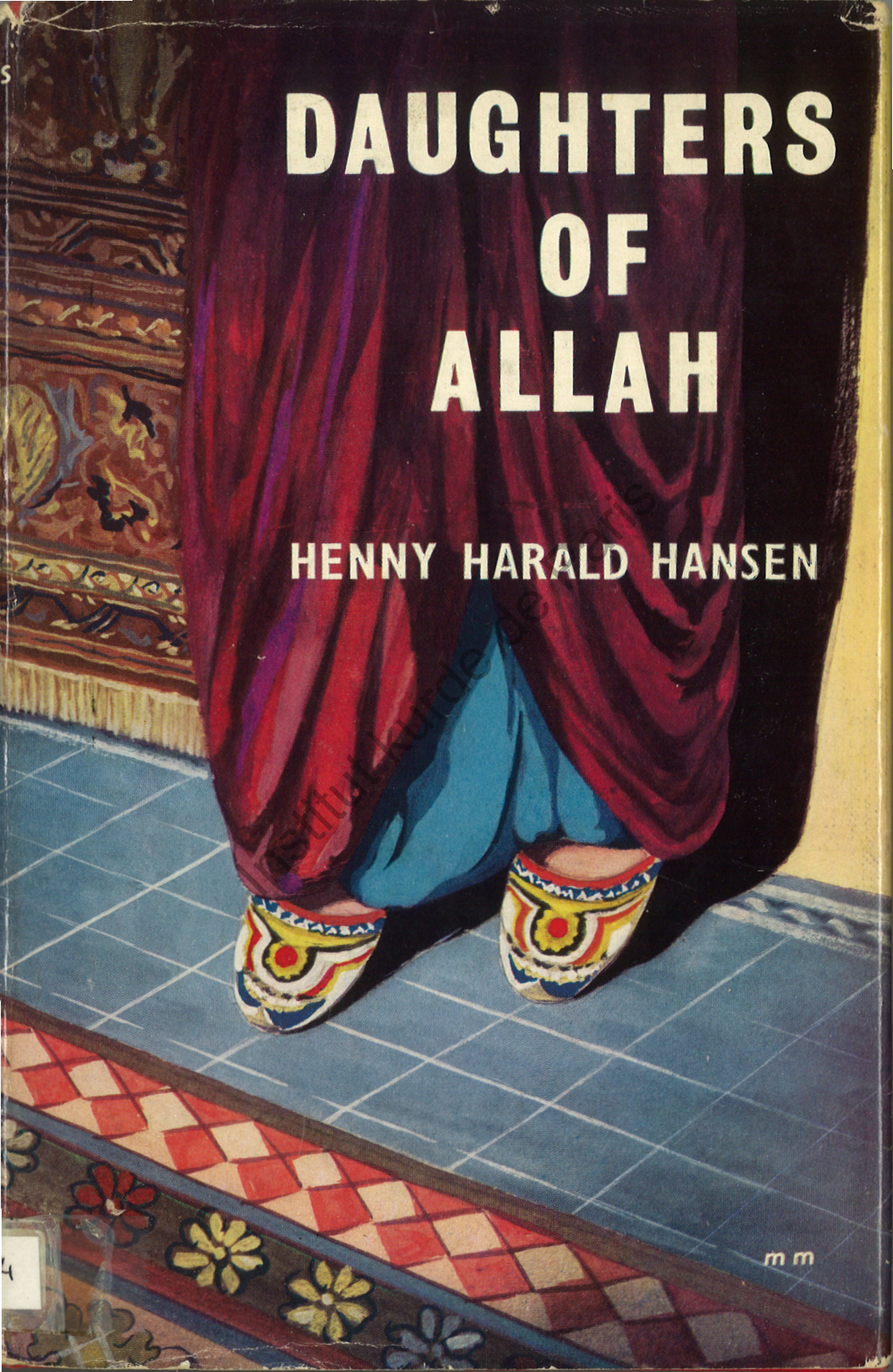
DAUGHTERS OF ALLAH

HENNY HARALD HANSEN



In 1957 the author was invited to take part in an archaeological expedition to the site of the projected Dokan Dam on the Little Zab river in Northern Iraq. Her responsibilities were ethnological, but instead of settling down with the expedition and visiting the Kurdish villages from the camp, she became the guest first of a local sheik and later of her interpreter's family. As a result, the doors of many Kurdish homes were opened to her that normally would have remained closed to foreigners, especially to a non-Moslem woman. She travelled widely among the mountain villages of Iraqi Kurdistan and was able to see from very close range the everyday life of the women of this strange and ancient race. It is very much a woman's view, of course, but few have had such an opportunity as this to penetrate the invisible wall which in a Moslem community divides the female world from the male.

The Kurds have inhabited since antiquity roughly the same region as they occupy today; even in 400 B.C., returning from Babylon, Xenophon and his Greeks had to battle with the Kurdish ancestors. They have been subject to frequently changing foreign rule and today their lands lie within the frontiers of Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Iran and the U.S.S.R. Recent unrest among the tribes and the news of bands of Kurdish refugees on the move has centred interest on a people of whom the public knows little, but of whom Henny Hansen has much to tell that is intimate and fascinating.

Illustrated

DAUGHTERS OF ALLAH

The author in her Kurdish costume.

HENNY HARALD HANSEN

Daughters of Allah

AMONG MOSLEM WOMEN
IN KURDISTAN

Translated from the Danish
by Reginald Spink

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INTRODUCTION

After completing the manuscript of this travel book, I was told that the first claim which the reader may fairly make on the author is to be informed at the start who is going where, and why. So I hasten to repair the omission.

Early in 1957 the Danish Dokan Expedition, which proposed to carry out archaeological excavations in Iraq in the area shortly to be flooded by the construction of the Dokan dam on the Little Zab river, approached the Ethnographical Department of the Danish National Museum with a view to the possible inclusion of an ethnologist in the party. In the region of the projected excavations there were Kurdish villages which would be suitable for ethnological research. The choice fell on me. Besides making general ethnological studies I should have the possibility, as a woman, of penetrating that invisible wall which in a Moslem community divides the female world from the male—a possibility that would not be open to male research workers.

The Carlsberg Foundation having generously provided the required funds, I left Denmark on the fourth of May, via Baghdad and Kirkuk, to join the expedition at the Dokan Dam Site, which is situated in Kurdistan in northern Iraq, at the intersection of longitude 45°E. and latitude 36°N.

It was originally the intention that I should be stationed with the other members of the expedition in their encampment at Tell Shemshara, visit neighbouring villages from there, and perhaps spend a short period in a Kurdish village home. In the event my stay of four months took a different form. Instead of accompanying the expedition to the camp I made arrangements, soon after my arrival at the Dokan Dam Site, to stay as a paying guest with the sheikh of the neighbouring village of Topzawah, from which the dam drew some of its workers.

The services of a female interpreter were essential for my ethnological work. Through a former minister, His Excellency Tawfiq Wahbi, and the mutesarrif of the local capital of

Sulaimaniyah I succeeded, a fortnight after my arrival in the village, in getting into touch with a young Kurdish teacher, Maliha Kareem Said, who agreed to join me as my interpreter. Later I had a long stay with my interpreter's family at Sulaimaniyah, and in her company I visited several villages where her extensive family relationships opened the doors of other homes to me. So instead of living with my own people during my stay in Kurdistan and visiting the native population for only a few hours a day, I spent the whole of my time among the Kurds. I thus had a far wider opportunity of studying the cultural pattern of these people than I should otherwise have had.

I visited the Dokan Dam Site about once a fortnight when the expedition car went there from Tell Shemshara for supplies. This enabled me to maintain contact with the expedition, and I went with its members to Baghdad in order to complete the necessary papers covering the export of my collections to the National Museum in Copenhagen. Otherwise I worked on my own, helped by my interpreter.

Besides Topzawah, the adjacent village of Rakawah, and Sulaimaniyah, we stayed at the ferry-point of Mirza Rustam on the Little Zab between the Dokan Dam Site and the expedition camp. We drove to the village of Shadala and rode on from there across the Charmaban Mountains to Sargalu. We visited Halabja, Balkha, and Tawela up in the mountains close to the Persian border. We also stayed in the village of Sarkan near Penjwin, and finally we drove through Kirkuk to Erbil, Mosul, and Rowanduz, to get an impression of the most northerly region of Iraqi Kurdistan. During the concluding stay in Baghdad I was able to visit Hilla and Babili, to the south of the national capital.

Finally, a few geographical and historical facts about the land and people I visited. The Kurds can trace their history a long way back in time. They have inhabited since antiquity roughly the same region as they occupy today. About the year 400 B.C. Xenophon and his 10,000 Greeks, returning home from Babylon, where they had been summoned by a Persian prince, had to fight the *Carduchi* in those same mountains which the Kurds still

inhabit. In the course of history the Kurdish tribes have been subject to changing foreign rule. Persians, Arabs, Persians again, Mongols, and during the 400 years down to 1920 the Turks have held control. At the present day the Kurdish region is divided among Turkey, Syria, Iran (Persia), the Soviet Union, and Iraq. Those Kurds whom I visited in Iraq are under Arab rule.

By religion the Kurds are Moslems of the Sunni sect, like the Turks and most of the Arabs. Their language is related to Persian and so, like ours, is an Indo-European language, in contrast to Arabic, which is a Semitic tongue. In mode of life some Kurds are nomads making regular seasonal migrations; but those I stayed with were sedentary farmers, growing wheat, rice, tobacco, cotton, and fruit, according to the varying resources of soil and situation. The Kurds in the towns of Kirkuk and Sulaimaniyah with whom I stayed were business people. The oil field at Kirkuk was exploited by the Iraq Petroleum Company (I.P.C.) even before the First World War.

The idea of an independent Kurdistan was discussed at the peace negotiations which took place at Sèvres in 1920, but was abandoned three years later at Lausanne. The resultant disappointment gave rise to rebellions in the Sulaimaniyah *liwa* in the 'twenties and early 'thirties, which are chiefly associated with the name of Sheikh Mahmud of Sulaimaniyah.[1]

The results of my scientific work will be written up later. In this travel book I have given an account of my experiences, as a woman living among Moslem women, of the people who were described until recently as 'the most turbulent tribes of the Middle East'.

[1] For further information about the history, politics, and geography of Kurdistan and the Kurds, which is beyond the scope of this short travel book, see:

C. J. Edmonds: *Kurds, Turks, and Arabs: Politics, Travel, and Research in North-eastern Iraq*, 1919–1925. Oxford University Press, 1957.

Stephen Hemsley Longrigg and Frank Stoakes: *Iraq* (Nations of the Modern World). Benn, 1958.

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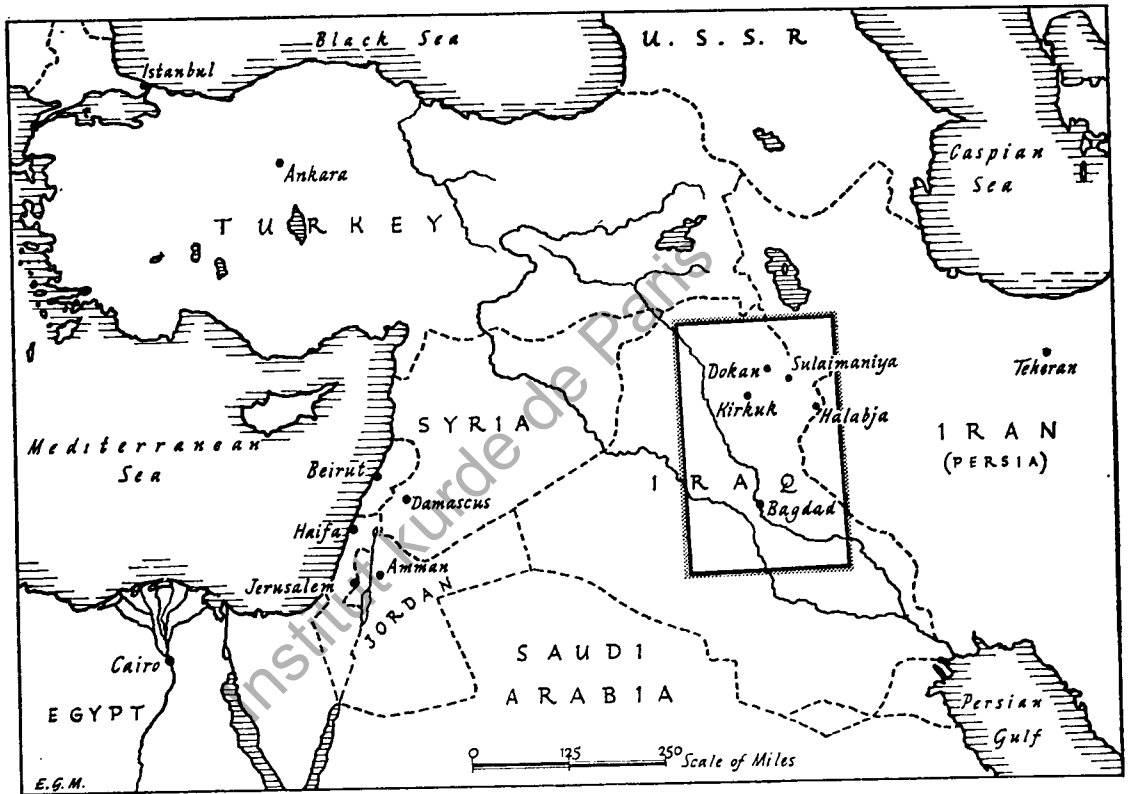
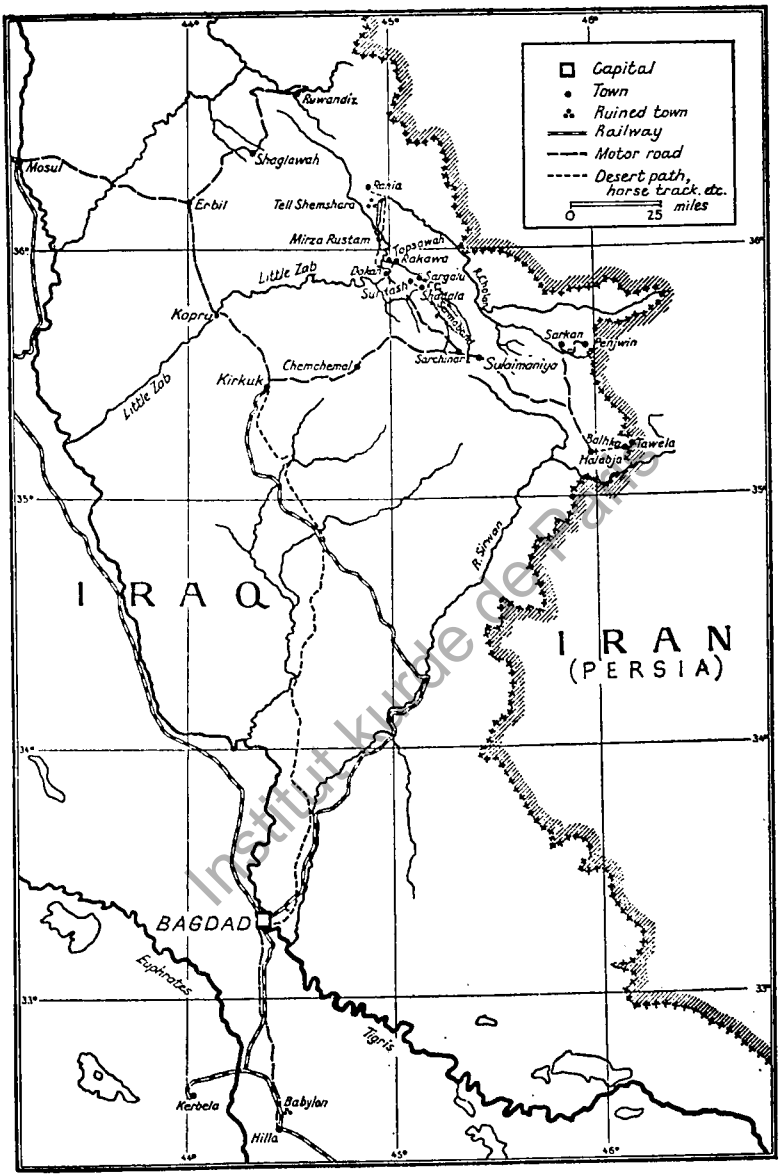
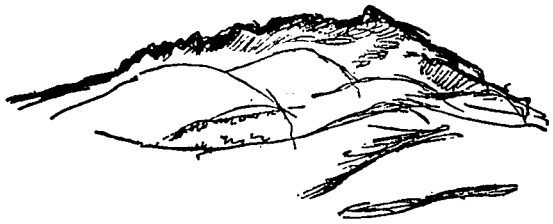


1 Map of the Middle East

Southern Kurdistan, that part of the Kurdish territory which I visited, is in the mountainous region of northern Mesopotamia, now Iraq. The oblong panel includes the whole of my itinerary, which extended south of the Kurdish area down to the alluvial plains around Baghdad. The other map shows the oblong panel magnified. On this map not only all the places mentioned in the book are marked but also the means of approach to them, comprising two railways, roads more or less fit for motor traffic, and tracks for horses or mules. Together the two maps will enable the reader to follow the routes, and like all maps they are decorative, with winding coastlines and ornamental courses of rivers.



2 Local map of the area covered



1—A Year Without a Summer

When I left Denmark it was early May in a short and leafy spring. When I returned September was half over. There was a touch of autumn in the air and I heard talk of the annual Christmas greetings to Greenland.

'I've had no summer this year,' I felt with a sudden little stab of nostalgia. To call *that* summer which I had experienced twenty latitudes to the south did not occur to me. That which in our climate we yearly hope for, dream of, and sometimes get for summer is something gentle and friendly, something blissful: the optimum of human life. What I had experienced when real summer passed over Denmark was something quite different.

The first time I heard at the Dokan Dam Site that work on the damming of the Little Zab would soon have to stop in the middle of the day because the workers would be unable to touch metal parts without burning their hands, I heard it with my ears only. It did not enter fully into my consciousness. There are dimensions —and degrees of heat—which have to be experienced to be realized.

Then came a day in the middle of the desert north of Baghdad. Actually, it is not a desert, though it is always described as such; to be exact, the country north of Baghdad is a desert-like bush steppe. It was afternoon in a car. Local low pressures were raising the dust into columns which stretched from the ground into the

sky, and which came spiralling across the great face of the desert. In the Bible we read of a pillar of dust which guided the Israelites by day on their long journey through the wilderness. There were a lot of these pillars, and the dust when you approached them would get into your eyes, nose, and mouth.

Since we had no need of a guiding pillar of dust but could well find our own way, aided by the faint tracks of other cars, we found that the best thing to do was to drive straight through a pillar when we encountered it. Also, it was best to shut the windows. But therein lay the difficulty. It was impossible to touch metal parts with the bare hands, even inside the car. Before I could close the window I had to wrap my hand in a corner of my dress.

It was rather foolish to drive across the desert at all during the day, and indeed that was the only time we did. At all other times we went by night. On the route, at fairly convenient intervals, there were *chaikhanas*: small houses built of sun-baked mud bricks, indistinguishable at a distance from the surrounding desert. There was shade and water inside. The water was obtainable luke-warm from the water cooler, a large open pitcher, pointed at the bottom, which was supported on a stand; or it could be used for making strong, sweet tea. In the latter case, of course, the water would be boiled, and this could be an advantage. On the day drive in question my Kurdish friends and I had an old woman in the car with us. It was not a case of philanthropy; it only happens to be the Kurdish custom to fill a car with travellers bound for the same destination, each passenger paying for his seat and no more. The idea that three people like us (we were a party of three: myself, my interpreter, and her brother) should hire a car for ourselves was unthinkable. In the first *chaikhana* the water cooler had contained some ice. The old woman had managed to get hold of a piece, had wrapped it in a rag, and had thrust it into her breast under the pile of clothes always worn by Kurdish women even in hot weather. Each time we stopped at a *chaikhana* afterwards she would pull out the lump of ice, put it into a metal drinking-bowl, and hold it carefully under the water with a none too clean index finger.

She would rock the bowl to and fro so the water could wash right over the piece of ice to absorb its refreshing coolness. Then she would generously offer the bowl round. . . .

It was incredible the amount one could drink. Though one continued to drink water, tea, curdled milk, and everything one could pour down one's throat, it was utterly impossible to keep pace with the evaporation of the body. For this reason the heat makes one emaciated.

On another occasion my Kurdish friends and I were returning to Baghdad from the south. Leaving the city before sunrise we had breakfasted on bread, water melon, and tea in the town of Hilla on the Euphrates. We had spent a long time driving round the town in order to find the country woman whose butter looked cleanest. The butter was white, resembled ointment, and was made from a mixture of goat's milk and cow's milk. In the end we had stopped and bought some from a woman who sat on the ground surrounded by a lot of little bowls. But I did not taste the ointment; there were too many flies on it. However, I took the bowl. And I still have it. It is incredible how the smell of goat is persistent!

As we sat outside the *chaikhana* in the square at Hilla droves of loaded mules and donkeys went by, their Arab drovers dressed in long garments. The river, with palms on either side, lay behind us. It was early and not yet too hot. We were on our way to visit Babili, the site of the excavated ruins of ancient Babylon. This had little to do with the life in Kurdish villages which I had come to study; but it was during the last few days of my stay in Iraq, my real work was over, and with me were my Kurdish interpreter and her brother, who always accompanied her. Being a young Moslem woman of good family she could not travel without a male escort, even though her identity was completely concealed beneath her black head-cloak, the *aba*, and black face-veil. My Kurdish friends had never been to Babili; and so together we visited the fabulous cubic brick architecture of the Ishtar gate, the stone lion, the museum, and the rest of the many sights. A small boy in a long shirt, who may have been

twelve or so, acted as our guide. He spoke astonishingly good English. He secretly tried to sell us some stones on which were cuneiform inscriptions. When we made our way from the site of the excavations to the museum in order to see the reconstructions which have been made of the fortress-like walls and the fantastic stepped pyramids of Babylon, the boy suddenly refused to go a step further, and, looking like an odd little ghost in his long night-shirt, stayed behind among the excavations. Was he afraid, or what? There are mysteries which one never unravels.

Later we drove back to Baghdad in the increasing heat, passing palm groves and camels as we made our way north. All this was as it should be; and so very different from the scenery in the Kurdistan mountains of my friends, where I had stayed for so long. Incidentally, unloaded camels look far more fantastic than camels carrying large and irrelevant burdens. The saurian head borne on the massive curved lever of a neck has a prehistoric appearance. And the body with the hump is like an orb on four high and gnarled legs moving huge plate-shaped feet below. I had always thought the giraffe the most astonishing of animals, but having seen the camel in its own environment of colour and line. . . . For the rest, camels are so well-proportioned that one never thinks of their size. Only the driver seems so strangely small for a man.

Half-way between the ruins of Babylon and Baghdad we ran out of petrol and came to a halt. Luckily, we were not in the middle of the trackless and silent desert north of Baghdad, as endless as the ocean, but on the Hilla–Baghdad road where there are more cars. Someone would surely pass by and help us out of our predicament by letting us have a little petrol.

By this time it was nearly noon. The heat was now so fierce that it was barely tolerable except when the car was in motion and the hot air circulated in and out through the open windows. If you stood still on the open road it felt menacing.

At length a bus crammed full with pilgrims stopped and let us have the petrol we needed. They had come from Kerbela, the

holy city on the Euphrates to the west, where every Shi'a Moslem dreams of being buried near to the mosque of the martyr Hosain. Farther along we met several ordinary passenger cars on the way to Kerbela. On top were oblong boxes, which at first I took for a special form of trunk. But in this I was mistaken; and why should bodies in coffins not be carried on the tops of cars just as well as perambulators and bicycles?

The risks of heat and glare in the Iraqi summer were things one had to remember and guard against, just as we must guard against the cold in severe winters.

A temperature of over 120 degrees Fahrenheit is a singular experience. The air is so hot that it is almost palpable. Walking through it is like walking through flames. They are flames you are a little afraid of, and yet at the same time feel that you cannot have enough of.

The British whom I met at the Dokan Dam Site said that during the first summer you always felt fighting fit, but that in the following one the heat became hard to endure. The Kurdish diet on which I lived may possibly have helped me to stand the heat as well as I did. Rice and bread were the staple ingredients. You got very little meat, plenty of vegetables, and lots of fruit. I did most of the things I had been warned against doing. I went out in the middle of the day, though, of course, never without a sun-helmet or similar headgear; and instead of cotton I wore nylon. I was very fit. But it was my first summer in Kurdistan.

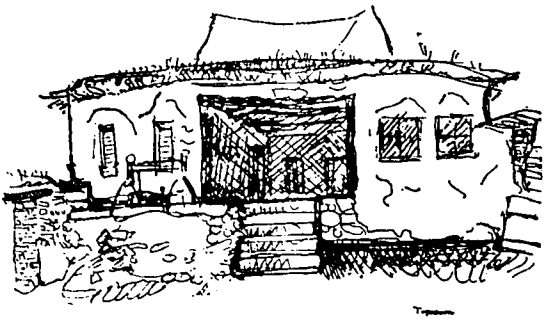
The British houses at the Dokan Dam Site were massive, tightly shut buildings of stone, fortresses erected against the summer weather. Drawn blinds and closed windows excluded the heat and glare. Punkas and air-cooling systems created a European temperature in rooms where work had to be done at a European pace. Emerging from these British homes with their artificially-cooled rooms into the open you felt the heat doubly intense, while the glare as you came out from the darkness was unbearably fierce. It was a shock. When you left a Kurdish room, which, because it was without one wall, was reasonably cool and shady, the heat and glare did not feel nearly so staggering.

Incidentally, I liked to sweat. You were dry again immediately. In the dry air, sweating was decidedly pleasant.

The hottest moment I recall from my stay in Kurdistan was on a Sunday afternoon at the Dokan Dam Site. A glaringly white hill, the macademized road leading to the Resthouse, a few minutes' conversation alongside a red lorry with the cellulose throwing off the heat: the heat then was so intense that I felt I should dissolve and evaporate into it.

The nights were very fine. Gone then were the sun and the glare, though the heat—only a little less intense—remained. There was a night on which there was dancing in the village of Topzawah, where I spent more than a month. Only the men danced. We women sat on the clay roof of the house where I was staying. The whole paraphernalia of tea-making had been carried on to the roof: the samovar for the boiling water, with its inside container for the glowing charcoal; tea-pot, sugar bowl, and tea-glasses; bowl of cold water for rinsing the glasses in before refilling them. All these articles were placed on and around a gigantic metal tray, and behind it the seventeen-year-old daughter of the house sat with her legs crossed, seated charmingly on a small rug behind the samovar, in a graceful position which gathered her body and limbs into a static whole. The tea-glasses were filled and emptied regularly in the hot night. Hour after hour drums and flutes kept up the monotonous rhythm of the music. All that the village had in the way of carbide lamps, including ours, had been taken down to the scene of the dancing, an open space between the clay-built houses. We could see the weaving chains of men dancing tirelessly shoulder to shoulder. The village lay dark beneath the stars. *Hautawana:* that was the constellation known to us as the Plough. Here they called it the Seven Stars. It was one of the first words I learnt.

No, I had no summer that year. What I experienced is not what we understand by summer. Moreover, you had to be careful with it. It was fascinating and dangerous; it was, literally, playing with fire.



2—*Here Comes the Bride*

During my stay in Kurdistan I was able to attend several weddings, three at any rate. To be quite accurate, the first I only half attended, as at that time I was still living among Europeans; that is to say, the British engineers at the Dokan Dam Site.

This Anglo-French engineering township stands in the middle of Kurdistan like an improbable Acropolis. Desolate, smoothly contoured mountains surround it. Small remote villages of mud-built houses with flat roofs set in terraces lie on the enclosing mountain slopes overlooking Dokan. Kurdish villages look rather like eyes, half-open and watching. Return their gaze and they will slowly close, the village being swallowed up by the landscape from whose clay it is built. It is very odd. I noticed it many a time as I drove through the country by car or sat in a bus. Suddenly a village would peer out where, only a moment before, there had been nothing but the rugged mountainside or the smoother outlines of a hill.

But to return to Dokan. One has to admire the intensity with which the British are able to surround themselves with England.

Rose-gardens, tennis matches, curry lunches, regular club rotas, freshly-ironed linen dresses, iced whisky: these formed a higher wall on surrounding Kurdistan than any wall built of masonry. At the Dokan Dam Site the electric light burnt all night long,

and all night long was heard the regular tread of armed sentries on gravel paths. When work had begun on the dam three years earlier, shots had been fired from the villages at the engineers.

From the wild country which surrounded this Anglo-French Acropolis workers were recruited for the dam. The Dokan dam is a gigantic human project to make a lake where the Lord ought to have made one. Workers were also recruited for the rose-gardens as well as the house-work, since the Kurdish village women did not take employment with Europeans; that would have been contrary to the secluded lives which women lead in this Moslem country. The Kurdish workmen employed on the dam wore European working clothes. Later on, when I had moved outside the range of European civilization and paid only occasional visits to Dokan, it was very strange to recognize in a dirty little mechanic dressed in overalls one of the handsome young Kurds from the village where I lived. As a son of the sheikh, he was surrounded when at home by the nimbus to which he was entitled as a member of what had been a ruling family for generations. At Dokan he was only a little mechanic selling his days at so much an hour. It was not only the voluminous trousers of brown, blue, or off-white wool and his striking fringed turban which lent him weight and dignity in the village; it was his entire background. A family name which was widely known; family connections which through carefully planned marriages had ramifications right across the country; a reputation for hospitality and domestic splendour which had been built up over generations. Reputation and family connections: these were the valid currency of the village where I lived.

Just before I began my stay there I went to a wedding. I had already paid several visits to the Kurdish family with whom I was later to live. In spite of our inability to converse, because I did not know the language, I had shared in several of their meals. Reasons of language prevented any show of politeness over accepting this spontaneous hospitality. The son of the family, who spoke a very little English, had said that there was to be a wedding. The bride was from another village some distance away,

and he offered to get a seat for me in one of the procession of cars, of various kinds, which was to fetch her.

In spite of the few roads which are good enough for motor traffic in Iraq, there are many cars in this country so rich in oil. Filled with Kurdish men in fringed turbans and with black bundles of veiled women, they are everywhere. On the occasion of this wedding the steep road leading to the village was to be negotiated by cars of all sizes and all makes, though to tell the truth the only thing it was fit for was a Land-Rover.

Unfortunately, I did not go on the journey to fetch the bride. There was no room for me in the cars when they passed through Dokan, at six o'clock in the morning, on their way to the bride's village. There were even groups of villagers sitting on top of the cars. The gayest of them all was the 'village idiot', a harmless young man who never hurt a fly, but who in the course of one of his attacks had pulled out all his teeth, with the result that he resembled a cross between an old woman and a baby. I think, as a matter of fact, that my young Kurdish friend had overestimated my chance of joining the party, even if there had been room. I was a woman, and fetching the bride from the home of her fathers definitely looked like a male affair. So when the procession had passed by I descended the mountain where Dokan lay, waded across a stream, and putting on my shoes again, walked up the rising path to the village, where the arrival of the bride was eagerly awaited. As it turned out I was not very lucky. I had taken my stand on the loggia of the house where I was eventually to live. However, the bride was taken out of the car at the opposite end of the village, seated on a white horse, and conducted to the bridal house by a devious route below the fields and round an old burial ground. All I could see from that distance was that she had a reddish-yellow veil over her head. And that was precious little.

On the other hand, I had the good fortune to be invited to the wedding dinner, along with other Europeans from Dokan and the Arab doctor from Dokan hospital.

On the mud roof of the bridal house itself, seating room for

about three hundred men from the village had been arranged on carpets. Here they had a meal consisting of rice, mutton, curdled milk mixed with water, fruit, and sweet tea. Everything was placed on large round metal trays and served by men. No women were seen. We Europeans and the Arab doctor were served on the roof of the neighbouring house, and chairs and a table had been moved there in our honour. Before the meal we washed our hands squatting at a round metal basin which stood on the ground, while a man poured water over them from a metal jug. When the dishes had been placed on the table we tried to eat with our fingers as we had seen the other guests eat, but quickly abandoned such experiments. The food was tasty like all Kurdish food. It was early in the summer and there was no risk in sitting out of doors in the middle of the day. While we were having our meal, the Kurdish men began their chain dance in the open space between the houses. Holding hands and shoulder to shoulder, they described a semi-circle, those who were at the ends of the chain swinging scarves in their free hands. The steps radiated towards the centre of the semi-circle and then out again. The dance was kept up for as long as anyone threw money to the musicians, a drummer and a flute-player.

The rhythm of the music was rousing by day. Later on, on the occasion of another wedding, I was to hear this same music on several dark evenings, and then it was wonderfully exciting. The pistol shot which one of the dancers fired off in his enthusiasm at the end seemed a natural climax.

The meal over, the European women were allowed to descend into the house and meet the bride. We climbed down from the roof with the help of a wobbling petrol can which had been put there as a step and with Kurdish fatalism left unsupported, with the result that it was more trouble than it was worth. Of course, we first had another wash at the metal basin while water was poured over our outstretched hands.

The bride was hidden away in a dark little room of the house on which the men had feasted. She sat on a mattress on the floor, with her back to a rectangular opening with rounded edges in

the thick clay-brick wall. There was no window-pane and during our visit the aperture was filled with the faces of some inquisitive children. The bride rose from the mattress at our entrance. She was still wearing the flame-coloured veil and, as far as I could make out in the half-light, a long coat of red, gold, or silver brocade reaching to the ground. She appeared to be unfamiliar with the custom of shaking hands and could hardly understand. There were two other women present, one of whom was busy making tea. This woman was richly adorned with silver ornaments and her bracelets rattled as she handled the glasses. After folding our clumsy legs as well as we could on the proffered mattress, we were given tea and cigarettes. I could make out the obligatory battery receiver standing on a shelf: one of the chorus of battery sets which transmitted the Baghdad programme in Kurdish villages all day long, without seeming to arouse very much interest or interrupt the daily round.

The bridal chest containing the bride's trousseau stood in a corner. It had been made in the bazaar at Sulaimaniyah from packing-cases, and their original contents and source could still be read, in black lettering, on the sides. The chest had tall legs and the front was covered with sheets of glass on which were painted flowers, fruit and a fabulous Moslem winged animal (*Burâq*). The paintings were in pure, childlike colours: scarlet, lemon, and blue. A child or Picasso could not have bettered them. The bride was said to have been married before, though they also said that the bridegroom had had to pay a substantial sum for her. At twenty-six she was considered to be rather old for a bride.

Later that afternoon I saw the bride's white horse, with its metal-studded saddle and fringed blanket, when it was ridden home by one of the young wedding guests. It may have been the fluttering fringes of his turban and broad waistband: but I seemed to see the Middle Ages gallop past.

This was the village to which I moved for my stay of more than a month at the sheikh's house. For a fortnight I lived there alone. The language which I spoke with the women of the house,

in whose company I was from morning until night, has since been a mystery to myself and people whom I met. Yet I cannot recall that ignorance of each other's language laid any particular difficulties in the way of our day-to-day association. We managed with the help of signs and gestures, together with the words and phrases which were most commonly used. I can still hear my Kurdish friends, mother and daughter, energetically exclaiming 'So, so,' in Danish. For my part I learnt a little Kurdish.

I remember a day when we had gone out of the farm, a thing which we rarely did, up into the mountain vineyards. Slipping on some stones, I slid down, sprained something in my shoulder, and struck my front teeth against the rock. Their loving sympathy and minute examination of me when they picked me up and counted my front teeth to see if I still had all I had had when I fell down must have been accompanied by a stream of Kurdish words. Both mother and daughter were lively and warm-hearted; but I cannot recall their friendly words in a language unintelligible to me. Of course our bilingual conversations dealt only with the concrete things of daily life. Discussion of more abstract matters had to await better times, when my female interpreter made her entry into my life.

I had called for her at Sulaimaniyah, and she came escorted by a brother and a future brother-in-law. The brother was to stay with her; the brother-in-law had come to inspect the conditions. From the start I was put in one of the two rooms set aside for male visitors. This room was situated in a wing of the farm, and was fronted by a loggia with pillars made from poplar-trunks, used for the reception of guests in the hot season. There was a direct approach to this part of the house from the road. In the evening when the wooden gate which led to the farmyard had been shut, I and the part which I occupied were cut off from the rest of the house. One of the two iron bedsteads belonging to the household had been placed there for my use, as we had not yet taken to sleeping on the roof. My interpreter and her brother were allotted the other room in the guest wing. They had brought their own 'beds', consisting of mattresses and quilts, which they

unrolled on the cement floor. During the night which he spent in the house the brother-in-law slept on a sofa in the same room. It is permissible for a young Moslem woman of Kurdistan to spend the night in the same room as such a comparatively strange man, since their future relationship precludes possibility of marriage.

Some time later another wedding was due to take place in my village, but by this time my status had completely changed since the time of the first wedding there. This time I should not sit with other European women on the roof, have my meal seated on a chair, or watch the men as they danced. Now I was a member of a Kurdish family, the leading family of the village. With its womenfolk, mother and daughter, my interpreter and I would receive the bride inside the house, in the presence of all the other women of the village. We were welcomed with all the honours due to the foremost ladies of the village, and my interpreter and I basked in the glory of it. It had all seemed so absurd when we had made our way from the sheikh's house to the bride's house; no proper road had led to it. In our best clothes we walked over rough stones at the foot of a gorge which earlier in the year had been a water-course. The stairs leading to the room where we awaited the arrival of the bride were not what one would normally call stairs. Stairs, in these village houses of sun-dried bricks made from the clayey soil mixed with water and baked in the sun, are clearly an insoluble problem. If I were asked to describe the stairs which we climbed, and all the other stairs I encountered, I should say that they were stepped heaps of clay. The steps were inconveniently high and very irregular, and the front edge of each was a crooked branch. They were not completely safe, especially when, as in this house and indeed many another, they were pitch-dark.

However, we arrived safely in the first-floor room to which the bride was to be taken on her arrival. It was the sort of room common to nearly every Kurdish house: the whole of one wall was absent and there were no other apertures. It was a cool and shady room. Outside was a wide terrace which consisted of the

clay roof of the rooms below. The entrance to the house was beneath that part of the terrace on to which we could look out.

For the rest, the plan of the houses—to say nothing of the plan of the village—was difficult to make out. The village stood on sloping ground, the houses sited one above the other. Buildings in Kurdistan, much more than in northern Europe, are a part of the terrain on which they are built. Not only as regards material, but also in colour and general character, the houses of sun-baked bricks plastered with clay, and with flat clay roofs, form an integral part of the landscape. In line, also, houses and village merge into the general pattern without interrupting it. Walls and flat roofs have lines which are neither wholly vertical nor completely horizontal. The houses are ruled by soft and animate curves. Over all there is the hand-made character of pottery made without a wheel.

Because of the stepped siting of the houses, one never knows whether one is standing on a floor or on a roof, since the terrace or open space which continues the floor of one house forms the roof of the one below. In this irregular terrain the only open spaces are indeed the roofs. The paths between the houses look more like twisting ravines or ditches, and will often have a stream running down the middle.

As I have said, one of the walls of the room was missing. Along the wall which faced the opening on to the terrace mattresses were laid. The whole floor had been laid with carpets for the occasion; and here, as close as possible, sat a crowd of women, perhaps fifty or more. They either squatted on the floor or sat cross-legged, occupying, in either position, astonishingly little space. As a result, in spite of their large numbers, there was also room for the host of children which in this country is an inevitable accompaniment to any group of women. They sat on arms, lay at breasts, or had found places between the bodies of the seated women.

I was left in no doubt that the two ladies of my family constituted the village aristocracy. That was plain to see from their clothes. They were dressed for the occasion in their very best.

Unfortunately! Unfortunately, because I much preferred the everyday costumes of the village to this Sulaimaniyah splendour. The gowns from this local capital were, like my interpreter's, of metal-threaded tulle. They were the latest fashion. But the transparent tulle reveals both the long, wide trousers and their shifts, making the women look only half-dressed. This urban variation has altered the whole character of the Kurdish costume. But in Sulaimaniyah it was considered to be the most elegant, and my two village ladies were keeping up with my interpreter, who came from the local capital.

Among the assembled village women my three ladies made a tremendous stir on account of their dresses. Their complexions also were different. Mother and daughter both seemed very fair, though they had jet-black hair and dark eyes like the rest. But then their skin was never exposed to the scorching sun. It was not that they had not enough to do on the farm, outside as well as in; they did the baking and cooking, and they milked the goats until these, later in the summer, passed into the village herdsman's charge and spent the day and night in the mountains. But they did not have to walk the long way into the mountains to the herdsman and milk the goats morning and night, as did the other women of the village. For this work my friends had a servant girl. Nor did they have to go into the mountains with donkeys and axes in order to gather fuel for the kitchen fires. This also was servant's work, and it was hard work, entailing five or six hours in the heat of the sun. Nor did they have anything to do with the ploughing and harvesting. They never dragged loads of corn twice the size of themselves to the threshing-floor as did the other village women. The sheikh's fields were ploughed and harvested by his tenants and their wives, whether they grew wheat or tobacco. The sheikh owned the village, as he owned other villages; and his womenfolk, in spite of the primitive nature of the daily household work, led a life of comparative luxury. That was why their complexions were fair and their hands soft.

They seldom left home. Occasionally I would see them in the nearest field, gathering onions and other vegetables. As I have

said, we once went into the mountain vineyards; that was to pick the youngest and crispest vine-leaves, which were used for wrapping round the rice for dinner, the green bundles being steamed, drenched with butter, until tender, in a copper pot tinned on the inside, over a fire in the kitchen. But otherwise they spent their lives in the farm.

My ladies stood out among the women of the village: the daughter because of her exceptional beauty; the mother, with her rather ample figure after five children, perhaps mostly owing to her ornaments. Gold coins worth more than a hundred pounds were strung from her wrapped turban of lilac brocade and as a chin-strap for the black felt skull-cap inside the turban. In addition there were the necklaces, the bracelets, and the jewels which alternated with the gold coins.

The room was packed to overflowing with women. The bridegroom, a handsome young man of about twenty-five, dressed in the usual Kurdish trousered costume with a fringed turban, came in to welcome the assembly. His mother was a worn-out, ancient, and toothless woman, probably not much more than forty-five, her face tanned like the trunk of an oak-tree. Considering that it was her son who was to be married, she wore remarkably plain clothes, as did her husband, whom hard work seemed to have prematurely aged. But he also was made to look older than he was by his lack of teeth.

We had been given the places of honour on the mattresses along the wall, where the bride also was to be seated when she arrived. A metal tray containing cigarettes was placed in front of us. The small tea-glasses, narrowed in the middle and with a gold border, which I think were made in Bohemia, were filled and emptied and refilled. With the saucers and small tea-spoons they were brought in and taken away, with incredible agility and grace, by a barefooted little married woman of at most fifteen. Wearing her wifely dignity, her heavy turban, and her white head-veil with deportment, she saw that no tea-glass was forgotten but that all those many guests had as much of the sweet and strong beverage as they could drink. She looked perfectly

enchanting as, dressed in wide trousers and a long gown, she threaded her way in and out without upsetting a single glass or ever losing her balance among the crowd of seated people.

A whole group of young people had gathered round the daughter of my family. All wore costumes which were more highly coloured but less pretentious, and all had darker complexions than the high-born young woman of the village who was so rarely seen outside her own home. They had caught the mood of the wedding and were whispering and laughing together.

I had been given a seat on the mattress next to the place reserved for the bride. Once again I wished that I had been legless or had the agility and suppleness of the other women. Twist and turn as I might, I took up double the floor space, and my shoes, which I had of course taken off before sitting on the mattress, were constantly in the way.

Women from other villages were also there. They wore a small gold pin or some dangling gold leaves inserted in their noses, and on their faces some dots and dashes were tattooed.

All the women there were dressed in quantities of clothes, with sleeveless jackets and coats over their gowns. The long wide trousers, which are gathered at the bottoms, are themselves a fantastically hot garment. The married women also wore the felt skull-cap enclosed in the many wrappings of the turban, which made the head look so large. The head-veil arranged on top gave further heat. 'I wonder they don't die of heat,' I thought, as the sweat trickled in large drops down my face. And I was wearing neither long trousers nor a turban.

The arrival of the bride was delayed. She had a long journey from Sulaimaniyah. She had never seen her future husband, nor had he seen her. Something was now put under the mattress on which the bride was to sit; it was a lump of honey wrapped in a wafer of bread, and its purpose was to ensure that the bride would prove as sweet as honey. It was an old and tried remedy which never failed.

Time passed; and in spite of constant tea-drinking we had

grown quite hungry. It was after two and we had been there since half-past eleven.

Not that I was bored. The mixed flower-bed formed by the costumes of turquoise, violet, green, and scarlet provided ample entertainment; as did the curiously coloured baby clothes and the striped nightshirts of the boys, as well as the diminutive versions of women's costumes worn by the girls. There was indeed plenty to look at.

At long last something seemed to be happening. There were sounds of a disturbance and a throng of people appeared on the terrace above the front door, which was just outside the room where we were sitting. The cars containing the bride and the men who had escorted her from Sulaimaniyah had appeared in sight, winding like a long serpent up the wretched path which led to the village. It was an admirable route for pedestrians and for cattle and mules, and could be negotiated by a Land-Rover as well as the local bus, which got through every day as though by a miracle. But here was a procession of cars of the type commonly seen in Iraq: the finest American makes, long and wide like ocean liners. Slowly they clambered up, crossed the stream safely at the bottom, disappeared behind a mountain rock, emerged into view again.

The bridegroom stood on the terrace with two of his friends, who were engaged in whittling a large stout broomstick. Some women were holding a cock. It had been an old custom to kill a cock at the moment the bride crossed the threshold of her future home, but now it was released from the roof over the bride's head. When this occurred all the women would rise and go on to the terrace over the front door.

'Here comes the bride,' the cry went up. There was the same magic effect as when the cry of 'Here's the bride' is passed from lip to lip at a wedding in a European church.

The bridegroom had seized the stout stick and stood with his friends on the edge of the clay roof just above the doorway. As a guest from abroad I was to have the best view and was pushed forward next to them. All the women behind pressed forward in

order to see, and at the vital moment I very nearly got pushed off the roof. I flung my arm round one of the women next to me: it was Naima, the lady of the house, in all her golden splendour, and we two mothers held each other tight. We never learnt one another's language, but linguistic understanding at such a moment is immaterial. Both of us had the major part of our lives behind us. We were about to see a young woman cross the threshold not only of her future home, but also the most important phase of her life.

She came round the corner of the house at which the cars had stopped. Two women were holding her under the arms; she seemed, in all the clothes she was wearing, to have difficulty in walking. I could see under the flame-coloured veil over her head-dress that she had used lipstick for the occasion. The cock was released and flapped out from the roof. The bridegroom raised the stick in both hands and took aim, having first thrust his friends aside in order to have more room to swing his arms. The heavy stick swished with all the strength of his twenty-five years on to the bride's head, striking it with a dull thud at the very moment that she set foot on the threshold of her future home.

The two women were holding her, and so prevented her from falling. She was wearing a black felt skull-cap and a turban wound round it; but a few days later they told me that it had been a vigorous blow which had made a big lump on her head. The purpose of the blow was to avert evil.

Inside the house, she was half dragged, half carried up the pitch-dark staircase with the high and irregular clay steps. As she disappeared into the house, all the women had rushed in from the roof to receive her. Her head with the fiery veil came into view on the staircase, followed by the bride herself. With the help of the escorting women she was led across the room to a seat on the mattress. The bridegroom's mother bent over her, laid her hands on her shoulders, and gave her a kiss of welcome on the crown of the head. The veil was then lifted and the whole crowd of women surged round her to see what she was like,

this new little member of our village community. The crush took the last breath of fresh air from the poor half-fainting creature. One of the attendant women took a fan, the general type of short-handled fan woven from bast, and began fanning the bride in order to revive her. I felt deeply sorry for her. First she had been dressed in many, all too many, layers of clothes so she should look really splendid as she made her entry into her future home. She had then travelled a journey of at least three hours from Sulaimaniyah in the hottest period of the day. Finally, she had been dealt the heavy blow on the head and was nearly suffocated by lack of air and the overpowering interest of the women.

She sat on the mattress in a hunched-up and unbecoming attitude. She had not even the strength to fold her legs up beautifully in the usual cross-legged fashion with spread knees. They gave her some water to drink. But the poor creature bore every sign of being worn out. Her face had been made up for the occasion with face-cream and powder of a curiously yellowish-white colour, and lipstick that was blackish-red. She looked like a superannuated variety star after a night out. I saw her again a few days later; she was not yet sixteen and had a pretty, if rather heavy, face and a golden complexion.

In the summer heat her costume was incredibly hot. The long trousers of ochre brocade were of very expensive but very heavy material. She also wore stockings, which were not customary. Her ochre-coloured gown was of heavy lace fabric, the sleeveless jacket of green brocade, the surmounting padded jacket of lilac brocade. Over and above all this she wore a long padded coat of blue brocade. So many layers in a temperature of a hundred and five!

From time to time she would helplessly lift the dress out from her middle. The top of the wide trousers fits round the hips, so there are fewest layers round the stomach. By pulling out her clothes in this way she was trying to get a little cool inside the overfilled space.

Drinking some more water from the metal bowl which was

handed to her, she seemed at length to recover a little; she sat up and slipped off the long padded coat. The lilac jacket underneath had badly stained the coat inside the sleeves. That journey to the village from Sulaimaniyah in a closed car must have been like a Turkish bath lasting hours. I noticed when the coat was hung up on the nail in the wall that a strainer and some rough domestic utensils still hung there. Little clearing up had been done in the house on the occasion of the wedding.

Some time later the food came round to us women: large metal trays containing circular dishes of boiled rice, bowls of sauce with tomatoes and other vegetables, plates of mutton cut in small pieces, and, folded like serviettes, the big, wafer-thin flakes of home-baked bread. The trays were placed on the floor and the children were firmly driven out. The men had eaten their meal quickly, as people in this country always do. Now it was the women's turn; later it would be the children's. There were many of us to each tray, no individual eating utensils, and only one spoon in the sauce. There were also many of us to share the wooden ladle in the large bowl of curdled milk mixed with water that was handed round.

It is all a matter of habit: eating with the fingers as well as using the same spoon for the sauce and drinking out of the same ladle. It can be done with a great deal of elegance. And how clean are our own eating utensils after dubious washing-up water followed by dubious tea-cloths? Over one's fingers one has a little more control.

The bride's hands were tattooed with a small pattern pricked on the backs with a mixture of *khel* and milk. *Khel*, or antimony, is the black colouring matter which women draw across their closed eyelids with a small stick to produce a flattering black line along the base of the eyelashes. Her finger-tips were dyed with henna, and henna had been used to paint a crescent and sickle on the inside of her palms. Probably the soles of her feet were also dyed with henna, as I had often seen in the daughter of my house. But, as already mentioned, she was wearing stockings. Henna is a carroty colour, tending to brownish. Perhaps amber is nearer

to the colour which it imparts to the skin. It looks ugly when you are unused to it, and then one day it seems fine.

The bride ate little and spoke to no one. She gave the general impression of a richly-adorned idol with many large gold coins on the turban and some smaller ones forming a curb-chain round the face and suspended in necklaces and bracelets. She scarcely looked happy. I was told later that it was not seemly that brides should look happy, or indeed that they should look at all concerned in what was taking place.

One of the women escorts was a lively, one-eyed aunt of the bride. It is a mystery that a woman who has only one eye can appear charming, and yet she did. She was somehow related to the mother of my family, and they fell into an animated conversation across my legs, which remained in the way where eating, tea-drinking, and life in all its forms was carried on on the floor.

Personally, I was less interested in the one-eyed aunt and wanted to see more of the other escort. She was an elderly woman who had a responsible duty to perform, as I knew. Whereas the one-eyed aunt would remain with the married couple for a week, the older woman would return to Sulaimaniyah in the morning. The bridal sheet would have to be taken home to the bride's parents. Unless the sheet showed signs of her virginity the bride would be struck down by her father, brother, or another male relative, with the curved knife which they carried in their waistbands.

The old woman would sleep outside the door of the bridal chamber. I saw them take in the bridal bed, along with a rolled-up bundle of new cotton mattresses with flowered covers and a high-legged bridal chest with coloured glass pictures on the front. The bride's costumes were in this chest. They, like the rich gold ornaments which she wore, had been purchased with part of the marriage portion, and they said that she had been equipped with sixteen complete costumes. Women's dress in this country is governed not by fashion but by tradition, in the way that national costumes used to be in Europe. Thus at her wedding

a bride may receive enough costumes to last her for at least ten years. The clothing, as well as the gold ornaments and the household utensils which are bought with the marriage portion, are her private property, always kept by her in the event of divorce.

As I have said, the men had long since eaten. The food was the same food that we had had, only of course they had had it before any had been brought to us. They had then danced: the music could be heard in the distance. At this wedding I saw nothing of the male part of the celebrations, as my place this time was among the women.

By now it was late in the afternoon and time to leave; the official part of the wedding festivities were over. Descending the awkward, pitch-black steps, we left the bride to her fate.

Later in the summer all the men of the village had again gone by car to Sulaimaniyah to bring two very young brides. Evidently, summer was the season of village weddings. I had by then moved to my interpreter's house at Sulaimaniyah, and it so happened that one of the seven daughters of the house was to be married. Thus it came about that I not only attended the wedding ceremony, but also took part in the extensive, lavish, and lengthy preparations.

Kurdish homes have many occupants. The rooms are large but are few in number, though the roof and the courtyard are both used for meals and for sleeping. In my village home I had been lodged in one of the two large rooms which constituted a separate guest wing of the house.

In my urban home, on the other hand, I lived right in the middle of the family. In this house I found that none of the rooms had a fixed interior. The family wandered oddly about the house like nomads, 'encamping' each day in a new place. Neither objects nor persons had definite places; everyone ate and slept in new rooms and in new combinations every day. The food for the two main daily meals having been cooked over the kitchen fire, it would be served on large trays which would be placed on the floor wherever it was convenient. Sometimes it would be

served for me and another member of the family (usually my interpreter) at the one and only table, though by no means as a matter of rule. In time there was not a room in the house where I had not dined. Sleeping was the same. Two iron bedsteads stood on the roof, and I slept in one of them. But I also slept on a mattress which would be rolled out on the floor of the guest's reception room, as well as on a mattress in the courtyard, all according to whichever was convenient or the way the wind blew. The 'black' wind, that is the dust storm, was rare but disagreeable. When it came it drove us off the roof. One night I tried to stick it out in my iron bedstead, but it nearly blew me and my quilt over the roof-tops.

In one of the rooms there was a peg which was reserved for me. Sometimes one of the daughters would forget it was mine; that, however, was a minor matter. I also had a suitcase and finding a place for this was about the hardest thing of all. Every day the clay floor had to be swept and sprinkled with water to keep the room cool, and time after time I would find my case stowed away behind or on top of the coloured metal chests (the keys to which their owners carried fastened with a safety-pin inside their sleeveless jackets). The articles which I was most careful to look after, in this family of fourteen or fifteen persons of both sexes and all ages, were my camera and note-books. There were recesses up in the walls, but they were hardly safe repositories. Into them was stuffed everything from medicine bottles to cups, glasses, and soap holders. What is more, the house was swarming with children, those of the family and those of the neighbours. So my personal luggage grew less and less as time went on, an arrangement which seemed to be the most sensible one. But camera and note-books—these were both rather essential.

As I have said, there was to be a wedding in the very house where I was staying, and not only was I to attend the ceremony as a guest, I was to share in all the preparations in the bride's home where the wedding was to take place, the bridegroom's home being in a far-off and remote village. At first the young

couple would live in the town, in a house which the family would rent for them. Later they would move into the country, where they were to work as school teachers.

I did not, however, go on the extremely important shopping expedition to Baghdad, as I had left for Doken with some ethnographical material which I had purchased. As the bride's elder sister my interpreter spent five days in Baghdad, together with the engaged couple and a little sister who went with them to see the capital, Sulaimaniyah being only the local capital.

In Baghdad they shared one hotel room among them. Though engaged couples may not be alone together, they may sleep in the same room along with other members of the family. In the capital large purchases were made out of the marriage portion, which amounted to five hundred pounds. The bride's collection of gold ornaments, on the other hand, had been commissioned from the goldsmith at Sulaimaniyah. The bride in this case would also have a large suite of real furniture; and a large bridal bed, dressing-table, and wardrobe were ordered in Baghdad. The wardrobe was for the bride's Kurdish and European costumes, for she was to have both. Steel furniture was also ordered for the future guest-room. A metal basin and jug to match were bought for the guest's wash-basin, as well as utensils for serving tea. The purchases also included a beauty-box, which is an indispensable adjunct to a modern Kurdish bride's trousseau, though she may never have used make-up before getting married. It is a huge flat box covered with pink velvet and lined with pink satin; inside the lid is a mirror, and on the pink satin lie an assortment of jars and bottles containing American cosmetics.

After the return from Baghdad many hands were set to work in the bride's home and in the town bazaars. The pink quilt for the bridal bed was mounted with elaborate stitchings by a special craftsman in one of the open workshops of the bazaar. This quilt, the satin for which had been bought in Baghdad, was an object of interest to every passer-by, and we too would often pass that way to watch the man as he worked on the quilted counterpane spread out on the floor. Day by day we could see the work

advance, the quilted pattern becoming ever more splendid. One of the tailors of the bazaar was busily engaged in cutting out and making up many padded and brocaded overcoats in bright colours. A seamstress had called at the house to make the preparations for the work which she was to do. Sitting cross-legged on the floor, she had cut out several gowns and sleeveless jackets. When all the material had been cut to size, the bride's mother and her father's other wife—there being two wives in the house—had taken an axe and crushed a loaf of sugar on the silk and brocade. I made a move to save the precious fabrics, thinking that the action was a mistake. I was then given the explanation. The purpose was to bring good luck to the bride, and it was a necessary part of the ceremonies. Then the seamstress rose, shook off the sugar, rolled the cut-out materials up, and went home to finish the garments. The purpose of cutting the material in the house was to prevent loss. The seamstress had also cut out many yards of heavy white cotton cloth for men's baggy trousers. Seven of the bride's male relatives, on the occasion of the wedding, were to be supplied with outfits consisting of canvas drawers, shirts, ties, and socks.

A pink satin blanket with flounces and spangles was bought ready-made in Baghdad, together with pillow-cases of the same material for two decorative pillows. A matching housecoat for the bride, also of pink satin with spangles, was purchased. Her future life as the wife of a teacher, and a teacher herself, in a small village of mud-built houses, seemed oddly at variance with this trousseau, which rather suggested a spectacular production of *La Dame aux Cameliás*. Even the curtains for the bridal chamber had to be of heavy pink satin.

In the bride-to-be's familiar red-painted metal chest was a suit of light-coloured summer clothes of European style which her family had had made for the bridegroom. Along with underwear, shoes, ties, socks, shaving tackle, bathing wrap, and a small velvet bath-mat, it would be wrapped in a white satin cloth. A box of confectionery would be laid at the top of the bundle. The day before the wedding it would be taken to the bridegroom

by an old woman who expected, and doubtless would get, a reward of money.

But it was another week to the wedding day. There was a good deal to be done yet. All the young sisters in the house were to have new, short European summer dresses made. The old people, that is to say the father's two wives, were to have new gowns and shifts. The sewing-machine hummed under the busy fingers of the bigger sister.

The sole person who took no share in the preparations, and who on the whole seemed quite unconcerned by it all, was the bride. She hung around the courtyard or took a siesta in one of the three rooms of the house, dressed in a long pink, and not very clean, silk nightgown which she used for home wear. 'Brides must not engage in anything or dress up in the period before the wedding,' was the reply to my cautious inquiries. If they did any work their future 'in-laws' would think their own family took advantage of them, and if they adorned themselves or made the slightest effort to make themselves look attractive they would acquire a reputation for being interested in getting married.

Early one morning a half-blind workman occupied the entire courtyard. With him arrived two huge sacks of raw cotton. He himself brought various sticks, cords, and an instrument shaped like an outsize violin bow. The cotton for the large mattress of the bridal bed, for pillows, and for two smaller mattresses was to be 'whipped'. In this rich house everything had to be of the very best, and ready-made mattresses were viewed with the deepest contempt. No one could tell what they were stuffed with. In this house one had to be sure of getting the finest quality of cotton. So raw cotton was bought in sacks and a man was engaged to 'whip' it in the presence of the family before it was stuffed into the white bolsters which would be enclosed in flowered covers. The man arranged his sticks and cords fastened to the iron bars of one of the low windows which faced the courtyard. He then hung up the 'violin bow' and sat cross-legged in front of it. With a large cudgel he struck the one and only string. Its vibrations set the cotton fibres in motion, converting the dense,

irregular lumps into fine airy cotton-wool. From a pile of grey lumps the cotton passed the bow string quivering under the blows of his cudgel, and ended white and airy in the other heap.

The work took all day. Cotton fluff filled the air. It found its way into the nose and eyes and the whole house was filled with floating white fluff. But by evening a huge mattress had been filled and stitched in the required manner. The man had to use his feet to press the mattress flat enough to get his big needle through it. The two pillows and the two narrow extra mattresses were also finished. The women of the house and some of their neighbours who had turned up began eagerly to complete the cushions and mattresses with flowered covers.

A house had also been taken for the young couple. I went with the bridegroom and the elder sister to complete the lease. The bride-to-be, of course, did not go. She should not see her future home until the day she was taken there as a bride.

On the other hand, her future husband was not unknown to her. The young couple had met at their work of teaching, and when the young man became interested in her he had got the women of his family to approach her family with a view to a possible marriage. No man in a Moslem community can propose to a woman direct. He had indicated his interest in the girl by telling the older sister that 'he had a mind to be admitted to her family'.

A younger sister to the bride had been married in rather different circumstances. She had been a big, strong girl of twelve and from another family had come an inquiry as to whether it would be possible to have her as a wife for the son of the house. Her own family had then asked her if she would like to be married and have a trousseau and gold ornaments. She was not asked whether she would like to marry a definite person. Of course she had never seen him. The girl had had no objection to exchanging her unmarried status for the dignity of a married woman, and the marriage had been arranged. Her husband-to-be she saw only once before the wedding, and only through the black veil which is always worn in Sulaimaniyah on leaving the house. The meeting

took place when the marriage contract was to be signed at the *cadi's*. On that occasion she could have objected if the young man had not appealed to her. No girl is forced to marry against her will. But her future husband could not see her, concealed as she was behind the veil. It was said, however, that he had once caught a glimpse of her from the roof of a house. At any rate he had been greatly pleased when the match was proposed. They had been married for five or six years and had two children, delightful little girls in European frocks and with ornaments and bows in their hair. Actually, I afterwards realized that the smaller little girl was a boy. For some reason or other they dressed little boys in girls' clothes; possibly to avert evil eyes, which threatened girls less than the more highly esteemed boys. For the rest, the couple appeared to be very satisfied with their fortunes. Indeed, their marriage was based on less volatile elements than love and personal attraction.

The young couple lived with the husband's parents. Even to visit her family, who lived a few streets away, the young wife had to have the permission of her parents-in-law. She paid frequent visits to us, so it cannot have been so difficult to get.

The house we had taken for the bride and bridegroom was situated a couple of streets away from our own. It was of the same type but newer, and so was wholly of brick with cement floors. In our own case, only half of the house was new enough to be brick-built; the rest still had plastered clay walls and levelled clay floors. Both houses had flat clay roofs which rested on a foundation of poplar-trunks and mats.

The engaged couple's house comprised a courtyard, a loggia, two rooms, and a small, windowless back-room which could be used as a lumber-room. A corner of the courtyard was arranged so as to enable cooking to be done there over a fire. Here was a small, bricked cooking-pit and, in the middle of the courtyard, a water-basin with tap. Over towards the neighbour's there was a small room which had a sunken basin with a hole in the bottom, bricked into the floor and complete with a tap. This was the customary type of lavatory in Kurdistan. There was a tree in

the middle of the courtyard. The house had electric light. Nothing could be better.

The day before the wedding the house was put in order by the bride's female relatives and their friends. There were as many of us as the house could possibly hold. The bride herself was not there. A woman specially engaged for the purpose had arrived that day to remove all the hair from the bride's body except its most private parts. These she had to do herself, during the triple bath in the hot *haman*, the small cemented bathroom of the house with bricked basin, running water, and small metal bowls for rinsing.

In the marriage house the largest room had been chosen for the bedroom. Here all the furniture from Baghdad had been installed. It was all over-sized in proportion to the room and left no vacant floor space. We set about making the marriage bed. On top of the ordinary spring mattress intended by the manufacturer to be used by itself the gigantic new mattress was placed. This had been stuffed so tight with the home-treated cotton that it was now too high and also too short. A rolled-up quilt at the foot-end of the bed, however, saved the situation. The sheet was spread over it. Instead of being tucked under the mattress it was allowed to hang down in order to display the coloured flower border embroidered along the edge. When I had seen the embroidering being done I had wondered how these flowers would be visible. The pink quilt, in the customary fashion, had a sheet sewn on with long stitches so as to form an envelope. On top was spread the pink satin counterpane with spangles. The two ornamental pillows were placed on this pink mountain. The satin curtains were then found to be too short. We were so tired that this was almost more than we could endure. But the situation was saved once more by sending post-haste to the bazaar for more material for a wide flounce at the bottom, and to the neighbour's for a treadle sewing-machine. The sweat poured down my face and the needle felt as if it would rust in my fingers as I sewed the flounces on. The beauty-box in all its pink-velvet splendour was placed on the toilet-table. In the other room were arranged

the guest sofa, the chairs, and the small smoking-tables. Not even the Japanese paper flowers—more lifelike than real flowers—were forgotten. They stood in small vases, both in the bedroom and in the guest-room, among European china ornaments.

There was drama in the air. The bridegroom's family had arrived the day before and had encamped in the courtyard where they cooked their meals. They slept on the terrace. The swarm of children, who, of course, came as well, did not confine themselves to the courtyard and terrace but ran in and out of the whole house. The energetic big sister in my family, who felt responsible for the entire arrangements as though she had been both bride and bridegroom, finally locked the well-arranged rooms. The 'in-laws', rightly feeling rather offended, had to manage as best they could.

When all was in order we were exhausted by the heat and our exertions. Fortunately, we were able to relax over water melons and hot, sweet tea in the neighbouring house, whose occupants had let the marriage house to us.

In the evening the courtyard at home was packed with female friends. The bride sat rather curiously frightened in a corner, still in her pink nightdress. Also present was an elderly woman. She had assisted at most of the twenty-seven births which had taken place in this house; now she would escort the bride the day after and bring home the marriage sheet. It was thought that she could be back by ten o'clock that evening, as the distance was not far.

On the morning of the wedding-day the bride was adorned. She was dressed in a Kurdish costume—the handsome garments made by the tailor and seamstress of the bazaar—and her big sister made her up. She was very shy while she was being made up. Sitting on a mattress in the adjoining room, she held up a woven fan in order to conceal what was being done from the crowd of sisters changing in the same room. Sitting in front of her, big sister put all her care and affection into the work. When at long last the bride was ready and sitting on a chair in the courtyard to receive the first women visitors, her sister started energetically on me.

Under an old promise, I had committed myself to wearing Kurdish costume on that day. It was the first and last time that I did. The long trousers were incredibly hot to one accustomed to bare legs, and the sleeveless coat which I wore over my gown was wet through from the start. I will say nothing of the head-dress. Of course, I had to wear the skull-cap and the turban of a married woman. I had promised the mayor, who had been a great help to me, that I would call on him in my Kurdish costume. For such an occasion the family did not think that my village gown of purple voile interwoven with metal threads was good enough, and so I was dressed in a showpiece of the house, made from rough pink tulle and stiff with gold thread. It was so transparent that I felt rather half-dressed. But then that was how one was supposed to look—though not in the street. On top of all this magnificence I had to wear the heavy black silk *aba*. It lay like a sleeveless cloak on my head and hung down to my feet. Before my face I of course had the black veil. Gold embroidered slippers I refused to wear. You could not keep them on in the unpaved streets. It was bad enough to avoid treading on the trailing black overclothes, and to see anything at all through the veil with more than one eye at a time was impossible. However, I got there and back alive, escorted by one of the many daughters of the house who piloted me through the multitude of large cars which took up a disproportionate amount of space in the streets.

On my return the house was full of the town ladies dressed in the same splendour as myself. They were served with the juice of grapes; wine is not drunk in Moslem families. In addition they were given tea and pastries.

As I had suffered enough in my heavy, unwieldy costume I changed back happily into a light European summer dress. The bride also changed. In the guest-room, with the blinds rolled down, a group of women were transforming her into a European 'white bride'; with a long white wedding-dress, a diadem of paper flowers, imitation jewellery, and white bridal veil. She had white shoes and white stockings with garters under the knee.

A girdle was not yet part of the costume, though white European underwear was. The wedding bouquet was of white paper flowers.

It has become the fashion in Baghdad, and in certain circles in Sulaimaniyah, for the bride to wear European clothes when she arrives at the marriage house. Copied to the smallest detail, the dress worn by the bride at a church wedding in Europe has been adopted by Moslem women. But there is no religious ceremony connected with a Moslem wedding. It is a purely civil affair, a fact which raises the burning question of what to do with the bride in her gleaming whiteness. So in Sulaimaniyah they have introduced the custom of sending the white-clad bride on a round of presentations in the town before handing her over to her husband. The bridal car is decorated on the bonnet with a pink silk square and wrapped in yellow and pink silk ribbons with bows, like a box of chocolates. It is accompanied by a whole procession of cars, filled to bursting-point by all the women and children who have been guests in the bride's house. All these women, of course, are heavily veiled.

For the first time in her adult life, as well as the last, a Kurdish woman thus shows her face when, as a bride in white, she is sent into the town protected from strange eyes by nothing more opaque than a white European bridal veil.

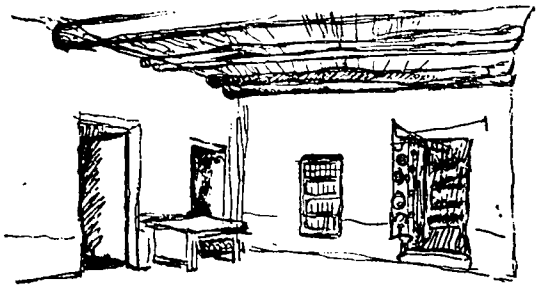
That a woman in a town like Sulaimaniyah should show her face, and especially her neck, as she does when she wears only a transparent white bridal veil, is so contrary to the Moslem view that it was very difficult to justify the white wedding dress. To me it was outstandingly the first portent of the time to come when all veils will be abolished in Iraq, as they have been in other Moslem regions.

The old woman did get back with the marriage sheet before ten o'clock. It was the small lumber-room which had had to serve as the marriage-room, and not the splendid pink room we had worked so hard to prepare. This was the fault of the 'in-laws'. Their encampment in the courtyard and on the terrace had after all been too much of a good thing for the young couple, and so they had sought more privacy in the interior lumber-room on

the two extra mattresses. The old woman sat outside and waited for the marriage to be consummated. She was not to be kept waiting in vain.

I asked whether in this case the bride would have been put to death if it had proved that she was not a virgin. It seemed an absurd idea in the context of European furniture and a white wedding dress. I was assured that she would first have been taken to the doctor. Nature does not make all women alike.

I gave a sympathetic thought to the young women down the ages who have been slain unjustly. But perhaps in a case of doubt old women will have cut the throats of chickens to save a girl's honour and conceal her shame.



3—*My Kurdish Costume*

In Iraq I had a full Kurdish woman's costume made for my own use. Lying in front of me now it is as out of place in the lighting of a Danish November day as one of those parrots which sailors used to bring home, and which dragged out the rest of their days in tall cages in overloaded drawing-rooms.

I consider its colours: turquoise, verdigris, lilac, violet, scarlet. They are just not true. Colours such as these cannot be put together in a costume. A glance at the colour photographs taken on the spot also refutes them. Even the small water-colours which I painted, because I think that colour photographs are sometimes at variance with the colours of Nature, give the lie to the colours used in my costume. Looking at them again, I find that they are indeed fiercer, more strident and garish, than I remember them to have been when I wore the costume in Kurdistan.

The point I am trying to make is that the lighting is an influencing factor. Just as the dry heat evaporated all moisture from the body, with the result that in spite of ample food one lost visibly in weight, in the same way the strong lighting burnt the harshness out of colours, leaving them with their rightful values. The high lighting and the scorched ochre, in the end almost

whitened, landscape make the choice of such colours correct. The same must also apply to the colours of the parrot in its homeland, though it did not compose them. Colours need not be harsh in order to prevail in the soft, low lighting of northern Europe, which deals kindly with every tone and hue, even the tenderest greys.

That I myself would never have dared to combine such colours in a costume is another matter. I should have lacked the necessary health and strength. Tentatively, I had ventured into the labyrinth of the bazaar alone, finding my way down into the lower roofed-in part where clothes stalls were concentrated. It was extraordinarily attractive. On a microscopic stage raised eighteen inches above the floor of the bazaar, against a setting of stacks of rolled-up coloured fabrics, reclined or sat the shopkeeper. The stage was brilliantly lit. You began your shopping sitting, as it were, by the footlights. On an opposite stage sat a tailor, spreading a layer of cotton material for a lining over some light-blue brocade. Behind him a third person was sewing on a treadle machine. Across the covered-in passage between the stalls the finished garments hung on clothes-lines. From the gangway where I was standing two side-alleys led. Everything between heaven and earth was obtainable in this bazaar, and each stall presented a scene of *disarray*. To shop here was indeed a pleasure. If you sat down beside a stall, all the passers-by who had nothing in particular to do would crowd round to give a hand. Small boys, who plainly began earning a living at an early age, would fight for the chance of carrying purchases home.

I abandoned, however, any idea of buying the materials for my costume myself. It is true that by this time I had lived for about a month in my village home and seen the women of the house in many different costumes in a variety of colour combinations. I knew that the predominant colours were lilac, scarlet, and turquoise. The materials with which I had become familiar I could see lying about on the stall shelves. I recognized the fabrics which I had seen in use in the village. I had learnt the names of the many parts of which a full Kurdish woman's dress consists.

Moreover, a clothes dealer in the bazaar knows exactly how much material each garment takes. In addition to all the magnificent coloured fabrics, he also stocks, whereabouts on his little stall I cannot tell, the white cotton material—of stout English quality—required for lining the various garments. From odd corners he produces bundles which he opens, revealing all the accessories: the felt skull-cap, silk kerchiefs, and the rest of the articles required to go with the turban headdress.

But to buy these things on my own was impossible. So firmly are we wedded to the visual patterns of our own world, so limited to its demand for certain colour schemes, that this alien wealth of colour is beyond us. Of course with the means available I should have been able to compose a costume. But I realized that, try as I would to forget my own continent and its colour schemes, they would be at work in my subconscious mind, leading my hand to a choice which in one way or another would be a European choice. And I wanted a genuine Kurdish costume, one which had nothing at all to do with Europe.

Putting off the decision, I sought the aid of my Kurdish interpreter. To go shopping with her was really interesting. Incidentally, at first we nearly disagreed. She refused to agree to my having a costume like those which were worn in the village. A costume I should indeed have, and a Kurdish one, but the sort of costume that was worn in Sulaimaniyah. However, I insisted that I wanted a costume like the ones I had seen worn by the women of my village; and sighing at my dismal approach, she deferred to my wish. She also consented to shop in the covered streets of the bazaar, at the stalls where the village women bought material for their costumes, instead of in the newer shops where printed Japanese nylon predominated.

Accordingly, we made our way to the cloth stalls in the roofed-in streets of the bazaar, where, swiftly and unhesitatingly, my young Kurdish friend chose materials in colours that were just 'off' what I would have chosen, when they were not at the opposite end of the scale. She argued that you could combine any colours; though that, in fact, was exactly what you could not do. You

could not combine the colours which I should have chosen. That was just the point. Of course, she wore her black *aba* over her head, as well as the black veil. Two other black ghosts, women from the village who had come thus draped for shopping in town, greeted us. They do not wear this black disguise in the village. It is an odd feeling to be accosted by such a black bundle, which conceals everything until the lady kindly raises her veil.

I could never make out how one black bundle of clothes could recognize another when they met in Sulaimaniyah. Occasionally in the evening, as we made our way out from the noisy inferno of the local cinema in the dark, I was at a loss to identify the black figures which belonged to me. They all looked exactly alike.

How concealed, how unbelievably *incognito*, a woman is in such a costume! Through her veil she sees other people; but no one sees her. She is unknown, unknowable, invisible; even more than she would be if disguised with wooden pegs in her mouth. It is a mystery to me that men will consent to talk to creatures so well camouflaged.

With my interpreter I visited a number of public offices, where the men would sit with uncovered faces like me, and their reactions during conversation could be observed in the normal way. Opposite would sit my interpreter hidden behind her black clothes. It was quite ludicrous to see her empty a bottle of Pepsi-Cola behind her veil. Visitors in this hot climate are always offered something to drink, and as a rule the choice is between hot tea and Pepsi-Cola, a beverage which, with its slightly stimulating effect, has had a fabulous success in Moslem regions, where spirits and even beer are prohibited. We paid several visits to this office, and in time the man knew the girl's voice. But he never saw her face, and never would; for he belonged neither to her family nor to its close circle of friends. A woman who sees everything while remaining invisible herself must be at an advantage; and I think that it must have a nerve-racking effect on the men. If it is true that the veil has its origin in a desire by men that their womenfolk should be unseen by other men, then I think that they are the chief sufferers.

I once saw my heavily veiled and black-cloaked female interpreter tame a crowd of big strong men who were standing round a bus. It was a local bus, and the time was late afternoon, getting on for evening. For some reason, I wanted to go to the Dokan Dam Site; but the bus was full, and it went no further than the village at the ferry-stage below the mountains where the Dokan Dam Site was situated. The first problem was to get on to the bus; the second to get it to go beyond its scheduled destination. Like a little tiger my interpreter went for the driver, the proprietor, the male passengers, and the crowd of sympathetic idlers who always in such cases assemble and take part in the proceedings. I would gladly have joined in, as the matter concerned me and my errand. But my vocabulary was of a different order from that which was required—and was used.

When at length the bus departed she remained the victor, though no one present had seen her face, or ever would.

So far-reaching was the effect of what she said that the driver dared not admit another passenger to the front seat, where he and I spread ourselves alone. There was plenty of room, and I must have looked amenable enough. But the extra passenger was left to hang on outside. I saw the fluttering fringes of his turban as he leant imploring towards the driver's window. My interpreter, however, had paid for two seats for me, and doubtless her threats to take the bus's number and hold the driver responsible to the mayor for my safety, together with the rest of what I could make out of her rapid torrent of speech, still rang in his ears. The extra passenger hung perilously on outside, and I, in time the only passenger left, was comfortably conveyed to my distant destination. I can understand a man—in this case several men—being cowed by a pair of flashing eyes, or by an angry look. The invisible face and the furious voice behind the veil had clearly made at least as great an impression.

I must add that it is not only the veiling which seems to work to the woman's advantage, in spite of opposite appearances. The same applies to other restrictions which govern the life of Moslem women. A European assumes that to live under them must be

dreadful. When you have seen them in force you cease to be quite as sure that the independent western woman is better off, for all her vaunted emancipation. In the west in the last half-century we have been very busy emancipating women and giving them equal status with men. After some months spent among what we should call suppressed and confined Moslem women I have begun to think; and I have come to the conclusion that I should hate in such a community—to be a man. At any rate in the towns; in the villages, on the other hand, it is possible to speak of equality.

In my town home at Sulaimaniyah one evening we had a ladies' party. In the hot evening air the clumsy guest-room, comprising sofas, chairs, and tiny high tables for tea-glasses and ash-trays, was moved into the courtyard. Mattresses were laid along one wall of the house for those guests who preferred to sit on the floor. It was assumed that I did not, for which reason I had to sit all evening on an over-high and very hard sofa.

The party was attended by four groups of women, a fact which made it exceptionally interesting. The first group, to which I and (on that evening) my interpreter belonged, wore European dress. Included in the group were other daughters of the house who had a school education. There was also a small group of women dressed in long, pink silk nightgowns. These women wore no ornaments of any kind and no head-veil, and they said 'bye-bye' in English when they left. They felt themselves to be very Euro-American. The really old-fashioned women formed the third group. These looked splendid in their colourful Kurdish costumes, similar to those worn by the women of my village.

These were mostly women with many children. Their gowns were flowered in blue and green; their sleeveless coats were of dark-coloured brocade; their turbans, hung with ornaments, were black and lilac. Round their shoulders they wore shawls of tulle: pink, green, or lilac. The two mothers of the house, both married to the same man, belonged to this picturesque group. These women sat on the floor mattress and smoked light, home-made cigarettes. Their positions were so plastic. Only when one

has tried oneself can one understand the degree of suppleness required in the hip-joint to enable the bended knees to fall outwards and on to the floor of their own accord. I often tried to sit that way myself, but it was impossible. We Europeans are too well provided with seats which accompany us throughout life. Whether walking or sitting we move our legs in one plane only, backwards and forwards. Orientals, on the other hand, when they sit make use of all the potentialities in the special construction of the hip-joint. The tendons which hold the bones of the hip-joint together are overstretched, and when the Oriental sits tailor-fashion the knees can therefore be laid out to either side. Indeed, they are not just laid down on the floor, they fall down under their own weight. The outwardly folded legs support the erect body without effort. It is very beautiful, especially because the Oriental completely relaxes and rests in the position he takes.

We Europeans have a certain motor beauty when we have any at all. We must be seen in action. Even when sitting still or lying down we do not relax: no more than a tractor on a road, which may stand still, but which still vibrates with the movement that is locked within it. Therefore one is repeatedly struck by the beauty of the completely relaxed positions of the Oriental.

Besides the three groups of women I have already mentioned —the one in European clothes, the one in the long nightdresses, and the old-fashioned one in Kurdish costumes—there was a fourth group. It represented the Kurdish town lady as seen in the local capital.

Her costume is made up of the same elements as the village costume. But how those elements are changed! The transparent gown is of flower-printed Japanese nylon or coarse, metal-threaded tulle. The colours, unlike the bold, vivid hues of the old-fashioned costumes, are the softest and most delicate pastels. The shift, reaching to the knees and covering the upper part of the long, gathered trousers, is a European or American slip with lace. And a narrow, tight-fitting belt is worn round the waist. It may consist of gold coins set side by side; but that does not

improve it. The original Kurdish woman's costume has no real belt; the long wide gown hung straight down, or was wrapped with a long, folded sash which often went round the hips. As for the headdress, this was no more. The unmarried women had no madonna veil laid gracefully over the head, in the way the charming daughter of my village home always wore one. The married women had no felt skull-cap with curb-chain, no wound brocade turban held in position by a forehead cloth. The women of this group were bareheaded, and, what is more, they were close-cut and permanent-waved in styles reminiscent of the bobbed hair of the 'twenties.

Where, then, was all the gold; that which, as part of the marriage portion, hung in the form of coins from the curb-chain, or in chains across the turban, of the old-fashioned women? The city-dressed women wore all their gold in chains round their necks, as belts, or as bracelets. One wore gold ornaments worth eight hundred pounds. The town lady had retained her sleeveless jacket, which was of white or pink brocade and had a whole row of gold breloques or small gold coins along the edges.

The town ladies sat, not on the floor, but on sofas and chairs. One thing was striking both in the group that were dressed in nylon and tulle and in the group that wore long nightdresses, as well as in the women who were in European dress. They often sat with their legs straddled and their knees turned out: reminders, of course, of their posture on the floor and the result of their flexible hip joint.

Nor had they really accustomed themselves to the idea that shoes were things to be kept on. In a culture in which one is incessantly removing one's shoes, or slippers of wood or leather, before sitting on carpets and mattresses, footwear is connected with dress in a strangely loose way. In all the homes where I lived the footwear stood around oddly ownerless where people had stepped out of it. What is more, it did not give the impression of belonging to anyone definite among the women of the household. It was used by all without permanent ownership. Those who had gone in for wearing European ladies' shoes therefore

had difficulty in getting used to the idea of keeping them on, and as often as not went bare-foot about the house. But as natural and beautiful as it looked to see a woman bare-foot in Kurdish costume, just as oddly wrong did it look when the young daughters of my urban home went bare-foot in short European dresses.

The women's party in the courtyard went its course in the warm, starlit night. The usual refreshments were served. First water with snow in it. The snow was kept from the winter falls in pits up in the mountains, and sold in summer in large lumps at the street-corner. Rinsing the dust off it, one put such a lump in the drinking-water. All used the same glass, but fresh water was poured in for each guest. This was followed by tea. In between, a mixture of many kinds of fruit kernels was offered round. They were dry and pleasantly salty. Later we had fruit. Earlier in the summer it had been large, mild cucumbers cut in long strips and strewn with salt; now it was sweet melons or slabs of juicy purple water melons.

Shortly after her arrival, one of the old-fashioned women had quietly gone to the courtyard tap at the little basin in the corner. Here she had carefully washed her face, hands, and feet, and thoroughly rinsed her mouth and nose. Then she had gone to the row of clothes hooks. Here, among the multitude of black *abas* belonging to the guests, hung the soft, grey-brown prayer rug with fringes. She had spread this out on the floor beside the hooks. She had then loosened her sleeves so the long tips hung down to the ground, tied her white head-veil firmly round her face and neck, and, quite unregarded by the rest of the company, made the prescribed obeisances: down on her knees on the floor, forehead to the ground; up into a standing position; and down again. Clearly she had not managed to say her evening prayer—one of the five daily prayers ordered by Islam—before leaving home, and was making up for it.

The children of the house and those brought by the guests eventually fell asleep where they happened to be. An influenza patient who had been resting indoors came into the courtyard.

This was a half-grown daughter of one of the guests. The sick were not left at home in spite of a visibly high temperature, for then they would have been alone, and that was a shame. She had a bandage tied tightly round her forehead just above the eyes; they said in order to relieve the violent headache. It was a remedy I often saw applied by both children and adults. She sat down on the sofa next to me. The water melon had just been served. I took the first opportunity to find another seat. True, I had been nursed and cared for with the utmost solicitude and in accordance with the directions given by the Arab doctor when, at the beginning of my stay in the town, I had been ill with a high temperature from some stomach trouble. As a patient I had lain on the floor in the guests' reception room and completely occupied it during the days of my illness. So I was very reluctant to be ill again. I knew, to be sure, that the doctor would be called in if necessary. It was not until later, when the influenza epidemic had become rampant and four or five people were ill in our house at a time, that the head of the family had issued his categorical prohibition: no doctor was to be called and no patients taken by cab to the doctor's. But in the meantime a little child had died in the house in spite of all the doctor's injections, and confidence in medical aid had been shaken.

Among the many women there was one I particularly noticed. She was big and handsome. She had a very rich voice and resembled the current idea of an opera star. Indeed, it was said that she was a fine singer. There was of course no question of voice-training in a country where school education, or education of any kind, formed no part of the pattern of a woman's life. She was a bride—the women are for the first year of their married life—and had given birth to her first child. She had not been so well married. Her reputation had not been altogether blameless. I tried to imagine the career which her beauty and rich voice would have made for her in a European society, and compared it with the destiny which awaited her: her beauty admired only by other women; the endless succession of childbirths; a small community closing round this splendid flower and letting it die away. Well, even

west of the Bosphorus there are communities where a woman so exceptionally beautiful may be born, live, and die with no large public to enjoy her beauty.

The party proceeded, the women enjoying themselves magnificently. There was plenty to talk about. Of course, they knew everything that was worth knowing. Women who do not waste their time on work outside their homes but who sit like spiders in the web of the house know much more about what goes on than we harassed independent women of the west with our, in many respects, so limited outlook.

Doubtless the same was true of our great-grandmothers. 'The hand that rocks the cradle . . .' and so on. Nowadays we rock too few cradles, and in our working life cannot see the wood for trees.

At about eleven o'clock the menfolk, father and son, came home. In the west the arrival of the husband and son in the late 'twenties would have been welcomed. The women would have adjusted their hair and the conversation would have become more animated with this addition to the party.

To most of the women present at this Kurdish party the new arrivals were strangers. Had they been Europeans it would have been disastrous. The women would have had no alternative but to rush into the house and abandon the courtyard to the newcomers. As it was they were Kurds; but nevertheless the women were under the obligation to cover their heads and necks. In the circumstances this was technically impossible, there being so many women present that in their efforts to get at their *abas*, which hung on hooks by the front door, they would have fallen over one another. And so they did something else. The whole party of women remained quietly seated as though the men were not there. The lords of creation, for their part, behaved as if they were invisible. The master of the house slunk self-effacingly to one side behind the women and slipped discreetly into the room where he hung his clothes on a peg for the night. He reappeared soon after, dressed in a long, red-striped nightshirt over baggy drawers. Stealing behind the row of women, he reached the ladder in the

corner and disappeared on to the roof in the dark, where under the stars his iron bed stood ready for him. None of the women appeared to notice him.

The son had gone into a room on the other side of the courtyard. A few minutes later he reappeared in striped pyjamas, and walked across to the wash-basin by the wall. Here he brushed his teeth and washed his face and hands, and then lifted first one foot and then the other into the basin. Then putting on his slippers again, he stole unobtrusively behind the row of seated women across to the ladder. And so he disappeared on to the clay roof, in order to go to bed on the mattress which lay there ready for him.

Incidentally, I looked enviously in the direction of the men. I was tired from trying to follow the conversation in a language of which by this time I understood something, but which was still difficult to understand when many people were talking.

My bed also stood ready on the roof. I liked to sleep under the open sky. It was pleasant to see the arrival of the morning. The stars would grow pale, the sky quite grey, and then the sun would rise. All round the roofs of the town people would begin to throw off their quilts. Long pyjama legs would come out of beds. Fully dressed women would get up and draw back the curtains from cradles. Bedclothes would be rolled up and covered. Only the bare iron bedsteads would remain. A whole town would wake up and rise in the morning sunshine.

To return to my Kurdish costume. This proved to be very handsome, with long brocade trousers in turquoise, a lilac satin shift, which in the goodness of her heart my interpreter cut like a European petticoat, and a purple voile gown with inwoven silver threads. As Kurdish women's costumes should, it reached down to the ground and trailed a little. There is something extremely fascinating in the sight of precious fabrics trailed over stone courtyards and clay floors, their colours glowing against the yellowish-grey of the clay walls. Kurdish costumes seem to suggest the appearance of medieval women's costumes, with their vivid colours and trailing skirts, in rough bare rooms which otherwise it is difficult to imagine could be inhabitable.

The gown had the customary long sleeves with cuffs which ended in a wedge-shaped tip and reached to the ground. It is only during prayers that sleeves now hang down like this. Otherwise the tips are tied together in a knot, which is thrown back over the head, when the sleeve covers the arm in soft folds to a little below the elbow. A long coat, which was also of lilac brocade, was padded and lined below with scarlet satin. The lining was visible when the two bottom corners, according to Kurdish custom, were thrust into a slit in either side-hem. The tucks gave the rococo-like effect of panniers. When a coat or jacket is worn (in winter both), the long tips of the gown sleeves are drawn through the sleeves of the coat or jacket and are wound round the forearm outside. For head-dress I had the usual black felt skull-cap with a curb-chain. A coin was sewn on to the top of the skull-cap. There was a loop in the middle of a green tulle shoulder kerchief, to fix round the coin and enable the nape of the neck to be covered. The ends were crossed on the breast and tied round the neck. For turban I had a double-laid cross-strip of lilac brocade with black tassels, wrapped round with gold thread. After this had been wound round my head on top of the skull-cap, with the ends hanging down my back, a black silk kerchief with brown and white patterns was folded tight round my forehead. The dull brown pattern of the kerchief seemed quite out of place among these pure, vivid, and unbroken colours; but it belonged to the costume.

I had a pair of leather slippers with gold embroidery made for me in the bazaar, as none of those ready made would fit me. The costume was partly machine-sewn and partly hand-made. My interpreter made the long trousers on her sewing-machine. I wanted to have the gown made by hand, as to machine-sew such beautiful material seemed like vandalism.

I watched her cut out the gown. So ingeniously are the various parts of the material integrated into the pattern that not a millimetre of the material I had purchased was wasted. It is a tremendously effective use of a woven fabric, and yet one with very old traditions. The measurements, which had to be marked off before

she could begin to cut the material, were done by hand. Dexterously she marked off so-and-so many hand-breadths, measured by the distance between her outstretched thumb and little finger. I began to comprehend such ancient terms as feet and inches, those old human measurements which would always be within reach. As I have said, my gown was to be hand-made. I can see her before me as she sat down to sew. She wore her own Kurdish dress; the white head-veil of the unmarried woman lay round her neck. She sat on the chair, but crouched on top of it, as though squatting on the floor, the material she was working on laid across her drawn-up knees. Her bare, intelligent feet she had placed one over the other on the edge of the seat.

To make sure that my costume was in fact a true village costume, I took it wrapped in a bundle one day to the village where I had lived for so long; I wanted to see it on the pretty young daughter of the house, simply in order that I might learn to wear it. Every costume has its own special way of being worn and one must have known it for years in order to do it properly. We are so tied to our time and environment that without instruction we cannot wear the costumes of other periods or other regions. It is impossible to wear historically or geographically unfamiliar costumes without some knowledge of the way it is done.

When I arrived at my village home, the daughter at once understood why I had brought my large and indeed heavy bundle. European clothes are incredibly light compared to all the garments which a Kurdish woman has to wear at temperatures as high as 120 degrees. The young woman put on my costume, making the change in a squatting position. Like lightning she had changed from her own costume into mine, one intended for a married woman. At no stage of the change did she reveal as much as the merest glimpse of her naked body. This fact put me in mind of another situation.

During my stay at their house she one day asked permission to try on one of my perfectly ordinary Danish summer dresses. She was anxious for me to take a photograph of her in this attire. While I was photographing her in the courtyard a couple

2. Making tea on the baked clay terrace in front of the house. Water has been brought in a petrol can. Topzawah.

The daughter of the house cooking as she squats in front of the kitchen fire. Topzawah.

3. Goats are milked in the mountains above Topzawah.

My village home, the sheikh's farm at Topzawah.

of women passed the gateway, going to fetch water at the garden pool. The young daughter of the house suddenly disappeared from the range of my camera as though sunk into the ground. I raised my head and looked round in bewilderment. Where had the girl gone, and why? If anything so unthinkable as a European man had appeared at the gate I could have understood her disappearing, perhaps even if it had been a Kurdish man; but they were only women, and moreover from the village. I found her in the gloomy, cavernous kitchen. There she sat, crouched in a squatting position with her arms flung round her body, frightened out of her wits lest anyone should see her in such a fantastic and indecent dress which revealed her legs bare to the knees and her arms naked to the shoulders. Suppose it was reported in the village that its highest-born girl had been so dressed, if only for a moment and in her own home?

My Kurdish costume met with her absolute approval. Her enthusiasm for the colours and their combination convinced me that no trace of a European approach to the sort of colours which will and will not go together had slipped into its colour scale. She was dissatisfied with only one thing. The lilac colour of the long coat was a repetition of the colour of the turban and the short jacket. I subsequently changed the lilac coat for one of turquoise brocade, which would undoubtedly have won the approval of my young friend in the village had she seen it.

Otherwise, as I have said, she was delighted with the costume I was taking home to Denmark. It did indeed look splendid when, a little embarrassed at wearing the headdress of a married woman, she appeared in the large living-room of the farm, where she walked up and down with the purple voile of the gown trailing behind her.

It was impossible for me to explain, even had I been able to speak her language better, that that costume would never look quite so beautiful again. Not even if a girl of her own age, seventeen, wore it in my home country. Women acquire a distinct gait from walking bare-footed for a large part of the day. They also acquire a distinctive carriage by carrying burdens over

a certain size and weight on their heads. It straightens the back and neck and moves the head into place, making it really look as if it rested on the spine. During the time I lived in her parents' house I had seen her carry out all kinds of household work. In all that she did there was a matchless beauty, strength, and grace.

For that matter, she was not alone in walking so beautifully on her feet and bearing her body so erect that it became perfectly natural, and not merely an affected fashion, for the bosom to be emphasized. While I was staying at her house in the village a stream of women flowed through the gate across the courtyard, along the rough path between the garden and the house, to fetch water at the pool. We had a spring behind the house on the farm land, an excellent spring with good water. Only in a country where even biggish water-courses will suddenly dry up in the summer can the significance of water be understood.

Before going to Kurdistan I do not remember having drunk many glasses of water in the normal course. We drink so much else. Since returning home, I can never tire of looking at a large glass full of pure, clear water with small pieces of ice clinking against the sides. Our spring ran down into a rectangular bricked pool and left it again by a gutter which disappeared under the wall. A low, semi-circular bank had been built up round the pool, so that the gutter through which the water flowed out was more or less hidden from anyone approaching it along the narrow path. Where the spring water ran down into the pool drinking-water was fetched. It was carried away in petrol cans which were pretty heavy when full. Water could also be fetched in pitchers. Like the rectangular petrol cans they were swung on to the left shoulder. Unlike the cans the pitchers had a handle that could be held. They indeed were more in accordance with what one would immediately expect women to fetch water in, having in mind the well-known picture of Rebekah at the well. Water could also be carried in a goatskin bag. This was a whole skin, of which the neck and limbs protruded from the filled body when the woman carried it away. The barrel-shaped skin bag

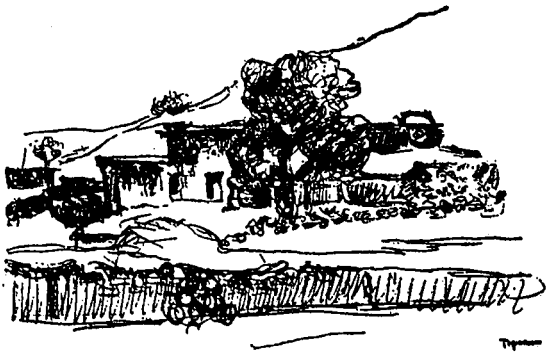
was not carried on the shoulder but lay across the woman's loins, and she held it with both arms; she thus acquired a less handsome, jaded, and bent carriage. When using the other water containers, however, the women held their bodies stretched in an S-shaped curve. One fully understood that Rebekah looked very beautiful when Elieser saw her for the first time.

The women took their time when they visited the water pool. There were so many things to do once they were there. The washing of hands and face was not associated with any morning toilet. On the other hand, it formed part of the preparations for the daily prayers. These could also take place here. Where the spring flowed into the pool lay a very large and quite flat stone, just big enough to provide space for a woman kneeling with her forehead to the ground.

One day I saw an old woman go through the whole ritual by the pool in the garden. Where the water left the pool she squatted down over the gutter and turned down her trousers. This was done with great discretion under all the other clothing she had on. Running water for the subsequent washing she had in the fullest sense close at hand. Of course she used the left hand. The right hand she did not use, as that is the one for eating with. Next she washed her face and hands, rinsed her mouth, and sniffed water into her nose from the hollow of her hand and spat it out again. This took place at the middle of the pool. Then she went farther along the pool to the large flat stone. Here with the hollow of her hand she splashed water over her bare, sinewy, very old feet with their long yellow toe-nails, tied her head-veil firmly round her face, and performed the prescribed motions of the Moslem prayer, standing and kneeling on the stone. Finally, she filled her petrol can with fresh water and went away. There were many of us women by the pool at the same time.

Some of the water of our spring was carried by a gutter outside the farm wall. Many women also came to this place. From the roof of the house one evening at sunset I saw a woman at the spot. Sitting down at the spring she washed her face, hands, and feet, and dried herself on her white head-veil. Then she rose, tied

the veil firmly round her head and neck, and carried out the prescribed obeisance. She then loosened the veil so that it hung freely down her back and swung the can full of water on to her left shoulder. Her left hand she placed on her hip with the fingers outstretched behind, and she held her right hand above her head to support the can of water. Then with a toss of her hip she walked off in her bare feet into the blue twilight.



4—*A Child and a Servant*

My village home was a large farm standing high on the mountain slopes. The living-room, which was flanked by two smaller rooms, was a deep and windowless apartment, lacking an end-wall on the courtyard side. It had clay stucco walls and a ceiling of heavy crossbeams, with the flat mud roof visible through the layer of branches and mats which bore it. Swallows nested under the rafters and the farmyard hens and chickens ran in and out on a floor consisting of a clay foundation covered by a thin layer of concrete that was watered repeatedly during the day to cool and moisten the air. Against the walls stood two clumsy unpadded wooden sofas and matching armchairs, with hard seats and broad arm-rests where the tea-glass could be placed. The occupants sat facing one another like passengers in a railway carriage. With increasing heat the furniture was moved deeper into the room, where it was darker and cooler. The flanking rooms were narrower and had low windows. On the rough hard-packed clay floor of one of them stood the family's brightly painted metal chests, a table, and wardrobes. At the beginning of my stay there was also an iron bedstead, but this was moved later into the courtyard. The other room had a cement floor, on which rugs

and carpets were spread for sitting on. A small door in the end-wall with a step leading up to it opened on to a little windowless chamber where there was a basin built into the floor. This was the *hamam*, or family bathroom. A large vessel behind the room could be filled with water and heated by a fire, and it would then be possible to take a bath there. The water ran into the basin and the washing was done with a small metal bowl, the bather sitting in the hot room on a low wooden stool. Behind this room were store-rooms, where shoulder-high earthenware jars, decorated by the impression of the fingers with broad borders of clay, served as receptacles for corn, and where such farm implements as the plough and sickle were kept. The men who worked in the sheikh's fields would come here for the implements and hand them in later. Here the flakes of bread were kept in large baskets; and here meat would hang from hooks in the ceiling, though in the heat of summer only from one day to the next. Here, sometimes, would stand the large hanging cradle where the servant's baby was laid to sleep. A dark and awkward flight of clay steps led from the store-rooms up to the flat roof of the house. Outside the living-room and the two narrow flanking rooms was a clay-built terrace, from which a flight of cemented and very high steps descended to the irregular beaten-clay surface of the courtyard. This was enclosed by low wings which could be overlooked from the terrace of the house. In these were the kitchen, bakehouse, stables, and a small gate-house with a wooden gate which was closed in the evenings. The dwelling-house was built of sun-baked clay bricks, some of the outhouses being of stone. The plan of the house was at first incomprehensible. The roofs were on several different levels; as for the ground-plan, the various wings met nowhere at right angles. I tried to puzzle out the plan from the roof of the house but never really succeeded. Kurdish houses completely follow the lie of the land. Not only does the building material make them one in colour with the landscape, but the way in which they smoothly and flexibly follow ridges and irregularities unites them, as it were, with the earth of which they are built. They are unbelievably

picturesque. Straight lines and right angles do not exist. Door and window openings in the thick clay walls are irregularly shaped and have rounded corners. It was ludicrous to see wooden doors and gates, or rectangular window-frames, set into these openings. I passed such a wooden door one day. Behind it lived a woman who had moved into a leaf-hut in the field, the sort of structure which people built when they had no roof to which they could resort when the heat of the summer became really intense. Our harvested fields were full of these leaf-huts. Four forked and crooked poplar trunks bore the roof, which was thick with many layers of branches with leaves on them. At first they would be green, and then as they withered would turn yellow and brown.

The principal purpose of the leaf-hut was to keep off the burning sun. It was really a roof of leaves erected on poles, with walls on three sides which consisted of mats or thin vertical stakes interwoven with branches full of foliage. Under this canopy of leaves the family would encamp, taking such household utensils as they required.

Leaving her clay-built house in this way, the old woman had taken care to put a large padlock on the wooden door. But the opening in the wall happened to have completely different lines from the door. There were places where the whole length of one's arm could be thrust in between the door and the surrounding wall.

When the 'black wind', the dust storm, raged, and the village was enveloped in a yellow fog, gates and windows would be torn more and more loose from the surrounding wall. I would shudder when I heard the door outside my room rattle in the night. When would it break loose? Building the clay houses was quick work. I watched it in progress over a fairly long period. Clay for the bricks would be mixed with water, using the bare feet. Water would be brought in bags, unless enough was obtained from a small ditch which would have been dug to the site. The clay would then be shaped in a wooden frame, the contents being afterwards laid out to dry like peat. In a few days the

bricks would be ready. The wall was built with the help of a length of taut rope but without the use of a spirit-level. It would be erected round the site used for mixing clay for the bricks. The floor was not dug out until the walls were completed. Consequently, the result was not very flat, and no subsequent attempt was made to straighten it out.

Later the wall was plastered with a layer of clay mixed with straw and water. The houses were quickly built, but were not very durable and soon began to look dilapidated.

There was a good deal of domestic work to be done in a large house like my village home; it was only gradually that I realized how much. And I did not immediately find out how the household work was apportioned.

The adult women comprised the mother, the daughter, and a servant, and there were also two little girls. The female members of the family, without exception, had to wait on the males, the father and three sons, the youngest of the sons being only seven. The women of the villages do not wear the black veil and black *aba* which are worn in the towns. The family life in the villages is more like family life in the West, the segregation of male and female being less clearly marked than in the towns. The village home was collective in quite a different way from the urban home. Both male relatives and male friends visited our house in the village. But no European man had ever set foot inside the door; he would get no further than the guests' reception room.

When European men passed the gate into the courtyard as they descended from the loggia in the guest wing they would have no idea that pressed up against it would be two very inquisitive women, the young daughter of the house and the servant. They would each have chosen a peep-hole in the gate in order to get a tiny glimpse of what they had never met and would never see at close quarters—a European man.

Most of the day-to-day work fell to the servant and the young daughter, who for her seventeen years was astonishingly capable. But they were assisted by someone else, the elder of the two little

girls, aged twelve. A large, pretty, but very tousled head of hair hung down over her gold ear-rings. She had the shambling gait which comes of constant fatigue. She would be in regular transit between one and another of her many tasks from dawn to midnight. One day as we were crossing the courtyard together I took her by the hand for the first time. It was as hard and calloused as the hand of an old woman. I had to lift it up and examine it before I could believe it. She was a step-daughter. Children of divorced parents when not very small remain at home with their father. She was not ill-treated; far from it. She just happened to be the elder of the little girls. In a country without compulsory school attendance, where such educational opportunities as exist are open only to boys, little girls are cheap and always available labour. There are no technical aids to house work, which is based entirely on human labour power, including that of children.

If a member of the family squatted on the terrace outside the farm living-room to wash his hands, it was Atja's job to fetch the metal bowl, soap, and jug, and pour water for him. When her father and half-brothers came home it was her duty to get them a change of clothes and shoes, or the pyjamas which they wore in the house. She had to stand at the table where I had my meals with an adult member of the family and whisk away the flies. In the face of all my protests she dragged water on her frail little back into my room. The common washing facilities down by the garden pool I had soon found too involved, and so a few days after my arrival I had got some bowls in the room where I slept. But they regarded it as an insult to the house if I tried stealthily to fetch my own water. Unfortunately, one soon grows accustomed to being waited on.

Another of Atja's tasks was to take the heavy food trays, dishes, plates, and the still heavier tinned copper pots to the pool by the spring where they were washed up. When tea was to be made she had to fill the inside of the samovar with charcoal or embers, taken from the fire in the dark kitchen. The heavy fire-irons with which she carried them, and which were shaped

like a pair of huge tweezers, she managed with incredible skill.

She would be in full swing when I woke up at six o'clock in the morning. While the grown-up daughter or servant was shaking the goatskin bag in which butter was churned, Atja would be busy sweeping the yard. She did this in a squatting position. With a short-handled broom made from palm-leaves she would sweep the place fairly clean and herself incredibly dirty. The sweepings she scooped with her bare hands into an empty petrol can, which did not make her any cleaner.

One day, in a sudden fit of energy, the head of the family decided to roast some corn on an open space behind the house. The roasted corn was later shelled in a stone handmill. When boiled it tasted excellent, rather like rice or nut kernels. Incidentally, the mistress of the house came out during the work and took away all her husband's pleasure by pointing out that he should not have used ripened yellow corn but the green half-ripened. His face took on the expression of men the world over when their wives show themselves to be the wiser.

The sheikh, however, thoroughly enjoyed roasting his corn, which was spread out in a thin layer on the ground before being set alight. But the finished corn had to be removed so that a fresh layer could be spread, and this job fell to the little girl. The roasted corn was gathered up and placed in a tinned copper vessel, and the burnt straws taken away. All the work was done with her bare hands. It was breezy that day and the smoke from the fire blackened and streaked the girl's face. She was hustled. It was too slow for the lord and master. As patiently as a beaten little donkey the child worked away, the pace getting faster and faster. To make as great haste as possible she thrust her bare hands into the still smouldering corn, and her hands must have been tough indeed to be able to do this.

The father saw nothing remarkable in letting his little daughter work like this, and she herself appeared to find nothing strange in it. Perhaps there was something wrong with me.

When tea was made after meals Atja went on her regular service with the filled and emptied tea-glasses. In this, however, she was not alone. Her younger, eight-year-old half-sister and even her seven-year-old brother gave a hand. Unlike Atja, her younger sister had a sheltered position. For one thing she was, of course, younger; and for another, she was well aware that in time she would be a very pretty girl. She was incredibly conscious of her femininity: a fact not so very remarkable in an environment where the knowledge that a woman's most important mission after all is to get married and have children is not obscured as it is with us. She already bore her flat little body with assurance and wore a smile when she shook her small gold ear-rings, as much as to say that she knew very well she would grow into a great beauty. But I have seen even her pulled up and pushed away from the felt mat on which one of her brothers wanted to sit. Atja also was extremely charming, but she had that look of endless toil in her body and carriage, and the black rings under her eyes told of a chronic lack of sleep. In this respect, too, the younger sister had a great advantage. She was allowed to sleep when she felt like it, and for as long as she wanted.

No children in Kurdistan are put to bed. All the struggle, persuasion, and trouble familiar to us is therefore non-existent. Children stay up till they are tired and fall asleep on the spot where they happen to be. Then later in the evening they are moved to more suitable sleeping places. In my town home, where there was a swarm of children of all ages from four months upwards, I have helped to sort out a group of them who lay sleeping with their bodies, arms, and legs over one another. The pile was disentangled and the children were disposed for the night.

If children feel like a sleep during the day they lie down just where they happen to be and are covered up by a passing and an affectionate hand with a mosquito net, a head-veil, or whatever object is nearest. In my urban home I would often just miss treading on, or putting something down on, a sleeping little bundle which happened to lie across my path. On their evening

visits mothers would bring with them their children of all ages. When it was time to go, the sleeping infants would be lifted up in their arms and carried off under their black cloaks. All the ritual of washing, teeth-cleaning, and undressing which is required of Western children was entirely unknown. Children, like adults, slept in their daytime clothes: boys in long striped shirts, sometimes with trousers underneath; girls in small frocks and with little underwear. In the village, on the other hand, girls usually wore a smaller version of the adult costume.

When the eight-year-old daughter of my village home felt sleepy after supper she would drop off on the nearest mattress, generally along with her seven-year-old brother. The brownish goat's-wool prayer mat or some other rug would be spread over them until, later in the evening, they could be carried into another room. As the summer advanced and the family lived on the roof, the two children would creep into one of the big communal beds made by the carpenter for the purpose. Other houses in the village did not have such splendid beds. There they slept on mattresses which were unrolled on the bare floor, or on a foundation of branches resting on four empty petrol cans. The little eight-year-old got plenty of sleep. Her cheeks were round and red and there were no shadows under her eyes.

But the twelve-year-old! After late supper there was washing up. In the darkness which had suddenly fallen she would take a lamp, lift the metal pan containing the dirty bowls and plates on to her head, and go off behind the house in the direction of the pool; or, without a light, she would dive into the pitch-dark room where the food had been cooked on a fire to get embers for the samovar. Meanwhile, her big sister would get the tea ready, and she would have to carry the tea-glasses round. Atja's many duties left her no time for a siesta in the middle of the hot day such as we others got. On starlit nights she would wait on the rest of the family, a little patient shadow, till midnight. In moments when there was no tea-glass to fetch or take away she would sit, like a poor little idol, next to her big sister who sat enthroned behind the samovar. I saw her on many an evening

swaying as she sat, only half awake. Not from cruelty, but merely from ignorance that growing children need more sleep than grown-ups, she was never allowed to rest, but would be nudged and given a glass of extra-strong tea to rouse her. It was her pallid little face which made me less sorry to leave the village at the end of my stay than I should otherwise have been. One must never interfere in the way other people bring up their children. But sometimes it can be difficult to refrain.

The last I heard of her was that, besides the duties she had had in my time, she had been given the job of going into the mountains and milking. Generally, it was the work of adult women to go out and meet the village herdsman when he brought sheep and goats for milking. It had been the servant Gulla's job. She, however, had gone out of the family's life and now the work had been laid on Atja's frail shoulders.

For her board, and clothes for herself and her two children, Gulla, who was a widow, worked all round the clock. Where she went off to sleep I never really discovered. Late in the evening she would shoulder her three-year-old girl and take her boy of a year and a half on her arm and vanish into the darkness. The farm had many rooms. Some were entered from the courtyard. They gave shelter to the livestock. But there were some that were entered from the mountainside. Gulla and her two children must have slept in one of these, when she slept at all. Her working day was hard and long. Sometimes she would go off at daybreak into the mountains with a donkey, a rope, and a crescent-shaped axe to fell trees and gather fuel. She would return late in the afternoon with the donkey heavily laden. Long branches were used in their full length, instead of being chopped into kindling-wood. They were laid cross-wise in one of the cooking-pits of the kitchen, which were formed in clay along one wall. On the fire was placed a reversed iron tripod, which rested on the semi-circular clay wall of the pit. On top of this went the tall, internally tinned copper pot in which rice was cooked. Either the rice was steamed with butter, onions, and other vegetables to make a rich dish, or it was steamed with water alone. In both cases

the cooking was done over the fire, and the one who cooked it squatted in front of it.

Nor were the branches chopped into sticks when the baking-oven was to be heated for baking. The long branches were bundled up and thrust vertically into the buried pitcher-shaped oven, which when not in use was covered with an iron plate. Goats walked about in the room where the oven was.

When branches were short I have seen the mistress of the house go round on the flat roof and stealthily pull some out of the eaves. But that, of course, could not be done on any large scale, for then the house would have collapsed, or at least the roof would have fallen in.

Gulla was as cheerful as she was dirty: jolly and plump in long red trousers, a lilac gown with red, blue, and yellow flowers, and a scarlet jacket. All these garments were of cheap cotton material. But over her shoulders, and also for the most part over her head, she had a silver-threaded silken shawl. It looked quite incongruous with her other cotton clothes and her consistently unwashed person. Her hair was dyed with henna a peculiar reddish black.

She had difficulty in keeping her children clean for reasons of clothing, time, and energy. The boy of a year and a half crawled all day long on the floor in a little cotton shirt which was his only garment. It was frequently wet behind. For one thing the floor was often sprayed with water, and for another the boy relieved himself as he crawled around. He had his midday nap in the back room, in a large wooden cradle suspended from a rail. Sometimes the cradle, which could be taken to pieces, was pulled out on to the terrace. There he slept on some indescribably filthy sacks. On the day the fields were harvested he was given some fresh straw to lie on. How it suddenly struck me that the infant Jesus had really been well off in His straw-filled manger!

The child had begun to stand up on his little crooked legs while I was in the house. It was amusing to see him being suckled, standing beside his mother in the huge men's shoes which he

had on his feet. Suckling a standing child is not so very difficult when the mother is seated on the floor.

I have never seen a child so overrun by flies; but they did not seem to trouble him. He used to crawl about the house, managing as best he could. But one day he tumbled over the edge of the terrace and fell head first down the high cemented stairs. I made him a nice bandage; but it was not easy to persuade his mother to leave it alone. She was far too curious to know how the wound was getting on.

The family were extremely good to the servant's children. Where in the West would a servant be allowed to have her offspring living in with her? But they were often petted in a rather heavy-handed manner; though the children seemed able to stand it. They had all the food they could eat and a little clothing to wear, and on rare occasions their mother would make an effort to wash them. But not very often.

Then one day Gulla had toothache; it was a huge gumboil. Gold fillings in teeth are rather common in Kurdistan; you go to Sulaimaniyah, and you either get a gold filling or you have your tooth extracted. I doubt whether there is a middle course. But in Gulla's world gold teeth were non-existent. They asked if she could have a sedative tablet, of the kind which had relieved a headache and the pain when the mistress of the house had had a tooth out. But in this case it was more than a matter of relieving pain; it was something which required attention.

Gulla sat crouching on the floor in a corner of the room, holding her swollen cheek in her hand, silent in her pain as though she did not expect that anyone could help her.

At the time I was staying with the family alone: my interpreter had yet to appear on the scene and I could not comprehend where the problems lay. For problems there were. Fortunately, the sheikh's brother turned up; he spoke a little English and was able to explain the position to me. It was as simple as it was cruel. Gulla did not earn any cash. Transport to the doctor cost money, and so she had to stay where she was. She was poor; and there was nothing to be done about it. I gained the impression that

poverty was looked upon as an inherited failing; like, say, a humped back.

As it happened, they had promised to drive me the next day to the Dokan Dam Site, and, of course, she went with me. I held her hand while the hospital surgeon gave her a penicillin injection in the thigh to remove the severe inflammation; only then could the tooth be extracted. Afterwards she thanked me with a fervour I would never have expected. Then with a waddle of her bottom she hurried off down the mountain to return to the village and her many jobs.

She must later have taken her two children on her back and wandered off somewhere else. When I visited the house later on in the summer she was no longer there and her milking duties, as already mentioned, had passed to Atja.

To see the herdsman coming down over the distant mountains with the sheep and goats was a magnificent sight. He would have his crook in his hand, and over his shoulders the coarse felt jacket, shaped like a bag and without arm-holes but with a pom-pom on each shoulder. This stiff jacket afforded as good a protection against the cold in winter as the heat in summer, and it was absolutely waterproof. Some of the women would have brought kids, whose plaintive little bleating would be answered from afar off by the mother goat. The women could tell their own livestock at once. The goats were milked from behind, not from the side like cows. They did not give much milk each, but we had many of them. The women carried the milk home in metal pails on the flat of the hand, which was turned backward and held shoulder high.

Only goats were milked in the mountains; the cows came home every evening. Standing on the roof at sunset I would see the herd of slender, agile animals come into view on the sunken road which led past the hill where the burial ground lay. Once they had reached the village they would find their own way home. They rarely made a mistake.

Cows in Kurdistan differ widely from cows in Denmark. They forage for food in the same mountains as the sheep and

4. *Left:* Veiled Moslem woman. Erbil.

Right: Woman in black *aba* and black veil entering our opposite neighbour's house at Sulaimaniyah through the narrow door in the clay-built wall.

5. Mother and child. Children are suckled until they are over two years old. Halabja.

goats. There seems to be little food to be had; only gorgeous blue thistles. Compared with Danish cows they give little milk. But how much milk would a Danish cow yield, if it had to make the days' marches in search of food which the cows of Kurdistan have to make? It was not until I saw these cows that I actually realized that cows can be nomadic, as, for instance, they are in Mongolia. I had never really believed it.

All milk was boiled immediately, the cows' and goats' milk mixed up together. When it had cooled to body temperature a handful of curdled milk from the previous day would be added to it, and it would then be left standing in the courtyard in a pot with a metal tray for lid. The result, the next morning, was the wonderful Kurdish curdled milk called *mast*, in Arabic *leben*.

When this curdled milk was put into a goatskin, which had been tanned with the bark of oak and thoroughly smoked for at least a fortnight in the bakehouse, it could be made into butter. The goatskin would be tied up at every opening so as to form a bag, and the curdled milk would be poured in through the neck. The lip would then be turned down and made fast with a woollen cord. Two spindle-shaped pieces of wood, one at either end, would hold the bag distended, and it would then be hung up by a rope over a beam in the kitchen or protruding from the clay wall in the yard. In other houses I have seen the butter bag suspended from a frame made from three sticks like the rudiments of a tent. A charm, which had been sewn up in a piece of brocade, was tied to the frame to make the butter successful.

The bag of curdled milk was shaken for a quarter of an hour. Some water was then poured in through the neck opening, and after this had been reclosed the shaking was resumed. The soft lapping of the butter bag as it rocked regularly to and fro is intimately associated in my memory with early morning in the village.

After a while the bag would be opened and its contents inspected. I have seen Gulla do this many a time. White lumps would have begun to separate. The whey would then be poured

off, more water would be poured in through the neck, the bag would be tied up again, and the lapping would continue. When finally the contents of the skin bag were emptied into a bowl or pot, there would be white lumps, large and small, floating in the whey. Nimble, not always very clean, fingers would gather and mix the separate lumps into one big one, which would be proudly displayed in the hollow of the hand with an invitation to taste. Buttermilk, called *do*, was very refreshing as a drink, though less esteemed than curdled milk and water.

The butter had a penetrating flavour of goat and was chiefly used in cooking. It was white and soft. I disliked it.

The butter was gradually collected in an earthenware jar and sprinkled with salt to keep it. Sometimes the hope of the family, the seven-year-old son, would feel a craving for something good. Climbing on to a chair or a petrol can, he would take down the earthenware vessel from its hook in the store-room, and removing the lid would scoop out a lump of the white, soft butter, which he would sit down happily to consume with the help of scraps of bread.

These would be pieces of the large, round, pancake-shaped wafers which were called *nan*. In the villages, and for the most part in the towns, the family baked its own supply of bread, which was not small. The family in my village home comprised ten people all told, and we baked two or three times a week. It was hot work, and yet none of the women removed any of their many garments for it. They would start baking in whatever clothes they happened to be wearing, whether the daughter had on her black chiffon gown with the spots of gold thread, or the mother her turban adorned with her magnificent array of gold chains.

The only precaution they took was to twist the long, pointed tips of their sleeves firmly round their forearms as a protection from the heat of the oven. This, which in shape was like a pitcher, was let into the ground. It was ventilated through a hole in the side and a pipe running into the floor a short way from the oven. The oven at our house was sunk into the ground in the forepart

of the goat-fold, as I have already mentioned. Skin bags hung from the ceiling to smoke. Parts of an old plough stood in the corner. Everything connected with baking took place on the floor of this room. The dough was shaped into lumps, which were laid to settle on a plastic cloth. Plastic cloths and battery receivers were both a part of the cultural pattern.

Mother and daughter would sit facing each other on an outspread felt rug. Each would have in front of her a rather low and small baking table made of wood; or it might be called a stool. It was a thick, rounded board supported by three or four short legs. The dough was rolled out with a thin rod, not a rolling-pin. The sheet was raised repeatedly into the air and slapped down on the baking-stool by means of the rod, each time getting thinner and thinner. It looked as simple as could be, and I had a try at it; I had rolled dough for cakes at home, at least during the Christmas baking. But Gulla's three-year-old girl could beat me at it. I consoled myself with the thought that the others, who were amazingly skilful, must have started at the same age and not been interrupted later in life by things so destructive of baking, and indeed any domestic pursuit, as school attendance.

When the sheet of dough was the size of a dish it would be carried by the wooden rod to a baking-cushion, which Gulla would hold out. The cushion, which was home-made and incredibly dirty, was shaped like a bag. Thrusting a hand inside, you took hold of it by a loop. The dough was given an extra stretch on this cushion and—now as thin as paper—was slapped swiftly on to the inside of the hot oven. The sheet would curl up and be ready baked in the short time which it took to prepare the next sheet of dough on the cushion. The baked bread would then be loosened from the side of the oven with a stick and thrown into a large flat basket, where a tall and rather wobbling tower of circular wafers would gradually rise. When freshly baked they were deliciously crisp. To make them keep they had to be sprinkled on both sides with water; otherwise they became dry and uneatable.

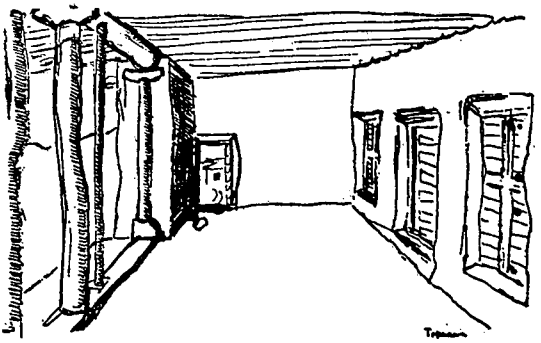
At meal-times the soft wafers of bread, looking rather like

wash-leather, were folded like table-napkins and laid on the table or food tray. Not only was the bread eaten with the hot food, it was used for eating it with. A piece would be folded, for instance, round a scrap of meat or lump of *kebab*, which latter may be described as a sort of oblong hamburger, pressed raw round a thin iron skewer and laid over charcoal embers until roasted, a process taking only a few seconds. In the same way, pieces of wafer would be folded round the stalks of onions, leaks, and lumps of boiled rice. Even curdled milk could be eaten with the help of a piece of wafer bread folded into the shape of a spoon.

In the village, I had described to the best of my ability the varieties of bread which we had in Scandinavia. The description which I gave of our dark rye bread evoked the greatest sympathy for anyone having to eat it; but then the same thing may be experienced in, say, England. The appearance of European wheaten bread was easier to understand, but still difficult. I thus had to show them what I meant, and twice I brought bread from the Dokan Resthouse, where the chef had learnt to bake it.

On the first occasion the womenfolk tried it on their own. They pulled it to pieces, found the crust acceptable, and threw the 'nasty' inside part away. The second time, besides a loaf of bread, I brought a packet of Danish lur-brand butter. It is touching to a Dane that there are so many parts of the world where our 'telephone butter' can be bought. (The two intertwined wind instruments of the Danish Bronze Age may easily be taken, by anyone unfamiliar with them, for a pair of old-fashioned telephone mouthpieces.) I saw to it that no one in the family made free with either the bread or the butter until I was there to help them. When I felt that the suspense had become sufficiently acute, I cut the bread into slices. This was rather a difficult operation in the absence of any such thing as a breadknife. It was surprising that there were no good household knives in a country where men carry large curved knives in their waistbands. But there were none. Having sliced and buttered the bread, I handed it

round. They were polite enough to say they thought it tasted good. Personally, I did not think so. In a way it did not go with the climate, the place, and the rest of the food. From then on I lived on the flat wafers of Kurdish bread and never missed European bread.



5—*The Child that Died*

In my town home I detected a faint and strange smell in the room where I used to take my siesta when it was too hot at mid-day to be out of doors. I thought at first that it came from the clay floor. But this was swept every day (with a broom made from palm-leaves) and sprinkled with water. It then occurred to me that perhaps it came from the cotton mattress on which I slept, or the straw mat on the floor underneath. But no, it was not there. And it was not the clay-plastered walls, where the family clothes hung on innumerable pegs and nails. The scarlet, bright-blue and brown chests piled in a corner were of metal; the smell did not come from there. Or from a wardrobe; a European one with a mirror. Usually this stood ajar and one could see inside to a heap of motley bundled-up clothes. That the wardrobe was a place where clothes could be hung up, or that it had once had shelves, were matters of no concern. Articles were kept in metal chests, in bundles, and on nails in the wall, in a strangely nomadic fashion, even in a house in the town.

My gaze then fell on the ceiling. This was 'nicely' covered with sacking, fixed on the inside with nails, and on the material were darker brown patches. I knew that the sacking concealed a layer

of stripped, gnarled poplar trunks laid across the room. The tree-trunks were overlaid by branches and straw mats, with a thick layer of clay over these. I had seen painted on the outside of the house the letters 'D.D.T.' and a date. The inscription could be seen everywhere. All Kurdistan, the capital as well as the villages, had evidently been disinfected. It was that smell which still faintly pervaded the room.

The room was without furniture, and the carpet which covered the floor in winter had been taken up for the summer and was stacked away in another room. Sometimes a mat and a mattress would be rolled out for me to lie on for my siesta. Sometimes at noon one of the large round metal trays containing food would be placed on the floor. In the town as in the country, the food consisted of a heaped-up plate of rice in the middle of the tray, surrounded by two bowls of vegetables in tomato sauce and, occasionally, meat. There were spoons for use with the bowls but not the dish of rice. Some of the large, wafer-like sheets of bread would lie folded on the tray like serviettes. As a general rule I was given a fork of my own, since I found it hard work eating with my fingers without spilling, though I was beginning to learn. At breakfast I had got quite skilful at folding up little pieces of bread and dipping them into the bowl of curdled milk.

Scalding hot tea was served after every meal, and it was always made by the senior wife. A black-haired, spare creature, she was the one who took up least room when she squatted on the floor. She required incredibly little space as she swung herself into position, her body as though suspended from her bent knees, in front of the samovar or the basket in which she prepared the meat. Her reach when squatting was quite astonishing, as I observed when she was ironing, a blanket spread out on the floor in front of her as though on an ironing board, or when she washed clothes at a tub in the courtyard. I suppose that I noticed her amazing reach most of all when she suddenly jumped up on to the edge of the small bricked-in basin in the corner of the court-yard to wash herself. The edge was only half as wide as the length of her foot. So fantastic, however, were her balance and agility

that after washing her face and hands she was able to stretch out first one foot and then the other to rinse them under the tap.

Many a time I have seen her seated on the floor, busily preparing vegetables while one foot—an apparently wholly unconcerned foot—kept the cradle rocker in regular motion. The baby she was rocking was not her own. She was the older wife and her three surviving children, out of eleven, were grown up. She did not know her age, but only that she had passed the climacteric, and had to dye her greying hair black with a mixture of henna and a greenish powder. I would put her in the early fifties.

The baby was the youngest child of the younger wife, a tall, handsome, and heavy-limbed woman. Before their marriage the husband had asked his first wife if she was prepared to accept this addition to the family. The two wives seemed to get on very well together. They shared the housework as good companions; they were as affectionate with each other's children as they were with their own, and they took it in turns to look after them.

The little boy, nearly six months old, was not well. His mother had no milk. She was not the only woman I met with during my stay in Kurdistan who could not suckle her baby. I asked a German woman doctor in Sulaimaniyah why this was so. The reasons she gave were the continual pregnancies, from which the women were unable to recuperate, often combined with inadequate or unsuitable food, deficient in protein. The wife who cooks and serves the family meals must make do with what is left over.

The baby at this house was fed on milk powder mixed with water, little attention being paid, as far as I could see, to the degree of strength or temperature. The handling of the bottle and teat was casual as regards cleanliness. Moreover, I do not think that the strong tea and unboiled water with snow in it, which were given by way of a change from milk powder, were fit for the child's stomach.

We had been to see the doctor with him. The journey had been made by open cab, with the mother holding her baby under

her black *aba*. During the drive the child had had on some rather motley baby clothes up above, and its mother had held a brightly coloured cloth under its little bare bottom.

'Green diarrhoea,' the doctor had said, with a shake of his head. A nurse came almost daily, giving the little creature injections of one sort or another. This nurse was one of the modern Kurdish women who have been educated, and she had taken up one of the two occupations which are open to women, and which it was hoped that many would go in for in the future. Hospital nursing was still carried out by males, or by women from the lowest social classes. The other occupation available to women of education was teaching at schools for girls, and of these there were not yet very many.

The nurse came, in the custom of Sulaimaniyah, heavily veiled. Under her black cloak she wore a pink silk nightdress with puff sleeves.

The sick child grew smaller and thinner day by day. Some of the women neighbours who were suckling gave him some of their milk, but it was of little use.

For hours the mother sat in dumb despair with the little thing lying across her knees. His big sisters would carry him about in their arms or try to prop him up on his stick-like legs; it was not customary to keep a sick child like this in bed. It was easy to see how small he had grown when, half lying, half sitting, he was placed on his baby's night-stool. This was a small, grey-painted armchair with a hole in the seat. A pot was placed underneath it, and the seat had a wreath-shaped cushion and a stuffed pillow at the back. It was a most practical object, this night-stool for children. They were put on it as early as possible, and they used it till they could balance squatting in the little room with the hole in the bottom. It was one of the few articles of furniture which always stood ready to hand in the courtyard.

The child died. I woke one morning and saw him lying, a flat little thing, on the stone floor, covered up with his mother's *aba*. Somebody had already been despatched to the bazaar to get a length of white cotton cloth for a shroud, and a moment later

the old mullah arrived who was to make the necessary arrangements along with one of the brothers-in-law.

Before his death the child had shrunk into the smallest human creature imaginable. *But he was a male;* and only males could now have anything to do with him. The old mullah removed his long grey caftan so that it would not hamper him as he worked. Hot water was got ready in the kitchen. The brother-in-law, without the aid of scissors, tore up the newly-purchased material. There was a large piece for the shroud, and two square pieces which would be folded into triangles and tied round the child's head, one over the crown, the other across the forehead. An oblong piece would make a shirt. Moistening it in the centre with spittle to make it easier to tear, the brother-in-law ripped a long slit in it as an opening for the neck. The shirt was not made up. But with a needle and thread the last piece of cloth was given to one of the women to be sewn into a bag, which would be used as a wash glove. The dead baby was to be untouched by hand, and would be lathered three times from head to foot. The brother-in-law stood holding the metal ladle for the hot water with which the body was to be rinsed.

A prayer rug, the only one in the house, was laid on the large box which stood in the ante-chamber to the bathroom. A large yellow bath sheet with which the body was to be dried was spread across it.

Picking the baby up the two huge men disappeared into the bathroom, to which no woman was admitted. I managed to catch a glimpse of them when, after completing their work, they tied the three strips formed by the torn-off selvages of the cloth round their little oblong bundle.

The brother-in-law then picked it up and carried it out of the house, while his wife set about washing the baby's clothes and the yellow bath sheet. The cradle had already been stacked away on top of the woodpile at the entrance to the kitchen. The mullah had left.

Meanwhile, the mother had sat speechless with grief. Of the fifteen children to which she had given birth this was the seventh

that had died. She sat on the stones in the courtyard, her right leg bent and turned outwards on the ground. Her left arm lay on her raised left knee, her head resting heavily in the crook. She remained seated thus as the women from the neighbourhood began to stream in. The mourning visits would last for three days, and the *hamam* (bathroom) would not be used by any member of the family for a week.

But an exception was made for me; I was not to be stopped from taking my daily bath, no matter how bad for health they might think it. The bathroom was at my service, and as soon as the little body had been removed I was shown in. The prayer rug on which the dead baby had lain was still in the ante-room; the ladle and vessel still stood in the bathroom itself. It would have hurt the family's feelings if I had declined the offer of it; and once I was inside and friendly hands had closed the door after me, the best thing to do was to take my usual cold douche without giving the matter a thought. It would not have been proper of me to come out at once.

The child had been a male; and only males had been allowed to handle him when dead. Some time later, in the house opposite, a little girl died, and again it was stomach trouble. We learnt of the death one afternoon, when women began to pour into the house for water. We had town water laid on, but the house opposite had only a natural stream flowing through the courtyard with not very clean water.

This house stood opposite a narrow unpaved alley which led past a small mosque, from where, day and night, especially when I slept on the roof, I could hear the muezzin proclaim the hour of prayer. He would summon the faithful to prayer, in his monotonous sing-song voice, five times a day. The winding alley ended at the other end in one of the main streets of the town.

On my first visit to Sulaimaniyah I had looked wistfully up this particular alley between yellow-grey clay walls, windowless and with only low, closed wooden gates in their thick walls. I had come to the town by the local bus from my village in order to

see the mayor about the possibilities of getting a female interpreter. Passing the alley, I had seen veiled women wearing black cloaks disappear into the houses. I had felt inclined to go down the alley and see where it led, but was afraid that if I strayed into these crooked alley-ways with their low houses I should never find my way out again.

The mayor, the *mutassarif*, expected me. As I have said, it was my first visit to the town, and a few minutes before some boys on a roof-top had hit me in the back of the neck with a stone. I was alone, knew little of the language, and could not ask my way if I happened to get lost. It had, indeed, been difficult enough finding out the time for my return to the village.

Getting off the bus on my arrival, I had gone round to the driver, and showing my wrist-watch, had made some circular motions with my index finger. I was trying to make him understand that I wanted to know at what hour the bus would return. He stared at my finger and shook his head blankly. He then sought the help of the other passengers and some sympathetic bystanders, but no one grasped what I meant.

At long last the driver seemed to have an idea, and called one of the many boys who swarmed round the bazaar; the bus had stopped in an open space among its many passages. The situation was explained and the boy beckoned me to go with him. It seemed rather odd that we should have to go elsewhere to find out the departure time, but of course I could not argue. Turning the corner into a bigger street, we crossed a couple of side-streets, and then, showing every sign of pride, the boy pointed—to a watchmaker's. Luckily, there was someone in the shop who could speak enough English to give me the information I required.

So I gave a wistful look at the black female bundles and stayed in the main street. Now, two months later, I found myself staying at a house in this same alley. There were no windows on the street side, and the only opening was the door, which exceptionally was made of iron. During the day it always stood open to give a draught, but any view of the interior was hidden by a flowered cotton curtain.

The house opposite was a very large one. Originally, it must have belonged to a rich man, but it was now very dilapidated and was occupied by many families. It had been condemned for early demolition and was to be replaced by one or more houses of more substantial material. It will be recalled that part of our own house had been pulled down and rebuilt in brick, and only one of the wings which enclosed the courtyard was still built of clay.

The house opposite had an immense unpaved courtyard in which were some scattered trees. In the middle stood some bare iron bedsteads on which the occupants of the house slept during the night, and, with no system at all, two heavy wooden sofas had been put there. The doubtful stream flowed through the corner of the courtyard. There were swarms of lean hens all over the place.

We had entered the courtyard together with other black female shapes, for, of course, the women of my house wore their black *aba* and black veil; in Sulaimaniyah a woman who wishes to preserve her good name and reputation cannot leave her house unveiled. The head of the family, as a matter of fact, had just grumbled because one of the growing girls of the household had not yet begun to wear a veil; at the age of thirteen she was considered too big to go without. On the other hand, a cloak would conceal any sort of clothing, from a full, gold-decorated costume to a long nightgown in which its wearer had just got out of bed or risen from the quilts.

Compared to the Kurdish women, I felt rather half-naked in a European summer dress with nothing to cover my arms and legs. I also felt poor. A Kurdish woman's costume can be both shabby and ragged. Besides, it is not always clean. Clothes that are slept and worked in continually for many days on end will show the marks. But the materials from which the dresses are made are truly magnificent. Silk, taffeta, satin, brocade, light muslins interwoven with metal thread, tulle, and velvet are the fabrics used. Even at their shabbiest and most ragged the costumes never lose their appearance of prodigal splendour.

As we women entered the courtyard through the low gateway in the clay wall we could hear issuing from the house the plaintive sound of voices rising and falling. Following the sound, we crossed the yard and passed through an open veranda into a windowless room behind. Here on the floor with their backs to the entrants sat three adult women, and between them on a red rug lay a small object covered by a towel. It was the little dead girl surrounded by the grandmother, aunt, and young mother. All together and without pause the three women uttered their wild cries of mourning over the child, who was said to have been 'so pretty and fat' a short while before. Loud wails alternated with singing eulogies. All three women wore gowns of black and white material and black turbans. Black is rarely used for anything but cloak and veil, but an uncle or some other near relative had died less than a fortnight before; hence the black.

At one point the young mother raised the towel which covered the child. I saw that it was not wearing what one would call night-clothes. A few garments of lilac silk and scarlet velvet covered the child above. Round the head was wound a piece of dark material which was tied tightly round the forehead. The legs and lower part of the body were bare.

A little way off stood the child's night-stool, smelling sour. Inside an adjacent room I could catch a glimpse of the cradle.

The lamentation rose and fell. The mother accompanied her wailing by striking her thighs with her flat hands in time with her wails. Her grief was poignant as an animal's. Suddenly she snatched the towel aside and flung her body forward between her bent and pointed knees over her little daughter, as though to prevent the child from being taken away from her.

A new person had made her entry, a middle-aged woman. Officious and talkative—I imagine with soothing and consoling words for the heartbroken young mother—she made her way in, pushing the grandmother and the rest of us aside. She was carrying an armful of white cotton cloth. She sat down on the floor beside the silent little figure of the child. Skilfully she measured off the piece that was to form the shroud. It was to be a little

longer than the child, both at the head and the feet. The other pieces of material were made ready. The piece intended for the wash glove was handed to one of my women for sewing.

Then the woman lifted the dead child into her arms. As she carried her off, to disappear from her mother's world, a little yellowish-green blob fell from the bare bottom on to the rug where we sat.

We followed the woman into the courtyard. In a corner a fire had been lit, and on it stood a large pot of boiling water. Beside it a woman stood ready with the ladle. The child was laid on a large upturned food tray and her clothes were taken off. Some of these were torn to pieces under the woman's busy hands. Then she picked up the wash glove and the lathering began. The child's hair and body were lathered. The mouth, the ears, and the genital opening were cleaned. When for the first time the child was raised into a sitting position, so that the woman could lather its back, it vomited.

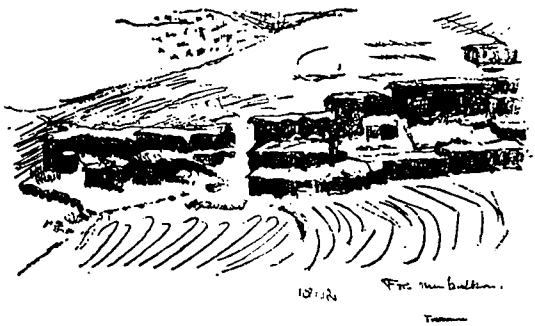
Three times the woman lathered the child and three times the other woman poured warm water over her. Then the child was dried, resting on a large towel on the woman's lap as though alive. Next the little, unsewn shirt and the two head bandages were put on. Finally, she was laid on the large shroud which was to serve for coffin, and which was folded up and wrapped in three strips of cloth: one in the middle so that the arms were held in place by the sides, one for the head, and one for the feet. A prayer rug was spread on the ground and the little white package was laid on it.

From a gate at the other end of the courtyard, where on entering I had caught a glimpse of the father, a man approached the white bundle on the prayer rug. On reaching it he raised it twice from the ground and laid it down again on the rug. The third time he kept it in his arms and carried it across the yard and out through the gate into the male world for a brief stay in the mosque, and then afterwards away to the distant barren hill with the erect bare stones that was the town burial ground.

While the woman had been slowly and carefully washing the body a wild chase had gone on round the courtyard. A cock was

to be caught, and its head cut off for burial with the body. Two deaths had occurred in the same family in the course of a fortnight and this sacrifice was to avert more. Evidently it is a custom with origins far back in paganism before the days when Islam became the religion of the Kurds.

The last thing I remember is the quivering headless body of the cock being carried by a woman holding its wings. The bird was twitching as though still full of flickering life, in sharp contrast to the little white parcel which the man had carried off in his arms.



6—Snakes and Scorpions

I have seen colour photographs of the big scorpions which appeared in the expedition camp at Tell Shemshara. They were red and lilac and the poisonous sting was clearly visible on their upturned tails. There were also hyænas and snakes out there.

In my village life I met very little of that kind. Scorpions I never saw there at all. The only one I did see lay one evening on my spotlessly clean pillow in my very English bedroom at the Dokan Resthouse. It was not much longer than a finger, whitish with a faint lilac shade. It rather resembled a crayfish which could bend its tail up over its back and sting. I managed to manœuvre it into a metal bowl and get rid of it by pulling the lavatory chain. The poor 'boys' were set the next day to ransacking the house and changing the bed-linen. As if they could help it that one of their native creatures had got into European territory, though the houses were completely sealed with metal mosquito nets at every door and window, so you looked out as through blurred spectacles!

That was the first and last scorpion I ever encountered. If there were others I never saw them.

With snakes my relations, as it were, were more personal. The fact is, I once had a snake living inside the roof of the room

where I slept. It was at the beginning of my stay at the sheikh's farm in the village, and before the arrival of my interpreter.

Of course I had no knowledge of the snake's existence. I slept in the guest wing of the house in an excellent iron bed which had been placed there in my honour. Every evening when I expressed a wish to retire I was escorted to my room by a party consisting of the two adult women of the house, mother and daughter, the two younger daughters, and the servant carrying a carbide or kitchen lamp.

Sometimes the escort included men; on one occasion the uncle, who wanted to make sure that the high windows in the thick clay wall would keep out the dust storm. 'Kiss me,' he said. But I quickly realized that he meant 'Excuse me'. Kurdish men when they learn English carry over all their traditional and elaborate courtesies; but the flowery phrases sound a little impoverished when transferred to English. All the host's assurances that the house is the guest's and all the requests for forgiveness if the guest has been in any way disappointed sound fine in their own language. That they are clearly not meant to be taken any more literally than our own social phraseology is, of course, another matter.

The train of attendants who with lamps and lanterns saw me out of the gate of the house, up the stairs to the guest loggia, and into my room was like a procession of ancient minstrels. Once we were even joined by the half-grown son of the house and a distant relation, a carpenter, who was staying at the house while working there.

The escort made sure that the pitchers contained water for my morning toilet, for I had abandoned the attempt to wash myself seated on the edge of the pool behind the house, with the womenfolk of the house or an assemblage of village women as admiring onlookers. They also saw that I had a lamp; that the lamp was filled with paraffin; and that I had some matches. In that house going to bed was a fascinating ceremony. Having finally convinced themselves that all was in order and the two wooden doors were securely fastened on the inside, my escort would move off smiling and waving along the loggia, the light from

their lamp playing on the colours of their costumes. First they would pass by my two long, low, and iron-barred windows; I would then hear them close the wooden door between the loggia and the little flight of stone steps; and finally there would be the heavy bang of the wooden gate into the house itself and the shooting of the bolts. The point was that I lived outside the actual house. From the two rooms which I occupied (one of which was later taken over by my interpreter) there was no passage which led direct into the courtyard. When the gates had been locked in the evening I was, in short, locked out. It was for this reason that my windows had iron bars and that the women took such great care to ensure that the loggia doors were properly fastened. The road ran straight past, and one night some men from a distant village had encamped round a fire just below, though I had heard nothing of them and the next morning they had gone on their way.

However, I felt little anxiety, even during the two weeks when I lived alone in my rooms. But when later on I was shown some fine revolvers which belonged to the house it suddenly dawned on me that they were not kept there for fun.

I never had any unwelcome visitor, however. One day when I was having my siesta and my windows, which reached down to the ground, were open behind the drawn, coloured cotton curtains, a hand suddenly appeared and thrust a flat package in between the iron bars, behind the curtain, on to the window-sill. I realized that it consisted of books, wrapped in a cloth. A mullah was passing by and had sat down to rest on the guest loggia. Later I had a quick glimpse of him as he left the house after having a meal with the head of the family.

Early one morning, at five o'clock, I had gone out on to the loggia, as it was such a fine sight to see the village wake up in the first grey light of day before the sun rose above the mountains. Small fires had been lit round about in front of houses, and women were going to fetch water.

Suddenly somebody tried to push the door open and enter the loggia. I succeeded in getting the intruder to abandon his attempt,

ignorant though he probably was of what it was all about. It was too early to disturb the family inside the house; and so, polite and well-mannered, he had intended to sit on the loggia, that being the most correct place to await a more convenient time. He could not know that I was staying in the guest-rooms, or that I had happened to get up early that day.

Each evening when my escort had left me and I had lain down, I would project the light from my pocket torch on to the ceiling above my bed, which stood in the middle of the room. The clay roof was so thick that it completely insulated the room against the summer heat, and it was so solid that it was thought to be as firm as the ground itself. Early in the summer the roofs became overgrown with patches of long grass. These gradually got more and more yellow, and by the time the hot and exceedingly dry air had become unbearable to breathe the roofs would be bare. On every roof there was an old wooden roller, which was used for reconditioning it after rain. What the roofs could least of all withstand was water. There was a sharp, heavy shower a day or two after my arrival. Only the horizontal bottoms of the recesses which were cut into the thick clay walls, and in which articles were stored (my camera, fortunately, among them), were proof against the thick brown paste, a mixture of rainwater and clay, which poured in from the roof. Everything else was deluged.

The roofs were quite pretty to look at. They were cushion-shaped and irregular in thickness, and the branches and tree-trunks which projected gave them an irregular, somewhat jagged edge. Poplar trunks, the timber chiefly employed, were used in the natural state, uncut into planks, poles, or squared beams. The wooden pillars of the loggias, instead of being straight and erect, were bent and twisted like trees in a forest. It was fascinating to look at, and I could never grow tired of studying the strange, animate, hand-made architecture.

The ceiling of the room where I slept was full of cavities. It was there my snake lived; but I never saw it. When the cone of light from my pocket torch combed that part of the ceiling which was directly over my bed, the place seemed as peaceful as the

fringe of a wood. The snake preferred to come out from under the eaves.

One morning I was explaining to the lady of the house, by means of signs and gestures, the proceedings of a Danish church wedding. Weddings in a Moslem country are not associated with a visit to a mosque, and so our ceremony was rather difficult to account for. But we had to talk about something, pending the discussion of subtler matters on the arrival of my interpreter. The conversation was set off by a bunch of flowers which I had brought home from a morning walk in the mountains.

That, incidentally, was the first and last time I went for a morning walk alone far from the village where I was known. On the way I had approached a solitary little farm. The women and children were under a leaf canopy in the field. They waved and beckoned to me to come and sit down, which I did. After a while their interest in the clothes I was wearing got rather embarrassing. They tugged at my clothes while pointing to their own rags. I gained an unpleasant feeling that they seemed to be more interested in my belongings than was really comfortable. I understood nothing of the language at that time. Whether the feeling which came over me was justified or not I cannot therefore say. But I got up, took leave of them as well as I could, and left the field to return to the mountain path. I continued a little farther along this, but had suddenly lost the desire for a longer walk. So I turned back and had to pass the field with the snatching women under the leaf canopy once more. They had now come out of the hut and were waving and calling to me. I waved back but hurried on. A moment later I found myself surrounded by a crowd of little girls, who had been with the women. I smiled and nodded to them to make up for my ignorance of the language. Then the first stone whizzed.

Even small stones are unpleasant when thrown. I quickened my pace in order to get away. I was afraid to run in case I tripped. Also, to begin running is rather like abandoning one's dignity. Moreover, in their bare feet the children could run a good deal faster than I in canvas shoes. It looked as if they were only going

to follow me as far as the stone wall which marked their boundary. However, when I got past this I was approached by two boys of ten or twelve who had been cutting grass. It is boys' work to gather grass for fodder. I have often met the boys of our own village a long way from home, frequently on donkeys.

These boys were on foot. The sacks of grass were slung over their shoulders, and in their hands they carried the large, curved sickles which they used for this work. A sickle looks even bigger and more savage in a child's hand than it does in a man's.

As I met the boys I smiled pleasantly at them, and as I remember, made a clumsy attempt to give one of them a friendly pat on the shoulder. I was not in any awkward situation. It is true that behind me was a crowd of little girls who had thrown stones at me, though not with any spiteful intent. They were only playing; a rather unpleasant game, no doubt, and yet—it was then that one of the boys made a slash at me with his big curved sickle.

I must admit that I have never been so frightened in my life. It was a long way from my village and I could not speak the language. How could I know what went on in the head of a young Kurd? Suppose he was more afraid of me and my fair eyes than I was of his sickle? His eye was not pleasant to meet at the moment when he slashed at me. I felt that I had no earthly chance of getting home safely.

Suddenly it occurred to me to say the name of the sheikh at whose house I was staying, together with the word for 'house'. I imagine that that is how people in olden days will have used the name of God in order to avert the powers of darkness. It had the intended effect and the boys let me pass. By this time I was also outside the range of the stone-throwing girls. But I was still afraid to run; and I dared not look back. Even now, in telling of the encounter with the children of that isolated farm, I cannot help trembling a little. I must have been very frightened indeed.

The flowers I had gathered on the first, and last, morning walk alone were, as I have said, the occasion for demonstrating the arrival of a Danish bride at the church. The lady of the house and I were well in the middle of it when the daughter came in

from the courtyard, displaying every sign of excitement, and tried to get us to go out into the road. We were in no mind to break off our interesting conversation, but the daughter kept on motioning us to go with her. Owing to my slowness, we arrived rather late in the sequence of events. Outside my loggia I found an excited crowd of villagers. The head of the family was standing spade in hand, and on the ground in front of him, writhing in its last death throes, was a creature a yard long. *Mar* (snake) was a new word which I learnt that day.

Having been duly killed the snake was buried in the nearest ditch, and the crowd dispersed. I endeavoured to go deeper into the matter. There are not many snakes in Denmark and this was the first I had ever seen in the wild. They said that it must have been living inside the roof of that part of the farm where I had my quarters. It had crawled out from under the eaves, probably to find water. The sheikh had been called and had promptly killed it with the object nearest to hand, the spade.

I was naturally interested to find out if it was poisonous. That was difficult enough in view of my poor knowledge of the language, and there was no one in the village that day who could speak or understand English. I was inclined to think that it was not poisonous: it was so big, and the large European grass snake is not poisonous, while the smaller adder is. I could not get a proper answer; the women only laughed. So in my diary—I have looked it up to make sure—it says 'Today the sheikh killed a snake with a spade. As far as I can make out it was *not* poisonous.'

I have since found out that in replying in the negative to my questions about the snake's poisonousness they had misunderstood them. They had thought I had asked whether an adult person would die, be made 'to sleep' as they said, by one of its bites. We too would probably have tried to minimize the matter and laugh it off. The snake had actually lodged in the roof of the room I occupied. In the monotonous life of the women I was a pleasant change. I doubt if they would have been pleased if, panic-stricken, I had suddenly packed my things and gone. We got on far too well for that.

When at length the time came for me to leave and they knew I had come to say goodbye, a chain of cloves with a charm was hung round my neck, a chain with a strong and spicy fragrance, which was to accompany me to my distant land and by its smell bring Topzawah back to my memory. It was done with grace and dignity. I was full of sorrow at taking leave of the two handsome women of the house who had displayed such warm friendship to me.

I did not get a proper answer, then, to my question about whether the snake was or was not poisonous. They laughed and made fun of it. A light was shone under the bed when I was escorted to my room at night, and I consoled myself with the thought that such large snakes were surely not poisonous. My interpreter arrived a few days later. There were so many other things to talk about. So it was not until later on, when a harvest worker in the village fields had been bitten by a snake which had lain concealed in the corn, that the account of his conveyance on a mule and later by car to hospital at Sulaimaniyah led me to raise the subject again, with my interpreter to help me. Yes, it was quite right. The man had been bitten by the same kind of snake as the one which had lived in my roof.

In Kurdistan harvesting is not done with a scythe but with a short-handled, crescent-shaped sickle, of the type used by the boys for cutting grass. Walking forward side by side in a row the men hold the sickles in their right hands, and in their left a set of iron claws made fast by short chains. These resemble long, curved nails and make it easier to grasp the corn that is to be cut. When cut the corn is gathered by the women into big heaps. When such a pile is large enough the woman ties a rope round it, lies down on it on her back, takes the ends of the rope over her shoulders, and then stands up with the pile of corn. The heaps of corn can be seen crossing the fields to the threshing floor, the women underneath supplying the hidden motive power.

Later, on the threshing floor, which is circular and has a rammed clay floor, but is in the open air, a number of horses, donkeys, or oxen are driven round and round on the corn to tread out the

grains. Afterwards the corn is thrown into the air so that the chaff can be blown off by the wind. Corn threshed in this way is not particularly clean. The flour is grey, the bread baked from it likewise.

In my town home ground flour was never bought. It was not good enough for baking. One day I witnessed the arrival of the family's annual consumption of bread grain. It came from one of the villages loaded on three donkeys, with two drivers and the man who sold the corn. The donkeys climbed the three stone steps which led to the entrance door of the house, passed like other guests under the long cotton curtain, and tripped into the flagged ante-room which was open to the courtyard. It was strange to see donkeys on these flags. Many members of the family slept there. Coming in late at night you had to be careful not to tread on any of the many sleepers. Here, too, the patients during the influenza epidemic had lain.

Hanging from the backs of the donkeys were coarse, home-made woollen sacks, which, instead of being laced together with string, had the openings sewn up with a number of rough stitches, with the result that the sacks kept their rectangular shape. The sacks were unloaded and ripped open, the contents of newly threshed corn being emptied out into a large dusty heap on the flagged floor. Two sofas were pushed in front of the pile, which would have made too tempting a 'sand-pit'. The womenfolk then embarked on the long and complicated process which had to be gone through before the corn could be taken to be ground at the mill, and which while it lasted occupied much space in this house so full of people.

The corn was first washed in running water in the courtyard. This was done by means of the tap and rubber hose-pipes while the corn was in a large receptacle, originally a petrol can. It was then dragged, in large pieces of sacking, up the narrow wooden ladder to the roof of the house, where it was spread out on the sacking to dry alongside the family beds. In the following period heaps of yellow corn lay on sacking on all the house roofs, drying in the hot sun and being frequently turned and ventilated to make

it perfectly dry. The corn was then returned to the courtyard, the women simply pouring it down on to the next storey. The large pieces of sacking with the corn on them were dragged to the edge of the roof, another piece having been spread out in the courtyard. The smallest children were removed out of harm's way, and the corn then streamed down in a golden torrent, while a no less golden dust filled the air. The downpour fortunately took place in several stages so that the dust would have time to settle, otherwise it would have been choking. From the furthest sites the corn first had to be put into a bucket and carried to the edge of the roof before it could be poured down into the yard.

The following morning at dawn the woman arrived who was to attend to the next stage of the cleaning. Her sight was not as good as it might have been, especially in one eye, but for that very reason the sensitiveness of her finger-tips was exceptional and she was well known for her skill in cleaning corn. The fact was that it was still far from clean enough. She sat down, first alongside the heap and then in the middle of it. In her hand she took a circular riddle which she rotated in a tilted direction, causing the cleanest and lightest corn to fly off the edge. The remainder she smoothed over with her finger-tips, which instantly detected any foreign body. She made a fine sight sitting in the corner of the courtyard in the line of sunshine and shadow, rotating her riddle in oblique circular motions. She resembled a Buddhist monk performing some cultic rite. The little heap of corn which failed to find favour in her eyes underwent another process of washing and drying later on. Every day there was sunshine to be had.

But to return to the harvest in my village. One of the workers, while cutting the corn with the sickle in his right hand and holding it with the claws in his left, was bitten in the left arm by a snake, which must have had its abode down among the stalks. The man was placed on a mule and taken to the hospital at Dokan, where they had snake serum. However, the case must have been more serious than this small hospital thought itself able to deal with. I

heard that the man was taken by ambulance to the hospital at Sulaimaniyah, a journey of some hours.

Later I also saw a boy who had been bitten by a snake. We were travelling by the local bus from Halabja to Tawala, high up in the mountains near the Persian border. We two women sat in front with the driver. This was much more comfortable than behind, where the accommodation consisted of two long, parallel seats, so narrow that you had to hold on to the posts which supported the roof. Some of the passengers made the journey on the outside of the bus, either sitting on top or standing on the platform.

We had made a late start at Halabja, where we had spent the night at the home of some hospitable relations. Their house stood on the outskirts of the town on the edge of the plain which we had to cross before reaching the mountains. We had hardly got out on to the road across the hot and open plain when the bus stopped. There was a large bundle lying on the road. At first it was taken to be a cow or a donkey that had been overcome by the heat, but it turned out to be a man, lying motionless in the broiling sun with a bare and bleeding head. His turban and skull-cap had rolled off. Some of the passengers jumped out of the bus and dragged him, more dead than alive, to the side of the road. It looked bad as they tried to lift him on to his feet, instead of carrying him lying down.

The same procedure of trying to get a person walking instead of being carried I saw somewhere else. A little girl had fallen from the hood of an overfilled cab in Sulaimaniyah, during the celebrations which mark the *Kurbam-bairam*. From early morning children were sent out into the streets of the town in new clothes and with a supply of pocket money. There they hired cabs in which they drove round the town all day as if it had been a fairground. From the folded hood of one of these cabs overfilled with merry, nicely dressed children, I saw the little girl fall on the road as an apple drops from a loaded tree. She was quickly taken to the pavement, but not lying down: they stood her straight on her feet, shook her till she recovered consciousness,

and put her back on to the cab. And so the man on the Halabja road was dragged to the roadside more dead than alive. Some of the passengers stayed with him till help could arrive. The obvious course, one would have thought, would have been to lay him in the back of the bus and drive him straight to hospital. But that was not what they did. The half-empty bus scorched back, not to the hospital but to the police-station, where one of the senior police officers was having his siesta on a bench in the garden, outside the gate where the prison windows were, and from where the prisoners could see who came and went.

It took time for the policeman to collect himself and his scattered uniform and with sufficient authority order someone to return with the bus to the scene of the accident.

On the way back we two women alighted in order to get a drink of water and find a cool spot at the house of our hosts of the previous night, the last house in the town. From the shade outside the house we could see what took place over on the plain.

The presence of the policeman meant that the man could now be taken to the local hospital. His conveyance there took a long time. We women had found a cool and shady place, where we could obtain all that we needed to drink. Waiting did not bother us. But the situation of the passengers left behind on the plain in the burning sun was less pleasant. My interpreter was concerned about her thirteen-year-old brother who was among them. We were relieved, and could enjoy our agreeable leaf canopy in front of the house, when we saw some small figures—who were not black but in the fierce sunlight only pale grey—cross the fields and seek protection from the pitiless glare and staggering heat in the shade of the heap of corn which lay on the threshing-floor.

At long last the bus had delivered its patient, who must have fallen, unobserved by the other passengers, from the roof or platform of another bus earlier in the day. It was now the duty of the male nurses at the local hospital to attend to him; we had done ours. The bus resumed its interrupted journey across the plain in the direction of the mountains.

The road when it reached the mountains climbed up out of the merciless sun into the shade of trees and past unbelievably fresh water flowing from mountain springs. Here we stopped at a small *chaikhana* in order to quench our perpetual thirst with sweet strong tea. The tea-shop stood by a spring in the shade of some big trees. Here, in fine, was everything that denotes Paradise to the traveller from the white-hot plains.

While we were there the bus travelling in the opposite direction drove up. It was of a rather more primitive type than the one we were travelling by. There were seats in the back of ours; but in this one the passengers had to stand up, as if it had been an open truck.

The passengers included two children, one of whom was a newly-wed wife of twelve. The fact that she was married was indicated by the headdress which she wore. She was from the district where there are large mulberry orchards. Both boys and girls help to gather the freshly fallen fruit, which is dried, put in skin sacks, and sold. Whole families will move into the orchards in the season. Here the girls cannot always be kept under observation, and so to avoid risks they are married off long before they reach puberty. Thus the marriage portion is assured.

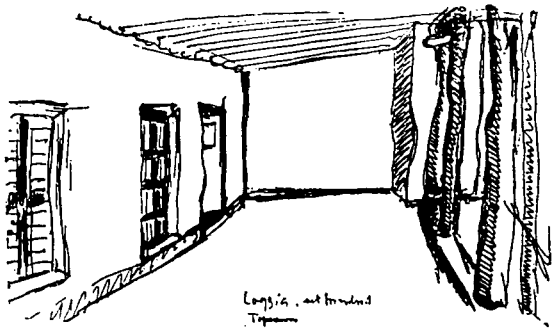
The little wife was accompanied by her ten-year-old brother; or rather, she was taking her little brother to the hospital, the one where a few hours before we had taken the man picked up in the road. The boy had been bitten by a snake; a number of cloths were wrapped round his already swollen arm.

I visited him at the hospital afterwards, along with some of the women. Halabja is large enough for the women to be veiled, as in Sulaimaniyah, and they grumbled because I walked too fast. I did not wear the long garment which clings to the legs when one walks, and instead of slippers I had shoes on. But I hardly think that it was because the Kurdish costume is so heavy and cumbersome that my lady friends got me to walk more slowly. We were in the main thoroughfare of the town, and I must say that it is more becoming to such heavily veiled figures to move slowly and with dignified short steps.

The little boy lay in an iron bed in a big gloomy ward, with a water cooler in the shape of an earthenware pitcher standing on a table beside him. They had succeeded in dealing with the venom, though it had taken nearly twenty-four hours to get the boy down to the hospital from the mountains. His arm was still swollen, and the women assured me that it was blue-black all over.

So the boy had escaped with his life. Reassured, we left him in the care of the male nurses in the men's ward. I had gone outside when they looked at his swollen, blue-black arm.

There was a very strong reason why I suddenly felt that to look at it was too much of a good thing. The snake in my life had been too close after all.



7—'Granny, are you going to be a Cowboy?'

So that was the meaning of the horse-shoe which I found! I was to be allowed to tell of my experiences during a summer in Kurdistan.

I found it in the pass, and to be quite accurate it was a mule's shoe. They say that it means luck. I thought when I found it that my luck was evident from the fact that instead of riding on a mule I had been allowed to walk along the track across the Charmaban mountains behind Pira Magrum. It was early morning. My Kurdish friends and I had plenty of time. We were returning from the small village of Sargalu, deeply secluded in its valley. Its sole link with the outside world was this mule track over the mountain ridge. Our guides had had the sense to let us dismount and negotiate the actual pass on foot. The track was very narrow and full of loose stones. It was best to avoid looking out over the edge of the track, and that was easier to do when you were on foot and could hug the cliff face. Riding a mule it was at once more difficult. The animal preferred the very brink; and even when you have been told that mules are extraordinarily sure on their feet

and always put their hind feet in the marks of their forefeet and similar reassuring things, nevertheless it is a little unsettling when three of the four feet are placed on stones which lie rocking on the outer edge of what you would rather not look down on.

Now I was not in the habit of riding a mule, and yet I felt that perhaps I should have taken the situation in my stride. Later on, however, I met a man who travelled the country by car, on horseback, and on mules, an employee of the local government. At the very spot where I felt that the track across the pass was not wide enough even for a mule, and where I was most inclined to walk sideways when returning that way on foot, his horse had vanished beneath him. Only a tree on the edge had saved the man from going the same way. It had annoyed him that he had had to pay for the horse.

In my village of Topzawah I had heard a lot about Sargalu, beyond the mountains. As the summer sun parched the mountains first a golden and then a whitish colour and one water-course after another ceased to carry water as the merciless summer advanced, the description of Sargalu increased in intensity and beauty. Through the village beyond the mountain flowed a flood of water, they said, which never stopped. There were orchards of green trees and you could walk through them for hours on end. Sargalu was shaded, the mountains closing in on the valley at great height, so the sun rose late above their crests and went down early in the afternoon. Topzawah, in contrast, lay open all day long to the burning sun on the southern slope of a mountain chain.

In Sargalu were shade, coolness, and rippling water: those blessed things which are represented in the Moslem idea of Paradise. They are indeed the very essence of bliss itself. You feel that when the perpetual sun and the increasing drought begin to get unbearable from day to day.

Sargalu was also seen in the light in which only the home of one's childhood can be seen. My village hostess had been born there. We *had* to go to Sargalu. The sheikhs of Topzawah and Sargalu were brothers, and the biggest and richest house in

Sargalu was open to us. We had to go. My interpreter and I asked if we might take the seventeen-year-old daughter of the house with us on this family visit to the village home of her mother's childhood. But no, her father refused his permission. So closely are young daughters guarded in a Moslem home. Not even we two women, who had lived in the house and the village for over a month, constituted a sufficiently safe escort. And we even had my interpreter's thirteen-year-old brother, a male, with us on the journey. But permission to take the girl with us was not given, and so there was nothing to be done about it. The father's authority was absolute on this point.

It was quite possible to ride all the way, but we dared not undertake a journey of eight hours on mules as we were without any training. So we hired a car that was to take us to Shadala.

The journey took only an hour and a half but was to cost a fortune. When we reached Shadala I knew why. The road there was not a road as we understand it. The car had to drive down into dried-up water-courses, climb up the sides again, and continue over stony ground. But it stood up to every exertion and dropped us at a farm, with a promise to pick us up and take us back two days later.

Entering the farm we were seated on rugs and mattresses under a shady canopy of leaves with a view of a pool of water and an orchard. My parched village would be about 2,000 feet above sea-level. Here we were a good deal higher up. There was more water and fruit-trees would grow.

We were given water, tea, and fruit. At the pool one of the women of the house was dressing a fowl. Once more I had to admire the great range of a squatting woman. Easily and neatly the fowl was washed, cut into pieces, washed again, and the pieces put into a basket. The woman, in her long-gowned costume, got neither dirty from the flesh nor at all wet from the washing. On a low wall alongside the pool sat a tall, thin old man. He was dressed in a long Arab caftan, not the characteristic costume with the wide trousers which makes the Kurdish male figure so wide-hipped. He would be somewhere around seventy. Below his

turban his eyes gazed aloof and uninterested into space. Later he told my interpreter that he had had nineteen wives, besides the illegitimate ones. Hearing this, I suddenly ceased to think that his eyes were so aloof when looked at properly.

The wives must either have been dead or been sent home with all their ornaments and belongings. At the time of my visit he had only one, but among the numerous members of the family in the house, dispersed among the various apartments of the farm, I realized that several broods of children were represented. I saw a week-old grandchild dressed in bright red silk and lilac velvet, fastened in its cradle. As the child was such a newcomer, the cradle had black hangings to shade it from the strong light. The mother looked feeble and had not much milk, but nevertheless was sharing the domestic duties.

We were late. It was past five o'clock, and they said that the journey across the pass into the valley on the other side would take at least two hours. There was no time to be lost in getting mounts. While we were waiting for them, I went into the orchard in order, concealed by the fruit-trees, to change my linen skirt for a pair of long blue canvas trousers, which I had brought with me for riding in.

I should never have done so. It caused a wild but not a rapturous sensation. It was quite remarkable in a country where the women wear long trousers, whose presence is obvious. They can be glimpsed round the woman's ankles as she walks and more of them can be seen when she is seated, or when she raises the trailing gown to do some household task. They also reveal themselves by their conspicuous colour and the splendour of their material, and they are certainly never meant as invisible underwear. But a pair of long, dark-blue canvas trousers are clearly not the sort of thing a woman can wear when, like me, she lives as a member of different families and is passed from hand to hand along the complex channels of their extensive connections.

My interpreter wore long trousers of pale-green brocade, a gown of pink muslin, a sleeveless jacket of pink brocade, and a white gauze head-veil. On her feet were slippers with medium-

sized heels. Everyone thought this an excellent travelling and riding costume—but mine! In Kurdistan a woman is required to dress like a woman, no matter what she is doing; and I, it seemed, was not.

At length our mules arrived. To tell the truth, mine was the only mule, the others being donkeys. Had I been given the choice, I should certainly have chosen one of the donkeys; they were nearer the ground. As far as height was concerned, my mule took after the parent horse.

There were two guides: one to lead my mule on a rope; the other to keep an eye on the donkeys, whose riders each had a short stick. The animal destined for me had neither saddle nor any other article belonging to the normal equipment of riding. There was nothing more than a very flat, ragged cushion, loosely girthed under the animal's belly.

I had learnt to ride in the remote past; but I rode only for a short time and on a properly equipped horse. As I have said, I should certainly have preferred one of the donkeys. But the mule had been procured for me as a special treat. Thus there was no choice, and moreover we were late. I also felt myself to be so wrongly dressed that I thought it best to get onto the animal as quickly as possible. A pair of sunglasses I had hanging on a cord round my neck were spoilt as I did so. My camera got jammed. I distinctly felt that I had not succeeded in 'leaping' into the saddle. Eventually, however, we got started, my interpreter in all her Kurdish splendour, with her black *aba* lying in front of her on the donkey. To enter the village on the other side of the mountains unveiled was unthinkable.

At first there was not much climbing. The route was across stony ground and some streams which were no longer there. But while clinging to my mount I was able to push my sun-helmet back and look round.

We rode diagonally through a high valley, which seemed open at either end. Behind us we had Pira Magrum and its neighbouring mountains, in front of us the chain of mountains we were to cross. It was marvellously beautiful in the late lighting. The sun had

chosen to set so that its rays fell lengthwise into the valley, while it went down between the mountains at the western end of the valley.

Then began the ascent of the jagged mountain crest, where the pass was to be found between two of the points. Everything still went very well. The mule continued to move fairly horizontally. I gave a kindly thought to my grandchild. Hearing that I was going as an ethnologist to Kurdistan, he tried with a five-year-old's understanding to fathom what it meant. One day, at long last he understood. 'Granny,' he said in his sweet, grave voice, 'is it true you're going to be a cowboy?'

I wish he could have seen me making my way into the mountains on my long-legged mule. But suddenly I forgot my golden-haired grandchild. The mule no longer moved horizontally. It was sloping beneath me and the saddle cushion did not feel very firm. The track wound snake-like and grew very narrow. In places there was no mountain down on one side, and a vertical mountain face on the other. I glanced at the rope held by the man hurrying along in front of me in his flat fabric shoes. The rope was as reassuring as sewing cotton. If one of the mule's legs happened to slip on all those loose stones, the rope would not be much good. 'Madame Henny, take care of yourself,' I heard in the affectionate, concerned voice of my interpreter. I could not see her. The narrow track wound its way behind, and up over boulders of rock. By this time we were equally afraid, she and I, and clung to our saddle cushions with one hand on the front edge, the other on the back: a very uncomfortable corkscrew-like position to ride in. At length we were on the top of the pass and could look down into the valley beyond the mountains. A long, long way down and deep in the valley the guides pointed out Sargalu. We gave up trying to locate the village in the gathering dusk. We could not have cared less.

Then began the descent. It was a thousand times worse than the ascent. You can hang on to a slipping saddle cushion when the mule or donkey is climbing obliquely; but when it is going down obliquely, and the track is winding so that it looks as if only half

of the creature can find room in each turn—then it is a thousand times worse.

Our guides had said that the journey would take two hours. It took practically four. Darkness had long since fallen when, with the village flock of sheep surging around us like a warm, brownish-black sea, we made our entry into Sargalu.

The traffic arteries of the village wound as dark ditches between the houses, which were situated at different levels, stepped up a mountain slope. As far as I could see in the darkness, we passed several stout gates. We were in a well-timbered region. The delicious surge of the river which ran through the village reached our ears. We then passed through a large wooden gate and found ourselves on the sloping, unpaved courtyard of the sheikh's house, where we were to spend the next two nights.

I was sore in the usual place after riding. I could not control my knees when I walked, because my legs straddled after dismounting from the mule. But most of all, my arms were tired from clinging to the sliding saddle cushion.

My stay in the village was influenced by my dread of the return journey. I did not know that on it we should have better guides and properly fixed saddle cushions shaped so you sat firmly and comfortably. Nor did I know that we should descend from our mounts before reaching the pass and be allowed to walk across it. The reason for crossing it, so to speak, 'in the saddle' was the lateness of the hour. The guides had been fully aware that we should have put off the journey till the following morning. If there had been an accident of any kind, these desolate mountains were no place to stop in after nightfall. Caravans of mules cross the pass in daylight. We did not encounter a living creature on our late journey over the pass. On the return journey, however, we saw several loaded mules and their drivers.

One of the daughters-in-law of the family we lived with had crossed the mountains the year before, gravely ill. There had been a miscarriage, and there was no hospital, only a sort of casualty ward, where, however, an excellent male nurse provided out-patient treatment, and where medicines could be purchased. There had

been complications and, gravely ill, the patient had been placed on a mule and taken across the pass and a further eight miles to the road, where she had been transferred to a car and driven for four or five hours to the hospital in the oil town of Kirkuk. Here they had kept her for four months. She had only recently returned, travelling the last three or four hours, like us, on a mule. She still looked in very poor condition, as she sat in front of a large round brass tray, making cigarettes from local tobacco for herself and the family. The cigarette wrappings, with long cardboard mouthpieces, were bought ready made, and fitted into one another in large packets. They were separated and stood upright on a tray. Tobacco was sprinkled over them by hand, and then the bundle of wrappers was held in the hands and shaken up. In this way the tobacco fell down into the wrappers, and the process was then repeated. The cigarettes were light and rather too quickly smoked. Looking at the woman's pale face and transparent hands I realised with a shudder what it must mean to be seriously ill in a country where the means of communication are so poor.

We were on a large property. A very steep staircase with the usual over-high steps led up to a loggia, and behind there were several rooms, all without furniture. Some of the rooms contained bricked cooking pits. At the end of the loggia was a carpeted room with recesses in the wall and a line for clothes hung right across it. Stepping over a low parapet on the loggia one came to a large flat roof over the outbuilding. The roof was used for sleeping on at night during the summer. In a corner close to the house and sheltered by a low wall was the outdoor cooking site. On the evening of our arrival there was a large pot of rice boiling there. It was a copper pot tinned on the inside, and the sides sloped in towards the top. It stood on an inverted iron foot, which was laid across the clay pit in which the fire burnt. The lady of the house squatted in front of the pot, ladling out the rich dish of rice boiled in butter into round plates, which were carried to the various family groups on trays. With a graceful, almost caressing motion of her hands she would smooth each heap of rice before handing it over. We sat down on the mattresses; I

in my improper attire and my interpreter wrapped in her black cloak. She had managed in some miraculous way to drape it round her as, faint and weary, we had approached the village. How she managed it I did not see, for at that moment the flock of sheep had surged round our legs and I had had other things to occupy me.

The beautiful lady of the house was very pious and had fasted from dawn to sunset. This was not because it happened to be Ramadan, the annual fast which all must observe; she was fasting on her own, for the granting of a wish—that a pilgrimage to Mecca by some of her relatives would be successful. To abstain from food for a day when you have had enough to eat before seems entirely possible, as does abstention from tobacco; every day comes to an end. But to deny the body its intense demand for liquid for a whole day is, I would say after a summer in Kurdistan, the most difficult, not to say impossible, feat of endurance. At least it is the most inhuman. The need for liquid is enormous all through the day, not merely on account of the heat, but because the air is so fantastically dry. It is this dryness which enables one to tolerate temperatures of over 120 degrees without gross discomfort. In Baghdad, which is situated at a lower altitude than any of the villages in the Kurdistan mountains, and a good deal lower than the local capital of Sulaimaniyah, I experienced 125 degrees and it was not, to my recollection, intolerable, provided you got enough to drink. It had either to be very cold or very warm.

Islam, the Moslem religion, influences the lives of the faithful in a quite remarkable way. Before going to Kurdistan and living day by day with the women there, I was not really aware of the extent to which religion also influences *their* lives, and how piously they observe the fast, the five daily prayers, the almsgiving, and, when there is an opportunity, the pilgrimage.

In my village home I saw mother and daughter, five times a day, spread out the prayer rug and fasten their veils round their heads and necks so that only their faces were uncovered. They would then loosen the knot with which the long tips of their sleeves

were tied together and allow them to fall to the ground over their hands. They would step on the lower edge of their gowns so their feet also were concealed, and then, with silent dignity, begin their obeisances, utterly absorbed in their prayers while life went on around them. A little way off the son of the house would perhaps have placed the carbide lamp on a table, spread out his shaving tackle, and removed his young beard slowly and carefully. The radio would be on, and tea-glasses being carried round.

Once the lady of the house was saying her prayers on the prayer rug, which had been spread out on the floor along one of the walls. Behind her the two youngest children of seven and eight were having a stand-up fight over a knife for peeling cucumbers. The scuffle threatened to upset the samovar, which was full of red-hot charcoal and boiling water and which stood near by. My nerves were on edge. But the mother did not allow herself to be disturbed or interrupted by what was going on immediately behind her. Only when the prayer was concluded by her kneeling towards Mecca and turning her head first to the right and then to the left as she murmured the final sentences of the Koran did she rise and stop the fight with a firm hand.

In my village home I also saw the master of the house say his prayers. There was no mosque in the village. We were sitting in the courtyard one evening. Some of the village men had paid a call. The tea-glasses were carried in and out by the children. Conversation was quiet and friendly. The villagers lived quite a different family life and the women took part in the male conversation in quite a different way from the townspeople of Sulaimaniyah.

Suddenly the sheikh laid aside his cigarette, wrapped his big fringed shawl for a turban round his skull-cap, slipped his European lace-up shoes off his feet, and rose. He was a big, handsome, virile man. At a steady pace he walked up the steps to the open sitting-room, took the prayer rug down from its nail on the wall, threw it with a sweeping gesture on the floor, and began the prayer ritual. Up on the dark terrace the white twists of his shirt sleeves stood out against the sleeves of the dark costume. The

white twists moved rhythmically up and down during his obeisances. Now he knelt down, bent his broad back, and laid his turban-clad head against the prayer rug. Now he rose. Now he knelt down. Now he rose again.

His prayers finished, he hung up the prayer mat on the nail from which he had taken it, and, head up and full of dignity, strode back down the steps to his chair. Sitting down on his chair he folded his legs up beneath him, took the large silken shawl from his head, lit a cigarette, raised his tea-glass, and resumed the interrupted conversation.

On the evening of our arrival at Sargalu most of the furniture of the house had been placed outside. On the roof stood one of the big, clumsy, unpadded guest sofas used for sleeping on at night, and some of the menfolk of the house sat on it with their legs drawn up. This manner of sitting on the floor was often transferred to chairs and sofas, with the result that the covers would frequently be stained by the marks of the many bare feet which had rested on them. To see the folded and completely relaxed positions which Kurds assumed when they sat like this on sofas or in large armchairs was a very fine sight; they resembled Buddhas. Their bodies and limbs were one; so unlike the way in which we sit, with our arms and legs stretched out in different directions.

The roof of the house at Sargalu on which we were to sleep ended in a wattle fence of branches and mats, which marked it off from neighbouring roofs. Visitors would come from there during the evening, appearing suddenly and slipping quietly into their places on the floor mattresses among the rest of us. Children ran about playing, and suddenly fell asleep wherever they happened to be or crept on to their mother's knee. Mattresses were spread out for us guests along the wattle fence, the members of the family disporting themselves round about. Two half-grown girls were picked up asleep and moved under some quilts.

We spent two nights here, and on the intervening day went for a walk in the village. The river was indeed as surging and as cool and fresh as we had heard it described. We were on a long

round of the orchards. These were real plantations. It was strange to be among trees and foliage and hear the sound of rushing water after the parched, arid, by now silent village where all sound of running water had ceased in the blazing heat of summer.

But in a way I did not like Sargalu. It was too gloomy. The surrounding mountains were too lofty.

It was whispered that it was the headquarters of the Haqqa sect. What that was, those outside it knew very little about. It was spoken of with a mixture of fear and respect. If a mysterious sect were to choose a headquarters it could not have chosen better.

Up in the mountains there was said to be a cave, where Sheikh Mahmud, of Sulaimaniyah, who had led the revolt in the 1920s, took refuge during his flight from superior forces.

No, it was a strange, wild, and sombre place, but I could not find it in my heart to say so when we returned to my parched village. To the family there it was, and would remain, Paradise.

I was also on horseback in Kurdistan. Perhaps I would rather have had my grandchild see me on that. The horse was a handsome one with fine legs, a long tail, and a magnificent head. Round its neck was a chain of blue pearls as a protection against evil eyes, and it had a parti-coloured, fringed saddle. I realized then where the fringed velvet covers of bicycle saddles originated which I had seen in Sulaimaniyah. They imitated the trappings of horses. There were plenty of opportunities to admire them. Bicycles were even taken into the cinema, and parked in front of the screen.

As it happens I am no hero, so I let the guide hold the bridle. But for one brief moment I tried to ride by myself. Holding the reins between my fingers in the way I could remember they should be held, I applied my heels to the horse's flanks and felt in fine fettle. This was life; and I wished that all my friends and acquaintances could see me crossing the sunny mountains with their isolated trees on such a thoroughbred of a horse.

Then, suddenly it made as if it would leave the narrow track which wound across the hills. I could well understand if, once outside its village home, it felt like having a look round. It raised

its head, gave a tremendous flourish of its tail, and, in so far as I could see from where I sat, acquired an energetic expression all over its body.

Plainly, it had a mind to streak off across the wide open space which lay before us.

And so I abandoned the idea of riding by myself and handed the reins over to my guide who walked alongside. In other words I did not ride, I was transported; but, I was travelling on a scientific errand and it was desirable that I should return home safe and sound. My interpreter did ride by herself, but had at one point to call abjectly for help, thereby restoring the balance between us. Her horse had jibbed at a water-course and refused to be driven across.

These horses took us to a village across the low mountains, one to which I made up my mind to return for the rest of my days. When travelling one comes across such places where one makes such vital and highly troublesome decisions. But this time I seriously meant it.

The horses we rode on had been sent a distance of two hours across the mountains to take us from the road which leads to Penjwin and to a small village called Sarkan. They were not the only horses on the sheik's farm. He had twenty in his stables. Later I saw them tethered behind trees at the farm, the way we might leave bicycles. Besides the usual unpleasant, greyish-white sheepdogs there were greyhounds for hunting. In winter they hunted wild boars and bears.

The village could not be reached by any car yet invented, but only on horseback. In winter it was completely cut off from its surroundings. Even the road we had driven along, and which leads to Penjwin, was closed by snow for many months.

Yet there was neither telephone nor telegraph to link Sarkan with the outer world. Here indeed was the 'desert island' people dream of when the confusion of Europe becomes intolerable. No wonder that I wish to return to it. A dream is a permissible thing.

They offered to build me a house if I would go and settle down

there. The fact is, I became very friendly with the women in the family we stayed with. Some fifty people slept there that night. Men had come long distances for surveying. Normally the family did not exceed thirty, but a representative of the local authority and his assistants had come to fix the boundaries between the properties of the village and surroundings. He had given me and my interpreter a lift in his Land-Rover for as far as it would go, and then horses had taken us the rest of the way.

The village had gardens, trees, and water: the three things which in Kurdistan are synonymous with the utmost scenic beauty. Moreover, it was high up, so that the evenings and nights were fresh and cool even in the middle of the hot summer. There was the most wonderful open view across mountains, which were far enough off not to feel oppressive.

Our horses entered the open space between the detached houses which together made up the sheikh's property. Immediately after dismounting we were handed a large bowl of curdled milk and water, a most delicious and refreshing drink in the heat. A whole group of people had received us: the lady of the house, surrounded by sons, daughters-in-law, and a swarm of their children. Later I got the number of the principal inhabitants. There were nine men: the head of the family, the old sheikh, three married sons, two nephews, three servants, and a blind mullah who was the family's spiritual guide. There were seven women permanently in the house: namely, the mistress, three daughters-in-law, and three servants. In addition there were children of all ages, whose distribution among the various marriages I gave up trying to find out.

We were shown up to a guest-house on high ground, quite new and built of stone. We entered the reception room. We were a good deal higher up than at Sulaimaniyah, which is over 2,500 feet above sea-level. At Sarkan it was cool, and so the floor of the room was fully laid with carpets. Like the others, I took off my shoes before walking on them.

The youngest married son of the house came in and sat on the carpet next to my chair. In a way it is wrong to remove one's

shoes in order to sit on a green steel chair. On the other hand, it is just as wrong to walk on precious carpets in shoes. It was definitely the chair which was wrong in this setting, where life is lived on a carpeted floor. Pointing to my blue linen dress, the young man asked a question which many must have wanted to ask: why I was so poorly and plainly dressed when there were so many beautiful materials to buy. It was difficult to answer. But looking at the other women, dressed in silk and adorned with rich ornaments, I had to admit that I bore some resemblance to a woebegone sparrow.

A tea arrangement on a rug in a corner of the room was supervised by one of the daughters-in-law. The gold of the coins and chains of the turban flashed in the light from the low window.

The old sheikh came in in his long green caftan and fringed turban to welcome us. Like lightning, my interpreter seized a white head-veil from one of the other women and flung it over her head and neck. The old man was a stranger to her, and the head, and more especially the neck, must on no account be seen by a strange and unrelated man.

Many is the time that I saw women in Kurdistan cover their heads when a strange man approached. When there were male guests in the guest-room of my interpreter's home in Sulaimaniyah, she would wear a white veil over her head and neck when she brought them water or tea. When making up the mattresses and beds on the roof of the house at sunset, the women would have flowing white veils or pieces of white cloth hung over their heads, for, of course, at that time there would be men on the prayer roof of the adjacent mosque. It was possible to sleep in a large happy gathering on the roof, with the rest of the inhabitants of the town distributed on their own roofs, of roughly the same height, all around; but no woman could be seen there with her head or neck bared. So the women used to sleep with kerchiefs wound round their heads in place of the skull-caps and turbans, never with their heads bare.

It was in this, my dream village, that I saw the strongest manifestation of the female duty never to be seen by strange men. I

sat in the guest-room, conversing quietly with some of the seven adult women of the house. One of the young mothers was displaying her baby dressed in red and lilac with a red silken hood, and with a small crescent-shaped gold ornament plaited into its hair and hanging down its forehead. Suddenly I saw the handsome white-haired head of the man who had brought us to the village. He had called to take us to see his assistants, who were with a crowd of peasants under some large trees alongside the house. There was a spring out there, and there tables and chairs had been placed for the men to work at, and later eat at. The sight of that head passing the window and about to enter the room with the rest of the man's person gave rise to the wildest panic. Jumping from their rugs, the women scrambled for the only door in the room in order to get out before the man reached it. They rushed out of the room, across a small ante-room, and into another room where I could make out some large earthenware pitchers which contained food. One of their own menfolk helped them into this store-room in the way one might be given a hand in a fire or an air-raid, and just managed to get the door shut behind them in the breathless second that the strange man entered the room in which my interpreter and I had been abandoned.

The amusing part of the story is that at first I did not connect the frantic flight of the women with the calm face which passed the window, but asked my interpreter what on earth had caused the women to fly from the floor, where they had been tending the samovar, playing with the baby, looking at me, and doing various other things with which they were filling the time before dinner.

This was not the only embarrassing scene. In the late afternoon the lady of the house suggested I should go with her to see the garden, which lay on the hillside. Preparations for the evening meal were in full swing. The same number of persons had to be served as at midday, and so all hands were at work. I would much rather have stayed in the big kitchen and watched all that went on there. One of the daughters-in-law, dressed in brocade and tulle and with the crown of her skull-cap covered all over with overlapping

gold coins of full weight, was squatting at one of the fires. It had been lit deep in the room, and the smoke was bothering her where she sat, hunched up, and flashing red, lilac, green, and gold. There was no ventilation of any sort over the cooking pits, where she sat at the copper pot, scooping rice which the maidservant had washed at the garden pool into the pot, with hands hung with ornaments.

There was no end-wall to the room; and from the opening there was a view over the cattle yard. Near this opening on to the light and fresh air sat the two other daughters-in-law, who were equally brightly dressed and festooned with gold. When married sons live with their wives in a large patriarchal house like this it clearly will not do for one wife to wear more gold than the others. I take it that the old sheikh and father-in-law, who by all accounts was immensely rich, would see that a balance was maintained.

The other two women also sat at a fire, and on this was another large copper pot, in which tomatoes were cooking. Water was boiling on a third fire. Into this water the two young wives, without removing any of their rich costume or as much as tucking up their coloured muslin sleeves, were dipping fowls. These were dipped one by one into the pot, feathers and all. The boiling water loosened the feathers, which afterwards flew off in all directions under the women's nimble fingers. Two maidservants then took the plucked birds down to the pool in the garden in order to draw and rinse them, whereupon they were given to one of the manservants. With a knife he severed the leg, cut the breast from the breast-bone, and sprinkled salt on. The fowl was then impaled on a long iron spit thrust through its body and crossed legs. It was now ready to be ranged with its companions in a circle round the fire in order to be roasted. The oldest maid was senior to the other two and gave the three young wives a hand. She emphasized the importance of her work by always moving at a run, and emerging from the various store-rooms with her fingers dripping with butter.

The old lady of the house contented herself with supervising

this swarm of daughters-in-law and servants. That was why she had time to make such an ordinary suggestion for a proud mistress of a large property: would I like to see the garden? And, of course I said Yes—in spite of my desire to remain in the busy, hard-working kitchen. However, our visit to the garden had to be abandoned. Insuperable obstacles had arisen.

Shortly before, I had seen a caravan approach the farm. It was nearly sunset, and over the low mountains twenty horsemen appeared, one behind the other. They were some of the male guests, who after the obligatory noontide siesta which is offered to all guests, had for entertainment been sent on a fishing excursion. All the farm horses had been placed at their disposal. I had not seen the riders leave the farm, but now I saw them return—a most wonderful sight. No motor vehicle can be so flatteringly beautiful as a thoroughbred horse, and here were twenty in a line. But now there were strangers up by the men's quarters under the big trees, and from there it was possible to look down into the garden. So my hostess, the mother of a number of children and grandmother of a few, could not go there. A strange man might catch a glimpse of her. The walk in the garden had to be abandoned, and was. We two grandmothers stayed inside the house.

When the men had ridden off in the afternoon, I and my interpreter were out with the daughters-in-law picking tomatoes, green vegetables, and figs. We had walked a short distance along a field path. Because of the cattle, the entrance to the kitchen- and fig-garden was closed by a fence of branches which we had to climb over. It looked extremely odd to see slippers, long gathered brocade trousers, and a silk gown getting over such a fence.

In the evening I had my meal with the women on the roof where we were later to sleep. It was the roof of the kitchen. A pitch-dark and impassable flight of steps of course led to it. Here we all arranged ourselves on rugs and mattresses round the food trays. Besides us women a few men were present. By the light of the carbide lamp two menservants were preparing fruit:

6. Woman with rich gold ornaments on her turban washing her feet in the women's garden pool. Sarkan.

7. Some of the sons and daughters-in-law of the house with my magnificent riding horse. Sarkan.

sweet yellow melons, and green water melons with the purple inside, which one is always surprised can be contained in the smooth green bowl. The fruit, peeled and cut into long narrow strips in the case of the sweet melons, and into blocks in the case of the water melon, was set out on large metal trays. A reasonable proportion was left with us. The rest was carried by the servants across the courtyard and up under the trees, where the men still remained, and where arrangements were made for those who wished to stay within the precincts of the house to spend the night.

Yet another man was present, the blind mullah. He had his small room facing a bend in the staircase which led up to the roof, and the key with which he carefully locked the large padlock when he left it he carried fastened inside his caftan with a safety-pin. Where he had had his supper I cannot tell, but when the fruit was served, I recall him rummaging like an animal among kernels and peel, assisted by one of the boys to find a little that was edible.

It had gradually grown cool—a rather remarkable feeling. The women put on short, padded brocade jackets. I, as always, had with me a woollen cardigan, and for the first time in months I had need of it. We were high up, hence the delicious coolness. Above us was the usual twinkling starry sky. When it is always what we would call fine, one gradually comes to take glorious days and nights as a matter of course.

We women, as I have said, put on warmer clothing owing to the cool evening. Oddly enough, quite different rules seemed to apply to the youngest of the company, two baby girls. One was only six weeks old, the other a few months. Their cradles, of the usual portable type, had been carried on to the roof and stood ready. The cradles were of a special kind, such as I had seen all over Kurdistan. They consisted of a flat bottom on rockers. At each end there was a large transverse loop of wood, connected by means of a thick twisted bar. On the flat bottom lay a gaily-coloured cotton mattress with a hole just below the middle. In the wooden bottom were two holes, so that the hole

in the mattress could be placed over whichever of them was the more convenient, according to where it was desired that the head should lie. For pillow there was a small bolster laid under the baby's neck. Fastened to the cradle by coloured cords were two padded bandages, the width of a hand. Before the baby was arranged, a sort of wooden pipe was thrust through the hole in the mattress and out through the bottom of the cradle. Pipes for the baby girls had a hole in the side, pipes for boys a pipe bowl. Only the bowl of the pipe rose above the mattress, and it was carefully wrapped in pieces of coloured cloth so that it should not be uncomfortable when it was placed between the baby's legs to receive and carry off the fluid passed during the night. This ran straight down on to the stones in the courtyard or on the roof (where liquid dried up immediately), or alternatively into a small bottle which could be suspended under the cradle. This bottle, however, I never saw in use; it would naturally be more useful in the carpeted rooms in winter than in the open-air in summer. Of course, this little wooden pipe, which saves napkins and washing, except for the small rags of coloured cotton material used for the motions, would be useless in the case of a baby which lay loose and kicking in its cradle. But babies in Kurdistan did not. Padded bandages were fastened firmly round baby, mattress, and cradle bottom, one over the baby's chest and arms, lying straight by the side of its body, the other over the abdomen and thighs, thus holding the little pipe in position. All the baby was able to move were its head and the little bare feet, which turned outwards. The feet retained this position even after the child had begun to walk.

While trussed up in this way the baby could be both bottle-fed and breast-fed, as the mother would sit on the floor holding the cradle over towards her. A small rug was laid across the bandages and a curtain of thin material was hung over the long bar. This for a new-born baby would be black; for bigger babies pink, scarlet, or turquoise. As the material covered the entire cradle, the baby lay in a sort of tent. A coloured blanket would be hung over the curtain on the roof at night.

That evening in Sarkan the babies were not put early to bed: they stayed up late in their young mother's arms, or on their knees and laps. One of them had wetted itself, but its mother was afraid that it was too cool to change it; and so the little silk dress was washed from behind while the child wore it. A towel was thrust between the baby's back and the wet dress before it was laid in the cradle and fastened down on the mattress.

Similarly, the other young mother did not change the clothes of her six-week-old daughter. The baby was suckled on her spread knees, the bare lower parts wrapped in a towel which was damp, having been used by the women for drying their hands before the meal. The little hood, hung with charms, was also damp by the baby's cheeks and chin and was not changed. Both babies were fed whenever they uttered a sound.

Late in the evening the mothers at last decided to put their babies to bed. They were trussed up in their respective cradles and then—a thing I have never seen anywhere else—they were blindfolded. The cradles were rocked till the babies were silent.

Then we too went to bed, on outspread, sheetless mattresses, drawing up the quilts which in this house lacked the sewn-on covers. Of course everyone slept fully dressed, only the ornamented skull-caps and turbans being replaced by veils tied tightly round the head. My quilt had a strong smell of goats and humans but I slept well in the cool air under the stars.

The household was awake early in the morning, before the sun had risen above the mountain-tops, and under the lean-to roof where the stairs ended a fire had been lit to warm up the cold morning air. The hard-working senior maidservant brought breakfast on a large round tray. It consisted of curdled milk, fried eggs swimming in butter, and flakes of bread which she had baked during the night. The women of the family sat along the wall fully dressed as they had slept, but still without their headgear. The two babies, thanks to the blindfolding and their other covering, were still asleep.

I learnt that the busy maid had entered the household a few years previously. Leaving her husband for some reason, she had

brought with her her two children, an eight-year-old girl and a baby. The baby had died soon after. One day the eight-year-old, who like all little girls in this country had to help in the house, was told to put a pot of water on one of the kitchen fires. She forgot the baking oven that was in the floor across her path. It was still hot after use; and the child died from burns.

There is neither hospital nor doctor in the village, only a male nurse who can give a little out-patient treatment. Serious cases have to be referred to one of the towns, but the only connection with the outside world, and then only in summer, is by horseback. After the birth of a previous baby one of the young mothers had suffered from inflammation of the breast, and had been taken to hospital and cured. But the baby, which she had been forced to leave behind, being too ill to take it with her, was dead when she came back. The infant mortality rate was extremely high.

Leaving the company, I made my way down the awkward staircase to go to the women's washing pool, which lay, surrounded by a low wall, at some distance from the house. In winter it is inaccessible owing to deep snow. In reply to my question as to what they did then I was reminded of the many servants they had to fetch and carry water.

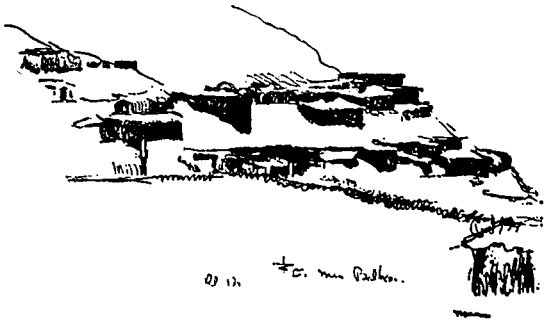
It was so early in the morning that I had hopes of solitude at the pool. At one end of it, where the water entered through an iron pipe, I found a churning sack hung up for rinsing, inside out. It hung deep in the water, so that it got well washed out. Before hanging it up, they had scraped it clean of the remains of milk and butter. Above the iron pipe lay the flat stone where the women could say their prayers. On the edge of the pool and by the outflow lay the offals of the many fowls which had been dressed and washed there. Along the runnel which formed the outflow there were distinct signs that this was where the women relieved themselves. Still, there was solitude and I began my morning toilet. Suddenly the silence seemed to become audible. I raised my head. A young servant girl, carrying a metal tray full of washing-up on her head, had slipped noiselessly inside the wall and now stood

motionless as a statue, lost in contemplating my behaviour. I got such a shock that I almost went head first into the pool.

Later I again mounted my beautiful animal with the blue pearls round its neck and the fringed harness, in order to ride back across the low yellow mountains with the scattered trees to the little *chaikhana*, the tea-house by the roadside where our Land-Rover was waiting.

Together with his wife, who for the buckle of her belt had a hemisphere of silver, a peasant was waiting for transport to Halabja, and he kindly offered us some of the grapes he was washing at a spring. We enjoyed the fruit until he told us he was ill with a chronic temperature, and was on his way to hospital.

I returned from my visit to Sarkan with an impression of a medieval, rich, and self-supporting community. It had every requirement. Sheep, goats, and cows gave meat. There were fruit and vegetables in the gardens, corn and tobacco in the fields. The rivers contained fish and there was game in the hills. All that had to be brought in from outside, once or twice a year by mules, was tea, sugar, rice, salt and cloth. Yes, indeed, I could live there for ever.



8—Beggars and Magicians

All over Kurdistan I saw triangular charms, as well as blue beads and buttons which averted the evil eye. Women wore the three-cornered charms fixed to their many necklaces, or among the coins, coloured beads, and gold ornaments on their skull-caps. Children had them fastened to their clothes with safety-pins. I have also seen them hanging in their silk, brocade, or plastic cases from nails in the walls, to bring good luck to the house and its occupants. Once I saw the contents of two such charms prepared. It was done by two itinerant *sayyids*, who visited my village home one day. *Sayyids* (descendants of the Prophet) claim descent from Mohammed.

Wayfarers of many kinds called at the farm. It was an ancient duty to keep open house; privilege carries responsibility, and the head of the household belonged to a highly important family. Public welfare formed no part of village life. The authorities had begun to make some sort of provision for the under-privileged of Sulaimaniyah, but there was nothing of the kind in the villages and some there no doubt were who would have ended their days on the roads rather than forego their freedom by accepting admission to any form of workhouse.

One day two men arrived at the house, an old man with a white forked beard, and a young man. Each carried at his sash a calabash

for a begging bowl. One was blind. For alms they were given a pat of butter and some flour. As they walked off along the road, here little more than a hillside track, I saw the young man, the one who was blind, place his outstretched hand on the old man's shoulder. Thus they wandered off, one behind the other, like beggars in a painting by Breughel.

On another day two women came. They stayed at the entrance to the courtyard, where they sat down just inside the gateway in the shade, waiting with their bundles for someone to see them. When someone did, they were given some water and buttermilk to drink and some flour and sugar was put in their begging bags. From the metal chests in the house, long coloured trousers and cast-off coloured silk gowns were brought out from the rich stores of both mother and daughter. The refreshment and food had been given to the women by the children and the maidservant. Now the young daughter of the house, acting like a lady of the nobility, descended the stairs from the living-room and crossed the courtyard to the gateway in order to present the garments. One of the women had very bad eyesight and the other was a cripple. I could hardly believe my eyes when this woman afterwards lifted herself and her bundles on to her crutches and hobbled off along the stony mountain track in the direction of the next village. To subsist by begging from village to village and from house to house in Europe is something one can imagine. But in Kurdistan! A country which is so sparsely populated and so impassable, where there are mountains and deserts and vast distances between the villages and where, last but not least, the sun and heat are so oppressive. How could people on crutches manage to survive in this country where locomotion was a great problem to the rest of us?

During the visit I had gone into the guest-room where I slept, and had got out a little money which I had given to the two beggar women. They thanked me as beggars would. What was most touching, however, was the way in which the women of the house thanked me. It was during the early period when I had no interpreter, so it was little that we understood of one another. But I realized what a stain it would have been on the reputation of

the house for charity and hospitality if I had not, as it were, been included in the honours. As a guest of the house I was also responsible for its reputation.

Then one day we were visited by two extremely unattractive beggars. They were two men, the most brutal and at the same time most cringing men I have ever seen. First an attempt was made to get rid of them as quickly as possible. A little flour and sugar, and then off with them! But they had got across the courtyard and half-way up the steps to the terrace outside the open living-room and were not so easily dismissed. There were only women in the house that day. They started to bargain about something I could not understand. The smaller man patted a green plastic bag which hung with other bags from his scarf. The other was recommending what was in the bag, very energetically and a little menacingly. Partly out of interest and partly, I think, because they were rather afraid of the two unattractive men, the women consented. The men were offered seats on one of the sofas in the open living-room. The mistress and daughter of the house stood in front of them. The women laughed across at me, sitting at the opposite end of the room, but my intuition told me that they were both a little disturbed and fascinated by the situation. It was a rather remarkable feeling to be witnessing something there was no means of understanding.

One of the two beggars was a tall and powerful man with an Arab's almond eyes and an unpleasant expression on his face. He wore a long brown caftan over a pair of white gathered canvas trousers and a blue European shirt, and over his shoulder outside the caftan lay a black transparent *aba*. For footwear he had white European tennis shoes and for headgear a white head-cloth, tied like a turban, with the green band of the *sayyid* round it. At his waist-band he had a large begging bag which was half-full, and a smaller and empty one.

The other man was smaller. He wore a black-and-white chequered caftan, white gathered trousers, tennis shoes, and an old, thick European overcoat. The costume would have withstood several degrees of frost, and it was June and very hot. This man

also had the Moslem sacred green round the outside of his turban. Under his overcoat I could see his begging bag and the vicious-green plastic bag which he had displayed and demonstratively patted.

From this plastic bag he took out an incredibly greasy book. Now books were no part of my women's world and none of them could read or write. At first I took it for a copy of the Koran, but later I was told that it was a book of prophecies. The lady of the house laid her hand on the book. The effect which it had on the women was well understood by the beggar and I gathered that he was haggling over the contents and demanding certain material goods in payment. He then opened the book and began to read aloud, declaiming in a sing-song, droning voice, the women listening with a mixture of the contempt which they felt for such social outcasts and respect for the unknown and unknowable contents of the book. The daughter rewarded the reading by fetching a large helping of flour and sugar, which the men promptly emptied into their bags. Plainly, the tall man was not content and was holding out for more, and so in his fawning way the little man tried another deal. Suppose the women were to take a little more of what he was offering? They also appeared to agree on this fresh bargain. I had no means of telling what it was, and could only wait and see.

The man asked for something, and the daughter went into an adjoining room and brought it. When she handed it to him he inspected it closely: it was a couple of sewing-needles. Apparently satisfied, the little man then thrust the needles into the seat of the sofa beside him, leaving them sticking straight up in the air. Between them he placed a bottle of ink which the big man produced from his bag. From his sinister companion he then borrowed a red pencil, and took from his own breast pocket some strips of paper with some red printing on them. As far as I could make out from my distant position, the printing consisted of a picture of a sword with lettering above and below it. Turning a strip round in his hand, the small beggar chequered it with criss-cross strokes, and in the intervening spaces wrote some words and figures. He then

folded the strip of paper, beginning at the bottom corner and turning it up zigzag fashion, to form in the end a small triangular bag. Taking the needles, he broke them in two and put the pieces into the folded paper, which he laid beside him on the sofa. From his breast pocket he then produced another strip of paper, which was plain and incredibly grubby, wrote on it with his red pencil, and folded it, though this time into a four-cornered packet. The folded strips of paper were then solemnly handed to the lady of the house. As payment another heaped scoopful of flour was emptied into the big fellow's bag. The two men still did not seem altogether satisfied and made an attempt to obtain cash in addition, but without success.

When at long last they had gone, the mother went into the side-room to put the two charms away in her red-painted metal chest, the key of which was always fastened by a safety-pin inside her sleeveless jacket. When the chest was opened, she opened another little box in order to place the charms inside, where others already lay waiting to be covered with silk, brocade, or plastic. I stepped forward to have a closer look. It is not every day that one sees charms being made, and I wished to examine them as during the beggars' visit I had been obliged to sit a rather long way off. Yet I did not want to be tactless. The mother smilingly made an inviting gesture. I was welcome to approach and look at the small paper packages—but *only if I took off my glasses.* If I glanced at them through spectacles before they were protected by a cover they would evidently lose their magic powers—and so unfortunately I had to abandon my inspection of these charms at close quarters.

After the two dubious fellows had gone, the daughter of the house suddenly became seized with energy and began taking carpets and rugs out of the two guest-rooms, of which I occupied one. She also began to sweep and clean up, as well as that was possible in the costume she was wearing. When, in all her glory, she was busy in the two guest-rooms and on the front veranda outside, two other beggars appeared on the stairs leading to the loggia. Once again they were *sayyids,* with green bands round their tur-

bans. One of them held an immense flat hand, cut out of metal, towards the daughter of the house. The handle by which he held it was wrapped in a flowing green silk cloth. The young woman took the metal hand and placed it against her forehead before handing it back. She then fetched a little flour and sugar for the two of them, but they were not admitted to the house. On that particular day, then, the village was visited by as many as four *sayyids*. The green wrapping round their turbans indicated that they were directly descended from the prophet Mohammed, but as far as I was able to see when watching their visits to the various houses, from my vantage point on the open loggia, they emerged from the doors, gates, and loggias with remarkable speed. Their allegedly distinguished descent clearly did not seem to be of much help to them.

I also encountered beggars during my stay in Sulaimaniyah. But unlike those who had visited the village, these were stationary. They stayed at the entrance to the mosque. This was adjacent to our house and was quite small. Fronting the mosque was a courtyard planted with trees, and in the middle of this a flat roof with four pillars had been erected as a covering for the pool at which the faithful performed their ablutions before prayers. The men prayed standing and kneeling on the veranda of the mosque and in rows in front of and behind the pool; but as the heat increased, the pillared roof itself was used for prayers. They climbed to the top by means of a long ladder, like the ladders made from crooked branches which were used in private homes. This roof was on a level with our own, and near enough for me to watch, every evening towards sunset, the preparations for the men's prayers. First the old servant of the mosque went up with a roll of carpet over his shoulder. Slowly he unrolled the carpet, and went down for another. When the roof had been fully carpeted, the turn came for the water cooler, a pitcher ending in a point at the bottom which stood on a stand. By means of buckets he filled the open clay vessel and floated a metal bowl on it. The men went up one by one and crossed to the water cooler, where they took a drink from the bowl, threw what they could not drink over the

roof, and refloated the bowl for the next thirsting man. They then sat down with crossed legs and waited for the moment when the joint prayers would begin.

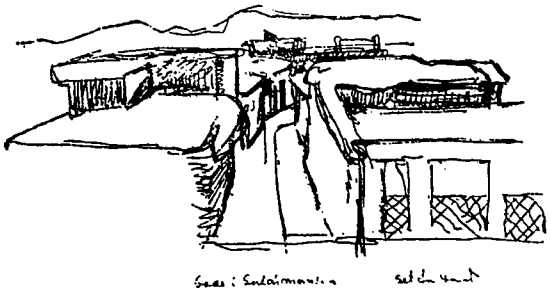
The chief person at prayer-time, the leader of the prayers, was the mullah, who wore a white headband outside his skull-cap. The first day of my stay in Iraq I had bought a yard of white cloth to wrap round my head as a change from a sun-helmet. The first act of my interpreter when I took up my quarters in town was to banish this white head-dress. It was all very well for me to be seen without a covering garment and veil; that could be excused on the ground that I was a European. But she could not let me walk about dressed like a mullah.

We would often take a short cut through the courtyard of the mosque. All who came from the alley which led past our house did the same, and none of the praying men took any notice of them. At the little gate leading out from the courtyard, which was so low that you had to bend your head in order to get through, there were beggars.

In the courtyard in front of the gate, inside the precincts of the mosque, stood a large perambulator. A perambulator is an unremarkable object in Europe, but they are never used by babies in Kurdistan, who are always carried until they are big enough to walk. This was not a baby's perambulator. Trussed up inside it sat a girl of perhaps twenty. The large head lay back, mouth open, and swarming with flies. In relation to her arms her hands seemed out of position. Between them was a bowl for alms. She was a half-wit. Her family used to leave her in the courtyard of the mosque in the morning and fetch her in the evening. According to my interpreter, there were institutions for the feeble-minded, but this girl's people would not give up the income which she represented. She was a cruel and heart-rending spectacle. After passing her and going out through the gate, I would see a little black cone sitting on the ground close to the wall, a heavily veiled woman. Across the child which lay, dressed in rags and swarming with flies, on her lap, she held out a begging hand. For women of this kind there was also, I understood, some sort of workhouse which

would look after them if they wished; but whether the child was her own or was borrowed for the occasion (a not unknown phenomenon in the Orient), she made good money by sitting there.

There are five pillars of Islam. The first and most important is the belief that there is but one God and that Mohammed is his Prophet, as the muezzin cries five times a day when calling to prayer. The second is the duty of the five daily prayers. The third is the duty to give alms. The fourth is the fast, observed by men and women. The fifth is the pilgrimage, when possible, to the holy city of Mecca in Arabia. The fact that in a Moslem country charity is a religious duty should make the beggar's lot a better one there than in countries where he is dependent entirely on common humanity.



9—*The Perpetual Fire*

The motorist who passes Kirkuk by night, driving south across the trackless desert to Baghdad or north along the road to Erbil, sees over the oil-field the flames which form Kirkuk's landmark. They are a captivating sight at night but are less interesting by day, when they are seen to be the flares of waste gas escaping from the tops of metal pipes. One result of the national wealth of oil is the virtual non-existence of taxes. I have heard young couples planning their entire future on the husband's expected income, all his savings having of course gone into the marriage portion and been prodigally spent in equipping the future home and adorning the bride. The idea of laying something up for unforeseen circumstances, including such things as taxes, was never thought of. I was so overwhelmed by this social security that I forgot all about snakes, scorpions, Asiatic diseases, and such-like trifles.

The presence of oil was also manifested in the buying of cars. Of course, only a minority of the population own cars. But what cars! All the latest and most luxurious American designs! Their owners change them every other year so as always to have the latest model, with the result that nearly new cars pass quickly from hand to hand down the social scale. Thus any ordinary hired taxi

may be a black-and-white De Soto which only a few years previously was the property of a Minister.

For a small sum, I had hired one such dream of a car in order to drive with my interpreter and her brother to Kirkuk, Erbil, Mosul, and Rowanduz, where the costumes, especially the men's, were said to differ widely from the costumes in the district where I had been staying.

To avoid the heat of the day we travelled part of the way by night. We had left the red flames of Kirkuk behind us, had passed Erbil, and were on the way to Mosul when, shortly before midnight, we saw a car lying with upturned wheels in a ditch beside the deserted road. The good Samaritan in me was at once aroused. There must have been an accident: it was our duty to stop and offer help.

'We are women,' my interpreter remarked laconically, wrapping her black *aba* more closely round her when I tried to persuade her to get the driver to stop; and so our black De Soto sped off along the road. No one in this country would expect a car containing women to stop and offer help in the middle of the night, even though there were men in it.

In a Moslem community women are precious, protected, and pampered. Their status is a highly privileged one. It is something we emancipated and independent western women have forgotten the existence of. We have achieved equality with men together with all its attendant advantages, but also all its consequent disadvantages.

When my interpreter had been shopping in the bazaar at Sulaimaniyah, or later in the shops of Baghdad, she never carried her purchases home; they were carried in a basket at her heels by one of the swarm of boys who loitered about for the purpose. I myself learnt never to carry my shoulder bag if it was at all heavy.

In the company of my interpreter I was transported to a life where to be a woman was to be a specially select being who demanded every possible consideration. It was surprising, and most pleasant, when I travelled, the only woman, as I did on several occasions. The Kurds treat a woman with so much consideration,

respect, and care that to be back among Europeans, of any nation, is something of a shock.

But the life of a Moslem woman is hedged in by many conventions. For this reason my interpreter could be very troublesome. She could not drink a Pepsi-Cola or a glass of tea in a bazaar, though we were offered one and though we were dying of thirst. It was not done by a veiled lady. She could not sit on the lower floor of a restaurant which we visited together in Baghdad; only men sat there. We had to go upstairs to a part that was select enough for women. If, when we travelled by bus or car, we stopped at a *chaikhana*, she could not sit outside under the canopy of leaves or on the clay benches where men reclined. Chairs had to be taken out behind the house; or if there was anything in the way of a garden, there would be seats there for women.

Once I drove with some black-veiled women from the small town of Halabja to see a certain shrine inside a small building in a burial ground. We had the car for only a limited time, as the driver had another engagement, and every minute was precious. We had got out of the car and were proceeding to the burial ground when the women suddenly disappeared behind a low wall, where I heard the sound of splashing water; a washing pool, it seemed. They were away what seemed like an endless time. When finally they reappeared I was told that before they could enter the burial ground they had to perform the ritual ablutions which they normally performed before prayers. Incidentally, it occurred to one of the women that she ought not to enter the place at all, being at the time in her critical period. At last the party completed their laborious preparations, and we visited the strangely neglected graves, each marked by two projecting flat stones, not upright but leaning in all directions. We also saw the shrine, which was in a sort of chapel. Outside stood a tree festooned with coloured cloths, hung there by grateful women whose wishes had been granted, as one sees silver hearts and similar objects hung up outside Roman Catholic churches. Inside the chapel we were stopped by a grating. Behind this was the sacred tomb, covered by a house-shaped scaffolding on which hung silken rugs of a green colour. The

8. Seated on the flat clay roof, a young woman is making cigarettes on a metal tray. Sargalu.

Milking a goat in traditional Kurdish way from behind.

9. Women at work in a room in the clay house, which has a pitcher-shaped sunken oven. Sulaimaniyah.

women picked up pebbles from the ground and pressed them against the wall next to the grating. If they stuck, their wishes would be granted. I also had a try, but my pebble must have been too big or my wish impossible of fulfilment. The pebble dropped down.

These ablutions, which men as well as women are obliged to perform before entering holy ground, I also witnessed in the little town of Tawela, right up by the Persian frontier in the mountains. We were installed in the best house in the town, and ate and slept in a room with the most splendid carpets. It was cool and fresh and the carpet-making country of Persia was near. The road leading to the town had been spread with similar carpets when the king's uncle had visited it a few years before. This had also been the occasion for laying out, on the first floor of the house we stayed in, a room which was displayed with justified pride. It was a huge bathroom with every European convenience.

I had the feeling that it was regarded rather as the wonder of the house than employed for everyday use, as we would use an ordinary European bathroom. Neither the husband, his three wives, nor an old sister who lived in the house seemed from their appearance to make very great use of it.

I was delighted to see sanitary installations again, whereas my interpreter immediately went down below to the arrangements she was more accustomed to, and which in fact are both hygienic and practical in the hot climate, provided you have the right flexibility in the knees.

In this house the three wives lived apparently as the best of friends. They helped each other with the cooking and looked after one another's children. They lived their lives on the surrounding balcony at first-floor level and in the adjoining rooms, which included a kitchen with fires on the floor. The house was in the form of a half H. The three wings enclosed a courtyard planted with flowers, in the centre of which was a green pool with a refreshing spring. The fourth side of the house was a low wall facing the road, the river, and the mountain-side beyond. Over the wall at some distance could be seen the market square, where

the bus arrived and departed once a day. On the square, which opened straight on to the river, were the shops of the bazaar, and from there narrow streets rose steeply between the houses. Below the market square was the women's public washing pool. This was an extensive and complicated arrangement consisting of a whole succession of pools, in which they washed shorn sheep's wool, the family's clothes, and themselves.

When I made my entry down the short flight of steps which led from the square to these underground rooms, lit only from the opening facing the river, a terrified young woman hid herself in a corner. My sun-helmet and white blouse persuaded her for a moment that a man had strayed into these most private female regions. At least it could not be a woman with that appearance.

The women of this town always wore a long coat of velvet or brocade over the usual costume. This was not for the sake of warmth, for on a summer's day it was as fantastically hot as it was anywhere in Kurdistan, though the evenings and nights were cool and people moved to carpeted rooms in their houses instead of on to the roof. The women here twisted the lower parts of their coats and laid them up on their backs like bustles. No woman, they said, would show her back without this protective covering, as to do so would be indecent.

The women of this house, the best in the village, spent all their time within its walls. We visitors made an excursion into the mountains so that we might say we had seen Persia, whose mountains were indistinguishable from the mountains on our own side of the frontier. They said that the women of the house had not been up there for fifteen years.

One of the daughters of the house took us to see the mosques of this large village, and we went inside one of them which stood by the riverside. It was supposed to have attained to its present height by divine intervention, the pillars having shot up into the air in a single night. The shape of the capitals of these mosques, as well as the arches over the doors and windows, indicated the proximity to Persia. Before we removed our shoes to go inside the mosque and see the shrine the women, of course, paid a visit

to the neighbouring house, where there was a washing pool. They were about to enter holy ground.

The tombs stood at floor level, each with a stone at its head and foot. Surmounting each tomb was a house-shaped frame with a pitched roof which was covered with green silk carpets. The dead person's turban hung from the gable of one of these superstructures. After kissing it tenderly, the daughter of our house reverently accepted some soil which the servant of the mosque scraped up from the floor.

Before setting foot on the carpets of the mosque we had taken off our shoes, as one always did on entering a private house. There are religious reasons for removing one's shoes before entering a mosque; in a private home it is done to save the carpets. The carpets and rugs for dining on, sitting on, and sleeping on must not be soiled by dirt from the street.

The growing use of European shoes in place of sandals and slippers is giving rise to a conflict. Footwear in its original form is the first traditional article of clothing to go, especially where men are concerned. Brown-and-white or black-and-white shoes made by Bata, and rather too pointed, are taking the place of the traditional footwear. I was particularly struck by this fact at Tawela, where they make exceptionally handsome fabric shoes called *kalash*. The soles of these shoes consist of narrow strips of folded material laid on edge and held together by a threaded leather strap. The upper, made by other craftsmen in the bazaar, is crocheted with cotton thread. There is no surer footwear on mountain paths than these *kalash*, and they have the added advantage that they can be easily slipped off before stepping on to carpets. European shoes are obviously more difficult to put on and take off, and probably the final result will be to keep the shoes on, as we do in the west. It will be a sad development from the point of view of both hygiene and the carpets.

Returning from Rowanduz, we passed through Kirkuk and were able to visit the oil-field of the Iraq Petroleum Company. A young engineer, whom I had met at the Dokan Dam Site, drove us round the moon-like landscape in his jeep, and was sensible

enough to show us no more than we could take in. We saw the oil seeping, black as pitch, from the ground, or trickling out in a clear sulphur-green stream. At one point the ground was on fire. Years before, somebody had dropped a lighted match and the escaping gas had been ignited. It had been burning ever since and would go on burning indefinitely. Protruding from the ground behind a small rectangular iron railing was a heavy bent iron pipe which was securely locked. It stood an abstract memorial to the first oil well, now exhausted. The dates of the birth and death were recorded in the inscription.

Finally, we were shown the last word in swimming-pools, with ice-blue tiles which in this weather, that had made the seats of the jeep burning hot under our clothes, conveyed an impression of deliciously cold water.

Seeing these tiles and this extremely well-designed swimming-pool—pure Hollywood and not a bit Danish—for some reason I had a sudden and violent attack of homesickness. I had by this time spent many months living with Kurdish families; was familiar with their everyday life and perfectly at home among them. But this object so well built, so full of right angles and straight lines, so artificial and engineered, took me suddenly by surprise and caused me to long for the world which for good or ill was nevertheless my own.

We had been invited to lunch with the engineer and two other young bachelors, but suddenly an intense conflict arose. I thought that I should never drag my interpreter into the peaceful drawing-room, where the touching sight of Danish beer awaited us. In there were *men*, strange men, and she had to reveal herself to them without the cover of her black veil.

The many sets of plates and the intricate assortment of knives and forks which accompany even a fairly simple western meal constituted another difficulty. By this time I too had forgotten how we Europeans (thanks, I think, to Louis XIV) have made the appeasement of hunger such a troublesome affair.

We were to stay that night with a man who had two houses, one for each of his wives. The houses adjoined each other but

were not directly connected, so that to get from one to the other he had to go out into the street. The two houses were identical, each consisting of two rooms separated by an ante-room. The rooms faced the street, and so the windows had been set so high up that you could not see out or, more especially, in. Oriental houses nearly always turn their backs on such wholly irrelevant things as streets and the world outside. The ante-room led to a stone-paved courtyard, which was shaded by vines and on two sides was enclosed by a high wall. On the third side was a building which contained all the necessary small apartments—kitchen, bathroom, and the small room with the hole in the floor. A cemented staircase in the corner led up to the flat roof, which in Kirkuk was surrounded by a low parapet providing far more seclusion than the hundreds of open roofs in Sulaimaniyah.

One of the two rooms of each house was the guests' reception-room and had the usual sofas, chairs, and small high-legged tables, together with a radio set and paper flowers arranged in small vases. The other room was the bedroom. But the bed had been transferred to the courtyard and mattresses for sitting on were laid alongside two of the walls. Standing against the third wall was a Singer treadle sewing-machine, to the handle of which a blue button had been fixed to ward off the evil eye. Metal chests—bright red, pale blue, and brown—stood in a corner. Hanging on the wall, between some colour prints of the Kaaba at Mecca, was a pair of gilt metal anklets. I was shown the contents of the chests, which comprised Kurdish women's clothes—gowns, sleeveless jackets, long gathered trousers, and skull-cap with turban. Both wives were present. That day, instead of their Kurdish costumes, they were wearing white dresses of the type worn by modern Turkish women; shapeless, ugly dresses of poor cut. When they squatted tailor-fashion I could not help noticing that underneath they had red cotton knickers which ended at the knees. One of the women was plagued by gout in her big toe. When we arrived a village woman with blue tattoo marks on her face, hands, and insteps was busily smearing ointment on the foot and applying a huge bandage.

I was suddenly reminded of a sick baby which had visited our village with its mother. It had been only a few months old. It had been taken to the hospital with a high temperature, but the evening before, so as to leave no remedy untried, it had been undressed and rubbed all over its body and face with freshly made butter by an old woman. Rather more had been taken from the jar in the store-room than had been needed. This the old woman had consumed with relish while she was waiting for the butter to dry well enough into the baby's skin for her to dress it again.

At the double house of the two wives we had supper in the courtyard, and later we drank an endless quantity of tea. The mattress seats as well as the patient had been taken out of the gloomy bedroom and placed under the vines. The husband was so well off that he had been able to send both of his wives on pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina, one of them having made the long journey overland, the other by air. Innocently, I asked why they had not gone together. This was a stupid question. Even by modern means of transport it was a journey which took months, and some time had also to be allowed for at the shrines. A Moslem does not spend large sums of money on acquiring two wives in order to live celibate.

Consequently, the two women had travelled at different times. After the pilgrimage it was forbidden to reveal any part of a bare arm or show the head uncovered. And so on the evening of our visit they were wearing long-sleeved dresses, with white madonna head-veils round their pleasant and smiling faces. I could not tell which of them was the elder.

The husband arrived home late from work. He was a dealer in bicycles and motor-car spares, and at his business wore a European shirt and long trousers.

He had evidently eaten in town. The rest of us had had a sumptuous meal, with fruit and with a large lump of ice in the curdled milk and water. He joined us for a cup of tea. "Joined" is hardly the word, however; for we sat comfortably on the mattresses, while he sat, a little on his own, on an arm-less chair which had been brought into the courtyard.

Sitting there, he seemed as if he did not belong to the family. It seemed, indeed, as if there was nowhere in the entire house that he could call his own. He had two houses and two wives; but where was there a room he could occupy himself? Each house was arranged as the setting for a woman's life. We visited the other wife's house the next day. It was, as I have said, a copy in reverse of the one at which we had stayed. We were received in the guest-room. The whole place was decorated, amid paper flowers, by a collection of European dolls and things for dolls' houses: a childless woman's dream of the child she did not have.

I gradually learnt that the husband did not live anywhere; or rather, lived in both houses, sharing his life regularly between his two wives and their two houses, spending twenty-four hours in each. The night we were there he was to spend in the other house, but after changing he returned to our house in order to talk a little more with us guests, see a little more of the wife who had gout, and discuss the household purchases he was to make the following day. Neither of the wives concerned herself with shopping. I was familiar with this from my home in Sulaimaniyah. The husband, who also had two wives, as well as seven daughters, five of them grown up and going around at home, made the day-to-day purchases, returning accompanied by a boy carrying meat, fruit, and vegetables in a basket.

The husband, as I have said, came back on an extra evening call. He had changed into his indoor and sleeping costume, consisting of a long-sleeved, white gown reaching to his heels and slippers. Shuffling off his slippers, he sat down on the mattresses beside the ailing woman, who wailed '*Wainana, wainana.*' As he folded his legs up I saw him lay a small object on the mattress at his side. It was not the pipe I supposed it to be. It was a revolver.

I recalled revolvers, of the finest American make, which I had seen in my village home. One of them had been used by the son of the house to lend colour to a dance one dark night. It went off as the culmination of the hotter and hotter rhythm of the drum and flute.

I also thought of a stack of rifles I had seen in the room, where,

on the mats, we had been served with an unforgettable meal by a manservant with a fringed turban, in the mountain village up by the Persian frontier. There the rifles had stood in a corner of the room against a European dressing-table with an oval mirror, which looked as though it had never been used since its first arrival as an inseparable part of a trousseau in the latest Baghdad fashion. