

AROUND THE WORLD ON A BICYCLE.¹

BY THOMAS STEVENS.

[Our Special Correspondent.]

PERSIA AND THE MESHED PILGRIM ROAD.

XX.

A MILE or so through the cultivated fields brings me to the village just in time to be greeted by the shouts and hand-clapping of a wedding procession that is returning from conducting the bride to the bath. Men and boys are beating rude, home-made tambourines, and women are dancing along before the bride, clicking castanets, whilst a crowd of at least two hundred villagers, arrayed in whatever finery they can muster for the occasion, are following behind, clapping their hands in measured chorus. This hand-clapping is, I believe, pretty generally practiced by the villagers all over Asia on festive occasions. As a result of riding for the crowd, I receive an invitation to take supper at the house of the bridegroom's parents. Having obtained sleeping quarters at the *chapar-khana*, I get the *shagird-chapar* to guide me to the house at the appointed time, and arrive just in time for supper. The dining-room is a low-ceiled apartment, about thirty feet long and eight wide, and is dimly lighted by rude grease lamps, set on pewter lamp-stands on the floor.

Squatting on the floor, with their backs to the wall, about fifty villagers form a continuous human line around the room. These all rise simultaneously to their feet as I am announced, bob their heads simultaneously, simultaneously say, "Sahib salaam," and, after I have been provided with a place, simultaneously resume their seats. Pewter trays are now brought in by volunteer waiters, and set on the floor before the guests, one tray for every two guests, and a separate one for myself. On each tray is a bowl of *mast* (milk soured with rennet—the "yaort" of Asia Minor), a piece of cheese, one onion, a spoonful or two of pumpkin butter and several flat wheaten cakes. This is the wedding supper. The guests break the bread into the *mast* and scoop the mixture out with their fingers, transferring it to their mouth with the dexterity of Chinese manipulating a pair of chop-sticks; now and then they take a nibble at the piece of cheese or the

onion, and they finish up by consuming the pumpkin butter. The groom doesn't appear among the guests; he is under the special care of several female relations in another apartment, and is probably being fed with tit-bits from the henna-stained fingers of old women, who season them with extravagant and lying stories of the bride's beauty, and duly impress upon him his coming matrimonial responsibilities.

Supper eaten and the dishes cleared, an amateur *luti* from among the villagers produces a tambourine and castanets, and, taking the middle of the room, proceeds to amuse the company by singing extempore love songs in praise of the bride and groom to tambourine accompaniment and pendulous swayings of the body. Pretending to be carried away by the melodiousness and sentiment of his own productions, he gradually bends backwards with hands outstretched and castanets jingling, until his head almost touches the floor, and maintains that position while keeping his body in a theatrical tremor of delight. This is the *finale* of the performance, and the *luti* comes and sets his skull-cap in front of me for a present; my next neighbor, the bridegroom's father, takes it up and hands it back with a deprecating wave of the hands; the *luti* replies by promptly setting it down again; this time my neighbor lets it remain, and the *luti* is made happy by a two-keran piece.

Torchlight processions to the different baths are now made from the house of both bride and groom, for this is the "*humum*" night, devoted to bathing and festivities before the wedding day. Torches are made with dry camel-thorn, the blaze being kept up by constant renewal; a boy, with a lighted candle, walks immediately ahead of the bridegroom and his female relations, and a man with a farnooze brings up the rear. Nobody among the onlookers is permitted to lag behind the man with the farnooze, everybody being required to either walk ahead or alongside. The tambourine beating and shouting and hand-clapping of the after-

¹ The first article of this series appeared in *OUTING* for April, 1883.

noon is repeated, and every now and then the procession stops to allow one or two of the women to face the bridegroom and favor him with an exhibition of their skill in the execution of the hip-dance.

The bridal procession is coming down another street, and I stop to try and obtain a glimpse of the bride; but she is completely enveloped in a flaming red shawl, and is supported and led by two women. There seems to be little difference in the two processions, except the preponderance of females in the bride's party; everything is arranged in the same order, and women dance at intervals before the bride as before the groom.

It begins raining before I retire for the night; it rains incessantly all night, and is raining heavily when I awake in the morning. The weather clears up at noon, but it is useless thinking of pushing on, for miles of tenacious mud intervene between the village and the gravelly desert; moreover, the prospect of the fine weather holding out looks anything but reassuring. The villagers are all at home, owing to the saturated condition of their fields, and I come in for no small share of worrying attention during the afternoon. A pilgrim from Teheran turns up and tells the people about my appearance before the Shah; this increases their interest in me to an unappreciated extent, and, with glistening eyes and eagerly rubbing fingers, they ask, "*Chand pool Padishah?*" (how much money did the King give you?) "I showed the Shah the bicycle, and the Shah showed me the lions and tigers and panthers at Doshan Tepe," I tell them; and a knowing customer, called Meshedi Ali, enlightens them still further by telling them I am not a *luti* to receive money for letting the Shah-in-Shah see me ride. Still, *luti* or no *luti*, the people think I ought to have received a present. I am worried to ride so incessantly, that I am forced to seek self-protection in pretending to have sprained my ankle, and in returning to the *chapar-khana* with a hypocritical limp. I station myself ostensibly for the remainder of the day on the *bala-khana* front, and busy myself in taking observations of the villagers and their doings.

