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Central Kurdistan

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CENTRAL KURDISTAN

Major Kenneth Mason, M.C., R.E.

Read at the Meeting of the Society, 3 November 1919.

KURDISTAN is a very old country. Some of its population are believed to be descended from the Jews of the First Captivity, and so can claim to be part of the Lost Ten Tribes with more truth than the Americans. For all that, it has not called for much interest in the people in England up till quite recently. Probably most of us have a vague idea that the Kurds have been concerned in Armenian massacres; fewer of us know that a very large section of Christians in pre-war days lived quite happily in Kurdistan. Before 1914 a certain number of Englishmen had travelled there, among them Colonel Maunsell, Sir Mark Sykes, and Captain Lorimer. A few accounts of the country have been made public. The first was by Xenophon about 400 B.C., and the latest by the Rev. W. A. Wigram, who wrote the 'Cradle of Mankind' shortly before the war. The Kurd has not changed much in the meanwhile, though he has recently heard of such twentieth-century innovations as Self-Determination and the League of Nations. Mr. Wigram belonged to the Archbishop of Canterbury's Mission among the Christian Kurds in the country between Lakes Urmia and Van. These Nestorians are probably the most primitive sect of Christians in the world; they were certainly there before the arrival of Mohammed on the Earth. Starvation, war, and the Turks have driven them out during the last few years to find refuge under our rule in Mesopotamia, and it is one of our difficult duties to resettle them. I have not travelled into the Christian country, but I have heard that when the Nestorians left, the Moslem Kurds plundered and wantonly destroyed most of their villages. These Nestorians must not be confused with the Armenians, and are held normally in much more respect by the Moslem Kurds than the latter.

The country I am to describe to-night is mainly south of this depopulated Nestorian and Jilu belt, west of the Turco-Persian frontier, and north-west of the Sulaimaniya district. It is a district that has suffered very much during the war, and a country that could ill afford to suffer. When I mention that one section of a tribe, the Kwakuruk, which in 1914 numbered over 150 families, now musters only seven, you can see that war, pestilence, and famine have taken a very severe toll.

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Ninety per cent. destruction is a heavy price to pay in some one else's quarrel. Another point in this enormous wastage is that the poorer and labouring classes have suffered worst of all. The survivors are mainly the better-class Kurds, chiefs, headmen of villages, their relations, etc. Most Kurds are more or less warlike; that is to say, they all carry arms, and before the war lived largely by raids. Very few tribes now feel strong enough to give scope to their old predatory instincts and will have to settle down to agriculture in earnest if they are to live. All tribes were once more or less nomadic, but the tendency has been to become more sedentary, and Turkish policy aimed at splitting up tribal organizations and settling the Kurds to agricultural pursuits. This, of course, was not so much for the benefit of the Kurds themselves as to prevent the possibility of large organizations of Kurds combining and causing trouble. The Turkish policy tended to split the tribal unit into a number of village units. The Turks believed that because two Kurdish tribes rarely combined, neither would two villages, and the units being smaller, the menace would be reduced. Generally speaking this has not come about. Tribal organization has survived the evolution from nomadic to sedentary occupation, and a chief now rules and owns the district in which his tribe is settled. He farms the taxes and calls the men out to war.

Some tribes have nevertheless remained entirely nomadic; that is to say, they move from place to place according to the season, the parasites of their own flocks. In summer they graze on the alpine yaylas of the Persian borderland; in winter they descend and graze wherever they can, in the valley and outer foothills. The Herki, for instance, move in early winter from the Persian frontier to the low ground below Akra, and before the war they used to plunder the weaker and were plundered by the stronger tribes through which they passed. Last winter, however, we saw some of them camped unmolested in the valleys of the Baradost, who were too weak to object. Sometimes a tribe is partly nomadic and partly sedentary; for instance, the Mangur, whom we met on the Pishder plain. The sedentary sections live in villages on the plain all the year round, while the nomads only come down from the grazing grounds on the Vasne alp for the winter.

In this district of Kurdistan the Kurds have only two towns—Rowanduz and Neri. Before the war the former contained about 2000 houses and a population of over 15,000. Neri was smaller and consisted of 250 houses. After the armistice, Rowanduz and its suburb Kala Teluk contained only sixty houses and Neri something under ten. Rowanduz with its roofless crumbling walls looks more like some town in Flanders. The whole country has, in fact, been laid waste by fire and sword, disease, pestilence, and starvation. To complete their cup of misery, when we visited the Kurds last winter, they were just recovering from the world-wide epidemic of "Espagnol"—Spanish influenza.

