burning, i.e., Saghistan, the place of the Saghis. This, by corruption

has become Seistan. By better authorities it is regarded as the Sakestane or the country of the Sakae, of the Greeks. The original inhabitants were known as Zarangae or Drangae by the Greeks; whether they were Afghan or Baluch is not known, and a trace of this exists in the name of the Gaud-i-Zirreh or Zurreh, being a contraction of Zerenj, which represents the Zaranji of the Greeks. Straightaway to our north we could see the flat-topped low field named Koh Khwaja, the hill of the Eunuch. Round about it, between it and the Palang Koh, on the west, is the country which is liable to inundations from the Helmund, and which, when Ferrier visited it, was a large lake known as the Meshila-Seistan. The Koh Khwaja looks like an enormous artificial earthwork or rampart in the middle of the plain, and is apparently the remains of the island in the Seistan Lake. The Editor of Ferrier's work mentions a tradition of ancient MSS. said to be possessed by Ghebers, who resided there, but Connolly carefully examined the island and found nothing. Seistan is one vast collection of ruins, and doubtless contains much valuable material to the archæologist and historian. At Furrah, where the Afghan Commissioner resides, are many large baked bricks, three feet square by four inches thick. Ferrier also mentions seeing them, and says they bore cuneiform inscriptions. It appears that the only other place where bricks of such a size have been found is in the kitchen of Sardanapalus at Calah

or Nimrood. It would be most interesting to translate the inscriptions upon them.

On our way back we came across three black tents which had arrived and encamped near us. Their inhabitants were the first we had seen since leaving Sahib-Zada Kili, some five hundred miles back, if you except the mullah at Zaru. Next day, the 16th April, everybody in both camps turned out to go and build the last pillar. After the Survey Officer had amused himself for some hours fixing angles, and made himself hoarse calling out degrees, minutes, and seconds, the stone bearing the inscription B.A.B. CLXXXVI was cemented in position, and the biggest pillar any of us have seen was soon built on it by every single man willingly helping. Then came the inevitable photograph, and we returned to camp in high good humour to think that the last pillar was erected, and that the actual demarcation, as far as the actual going over the ground and settling differences was concerned, was at an end. The event was duly celebrated in British fashion, and thanks to the inhabitants and their flocks arriving, we were able to dine off something better than the appetising *menu* I sent you in my last letter as the one we should probably be reduced to. The pillar, when whitewashed, became a very conspicuous object, and no one in Persia, Afghanistan or Baluchistan can in future complain that the point where these countries meet is difficult to see.

HOMeward BOUND.

[FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.]

CAMP ROBAT I, MAY 2.

Two interesting things about Robat II are, first, that on the Lar Koh near are the remains of a fire temple, high up on the mountain side; and, secondly, the remains of copper smelting furnaces, close by the camp, for such they are said by the guides and others to be, and such they have every appearance of having been. From a distance the ground, over an area of about half a mile long and 100 yards broad, is seen to be jet black in colour and to have some black ruins on it. Examining it you find the ground sandy, with efflorescence here and there, and covered with slabs and pieces of black slag, many of them showing green patches of verdigris upon them. The blocks have been used in building a fort apparently, and the ruined walls of a loopholed enclosure, about 30 yards square, still remain. To one side of it are several small oblong enclosures that look as if they might have been furnaces. No one can remember any smelting there, and it was probably carried on centuries ago. The neighbouring hills are full of precious metals, and pure metallic copper was found near the camp in small quantities.

From the 17th to the 19th survey operations were carried on, and on the 20th fresh supplies

having come in from Seistan and Sarhadd we commenced our return march, leaving Robat II at 4 P.M. The Afghans also started back marching by the Helmund to Robat where we expect to meet them on May 5. Instead of returning to Godar-i-Shah—the memory of our stay there still haunts us like a nightmare!—we skirted along the foot of the Lar Koh and Kacha Koh on the *daman*, to Lashkri, 21 miles. As rivers—all dry now of course—issue from the hills at frequent intervals, the whole *daman* is cut up by shallow nullahs and resembles a gridiron more than anything. Crossing it is most irritating and fatiguing, besides being very slow work. Lashkri is situated at the head of a fine gorge, and has a small spring of saline water. The gorge leading up to it from the plain is deep and very tortuous, so much so that in one place we wound along two complete horseshoes within less than 300 yards. We left the place on the afternoon of the 21st, meaning to try and reach Kartarkar, but the gridiron-like *daman* was even worse than before, and a thunderstorm coming on the guides lost their way, and we had to bivouac for the night. The storm was unaccompanied by rain, but was succeeded by a hot stifling wind blowing up much sand, and everyone suffered severely from the heat and thirst. Next morning instead of reaching Kartarkar we had to go up a gorge to Kacha, where there was good water, the place from which we made our wretched march to Godar-i-Shah.

The baggage camels also got lost during the night and had to halt in the Desert, coming on to Kacha next morning, but not getting in until mid-day. However, we started again at 9 P.M., and reached Kartarkar on the 23rd and Saindak on the 24th. Here we halted a day to give the camels a rest before marching to Amir Chah, a distance of 68 miles without any water. When coming we did this in three marches as we were lucky in finding a muddy puddle of water at Dranan Koh, but this had now dried up, and we had to make it two marches. We marched, therefore, carrying water with us and reached Amir Chah on the 27th.

The things that strike you most about the Desert are its dreary solitude, its want of animal life, and its intense silence. Mile after mile and hour after hour you travel without seeing a living thing or hearing a single sound, except the shuffling of the camels' feet and occasional conversation between their riders. The silence can almost be felt. There are none of those sounds of insect life such as you hear in a cultivated country to relieve it, and if one were alone in it, it would be most oppressive, almost maddening. To see a long caravan winding its way slowly and silently along such a desert by moonlight is a picturesque and weird sight one will not soon forget. The sandhills I described in a previous letter. Many of them are crescent shaped with the convex side towards the wind, and the horns tailing off in

the direction the prevailing wind travels; near Amir Chah this is usually from the north or north-west. The slope up the convex side is steep and the sands soft; that on the concave side is more gradual and is interrupted by a sort of step a few feet from the summit, the inclination of which is steeper than the rest of the slope. The sand on this side is also harder and gives a firmer foothold. The peculiar shape of these sandhills is presumably due to their being gradually built up round some obstacle which the blown sand has encountered, such as a bush.

One interesting feature of our return march was the knowledge the camels showed that we were returning. Instead of having to be driven as they were going when westwards, and instead of breaking back as some of them sometimes did, they travelled quicker and most willingly once their heads were turned towards India. They seemed, in fact, rather to push their *sarwans* along in front of them than to have to be encouraged to travel. Several things show that the camel does possess a little of the wisdom shown in his face. The same thing was noticed during the former portion of this Mission when it marched up the Gomal river and then turned off up in Kundar. The Mission had two lots of camels with it which usually returned every year from wintering in the Derajat to their summer grazing, round about Ghazni, one lot going the whole way by the Gomal and *via* Kataway, the other going the way the Mission

went *via* the Kunder and Tirwah. The latter camels gave no trouble as they were travelling by their usual route, but the others were difficult to drive, and were continually breaking back and trying to bolt up the Gomal *via* Kataway; this, too, when the Mission was as far as sixty miles up the Kunder from the place where the two routes diverge, and for as long (3 months) as the Mission remained there. Khudai Dad also, one of our camel contractors, relates how three of his camels once got away at Delhi and found their way alone as far as Dera Ismail Khan. Talking of camels a fall from one is not to be laughed at. I may mention that one night one of the riding camels stumbled (they always stumble with their hind feet) and threw one of our servants over his head. The wretched man nearly broke his cheek bone and damaged his chest so severely that he was very ill and spitting blood for several days afterwards.

On arrival at Amir Chah we received a post—many posts rather—as we had had no news of the outside world for 33 days. We halted one day there to rest the camels before the next fifty miles without water-supply was faced, and enjoyed it feasting on letters and newspapers as only those who have been so starved can. Leaving Amir Chah on the evening of the 28th we left the camp to go through the Desert to Darband, the next place with water 55 miles, while we made a detour through the Koh-i-Sultan mountains. I

mentioned these hills in a former letter as presenting a striking appearance when seen from the Desert, and on entering them we found even more to wonder at. They are composed mainly of conglomerate, and as the result of rain, etc., they have been split up and torn into a variety of fantastic shapes. The softer portions of the hills have been washed away leaving the more rocky parts sticking up in every shape and form—indeed, travelling through them in the moonlight one's fancy could not help seeing a succession of Cleopatra's needles and cathedral spires, most realistic in appearance. We passed near the Koh-i-Kansuri which I described before and which turned out to be really composed of two hills, and gradually came nearer to the Neza-i-Sultan—the wonder of the range. The name means Sultan's spear, and the resemblance to a spear is evident. Seen from far off it looked like a small pinnacle; near to where we bivouacked, it looked much more imposing, but it was not until we climbed up the steep slope at its foot the next day that we realised its enormous size and wondrous shape. It is a slightly flattened enormous pillar of conglomerate, a thousand feet from base to apex, and three hundred feet in diameter at its base, tapering to about sixty, probably, at its apex, which is blunt and split up into several small points. Its summit must therefore be about 6,100 feet. Its sides are perpendicular and from afar seem fitted with birds' nest holes. No birds dwell in the

country, however, and the pits turn out on inspection, to be large cavities left by the washing out of masses of rock. The pillar is not quite vertical, but its top leans a little to the south. Its sides are fluted or rather fissured, and at its base to one side is a low ridge crowned with minute peaks and ending about 40 yards away in a rather higher double peaked tower. This gives a church-like appearance at a distance. It is a striking object standing there, in solitary state "keeping watch and ward over the wreck of time." It is said that Nadir Shah paid this pillar an especial visit when marching through the country. There are numerous other smaller pillars and some almost as imposing. One close to it strongly resembles the towers of Antwerp cathedral. The Koh-i-Sultan are also famous for their sulphur, dyes, assafoetida, and robbers. Owing to the drought of the last two years the assafoetida has not come on much yet, and no signs were seen of the Kakars and Babars who come down from Kandahar usually at this time of year to collect it. We had a false alarm about robbers, however. Winding up the Kotal voices were heard on the other side. The faib of Chageh, a fine old man, who derives his knowledge of this country through having made three highly successful raids into Persia during his eventful life, drew us all together and dismounted, asking what arms we had. These amounted to one sporting rifle among the lot. It turned out, however, that the voices belonged to

some of our people whom we had sent on by another route, so our solitary weapon was not required. The next day we rejoined the camp at Darband, and as we emerged from the hills got our last view of the Gaud-i-Zirreh, and sighted the Koh Malik-do-Khand behind Robat: and a most welcome sight it was too.

From Darband we reached Robat in two marches and rejoined the main camp there on May 1st. We marched out on March 26, and so have been absent 37 days, covering nearly 600 miles, mostly desert, on our camels, and right well have they carried us, though not without suffering severely. We come back with 25 per cent. fewer than we started with owing to sickness, etc., and this, too, in spite of the fact that no camel carried a load of more than two maunds, *i.e.*, less than half loads. Had they carried more, the chances are they would not have got back at all.

Captain Walters and Lieutenant Webb-Ware and many of the camp rode out some miles to meet us and gave us a warm welcome back. Not having received any news of us for a long time they had become very anxious as to our fate, and the letter we sent on from Amir Chah came as a relief. Our horses had been sent out to meet us, but though we had often longed for them as a change from the eternal bobbing up and down of camels, the change wasn't as much appreciated by us as we expected. It was like sitting on a plank edgeways after a camel's back, and as the

animals were full of beans after nearly six weeks rest we had a rather unholy ride in.

While we have been away the officers here have explored most of the country round and have collected much valuable information regarding routes, etc. They came in contact with inhabitants, and have done much good in spreading information as regards the boundary line. They also had some fair shooting, ibex, etc.

We expect the Afghan Commissioner and party from the Helmund on the 5th May, and as soon as the maps and agreements are completed we start on our return march to Quetta.

CONCLUSION AND RETROSPECT.

[FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.]

CAMP QUETTA, MAY 29.

My last letter was sent off from Robat I where we rejoined the main camp on our return from the Koh-i-Malik Siah on May 1st. The Afghans reached Robat *via* the Helmund on May 5th, up to time. The next few days were very busy ones. The Commissioner's Office was working night and day drawing up the agreements, and Mr. Tate and the Survey Office were hard at work every day from 6 A.M. until one and two in the morning preparing maps. However, at last they were finished, and the final agreements and maps were signed by the British and Afghan Commissioners

on May 13th. On the 14th, after a farewell Durbar, the two camps separated. Sirdar Umar Mahommed Khan, who possesses all the better qualities of the Afghan race, and whom we grew to like very much, took his camp back to the Helmund and would probably proceed to Kabul *via* Kandahar. We were quite sorry to say good-bye to him, though very thankful the Mission had reached such a successful termination, and glad to be at last really on our way back to India. We marched by night and reached Lijji Talao, over 100 miles, in four marches. Even marching at night the heat was great, and there wasn't a dog in the camp that didn't get its feet blistered on the hot sand and stones. At Lijji Talao we halted a day and took over the Chageh fort from its Afghan garrison. It will be remembered that this is the place which the Amir occupied at the time of the Panjdeh business in 1884, and he has held it ever since. Under the Durand Treaty of 1893 he agreed to hand it over to us, and it is now again occupied by Sirdar Ali Khan, of the Sanjarani tribe, to whom it originally belonged. It is one of the places where the Amir took refuge when he fled into exile. Ali Khan's people are greatly rejoiced to have it restored to them, and there is every hope that the Chageh plain, which is evidently very fertile, will soon be converted by building *karezes* and wells into a most productive bit of country. The strategic importance of Chageh is well recognised.

I have already told you how lucky we have been in the matter of weather, though even as it was the desert marching was severely trying. The natives of the country never remember so long a cold weather (thanks to the heavy rain that fell while we were freezing at Spintijha in February), and say that we ought to have suffered from the weather we have enjoyed (!) in May, as far back as the end of March. At Lijji Talao it was truly awful, a temperature of 205° in the sun and 115° in our tents, duststorms all day long, with frequent "dust devils" tearing through the camp and leaving much sulphurous language and desolate looking heaps of broken-down, fallen tents in their tracks. Eyes, mouth, nose, ears and food all full of sand and dirt, unable to read, sleep, eat or talk in comfort, our lot was not a happy one. But at night it was even worse, for the temperature fell but little, clouds came up but refused us rain, and duststorms renewed their attacks. We were sleeping under the mess tent without kanaats for "coulth." One squall carried the whole tent away clear of us, the heavy tent poles luckily falling between our beds instead of on them, and the rest of the night was spent trying to get a little of the dirt out of our eyes and throats—the latter proving most difficult even with much hot soda to help in the process. From Lijji Talao we marched into Nushki, 99 miles, in $3\frac{1}{2}$ days, enjoying (!) similar weather to that we had at Lijji Talao, but not quite so bad. After a halt

of one day we resumed the march to Quetta and covered the remaining 108 miles in five marches, reaching Quetta on May 29th at 9 A.M.

Our march back from Robat to Quetta has really been a record one. We have covered the 307 miles in 15 marches, in $14\frac{1}{2}$ days, including two halts of a day each. Had we not been obliged to build some pillars *en route* it would have taken one day less. This too with heavy baggage, through desert (all except the last five marches) and at the end of May. The Kandahar march covered 300 miles in 19 days without a halt in light marching order through fertile country, an enemy's certainly, but not desert. Including the two halts our daily average march was $20\frac{1}{2}$ miles, excluding them it was over $23\frac{1}{2}$. No one fell out, and the spirit of all, tried as it has been by the fearful heat and other hardships of the last two months, was splendid. One cannot praise the men of the 24th Baluchistan Regiment too highly. They have done record marches, often 30 and 35 miles in a day, building big pillars *en route*, pitching tents on coming into camp, and never a grumble from any, always chirpy and willing, always *bilkul takra* as they say themselves. They are a very fine lot of men. At Panjpa, two marches out of Quetta, we were rejoined by Lieutenant Webb-Ware on the 27th May. He left us at Robat on May 6th to return by a different route and make a reconnaissance through Paniham and Dalbandin. He had had

a similar experience to ours as regards heat, etc., and was very glad to rejoin the main camp. He had travelled over more than 400 miles of country. He came across one of our Survey parties, and reported that one of the *khalasis* had become insane as the result of heat-stroke.

Now that the Mission is over, it may not be out of place to just run over the work accomplished. Captain McMahon has, since he began demarcating the Indo-Afghan frontier in March 1894, defined altogether 800 miles of country. Of this, the first Mission settled 330 miles from the Gomal to Chaman during a period of eleven months. This present—soon to be late—Mission started work at Chaman in March 1895, and in three months had completed 30 miles as far as Gwazha. This year demarcation was recommenced on January 27th and it is to the part of the frontier settled since that date, *viz.*, the length of 440 miles from Gwazha to the Koh-i-Malik Siah on the Persian frontier, that my remarks apply. The difficulties in demarcating such a piece of country were bound to be great, and it was with no light heart and with a full sense of the heavy responsibilities resting on him that the British Commissioner set to work. The country was most of it desert, much of it was totally unknown, the difficulties foreseen and unforeseen were great, and the size of the camp to be taken was, including the survey party, large, though it was cut down as much as possible of course in every

direction. Some said it would be found impossible to get across the desert on account of scarcity of water, difficulty of transport, etc., others that we were starting much too late which would have proved only too true probably, but for the heavy rain in February and for Captain McMahon's deciding to only take a very small camp, travelling very light, on with him across the worst portions of the desert and persuading the Afghan Sirdar to do the same. Yet one is thankful to be able to say that the work has been finished without loss of life, and that the whole boundary has been gone over excepting some unscaleable peaks and a few miles of country which were inaccessible on account of sand. Permanent and visible evidence of the boundary line has been left in the shape of stone pillars, and the inhabitants of the neighbouring tracts—to their expressed great satisfaction be it said—have thus had all doubts and disputes removed.

All this, of course, has not been accomplished without great forethought, great tact, and the constant exercise of those qualities of mind and heart in dealing with more or less uncivilised races which seem peculiarly British, and which are possessed by Captain McMahon in an eminent degree. The proof of this is that the demarcation of 800 miles of frontier, almost equal to that between Russia and Europe in length, all of it lying among tribes more noted for their lawlessness and disregard for life than for their manners,

and in country which, when not actual desert, has been hitherto regarded as unsafe for British officers to visit, has been settled, much of it rapidly and all of it without accident. The information collected on the Mission will be invaluable in deciding the question—that must arise sooner or later—of the improving of the communications, by railways if possible, between India and Persia. This question has come before the public of late years in the writings of the present Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and within the last four weeks Reuter's telegrams show that public opinion, as mirrored in the *Times*, is awakening to its importance. Little Englanders would have us believe that such railway extensions in Central and Southern Asia are really advocated on strategic grounds alone, and that the commercial advantages are mythical and not worthy of consideration, merely put forward to hide the real objects. This is not the case, however, in this instance. Seistan—both in its Persian and Afghan halves—is a rich country, and even as matters stand it produces a large quantity of wheat and other cereals, wool, ghi, etc., much of which is consumed locally, but much of which is exported to India by camel caravans. The waters of the Helmund have in past ages been diverted by means of canals to irrigate the country, and if a state of things were brought about in which the cultivating classes could enjoy security and find a market closer at hand than exists at present,

and carriage better than camel transport, there is no doubt the country could, and would, export an enormously greater amount of produce, while on the other hand large markets would be then opened up for European goods which now remain closed.

Had we, years ago, retained Shorawuk and the country south of the Helmund right up to its banks, there would have been no difficulty in running the railway along the river and across the Seistan plain to Persia. The whole of the country passed through would have become rich and prosperous, our relations with Afghanistan and Persia much improved, while Russia would have had more difficulty in obtaining a footing on the Persian Gulf—her great ambition undoubtedly—than ever. The route up the Helmund would then have drawn the trade from Seistan and further west through Quetta, this being the natural outlet, and one that has always been used. That is out of the question now, however. The sand mountains and want of water will prevent much commerce being carried either by caravan between India and Persia through Quetta by the route we have just traversed, and Mr. S. S. Thorburn's proposed company to lease Seistan and run the railway to it through Kandahar, will consequently remain impracticable.

Another route is, however, still available by means of which the Seistan trade could in time be developed and drawn either to Karachi or to some

port on the Mekran coast as was proposed by the late Sir Robert Sandeman. His scheme of controlling Kej and Panjgur was apparently based on this consideration, as well as on that of extending our influence into the south and east of Persia, thereby making an effort to counterbalance the influence of Russia over the northern portions of the Shah's dominions; to the importance of which the public at home are, somewhat late in the day, becoming awakened.

The survey work done during the Mission has been very extensive. Mr. Tate and the surveyors of his party have altogether surveyed an area of country amounting to 10,000 square miles, most of it hilly and the remainder sandy and waterless desert. Points were fixed by triangulation over an area of 10,000 square miles, all of which had not been fixed before.

The building of so many large pillars meant a tremendous lot of hard work, especially when, as not infrequently happened, stones were scarce and had to be carried some distance; and the way the 24th Baluchistan men marched long marches building pillars on the way and always turned up smiling, was a treat, and made one confident of the success of the rest of the Regiment in winning something for its colours in Mombassa if it gets the chance. Captain Walters combined the duties of Commandant of the escort and Intelligence Officer, and must have collected a large amount of information. A considerable amount

of relief, medical and operative, has been given by the Mission Hospital to the inhabitants wherever the Mission halted long enough to allow them to collect. Meteorological results of value have been obtained in a country where we wanted observations, and they should be very interesting taken in connection with the waves of heat which have recently passed over India. Amiel talks in his "Journal" of the "joys of action" and of the "sacred savour of accomplished duty." We have had lots of the former, and from the tone of this letter you will gather that we regard the savour as not only sacred but strong! Anyway the memory of the Baluch-Afghan Boundary Commission of 1896 will, in spite of its hardships, perhaps on account of them and the cheerful way everyone met them, ever remain a pleasant one to look back upon for the rest of our lives.

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