Time was, among ourselves, or more correctly, among our ancestors, when blood-letting was as much the professional calling of a barber as scraping chins or trimming hair, and when our respected beef-eating and beer-drinking forefathers considered wholesale blood-letting as a

well-nigh universal panacea for fleshly ills. In traveling through Persia, one often observes things that suggest very strikingly those "good old days" of Queen Bess. The citizens of Zendjan offering the Shah a present of 60,000 tomans, as an inducement not to visit their city, as they did when he was on his way to Europe, has a true Elizabethan ring about it, a suggestion of the Virgin Queen's rabble retinue, traveling about, devouring and destroying, and of justly apprehensive citizens, seeing ruin staring them in the face, petitioning their regal mistress to spare them the dread calamity of a royal visit.

The ancient Zoroastrian barber, no doubt, bled his patients and customers on the public streets of Persian towns, for the benefit of their healths, when we pinned our pagan faith on Druidical incantations and mystic rites and ceremonies; his Musselman descendants were doing the same thing, when we at length arrived at the same stage of enlightenment, and the Persian wielder of razor and tweezers to-day performs the same office as belonging to his profession. From my vantage point on the *bala-khana* of the Lasgird *chapar*-station, I watch, with considerable interest, the process of bleeding a goodly share of the male population of the village; for it is spring-time, and in spring every Persian, whether well or unwell, considers the spilling of half a pint or so of blood very necessary for the maintenance of health.

The village barber, with his arms bared, and the flowing, o'er-ample legs of his Aradan-Lasgird pantaloons tucked up at his waist, like a washerwoman's skirt, a bunch of raw cotton in lieu of lint, under his left arm, and his keen-edged razor, looks like a man who thoroughly realizes and enjoys the importance of the office he is performing, as from the bared arm or opened mouth of one after the other of his neighbors he starts the crimson stream. The candidates for the barber's claret-tapping attentions bare their right arms to the shoulder, and bind for each other a handkerchief or piece of something tightly above the elbow, and the barber deftly slits a vein immediately below the hollow of the elbow-joint, pressing out the vein he wishes to cut by a pressure of the left thumb. The blood spurts out, the patient looks at the spurting blood, and then surveys the onlookers with a "who-cares?-I-don't" sort of a grin. He then squats down and watches it bleed about a half-

pint, occasionally working the elbow-joint to stimulate the flow. Half a pint is considered about the correct quantity for an adult to lose at one bleeding; the barber then binds on a small wad of cotton. Now and then a customer gives the barber a trifling coin by way of *backsheesh*, but the great majority give nothing. In a mere village like Lasgird, these periodical blood-lettings by the barber are, no doubt, regarded as being all in the family, rather than of professional services for a money consideration. The communal spirit obtains to a great extent in village life throughout both Asia Minor and Persia; nevertheless *backsheesh* would be expected in Persia from those able to afford it. Some few prefer being bled in the roof of the mouth, and they all squat on their hams in rows, some bleeding from the arm, others from the mouth, whilst the inevitable crowd of onlookers stand around, gazing and giving advice. Whilst the barber is engaged in binding on the wad of cotton, or during any interval between patients, he inserts the handle of the razor between his close-fitting skull-cap and his forehead, letting the blade hang down over his face, edge outward; a peculiar disposition of his razor, that he would, no doubt, be entirely at a loss to account for, except that he is following the custom of his fathers. As regards the customs of his ancestors, whose trade or profession he invariably follows, the Asiatic is the most conservative of mortals. "What was good enough for my father and grandfather," he says, "is certainly good enough for me;" and earnestly believing in this, he never, of his own accord, thinks of changing his occupation or of making improvements.

Later in the afternoon I descend from the *baka-khana* and take a strolling look at the village, and with the *shagird-chapar* for guide, pay a visit to the old fortress, the conspicuous edifice seen from the trail-worn limestone pass. Forgetting about my subterfuge of the sprained ankle, I wander forth without the afore-mentioned limp; but the people seem to have forgotten it as completely as myself, at all events nobody makes any comments. A ripple of excitement is caused by a two-storied house collapsing from the effects of the soaking rains, an occurrence by no means infrequent in the spring in a country of mud-built houses. A crowd soon appears upon the scene, watching with unconcealed delight the spectacle of

tumbling roof and toppling wall, giving vent to their feelings in laughter and loud shouts of approval, like delighted children, whenever another bulk square of mud and *gatch* comes tumbling down. Fortunately, nobody happens to be hurt, beyond the half-burying of some donkeys in the *débris*, which are finally induced to extricate themselves by being vigorously bombarded with stones. No sympathy appears to be given on the part of the spectators, and evidently nothing of the kind is expected by the tenants of the tumbling house; the wailing women, and the look of consternation on the face of the men, who barely escaped from the falling roof, seems to be regarded by the spectators as a *tomasha* (show), to be stared at and enjoyed, as they would stare at and enjoy anything not seen every day; on the other hand, the occupants of the house regard their misfortune as *kismet*.

Returning to the *chapar-khana*, I get the *shagird* to pilot me into and round about the fortress; it is rapidly falling to decay, but is still in a sufficiently good state of preservation to show thoroughly its former strength and conformation. The fortress is a decidedly massive building, constructed entirely of mud and adobe bricks; a hundred feet high, of circular form, and some two hundred yards in circumference. The disintegrated walls and *débris* of former towers forms a sloping mound or foundation about fifty feet in height, and from this the perpendicular walls of the castle rise up, huge and ugly, for another hundred feet. Following a foot-trail up the mound-like base, we come to a low, gloomy passage-way leading into the interior of the fort. A door, composed of one massive stone slab, that nothing less than a cannon shot would shatter, guards the entrance of this passage, which is the only accessible entrance to the place. Following it along for perhaps thirty yards, we emerge upon a scene of almost indecipherable squalor—a scene that instantly suggests an over-crowded "rookery" in the tenant-house slums depicted by a New York sensational reporter's graphic pencil. The place is simply swarming with people, who, like rabbits in an old warren, seem to be moving about among the tumble-down mud huts, anywhere and everywhere, as though the old ruined fortress were burrowed through and through, or that the people now moved through, over, under and around the remnants of what was once a more orderly collection

of dwellings, having long forsaken regular foot-ways. The inhabitants are ragged and picturesque, and meandering about among them, on the most familiar terms, are hundreds of goats. Although everything is in a more or less dilapidated condition, huts or cells still rise above each other in tiers, and the people clamber about from tier to tier, as if in emulation of their venturesome four-footed associates, who are here, we may well imagine, in as perfect a paradise as vagrom goatish nature would care for or expect.

the donkeys and goats were driven inside and occupied the interior space, and the massive stone door was closed and barricaded. The villagers' granaries were inside the fortress, and provisions for obtaining water were not overlooked; so that once inside, the people were quite secure against any force of Turkomans, whose heaviest arms were muskets.

The suggestion of an amphitheatre, as above described, is quite patent at the present day, in something like two or three hundred tiered dwellings; in the days of



THE WEDDING PROCESSION AT LASGIRD.

At a low estimate, I should place the present population of the old fortress at a thousand people, and about the same number of goats. In the days when the bold Turkoman raiders were wont to make their dreaded *alamans* almost up to the walls of Teheran, and such strongholds as this were the only safeguard of out-lying villagers, the interior of Lasgird fortress resembled a spacious amphitheatre, around which hundreds of huts rose, tier above tier, like the cells of a monster pigeon house, affording shelter in times of peril to all the inhabitants of Lasgird, and to such refugees as might come in. At the first alarm of the dreaded man-stealers' approach, the outside villagers repaired to the fortress with their portable property;

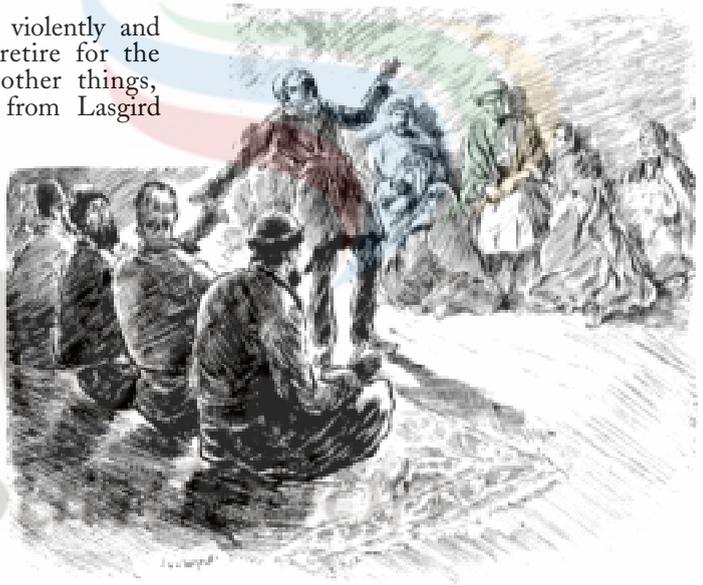
its usefulness there must have been a thousand. Thanks to the Russian occupation of Turkestan, there is no longer any need of the fortress, and the present population seem to be occupying it at the peril of having it some day tumble down about their ears; for massive though its walls most certainly are, they are but mud, and the people are indifferent about repairs. Failing to surprise the watchful villagers in their fields or outside dwellings, the baffled marauders would find confronting them fifty feet of solid mud wall without so much as an air-hole in it, rising sheer above the mound-like foundation, and above this tiers of rooms or cells, from inside which archers or musketeers could make it decidedly interesting for any

hostile party attempting to approach. This old fortress of Lasgird is very interesting, as showing the peaceful and unwarlike Persian ryot's method of defending his life and liberty against the savage human hawks that were ever hovering near, ready to swoop down and carry him and his off to the slave markets of Khiva and Bokhara. These were times when seed was sown and harvest garnered in fear and trembling, for the Turkoman raiders were adepts at swooping down, when least expected, and they rode horses capable of making their hundred miles a day over the roughest country. (Incredulous as this latter fact may seem, it is, nevertheless, a well-known thing in Central Asia that the Turkoman's horse is capable of covering this remarkable distance, and of keeping it up for days.)

A thunderstorm is raging violently and drenching everything as I retire for the night, dampening, among other things, my hopes of getting away from Lasgird for some days, for between the village and the gravelly and consequently always traversable desert, are some miles of slimy clay of the kind that in wet weather makes an experienced cyclist wince to think of crossing. The floor of the *bala-khana* forms once again my nocturnal couch; but the temperature lowers perceptibly as the night advances and the rain continues, and towards morning it changes into snow. The doors and windows of my room are

to be called doors and windows only out of courtesy to a rude, unfinished effort to imitate these things, and the floor, at daybreak, is nicely carpeted with an inch or so of "the beautiful snow," and a four-inch covering of the same greets my vision upon looking outside. Determined to make the best of the situation, I remove my quarters from the cold and draughty *bala-khana* to the stable, and send the *shagird-chapar* out in quest of camelthorn, bread, eggs and pomegranates, thinking thus to obtain the luxury of a bit of fire and something to eat in comparative seclusion. This vain hope proves that I had not even yet become thoroughly acquainted with the Persians, No sooner

does my camelthorn blaze begin to crackle and the smoke to betray the whereabouts of a fire than shivering, blue-nosed villagers begin to put in their appearance, their backs humped up and their bare ankles and slip-shod feet adding not a little to the general aspect of wretchedness that scums inseparable from Persians in cold weather. And these are the people who, during a gleam of illusory sunshine yesterday, were so nonchalantly parting with their blood—of which, by the by, unlike the burly buffettiers of yore, your bread and cucumber eating, and cold water thrilling Persian has little enough, and that little thin enough at any time. These rag-bedecked, shivering wretches hop up on the raised platform where the fire is



THE AMATEUR LUTI.

burning and squat themselves around it in the most sociable manner; and under the thawing process of passing their hands through the flames, poking the coals together, and close attention to the details of keeping it burning, they quickly thaw out in more respects than one. Fifteen minutes after my fire is lighted, the spot where I anticipated a *samovar* of tea and a pomegranate or two in peace, is occupied by as many Persians as can find squatting room, talking, shouting, singing and kalian smoking, meanwhile eagerly and expectantly watching the preparations for making tea. Preferring to leave them in full possession rather than be in their uncongenial midst, I pass the time in promenading

back and forth behind the horses. After walking to and fro a few times, the, to them, singular performance of walking back and forth, excites their easily-aroused curiosity, and the wondering attention of all present becomes once again my unhappy portion. An Asiatic's idea of enjoying himself in cold weather is squatting about a few coals of fire, making no physical exertion whatever beyond smoking and conversing; and the spectacle of a Ferenghi promenading back and forth, when he might be following their example of squatting by the fire, is to them a subject of no little wonder and speculation.

The redeeming feature of my enforced sojourn at Lasgird is the excellence of the pomegranates, for which the place is famous, and of which there seems an abundance left over through the winter. A small quantity of seedless pomegranates, a highly valued variety, are grown here at Lasgird, but they are all sent to Teheran for the use of the Shah and his household, and are not to be obtained by anyone. It has been a raw, disagreeable day, and at night I decide to sleep in the stable, where it is at least warmer, though the remove is but a compromise by which one's olfactory sensibilities are sacrificed in the interest of securing a few hours' sleep.

An unexpected, but none the less welcome deliverance, appears on the following morning in the shape of a frost, that forms on the sticky mud a crust of sufficient thickness to enable me to escape across to the welcome gravel beyond the Lasgird Plain ere it thaws out. Thus on the precarious path of a belated morning frost, breaking through here, jumping over there, I leave Lasgird and its memories of wedding processions and blood-letting, its huge mud fortress, its pomegranates and its discomforts,

Three miles of mostly rideable gravel, brings me to another village, and to four miles of horrible mud in getting through its fields and over its ditches. A raw wind is blowing, and squally gusts of snow come scudding across the dreary prospect—a prospect flanked on the north by cold, grey hills, and the face of nature generally furrowed with tell-tale lines of winter's partial dissolution. Whilst trundling through this village, both myself and bicycle plastered to a well-nigh unrecognizable state with mud, feeling pretty thoroughly disgusted with the weather and the roads, an ancient-looking Persian emerges from a little stall with a last sea-

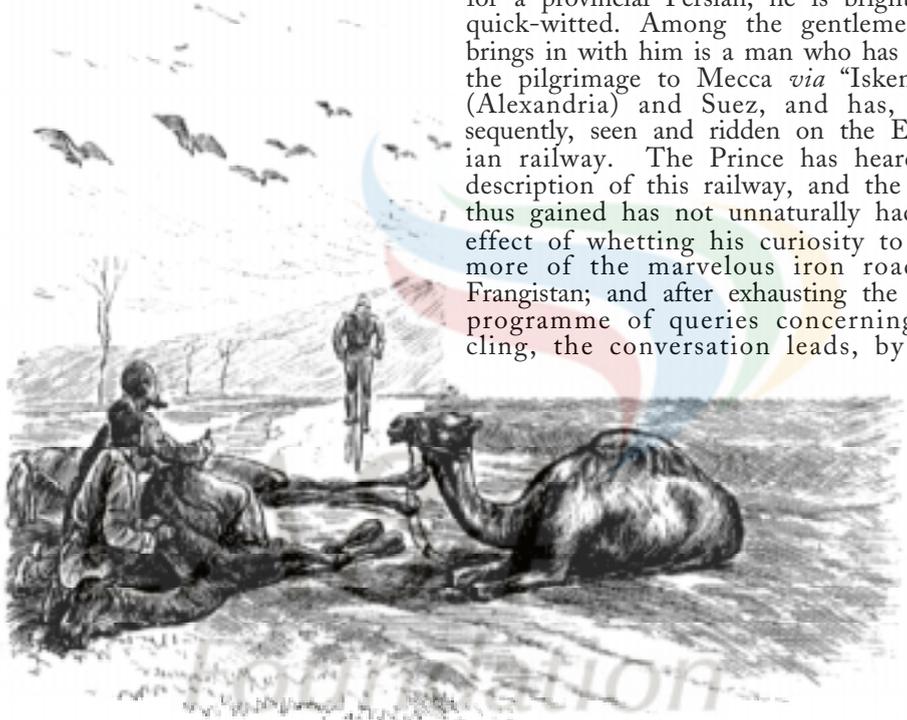
son's musk melon in hand, and advancing towards me, shouts, "H-o-i!!" loud enough to wake the seven sleepers. Shouting "H-o-i!!" at a person close enough to hear a whisper, as loud as though he were a good mile away, is a peculiarity of the Persians that has often irritated travelers to the pitch of wishing they had a hot potato and the dexterity to throw it down their throats; and in my present unenviable condition and its accompanying unenviable frame of mind, I don't mind admitting that I mentally relegated this vociferous melon-vendor to a place where infinitely worse than hot potatoes would overtake him. Knowing full well that a halt of a single minute would mean a general mustering of the population, and an importuning rabble following me through the unrideable mud, I ignore the old melon man's fog-horn efforts to arrest my onward progress; but he proves a most vociferous and persistent specimen of his class. Nothing less than a dozen exclamation points can give the faintest idea of how a "hollering" Persian shouts "H-o-i."

Seven miles over very good gravel, and my road leads into the labyrinth of muddy lanes, ditches and water-holes, tumble-down walls and disorderly-looking cemeteries of the suburbs of Semnoon. In traversing the cemeteries, one cannot help observing how many of the graves are caved in by the rains and the skeletons exposed to view. Mohammedans bury their dead very shallow, usually about two feet, and in Persia the grave is often arched over with soft mud bricks; these weaken and dissolve after the rains and snows of winter, and a cemetery becomes a place of exposed remains and of pit-falls where an unwary step on what appears solid ground may precipitate one into the undesirable company of a skeleton. By the time Semnoon is reached the day has grown warmer and the sun favors the cold, dismal earth with a few genial rays, so that the blooming orchards of peach and pomegranate that brighten and enliven the environs of the city, and which suggest Semnoon to be a mild and sheltered spot, seem quite natural, notwithstanding the patches of snow lying about. The crowds seem remarkably well behaved as I trundle through the bazaar towards the telegraph office, the total absence of missiles being particularly noticeable. The telegraph-gee proves to be a sensible, enlightened fellow, and quite matter-of-fact in his manner for

a Persian; apart from his duty to the Governor and a few big-wigs of the place, whom it would be unpardonable in him to overlook or ignore, he saves me as much as possible from the worrying of the people.

Prince Anushirvan Mirza, Governor of Semnoon, Damghan and Shahrood, is the Shah's cousin, son of Raahman Mirza, uncle of the Shah, and formerly Governor of Tabreez. Baahman Mirza was discovered intriguing with the Russians, and

use a very mild term—it may be as well to mention here as anywhere, that the Governor telegraphed to his son, acting as his deputy at Shahrood, that he had ridden some miles with me out of the city!) During the evening one of the Governor's sons, Prince Sultan Madjid Mirza, comes in with a few leading dignitaries to spend an hour in chatting and smoking. This young prince proves one of the most intelligent Persians I have met in the country; besides being very well informed for a provincial Persian, he is bright and quick-witted. Among the gentlemen he brings in with him is a man who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca *via* "Iskenderi" (Alexandria) and Suez, and has, consequently, seen and ridden on the Egyptian railway. The Prince has heard his description of this railway, and the light thus gained has not unnaturally had the effect of whetting his curiosity to hear more of the marvelous iron roads of Frangistan; and after exhausting the usual programme of queries concerning cycling, the conversation leads, by easy



SKINNING DEAD CAMELS.

fearing the vengeance of the Shah, fled from the country; seeking an asylum among the Russians, he is now—if not dead—a refugee somewhere in the Caucasus. But the father's disgrace did not prejudice the Shah against his sons, and Prince Anushirvan and his sons are honored and trusted by the Shah as men capable of distinguishing between the friends and enemies of their country, and of conducting themselves accordingly. The Governor's palace is not far from the north gate of the city, and after the customary round of tea and kalians, without which nothing can be done in Persia, he walks outside with his staff to a piece of good road in order to see me ride to the best advantage. (As a specimen of Persian extravagance-to

transition, to the subject of railways.

"Do they have railways in Yenghi Donia?" questions the Prince.

"Plenty of railways; plenty of everything," I reply.

"Like the one at Iskenderi and Stamboul?"

"Better and bigger than both these put together a hundred times over; the Iskenderi railroad is very small."

Nods and smiles of acquiescence from Prince and listeners follow this statement, which show plain enough that they consider it a pardonable lie, such as every Persian present habitually indulges in himself and thinks favorably of in others.

"Railroads are good things, and Ferenghis are very clever people," says the

Prince, renewing the subject and handing me a handful of salted melon seeds from his pocket, meanwhile nibbling some himself.

"Yes; why don't you have railroads in Iran? You could then go to Teheran in a few hours."

The Prince smiles amusingly at the thought, as though conscious of railroads in Persia being a dream altogether too bright to ever materialize, and shaking his head, says: "Pool neis" (we have no money).

"The English have money and would build the railroad; but, 'Mollah neis'—Baron Reuter?—you know Baron Reuter—'Mollah neis,' not 'pool neis.'"

The Prince smiles, and signifies that he is well enough aware where the trouble lies; but we talk no more of railroads, for he and his father and brothers belong to the party of progress in Persia, and the triumph of priests and old women over the Shah and Baron Reuter's railway is to them a distressful and humiliating subject.

The late lamented O'Donovan, of "To the Merve" fame, used to make Semnoon his headquarters whilst dodging about on the frontier, and was personally known to everyone present. Semnoon is celebrated for the excellence of its *kalian* tobacco, and O'Donovan was celebrated in Semnoon for his love of the *kalian*. This evening, in talking about him, the telegraph-jee says that when he pulled at the *kalian* he pulled with such tremendous eagerness that the flames leapt up to the ceiling, and after three whiffs, you couldn't see anybody in the room for smoke!

The telegraph-jee's *farrash* builds a good wood fire in a cosy little room adjoining the office; blankets are provided, an ample supper is sent around from the telegraph-jee's house, and what is still better appreciated, I am left to enjoy these substantial comforts without so much as a single spectator coming to see me feed; no one comes near me till morning.

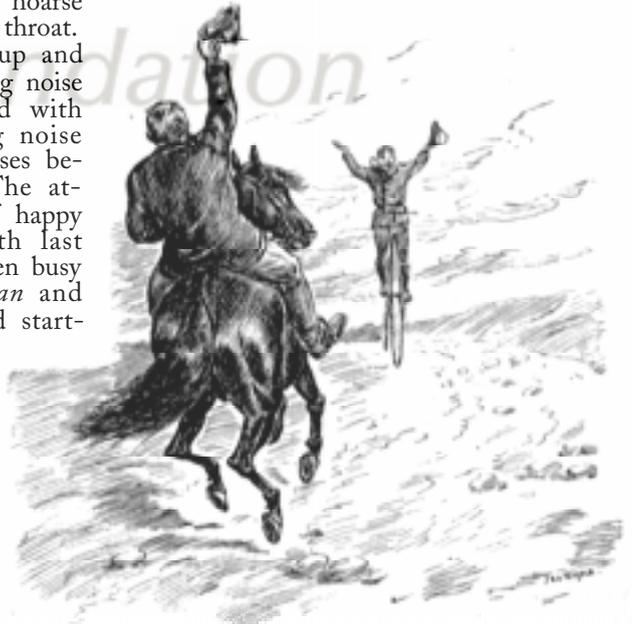
The morning breaks cold and clear, and for some six miles the road is very fair wheeling; after this comes a gradual inclination towards a jutting spur of hills; the following twenty miles being the toughest kind of a trundle through mud, snow-fields and drifts. This is a most uninviting piece of country to wheel through, and it would seem but little less so to traverse at this time of the year with a caravan of camels, two or three of these animals being found exhausted by the

roadside, and a couple of *charvadars* are encountered in one place skinning another, whilst its companion is lying helplessly alongside watching the operation and waiting its own turn to the same treatment. It is said to be characteristic of a camel that when he once slips down, cold and weary in the mud, he never again tries to regain his feet. The weather looks squally and unsettled, and I push ahead as rapidly as the condition of the ground will permit, fearing a snow-storm in the hills. About three P. M. I arrive at the caravanserai of Ahwän, a dreary, inhospitable place in an equally dreary, inhospitable country. Situated in a region of wind and snow and bleak, open hills, the wretched serai of Ahwän is remembered as a place where the keen, raw wind seems to come whistling gleefully and yet maliciously from all points of the compass, seemingly centering in the caravanserai itself; these winds render any attempt to kindle a fire a dismal failure, resulting in smoke and watery eyes. Here I manage to obtain half-frozen bread and a few eggs; after an ineffectual attempt to roast the latter and thaw out the former, I am forced to eat them both as they are; and although the sun looks ominously low, and it is six farsakhs to the next place, I conclude to chance anything rather than risk being snow-bound at Ahwän. Fortunately, after about five more miles of snow, the trail emerges upon a gravelly plain with a gradual descent from the hills just crossed to the lower level of the Damghan plain. The favorable gradient and the smooth trails induce a smart pace, and as the waning daylight merges into the soft, chastened light of a cloud-veiled moon, I alight at the village and serai of Gusheh. There are at the caravanserai a number of travelers, among them a moujik of the Don, traveling to Teheran and beyond, in company with a Tabreez Turk. The Russian peasant at once invites me to his *menzil* in the caravanserai; and although he looks, if anything, a trifle more indifferent about personal cleanliness than either a Turkish or Persian peasant, I have no alternative but to accept his well-meant invitation. At this juncture, when one's thoughts are swayed and influenced by an appetite that the cold day and hard tugging through the hills has rendered well-nigh uncontrollable, a prosperous-looking Persian traveler, returning from a pilgrimage to Meshed with his wives, family and servitors, quite a

respectable sized retinue, emerges from the seclusion of his quarters to see the bicycle. Of course he requests me to ride, sending his link-boys to bring out all the farnoozes to supplement fair Luna's coy and inefficient beams; and after the performance, the old gentleman promises to send me round a dish of pillau. In due time the promised pillau comes round, an ample dish, sufficient to satisfy even my present ravenous appetite, and after this he sends round tea, lump sugar and a *samovar*. The moujik turns to and gets up steam in the *samovar*, and over tiny glasses of the cheering but non-intoxicating beverage, he sings a Russian regimental song, and his comrade, the Tabreez Turk, warbles the praises of Stamboul. But although they make merry over the tea, methinks both of them would have made still merrier over something stronger, for the moujik puts in a good share of the evening talking about vodka consumed at Shahrood, and smacking his lips at the retrospective bliss embodied in its consumption, whilst the Turk from Tabreez catches me aside and asks mysteriously if my packages contain any "raki" (arrack). Like the Ahwān caravanserai, the one at Gusheh seems to draw the chilly winds from every direction, and I arise from a rude couch made wretchedly uncomfortable by draughts, the attacks of insects and the persistent determination of a horse to use my prostrate form as a rest for his nosebag, to find myself the hoarse and unfortunate possessor of a sore throat.

Persian travelers are generally up and off before daylight, and the clicking noise (Persian curry-combs are covered with small rings that make a rattling noise when being used) of currying horses begins as early as three o'clock. The attendants of the old gentleman of happy remembrance in connection with last night's pillau and *samovar* have been busy for two hours, and his *taktrowan* and *kajavehs* are already occupied and starting, when by the first gleam of awakening dawn I mount and wheel eastward. A shallow, unbridged stream obstructs my path but a short distance from Gusheh, and I manage to get in knee-deep in trying to avoid the necessity of removing my foot-gear; I then wander several miles off my road to an outlying Village. This happy commencement of a new day is

followed by a variable road leading sometimes over stony or gravelly plains where the wheeling varies through all the stages of goodness, badness and indifference, and sometimes through grazing grounds and cultivable areas adjoining the villages. Scattered about the grazing and arable country are now small towers of refuge, loop-holed for defence, to which ryots working in the field or shepherds tending their flocks, fled to for safety in case of a sudden appearance of Turkoman marauders. But a few years ago men hereabouts went to plow, sow or reap with a gun slung at their backs, and a few of them reaching the shelter of one of these compact little mud towers were able, through the loop-holes, to keep the Turkomans at bay until relief arrived. The towers are of circular form, about twenty feet high and fifteen in diameter; the entrance is a very small doorway, often a mere hole to crawl into, and steps inside lead to the summit; some are roofed in near the top, others are mere circular walls of mud. On grazing grounds a lower wall often encompasses the tower, fencing in a larger space that formed a corral for the flocks; the shepherds then, whilst defending themselves, were also defending their sheep or goats. In the more exposed localities these little towers of refuge are often but a couple of hundred yards apart, thickly dotting the country in all directions, whilst watch-towers are seen



THE ANTICIPATED MEETING.

perched on peaks and points of vantage, the whole scene speaking eloquently of the extraordinary precautions these poor people were compelled to adopt for the preservation of their lives and property. No wonder Russian intrigue makes headway in Khorassan and all along the Turkoman-Perso frontier, for the people can scarce help being favorably impressed by the stoppage of Turkoman deviltry in their midst, and the wholesale liberation of Persian slaves.

The town of Damghan is reached near noon, and I am not a little gratified to learn that the telegraph-jee has been notified of my approach, and has stationed his *farrash* at the entrance to the bazaar, so that I should have no trouble in finding the office. This augurs well for the reception awaiting me there, and I am accordingly not surprised to find him an exceptionally affable youth, proud of a word or two of English he has somehow acquired, and of his knowledge of how to properly entertain a Ferenghi. This latter qualification assumes the eminently practical, and, it is needless to add, acceptable form of a roast chicken, a heaping dish of pillau and sundry other substantial proofs of anticipatory preparations. The telegraph-jee takes great pleasure in seeing roast chicken mysteriously disappear, and the dish of pillau gradually diminish in size; in fact the unconcealed satisfaction afforded by these savory testimonials of his cook's abilities give him such pleasure that he urges me to remain his guest for a day and rest up. But Shahrood is only forty miles away, and here I shall have the pleasure of meeting Mr. McIntyre, before-mentioned as line inspector, who is making his temporary headquarters at that city. Moreover, angry-looking storm-dogs have accompanied the sun on his antemeridian march to-day, and such experience as mine at Lasgird has the effect of making one, if not weather-wise, at least weather-wary. In approaching Damghan, long before any other indications of the city appear, twin minarets are visible,



BEAUTY AND THE BICYCLE AT SHAHROOD.

soaring above the stony plain like a pair of huge pillars; these minars belong to the same mosque and form a conspicuous landmark for travelers and pilgrims in approaching Damghan from any direction: at a distance they appear to rise up sheer from the barren plain, the town being situated in a depression. Six farsakhs from Damghan is the village of Tazaria, noted in the country round about for the enormous size of the carrots grown there; the minarets of Damghan and the extraordinary size of the Tazaria vegetables furnish the material for a characteristic little Eastern story, current among the inhabitants.

Finding that people came from far and near to see the graceful minarets of Damghan, and that nobody came to see Tazaria, the good people of that neglected village became envious, and they reasoned among themselves and said: "Why should Damghan have two minarets and Tazaria none?" So they gathered together their pack-donkeys, their ropes and ladders and a large company of men and reached Damghan in the silence and darkness of the night, intending to pull down and carry off one of the minarets and erect it in Tazaria. The ropes were fastened to the summit of the minar, but at the first great pull the brickwork gave way and the top of the tall minaret came tumbling down with a crash and clatter, killing several of its would-be removers. The

Damghan people turned out, and after hearing the unhappy Tazarians' laments, some sarcastic citizen gave them a few carrot seeds, bidding them go home and sow it, and they could grow all the minarets they wanted. The carrots grew famously, and the villagers of Tazaria, instead of the promised minarets, found themselves in possession of a new and useful vegetable that fetched a good price in the Damghan bazaars. The Damghans meeting a Tazaran ryot coming in with a donkey load of these huge carrots cannot resist twitting him regarding the minars; but the now practical Tazarians no longer mourn the absence of minarets in their village, and when twitted about it, reply: "We have more minarets than you have, but our minarets grow downwards and are good to eat."

During the afternoon I pass many ruined villages and castles, said to have been destroyed by an earthquake many years ago. Some few natives find remunerative employment in excavating and washing over the dirt and *débris* of the ruined castles, in which they find coins, rubies, agates, torquoise and women's ornaments; sometimes they unearth skeletons with ornaments still attached. The sun shines out warm this afternoon, and its genial rays are sufficiently tempting to induce the jackals to emerge from their hiding-places and bask in its beaming smiles on the sunny side of the ruins. Wherever there are ruins and skeletons and decay in Eastern lands—*and where are there not?*—there also is sure to be found the prowling and sneakish-looking jackal. Shelter and the usual rude accommodation, supplemented on this occasion by a wandering *luti* and his vicious-looking baboon, as also a company of riotous *charvadars*, who insist on singing accompaniments to the *luti's* soul-harrowing tom-toming till after midnight, are obtained at the caravanserai of Deh Mollah. From Deh Mollah it is only a couple of farsakhs to Shahrood, and after the first three miles, which is slightly up grade and not particularly smooth, it is down grade and very fair wheeling the remainder of the distance. The road forks a couple of miles from Shahrood, and whilst I am entering by one road, Mr. McIntyre is leaving on horseback by the other to meet me, guessing, from word received from Damghan, that I must have spent last night at Deh Mollah, and would arrive at Shahrood this morning.

Only those who have experienced it

know anything of the pleasure of two Europeans meeting and conversing in a country like Persia, where the habits and customs of the natives are so different; and to most travelers, uncongenial and only to be tolerated for a time.

I have met Mr. McIntyre in Teheran, so we are not total strangers, which, of course, makes it still more agreeable. After the customary interchange of news, and the discussion of refreshments, Mr. McIntyre hands me a telegram from Teheran, which bears a date several days old. It is from the British Legation, notifying me that permission is refused to go through the Turkoman country; an appendage from the Charge d'Affairs suggests that I repair to Astrakhan and try the route through Siberia. And this, then, is the result of General Melnikoff's genial smiles and ready promises of assistance; after providing myself with proper money and information for the Turkestan route, on the strength of the Russian Minister's promises, I am overtaken, when 300 miles away, with a veto against which anything I might say or do would be of no avail!

Sultan Ahmed Mirza, a son of Prince Anushirvan, is deputy governor of Shahrood, responsible to his father; and ere I have arrived an hour, the usual request is sent round for a "*tomasha*," the word now used by people waiting to see me ride, and which really means an exhibition. His place is found in a brick court-yard with the usual central tank and the airy rooms of the building all opening upon it, and once again comes the feeling of playing a rather ridiculous rôle, as I circle awkwardly around the tank over very uneven bricks and around short corners where an upset would precipitate me into the tank—amid, I can't help thinking, "roars of laughter." The Prince is very lavish of his flower Persian compliments, and says, "You English have now left nothing more to do but to bring the dead back to life." In the court-yard my attention is called to a set of bastinado poles and loops, and Mr. McIntyre asks the Prince if he hasn't a prisoner on hand, so that he can give us a *tomasha* in return for the one we are giving him; but it is now the Persian New Year, and the prisoners have all been liberated.

Here, gentle reader, in Shahrood—but it now behooves us to be dark and mysterious and deal in hints and whispers, for the Persian proprieties must not be ruthlessly violated and then as ruthlessly

exposed to satisfy the prying curiosity of far off Frangistan; that would never do. Behold, then, Mr. McIntyre absent; behold all male humans absent save myself and a couple of sable eunuchs, whose smooth, whiskerless faces betray inward, amusement at the extreme novelty of the situation, and we all alone between the high brick walls that encircle the secrecy of an inner court—and yet not all alone, for—tell it in whispers—some half-dozen shrouded female forms are clustered together in one comer. Yashmaks are drawn aside, and plump, oval faces and bright eyes revealed, faces brown and soft of outline, eyes black, large and lustrous, with black lines skillfully drawn to make them look still larger, and lashes deeply stained to impart love and languor to their wondrous depths. Whisper it not in Gath, and tell it not in the streets of Frangistan, that the wondrous *asp-i-awhan* has proved an open sesame capable of revealing to an inquisitive and all-observant Ferenghi the collective charms of a Persian swell's harem! We can imagine these ladies in the seclusion of the zenana hearing of the Ferenghi and his wonderful iron horse, and overwhelmed with feminine curiosity, with much coaxing and promising, obtaining reluctant consent for a strictly secret and decorous *tomasba*, with covered faces and no one present but the attendant eunuchs and the Ferenghi, who, fortunately, will soon leave the country, never to return. Mohammedan women are merely

overgrown children, and the promise of strict decorousness is forgotten or ignored the moment the *tomasba* begins; and the fun and the wickedness of removing their yashmaks in the presence of a Ferenghi is too rare an opportunity to be missed, and, no doubt, furnishes them with material for amusing conversation for many a day after. Rare fun these ladies think it to uncover their olive faces and let the Ferenghi see their beauty; the eunuchs are generally indulgent to their charges whenever they can safely be so, and on this occasion they content themselves with looking on and saying nothing. After seeing me ride, the ladies cluster boldly around and examine the bicycle, chatting freely among themselves the while concerning its capabilities; but some of the younger ladies regard myself with fully as much curiosity as the bicycle, for never before did they have such an opportunity of scrutinizing a Ferenghi. And now, whilst granted the privilege of this little revelation, we must be very careful not to reveal the secret of whose harem we have seen unveiled, and whose inner court our paran wheels have pressed; for the whirligig of time brings about strange things, and apparently trifling things that have been indiscreetly published by travelers in books at home, have sometimes found their way back to the far East, and caused embarrassment and chagrin to people who treated them with hospitality and respect.

Foundation

SWALLOWS.

O birds! at dawn that chirp so merrily
 In the deep shadows of o'ershelving eaves,
 Then darting out through drooping boughs and leaves,
 Dip your swift pinions where yon brook flows by.
 Gay birds I with us ye tarry but awhile;
 The swirl of autumn storms is not for ye;
 The first light hoar frost sends ye o'er the sea
 In search of some soft clime or leafy isle.
 Ye cleave the air with wings so deft and strong,
 Your flight no labor seems, but joy alone.
 But, wanderers, can ye tell what land is best?
 Ye scale the clouds, and sea and sky belong
 To your domain; find ye no blissful home
 In all the wide-spread world—no land of rest?

A. Y. Cole.