Before describing the country, I will briefly sketch the vicissitudes of

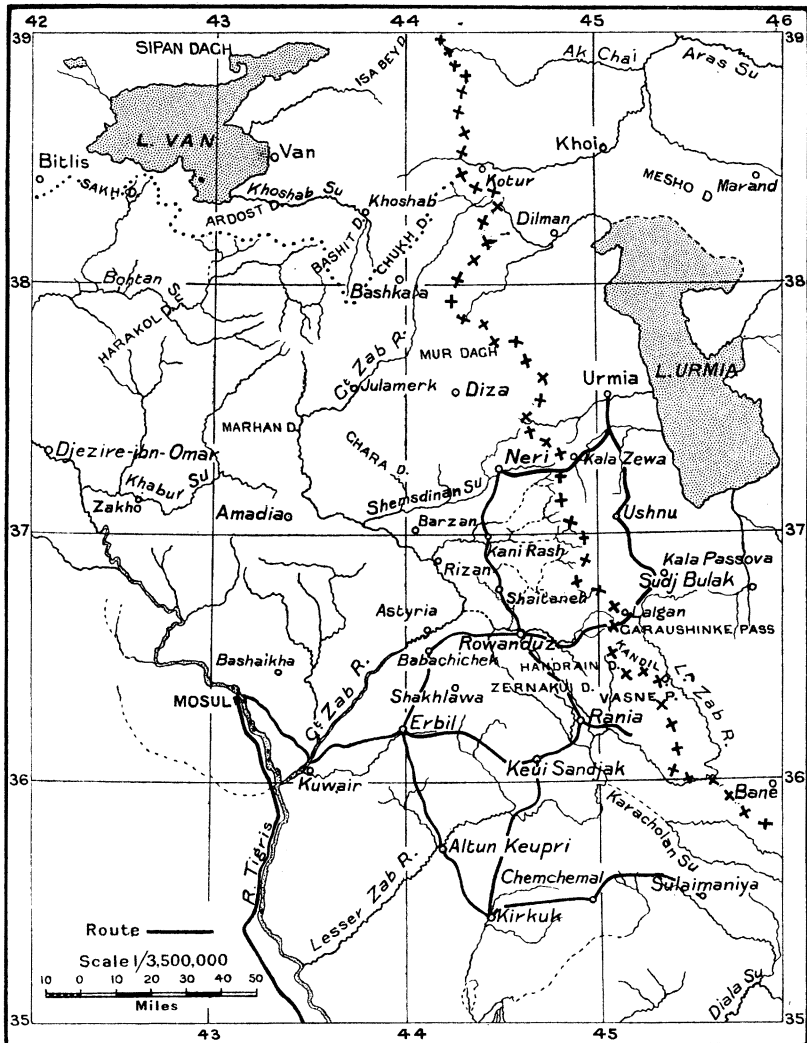
this district during the war. When war broke out between the Russians and the Turks, the demarcation of the Turco-Persian boundary had just been completed. The Russians were some time getting going, and the first we heard of them in Mesopotamia was when they began on 10 January 1916 to advance in the Caucasus. On February 16 they captured Erzerum, and on April 19 Trebizond. Simultaneously Russian forces moved forward in the Kurdish districts to the south, one force based on Hamadan operating through Kirmanshah towards Khanikin, while another based on Lake Urmia moved on Rowanduz. On 23 August 1916 the Russian general, Chernozubov, defeated the 4th Turkish division at Lalgan on the Persian side of the frontier, and drove the Turks back on Rowanduz. Two Turkish regiments were captured, and about two-thirds of the town population fled. The Armenian troops with the Russians massacred about five thousand Kurds, men, women, and children, by driving them over the cliffs of the Rowanduz gorge at the point of the bayonet. Even the Armenian can be a bit of a tiger when he has a defenceless prey.

Russia now overran the country. Some of the tribes were glad to be freed from Turkish misrule; others were not. Unfortunately the Russian is no administrator in countries such as these. He had no political officers with his troops and no method of liaison with the inhabitants. Friction followed licence and the Kurds turned on the Russians. Individual tribes harried and harassed the Russian communications and cut up small parties. They could not operate together, and suffered in various degrees in consequence. When Russia later on evacuated the district, for their own safety they took the precaution of wiping out almost every village on their line of retreat. Not one village remains intact between Rowanduz and the Garaushinke pass, and many are so completely obliterated as to remind one of the raids of Hulakhu Khan, who used to make his prisoners plough up the land over the villages and towns he destroyed.

The Kurds again came under Turkish control, and for the moment were glad of the change. But by this time the Turkish commissariat was so dependent on the country that the population died of starvation by hundreds. Epidemics of typhus and influenza also took heavy toll of lives. The armistice was signed between ourselves and the Turks on October 31 last year. One of the conditions imposed on the Turkish commander was that he should evacuate his troops from this area. He was allowed for the time being to leave his civil administrators, where they were until we took over.

Towards the end of last year I was ordered by my chief, General Sir Alexander Cobbe, to visit and report on the country, and I arrived at Mosul on December 28; Major Noel of the Political Department had already been at Sulaimaniya, where he had met with an enthusiastic reception from the Kurds, and he was now going on to Rowanduz from that place. Major S. Murray, another political officer, had gone to Erbil and was now stationed there. It was decided that I should meet Noel at

Rowanduz with certain supplies, and I hoped that we should afterwards be able to travel and work together. I had with me Capt. Stuart Murray, R.A.M.C., and two men, Sergt. Burgess and Corpl. Smith, 13th Hussars, who both volunteered for the trip. I could not have wished for better



Sketch-map of Kurdistan 1/35 M.

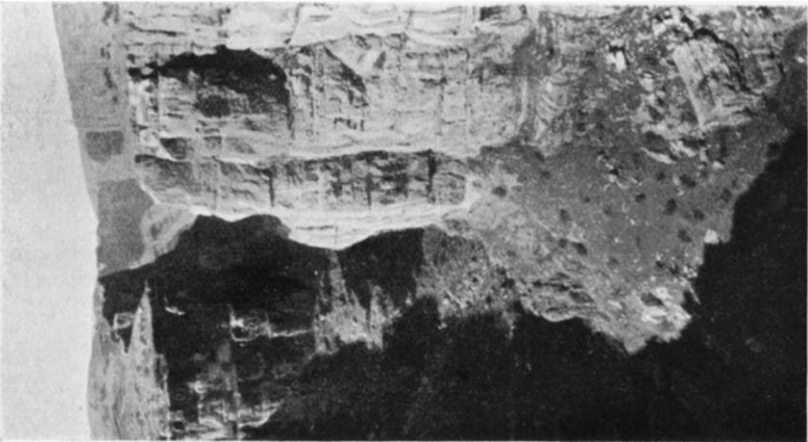
travel companions. Colonel Leachman, who is well known to the Society for his travels in Arabia, is the British civil representative at Mosul and gave us all the facilities we could want. We bought four strong hill ponies, and with a train of about thirty pack-animals left that place on January 2. We passed through the walls of ancient Nineveh, crossed the fertile plain



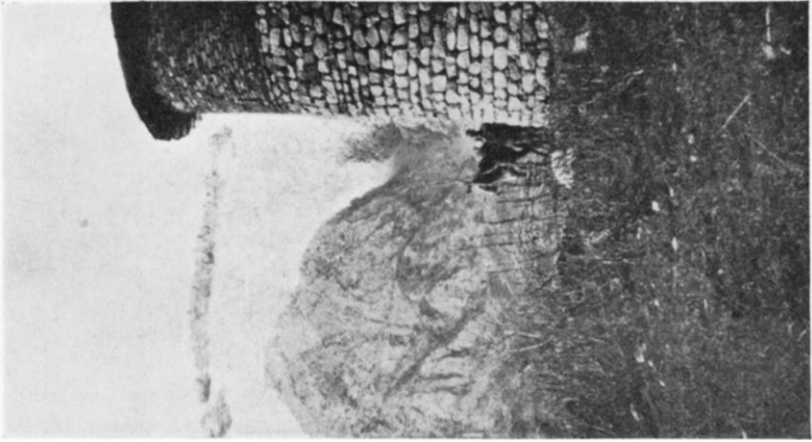
ROAD IN ROWANDUZ GORGE



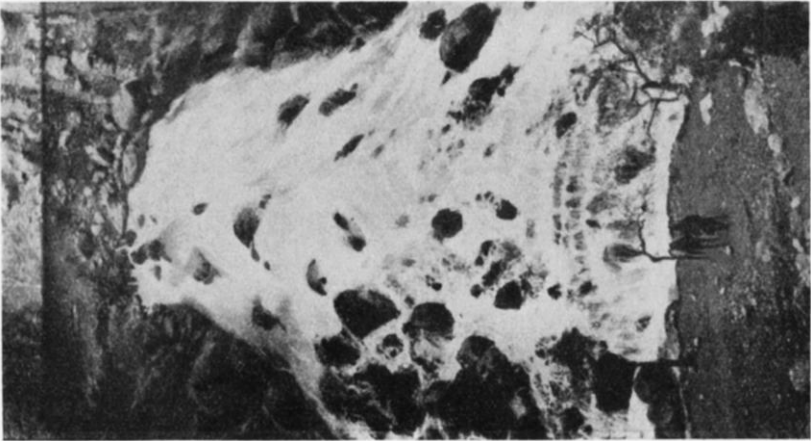
RAPIDS ABOVE THE SURRIA FALLS



THE ROWANDUZ GORGE



BASTION OF LAIOZHA FORT



SPRINGS IN THE BEKHARI DEFILE



THE BEKHARI DEFILE

of the old Assyrian Triangle, and made for the gap in the hills between the Jebel Maklub and the Ain es Saffra hills, leaving the Yezidi village of Bashaikah and the Christian monastery of Mar Mattai on our north-west. The map showed us a nice double line, indicating a carriage road from Bardarash over Serderria Tepe to the Greater Zab. This does not exist; in fact, in places the track is hardly passable for pack transport. We reached the Greater Zab at Astyria. At low water there are many fords across the river, but in January the traveller is lucky to find one. However, we could just ride our ponies over the Astyria ford, though the current was too strong for laden pack-animals. We had to unload them, ford the animals, and ferry the baggage over on a kelek. This raft was composed of fourteen skins with a superstructure of poplars, and is the only method of crossing when the river is high. Each complete kelek journey took twenty-five minutes, and eight journeys were necessary. It is the towing upstream of the raft between each journey which takes so much time. This ferry is alternative to the one shown on maps at Kandil-Kasroki; but both are not always running. The traveller should always make previous inquiry as to which, if either, exists. The two villages Kandil and Kasroki are shown on all maps on the wrong side of the river. Kandil should be on the east of the Zab, and Kasroki on the west. As an illustration of the caution necessary in dealing with these fords, I may add that our baggage ponies on their return from Rowanduz four days later tried to use the same ford after rain had fallen in the hills. The result was an accident and two ponies and a Kurdish muleteer were swept away and drowned.

The Turks did not use this line between Mosul and Rowanduz, but preferred to take the line from Mosul to Kuwait, where they crossed the Zab by a boat bridge and then followed a good road, as roads go in this country, unmetalled of course, to Erbil. Erbil is built on the ruin mound of the ancient Assyrian city Arba-Ilu, which gave its name to Alexander's crushing victory over Darius in the fourth century B.C. Up to this point the Turks used light lorry transport; from here onwards they constructed a so-called cart road *viâ* Babachichek to Rowanduz.

On our journey to Rowanduz we struck this road $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles east of the Zab. As the main line of communication of an army in the field it leaves much to be desired, for in wet weather it becomes almost, if not utterly, impassable. It is only very roughly metalled in the very worst places, and except for that is merely cleared of stones. Like most things Turkish, it was begun and never finished, funds having percolated into the pockets of corrupt officials.

There is a steep zigzag ascent known as the Spilik pass to the limestone mountains of Central Kurdistan; it is more in the nature of a big step up to a corrugated plateau seamed with valleys and gorges. From here the Turkish cart road descends a side valley to the Khalifan stream and enters the gorge of Gali Ali Beg. We spent one night at a small

village called Karakhin, arriving after dark. As often happens in Kurdistan, one of our Kurds signified our arrival by firing off his rifle. It was answered by another, and soon quite a lot of people were banging their guns off into the air.

Every one in Kurdistan carries a rifle from the age of about eight upwards, and all are swathed in two or three enormous belts or bandoliers of cartridges. They look like stage brigands, I suppose naturally, since brigandage is their normal calling. I do not see how we are to stop them carrying arms, either. No one under our rule is allowed to do so in Mesopotamia ; but in Kurdistan, if we tried to enforce disarmament the Kurds from the Persian side of the frontier would be constantly raiding.

It is a wonder where all their guns and rifles come from. Many are very modern, some are old. A collection from one of the larger tribes would probably show half a dozen different types. Turkish, German and Russian rifles predominate, but there are a good number of French Lebel weapons about. Some have undoubtedly been bought or smuggled from gunrunners in the Persian Gulf ; others have been sent from Turkey. More still perhaps have come from the battlefields and camps of Mesopotamia and the Caucasus, looted from the dead or taken from Turkish and Russian deserters. Ammunition is plentiful ; but where it all comes from it is difficult to say. I know that after the revolution Russian soldiers sold their arms and ammunition very freely in Persia ; and one Kurd told me he got his ammunition from the bazaars of Tabriz and Teheran. Another said he bought his from Baghdad. But the Kurd and still more so the Arab are expert rifle thieves, and I fancy the Turkish and Russian ordnance officers and magazine storekeepers know the secret of the largest supply. I remember that a theft by Arabs from one of our camps in Mesopotamia amounted to over seventy boxes of one thousand rounds each of small-arm ammunition in one night, although it had, I believe, been buried and all ordinary precautions taken.

I think the last march into Rowanduz along the Turkish cart road afforded one of the most striking day's scenery I have ever seen, appealing all the more forcibly to the imagination of the traveller fresh from the featureless deserts of Mesopotamia. On leaving the Khalifan camping ground the road enters the gorge of Gali Ali Beg, only 30 yards wide at the entrance. The road is at river-level, and crosses to the right bank by a wooden bridge on rough masonry piers half a mile beyond. About 2 miles further on the river, which is now some 40 feet below the road, passes in one undivided stream over the Surria falls, some 70 or 80 feet deep. Unfortunately it is almost impossible to get a photograph of the main falls, and I only succeeded in taking the uppermost rapids above the waterfall proper.

The road is now well over 100 feet above the valley bottom, and as it winds gradually higher and higher up the mountain-side the Khalifan cuts deeper and deeper into its limestone bed. Near the junction of the

Khalifan and Rowanduz rivers the road becomes much rougher, and projecting boulders make it in places very unsafe for even the lightest carts. It is perched high up the mountain-side, generally keeping to a line of stratification. The steep slopes are well wooded with dwarf oak, sycamores and scrubs.

The Rowanduz gorge, which is now entered, is in places barely 10 yards wide at the bottom. The road appears a mere knife-scratch 6 feet wide along the southern cliffs of the gorge, and in many places is nearly 1000 feet above the torrent below. The gorge is cut through horizontally bedded limestone. Skeletons of animals and a cart were seen caught in the trees below, evidence of a former mishap. It is rather a desperate sort of road to have as your main line of communication, but the Turks not only used this line as theirs, but are said to have taken a motor-car along it. There is one other point of interest before reaching Rowanduz. The road turns up a side valley, the Bekhari defile, and crosses a torrent by the usual ramshackle Kurdish bridges three times in about 200 yards. Just above the last bridge the torrent issues from the gorge wall in a number of springs, forming one large volume of water, falling into the defile from a height of about 70 feet. The torrent is not fordable at the foot of the fall.

We reached Rowanduz on January 7, and found it in the ruined state I have already described. The town itself was almost deserted, and only twenty of the remaining sixty houses—out of the pre-war two thousand—were in this lower town. The remainder are in the suburb of Kalah Teluk, higher up, and in one of these we took up our quarters. Noel, the political officer, had already arrived, and the Turkish Kaimmakam had already started down the road this day. We took over his house. Rowanduz could not support our baggage ponies, and the Kurds could supply no others. The question was therefore decided for us, and any future travelling would have to be done with only the kit we could carry on our riding-ponies. The baggage animals were at once sent back, and arrangements were made to get some barley for our riding-ponies up from Erbil, some four marches away. The weather then broke, and for that and various other reasons we were hung up for a few days. So was the fodder from Erbil, as the Turkish military road became impassable.

Murray the doctor put in some useful work here among the population. Roughly three hundred of the six hundred people had to be fed, and relief and hospital measures started. Murray opened a hospital and sent down to Baghdad for more medicines and hospital comforts, as we had only one hospital box with us for emergency cases. Noel also asked Baghdad to appoint a permanent doctor to look after the hospital.

We now decided to ride through the country, staying as far as possible with the various tribal chiefs. It necessitated a certain amount of arranging beforehand, owing to the scarcity of supplies, and we decided to visit the southern and less ravaged districts first. I will not describe

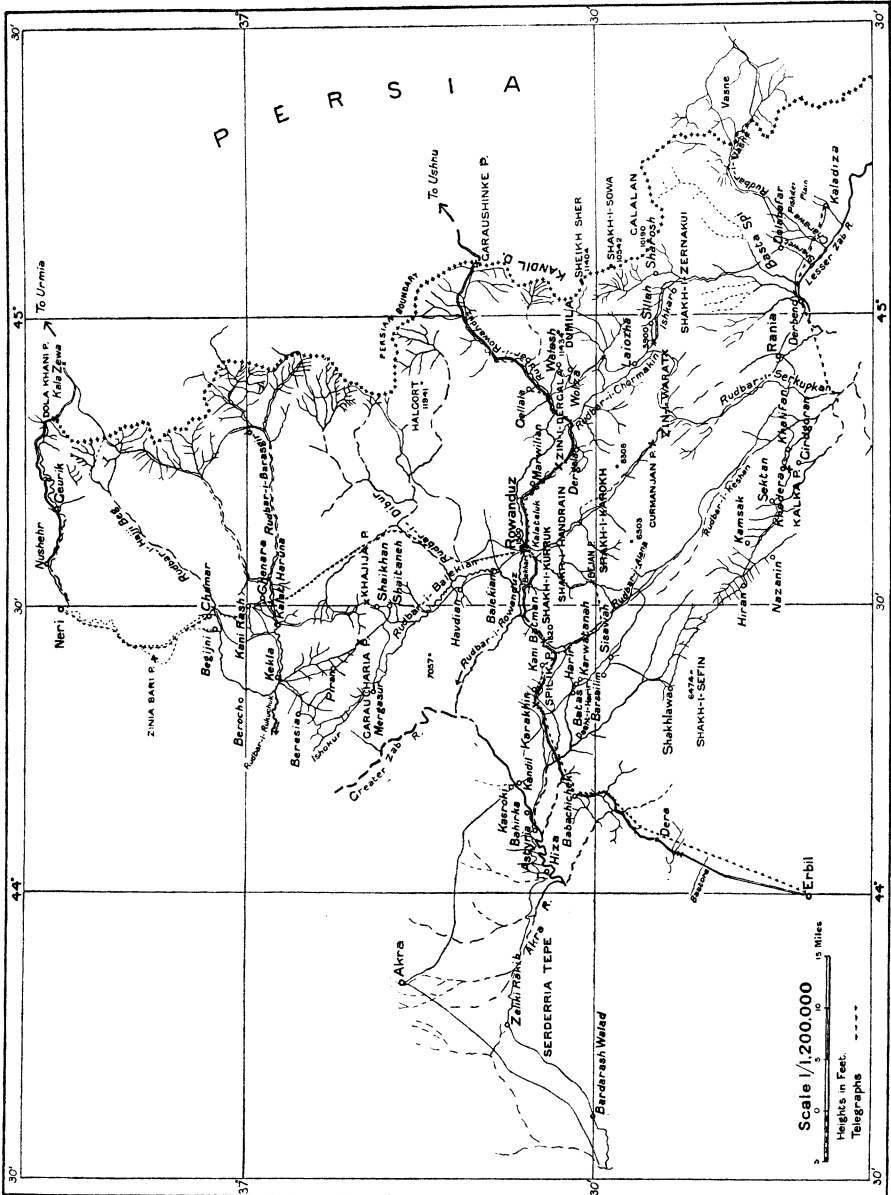
each journey in detail, as the routine of each day's march is much the same. The Kurd is not an early riser, and it is not easy to get him to move off in the morning. Our hosts always loved to pass the time of day chatting before we started, and villagers on the roadside would try and drag us in for coffee or tea ; or if they had neither they were content to chat. The result was that the day's march was often completed in darkness, which was not very satisfactory for my map of the country. On arrival at our destination we were generally taken into the chief's guest room, a fire was lighted, and our tea was made. The chieftains of most of these tribes live in the main fort of the village, surrounded by a high wall 2 or 3 feet thick built of solid masonry, and with only one entrance by a heavy door securely barred at night. No windows are accessible from the ground, and those of the upper storeys are generally made primarily for loopholes. A circular loopholed bastion usually stands at each corner of the fort. Within the walls is a courtyard, and the rooms, generally in two storeys, sometimes in three, face inwards to the court. There is generally no outlet for smoke in a Kurdish house, and as the fire is lit in the centre of the room on the floor, the smoke hangs heavily on the ground and fills the eyes. As one sits on the floor it is not very pleasant, especially late at night when reports have to be written up and maps redrawn by the flickering light of a candle. Of the nights I will not say much. Those who know the country know the night visitors.

We did not of course take a cook on these journeys, and lived and had our meals *à la* Kurd round the fire on the floor, all of us dipping into the same bowl. I remember in particular one evening we spent in the main hut of a small village, not in this case staying with a chief. In one apartment and under the same roof were our five selves, the owner, his family, a flock of goats, our ponies, and a donkey, besides all manner of creeping things.

Rather than describe each journey, it will be clearer if I sketch the country in general and its main characteristics and supplies, mentioning any points of interest we noted. I made a sketch-map of the country on a scale of 1 inch to 4 miles, showing the hill features by rough contours. The method I used was by accepting at first the positions of certain places such as Rowanduz and, when I got near the Persian frontier, observing the boundary commission points with my compass. I checked on as many points as possible, and closed on a series of points on the southern ranges of my area fixed by the Survey of India triangulators under Captain de Graaf Hunter, who were working at the same time in the foothills. I completed about 2400 square miles, but I do not claim any very great accuracy for it. Certain valleys may have stretched or become compressed, but I do not think any serious inaccuracies will be found in it. I was not surveying, and the map will in time of course be superseded.

As regards the structure of the country, the first thing that strikes the traveller is that the whole area consists of parallel valley troughs and

ranges, the strike of which is north-west and south-east. It reminds one of the Himalaya stripped of its firs. Here the hills when not bare are



Sketch-map of Central Kurdistan 1/1.2 M.

clothed only with dwarf oak and scrub. The southern ranges are generally of a soft sandstone, while north of the line Dasht-i-Harir to the Rania Plain, the parallel limestone ranges of Central Kurdistan

are drained by affluents of the two Zabs. The Rudbar-i-Rowanduz and Rudbar-i-Rukuchuk are the two main tributaries in this area of the Greater Zab. Both have their sources on the Persian frontier, which is here the watershed between the Zab and the Ushnu-Urmia basins. Though both these tributaries lie across the strike, their affluents generally have a north-west to south-east direction parallel to it, and the Rowanduz and Rukuchuk rivers have probably cut back their gorges in the limestone and captured the original rivers. We often saw the huge stratified slabs of limestone steeply and regularly tilted along a whole valley. As a natural consequence the easiest lines of travel are almost always in a north-west and south-east direction, except when the Zab is approached, when deep gorges are the rule and diversions have to be sought. Neither carts nor roads in the European sense exist in the country, but the military cart road already described is continued from Rowanduz over the Garaushinke pass on the frontier to Ushnu and thence to Urmia.

The country is too mountainous for railways, and if there is to be development it will have to be content with roads. Even the upkeep of these will be a severe tax on the country and no more than the essential ones should be made to begin with. Up till now the Kurd has been content with footpaths or, at the best, pony tracks from one village to another. What is first required is a good road direct to Rowanduz, the centre of the country. The present military road from Erbil, if improved and metalled, can be kept open all the year round, for it crosses no high pass liable to be closed by snow. But it goes over all the ranges at right angles to their direction, and I am inclined to think that a summer road from Rania to Rowanduz along the natural valleys and over the Gurmanjan Pass would well repay construction as a summer avenue of approach.

From Rowanduz there are good alignments for its continuation, northwards to Neri and eastwards into Persia. At present there are at least four routes to Neri, which are used more or less according to the whim of the traveller. All cross the frail north bridge, 30 feet long and 80 feet above the gorge at Rowanduz. The first is *viâ* Shaitaneh, the Khajija Pass, Kani Rash, and Chumar (63 miles). There is another *viâ* Shaitaneh, the Garaucharia Pass, Kekla, and Begijni (70 miles). A third is *viâ* Shaitaneh, the Mergasur Pass, meeting the last at Kekla. And a fourth follows the old Turkish military telegraph line *viâ* the Dibur River and Chumar. I know the first three. The Khajija Pass is certainly the best line for summer travel, but the pass is liable to be closed after heavy snow in January. Kurds then generally take either the Garaucharia or Mergasur. If one road has to be constructed and maintained open all the year round, I consider the best alignment would be Shaitaneh, Mergasur, Kekla, Kani Rash, and Chumar. It makes a somewhat longer journey, but the soil seems better for a permanent road, and part of the work, from Kani Rash onwards, has already been begun by the Russians.

There are some big obstacles to cross in winter, whichever route is selected. Apart from the particular pass of each, all routes must cross the Barlekian or Dibur rivers, and the Rudbar-i-Barasgird and Hajji Beg. All these are normally fordable where the roads touch them, and we forded them all last winter. But a few days' rain, almost a few hours', renders them extremely difficult, and they frequently become impossible from spate for days. We were hung up more than once by the rivers suddenly becoming unfordable. Good bridge sites exist, and there are some existing or broken bridges with masonry piers which could be rebuilt. They are all of one type. The piers and abutments are of rough stone masonry; logs are laid across and covered with a superstructure of brushwood, the roadway being formed of stones and mud. This type would hardly be suitable for permanent roads, and something more lasting would be required.

On this line, however, the biggest obstacle in winter is the Zinia Bari Pass. In a normal year it is closed to pack-animals by snow at least from January to March; winter blizzards frequently close it to pedestrians for days at a time. We ourselves failed to cross it in February this year, and were held up at Chenara for some days. Chenara is the headquarters of Ahmad Agha, chief of the once all-powerful Baradost Kurds, and we were his guests during this time. His tribe is now reduced from over 1000 families to 157; 52 villages out of 81 which were his before the war have been destroyed by Russians or Turks or deserted through sickness or starvation. The old chief himself had been a Russian prisoner.

All roads to Neri from Rowanduz have to pass through his country, and he was very hospitable to us. But his tribesmen are very destitute since the war, and we were very short of food both in his and the neighbouring districts. Meatless days were the rule, and our meals more often consisted of chupattis made from ground acorns from the wild scrub oak, and occasionally some sour curds and wild honey. The trip cost me four holes in my Sam Browne belt.

Branch tracks exist from the Rowanduz-Neri line over the frontier. Every valley, the Hajji Beg, the Karawa, the Barasgird, and the Dibur, has its route to the *yailas*, or summer grazing-grounds on the Persian frontier. Each has a pass to cross, more or less fit for animals in summer, and eventually leads either to Ushnu or Kala Zewa and on to Urmia. The northernmost of all, that from Neri itself *viâ* Nushehr and Geurik over the Dolakhani Zini Pass to Kala Zewa, has been much improved by the Russians, and with a little work could probably be made practicable for wheels, according to the Kurds. There is no doubt, however, that the Garaushinke is by far the easiest pass into Persia in this neighbourhood. There is no other south of this until the Vasne is reached. Here there is a high alp grazed by Kurds of various nomad tribes in the summer, and it has often been mentioned that this would form a good alignment for a road and even a railway. The ground on the west side of the pass, how-

ever, is far from easy, and the pass itself was closed in January this year when the Garaushinke was open.

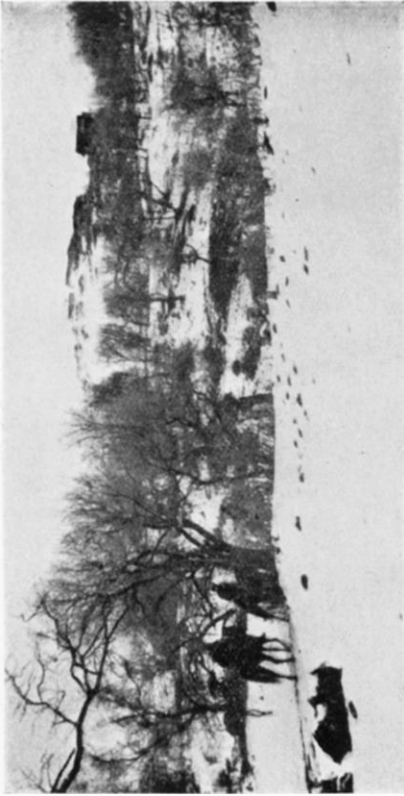
We did a journey from Walash, the headquarters of Mahomed Amin Beg, chief of the Bâlik Kurds, near the Garaushinke Pass *viâ* the Chormakin Valley and Ishkaro Gorge down to the Pishder Plain on the Lesser Zab. In winter there certainly is no way over the Persian frontier along this stretch. Even in summer the Kandil Dagh would call for a fair amount of mountaineering, and no permanent road could be made into Persia here. As I have mentioned the Kandil Dagh, I may say that this was the only range I heard in Kurdistan called by the Turkish word "dagh." Kurds themselves omit the word signifying "mountain" or prefix their own word, as for instance Shakh-i-Kandil. Similarly the river shown on the map as Rowanduz "su" should be Rudbar-i-Rowanduz. The sooner the Turk is forgotten here, the better for the tribesmen and the country.

It was while we were in the Ishkaro Gorge that one of our ponies, which was being led, missed his footing and fell over the cliff. The Kurd who was leading it tried to save it and was dragged over as well, but luckily caught a tree about 15 feet below and was only bruised. The pony fell down to the river below, and broke its neck and both hind legs. He was quite dead when we reached him.

We met, on the Pishder Plain, a type of Kurd quite different from those we were accustomed to. These were the nomadic Mangur tribe, wintering here from the yailas on the Vasne Alp. It was after dark when we reached their temporary village of Dolabafar, and they waylaid us and insisted on us stopping with them for the night. We had intended to go through to Kala Diza, some 7 miles further on, but I for one was glad to halt. The whole village turned out next day and escorted us to Kala Diza, with much careering and powder play.

To sum up as regards roads: the best communications for development seem to me to be Erbil through Babachichek to Rowanduz by the present military road, improved; and back, in summer, over the Gurmanjan Pass to Rania. The latter would be closed in winter by snow for at least six weeks or two months. From Rowanduz the best lines of development are eastwards over the Garaushinke Pass to Ushnu and northwards *viâ* Neri to Kala Zewa and Urmia.

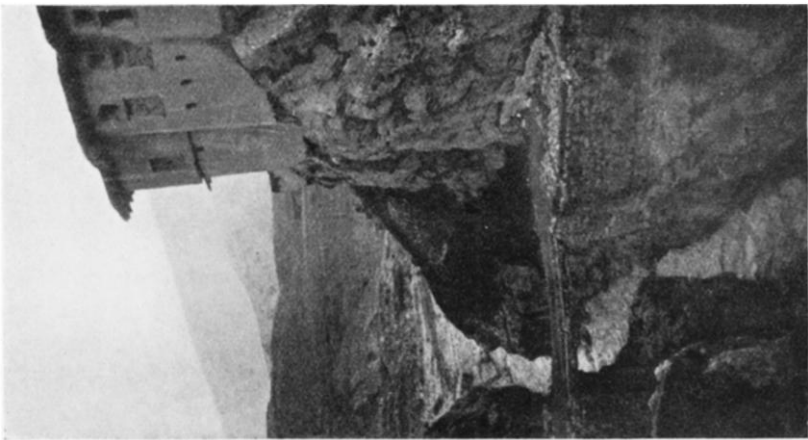
Rowanduz is already connected by telegraph to Erbil. This line does not follow the military road through the gorge, but crosses the Bejan Pass south of Rowanduz, and joins the road at Kani-Batman, the first stage on the road, beyond the gorge. Erbil is of course connected to Mosul and Baghdad. Another line from Erbil extends to Rania and on to Kaladiza, but ends abruptly there and does not cross the frontier. Neri and Rowanduz were connected by telegraph, but last winter the line was down in several places and sections had been removed. By now it is probably in working order again. Another line, also broken last winter, led from Rowanduz over the Garaushinke Pass to Ushnu. This has also



KANI RASH



ROWANDUZ



THE NORTH BRIDGE, ROWANDUZ



THE KANDIL DAGH ON THE PERSIAN FRONTIER



MOHAMMED AMIN BEG AND BALIK KURDS



CHENARA

probably been repaired by now and the local chiefs made responsible for its safety.

Roads and telegraphs are necessary if this country is to be developed. Tobacco used to be grown largely, and timber grown here would be worth its weight almost in gold in Mesopotamia. The villages Shakhlawā, Hiran, Nazanin, already have extensive poplar plantations. Dwarf and scrub oak abound throughout the country, and oaks 30 feet and more high are to be seen in places. The chinar, or oriental plane, is also common in some valleys, and mulberries and walnuts are cultivated in the villages. Cereals include wheat, barley, peas, cotton, and sesame, while vineyards are situated near many of the villages. All these have suffered very much during the war. I think there is coal in more than one place, and there may be oil.

The climate is rather of extremes, but quite bearable. In winter every year snow falls on the Shakh-i-Sefin and to the north of it. Night temperatures are normally not low enough to allow it to lie for the spring thaws below 5000 feet even on northward-facing slopes except on certain passes, where snow is apt to accumulate by wind, drifts and winter avalanches. The winter climate appears to vary a good deal from year to year further north, but very severe winters appear to be rare exceptions. As in all mountainous countries, the weather is liable to be broken by spells of foul weather lasting for a fortnight or even longer. During one of these spells last winter we wired down a weather report to Baghdad which helped them to prepare for the heavy river rises that ensued. Normal snowline at the end of January on northward-facing slopes appears to be about 3500 feet, while snow is fairly deep on plateaus and sheltered alps at 5000 feet. Southern aspects at this period should be clear after a couple of days' sun at this altitude. January, February and March are the months of greatest snowfall. The spring is normally mild, but travel is much impeded by snow passes and flooded rivers. In summer it is very hot and close in the valleys, but higher up on the northward-facing slopes probably quite pleasant.

The time will doubtless come when somewhere in these highlands we shall have summer hill-stations, so that the families of officials in Mesopotamia may escape the insufferable heat of the plains. I do not think a pleasanter spot could be found than somewhere in the neighbourhood of Shakhlawā or Hiran, both northward-facing and lying in the country of the Khoshnao Kurds. Shakhlawā is also fairly accessible from Erbil, and the Kurds are less unreliable than usual.

I do not know whether a southern boundary of Armenia has been fixed; but it will have to be, because no two documents agree on the subject. The Germans marked it in one place, the civil authorities at Mosul another. The Turkish 6th Army Commander, Ali Ihsan Pasha at Mosul drew a green line on the map in a third. The most natural northern boundary for Kurdistan seems to be the watershed between the Van basin

and that of the Tigris tributaries. But the Bashi-i-Ruan mountain range is a serious obstacle, and the Neri district and others north of this range are very isolated in winter.

It is not my place to discuss how we can maintain authority in these distant lands. Perhaps Leachman when he returns will tell you how it is done. He knows the secret, and so do many of the political officers working under him. There is no room for mistakes; and people who criticize often forget the fact that a slip sometimes costs the political officer his life. Leachman himself had a narrow escape when enforcing his own order on the prohibition of arms. A man turned round and fired at but missed him at 20 yards. Military support in a country like this is apt to arrive too late to aid a political officer in a tight corner. Aeroplanes can, however, give both moral and material support if necessary, though their operations are limited by the lack of suitable landing ground in such rugged country. The best site near Rowanduz was 250 yards in diameter and difficult of access owing to the mountainous approaches and the varying air currents.

There is only one other point I will touch upon. When we were in the country early this year we were treated with much kindness. The Kurds wanted help and were prepared to trust us. A chief told Noel that no refugees had preceded the British advance, whereas hordes of starving inhabitants fled before both Russians and Turks. On arrival in England I heard that the Kurds of the Sulaimaniya district had risen against our occupation, and had made prisoners the dozen British officers stationed among them. The rising was headed by Shaikh Mahmud, who, at the request of the local tribes, had been made paramount chief by the British. An expedition was sent up, and the prisoners recovered; Shaikh Mahmud was severely wounded from the air. There seems to be no doubt that the trouble arose partly at the instigation of Turkish agents and partly from swollen headedness on the part of Shaikh Mahmud. The trouble does not seem to have spread to the Rowanduz district, and the country seems to have settled down again. The process of taming brigands by League of Nations methods is not an easy one, and our political officers in Kurdistan have in front of them a very difficult task.

Before the paper the PRESIDENT said: Since our last meeting I regret to say that we have had to abandon our old quarters in Burlington Gardens, where we have been accustomed for many years to hold our meetings. I will not say how many years ago it is since I first lectured there, and I know that a large number of you, like myself, have pleasant recollections of great meetings in that old Theatre. Unfortunately the Government are no longer able to continue to us their hospitality, for they are altering the house, and we are unable to hold our meetings there. We have looked all over London for another temporary place in which to hold our meetings, and I am sorry to say that London is not so full of public halls as one could wish. I think, however, that we shall be comfortable at the Æolian Hall for this session, and eventually—before many sessions