

CONTRIBUTED ARTICLES.

A DIARY OF THE WAR.

BY ANON.

(Concluded from page 277.)

IN the autumn of 1919, I had twenty-five days' leave. How quickly the year had gone since my last. This time I had the wonderful opportunity of going to Persia. We left by paddle steamer for Baghdad. The journey took a few days and the heat was uncomfortable. We slept on deck, but even there, there was not a breath of air. From Baghdad to Quirito, we went by rail away past Baqubah, where a Ford met us, and we had two days' bumping over the sandy way with the jagged, angry-looking Persian hills on either side. It was a most interesting journey. We passed endless caravans making their pilgrimage across the desert to the great tomb at Kerbela. The women were heavily veiled and rode on donkeys, or were carried in a Kajavah—something like wooden paniers with a roof to them—these were slung across big donkeys or Arab ponies. Kurds, Lurds and Persians all passed us in their picturesque garb. Horsemen in long circular blue cloaks sitting on gorgeous Persian mats or saddle-bags made a lovely splash of colour in that sandy, dusty way. The foremost rider of each caravan carried, on a long staff, the hand of Alee. We rested at noon, at a camp at the foot of the Pitak Pass, where the officers of the regiment stationed there gave us welcome food and drink, while we ate, sat and looked up with horror towards the Pass and wondered how on earth our Ford could possibly climb it, but it did. I seemed to be holding on with my eyelashes, as later on, we climbed and climbed grunting and groaning up that hill. That night we camped at Karind. A noble Sikh with fixed bayonet guarded us till dawn. After breakfast of a very rough and tumble nature, two or three officers took us a superb walk to the source of the river. How delicious it was to see the water bubbling out of the ground, and we all refreshed ourselves with a mugful. It was a lovely way of putting in the time as we had to wait for our motor driver who was tinkering at the car. Something was always going wrong with it, and several times it broke down those two days. We were on our way by noon, however, and passed by the great new roads being made to Kermanshah, with large gangs of Kurdish men and women working under our indefatigable engineers.

The Caravansary is a conspicuous object in the land of Persia. We came across one about the distance of one day's march to another. The four walls of the Caravansary give shelter to the travellers' horses, donkeys or camel. The animals are tethered by a leg or wander about loose, each jingling bells within bells, which hang at their necks. The apertures in the walls around are the rooms in the inn of which one reads in one's Bible, "and because there was no

room in the Inn," our Lord was born in a manger. We went into the stable which is a dark building leading off from the inn with mangers all round. Mary and the little Babe had lain in one. The only light comes from a shaft from a hole in the roof.

We reached our destination, Kermanshah, about 7 p.m. rather tired and dusty after those two days in a Ford car. We were received at the Sisters' Rest-house where we enjoyed a lazy time. There are lovely walks and many Persian gardens, just delicious green oasis after long tracks of waste land. We made up a party one day and went some miles on the Hamaden road to the rock of Behistun on the road that Alexander the Great must have passed about 334 B.C. from Macedonia to conquer Asia. We were hot and thirsty after our scorching ride and drank long of "the sweet waters of Behistun," bubbling out of the ground. I remember a Mountain Battery was passing at the time and the men seemed much amused. Away high up on the rock overhead stands Darius the Great of royal blood, that remarkable ruler of Persia in 400 B.C., and figures of those who had to be suppressed stand beside him—Sardis, Susiane, Babylonia, Arachosia, Media, Parthia and Hyrcania. How the carving was done at that height few know, and the cuneiform writing underneath, I was told, tells us "I am Darius, King of Kings, and Lord of all Creation." There was a most interesting padre with us who explained everything most clearly. We are indebted to a British soldier who discovered the key to these writings.

All that passed by could not fail to look up and see this wonderful carving on the rock. Darius is 6 feet in length I believe and after all these years, the figures are in wonderful preservation. Some distance off, in the other direction, is the Arch at Tachi-Boston, full of carvings, and this is well worth two or three visits.

I happened to be in Kermanshah during the month of Mourning, otherwise the Muharrum, which is universally kept by all classes in memory of the martyrdom of Hussain and Hassan. Mohammedans are divided into two great branches, the Sunnis and the Shiahhs. The Persians are Shiahhs, particularly because they consider Ali, the son-in-law of Mohammed, to be the true and legitimate Caliph or successor to the Prophet Mohammed. In support of their claim a great battle was fought in A.D. 680 at Kerbela where Ali's two sons, Hussain and Hassan, were slain and where they were buried. Hence the soil of Kerbela is sacred and became the great place of pilgrimage. To commemorate their martyrdom, the Shiahhs have set apart the month of Muharrum as the month of Mourning for Hussain and Hassan. The tenth day being specially observed. During the first nine days certain notable incidents are read and acted each night, leading up to the great scenes reproduced on the Tenth day of Muharrum (the day of killing, October 5th and 6th). The day before crowds of people witness the whole of the events of the great battle (the Passion Play) which are performed in public. Each night preceding this day, the enthusiasm and excitement of the performers increase until the climax is reached on the eleventh day, when the men scourge and mutilate themselves even to the extent of

sometimes sacrificing their lives. So the padre who had lived in Persia many years told us. The people get intensely excited and fanatical, and we sisters as we went to "roost" on the roof of our Rest-house, could hear each night, the shouts and yelling going on in the village, and one day, I got held up in the bazaar and witnessed the whole procession,—numbers of women, weeping and beating their breasts, men with thongs hitting their bare flesh and others chanting the names of Hussain and Hassan. Camels passed by laden with supposed captives—men—carried on stretchers feigning death, covered in white sheets soaked in red staining, supposed to be the aftermath of the great battle, to keep fresh in the minds of the people the tragic deaths of these two.

I was back to work again within the month, and the hospital was very busy. Seven new regiments had just arrived in Mesopotamia to replace our demobilised men, and a number quickly succumbed to our trying climate. A horrid influenza with pneumonia complications was rampant, and we were rather short-handed at the time. Later on, one of my staff was sent to nurse a bad case of typhoid at Shiraz in Persia. She was a splendid nurse and most plucky, for the only way to arrive there quickly, was to go by aeroplane. She first went down the Gulf to Bushire by boat, and then went off, flying over seven ranges of hostile hills. The pilot, after depositing her, went off on a bombing stunt. She wrote to me the following letter after many weeks with her patient :—

"I had such a happy time in Shiraz. Instead of flying back to Bushire I marched with the troops. A column of the Baluchis was going down and the authorities thought my best plan was to go with them as one can't travel without an escort. So I was elected an honorary member of the mess, given a horse, and off we set on our eleven days' trek. It was just lovely. I enjoyed every minute of every day. I must say I walked a good part of the way as the mountain passes did not commend themselves to me on horseback. I left my patient very well, but I am afraid every one spoilt me."

I have always been hoping to hear that those in authority had recommended that sister for some honour, for it was a gallant deed, and when I was visiting her mother in Scotland, I was glad to see the Persians had given her some costly gifts in the shape of Persian rugs. They were fearfully impressed to think of a white woman doing what she had done.

Late that autumn, our new colonel arrived, a splendid man who liked everything "tip-top." We were all delighted when he came and each vied with the other to get their wards kept up to the standard he liked, but alas, being rather a delicate man, he too succumbed to this pneumonia-influenza, and after a few days' illness only he died, leaving many sad hearts behind. All friends at home take comfort that the graves of your loved ones in Mesopotamia are well cared for. "God's acres" are indeed Holy Ground out there, each grave with its little white cross. How often we seemed to attend those military funerals. I seem to hear the "Last Post" now with its sad and melancholy echoes, and how one ached for those sad mothers and fathers and others at home, but believe me the lads in hospital were well cared for, and everything was done that possibly could be done.

"There are some people walking the earth who are wearing a halo. It is invisible to you and me, we can't see it, but it's there round their brows none the less, and the glow of it lights the dark walls of their lives and sustains them through pain and oppression and tribulation. They are the people who have made sacrifices."

In January 1920 the through railway from Basrah to Baghdad was opened, and a friend and I were invited as guests among the notabilities to go up this first journey and to attend the opening at Baghdad. It was a great picnic, most splendidly run by the Engineer Officers in charge, and such an interesting new way up the Euphrates side. I had been up to Baghdad by river but this was quite another thing. As it was the 13th we were not allowed to start until one minute past midnight that night. We spent another night in the train and got up to Baghdad the following day. The whole of that city turned out for it. It was a perfect afternoon with one of those glorious Eastern sunsets, and Baghdad looked very lovely. We were back again to work after two more nights in the train.

In June 1920, I was demobilised and have been many different ways since, doing anything and everything. I began scribbling these lines when I was doing private nursing, my lady being at the Italian lakes. One place we visited was poor devastated Riva, but our hotel had the most beautiful Tropical Garden by Lago-di-Garda, where my patient and I loved to sit. Here we made tea and read and wrote our letters, and each evening after 9 P.M. came out to watch the myriads of fireflies among the grasses and bushes, flashing their little lights to tell their mates where to find them.

Moore, in "Lalla Rookh," describes the fireflies so beautifully: "Over yon planes which night had else made dark, those lanterns countless as the winged lights that spangle India's fields on showery nights." Only we were on Italian's new ground which Austria had had to relinquish.

A week or so later we wandered through the Austrian Tyrol. Was there ever anything so beautiful in God's Earth as up among those heights and near the Brenner Pass where I added more lines to this little book.

Innsbruck, lying by the Inn, surrounded by snow mountains, with a June sun shining on them, is good to look upon, and on to Vienna, passing Salsburg in an Eastern dawn with Venus "hanging like a lamp in the sky" peering at us.

And now, the curtain must fall, for I have finished my tale at Bad Pistyan, for fellow nurses (if they care to read it). Bad Pistyan is in Czecho-Slovakia in lovely parks by the river Waarg, a tributary of the Danube, and the lower Carpathians are all around us. Here I have brought my patient to try and get some benefit from the Radium mud baths. Will you forgive all errors in spelling and grammar, and if dates are not quite exact, pardon me. I never meant to write a book; these are only a few memories I cherish, set down, hoping it may catch the eye of some of those dear things who worked with me during the happiest and sometimes the saddest six years of my life with my friends the Tommies and their Officers, for those sad and happy memories can never be blotted out while life lasts. And so, "Farewell,"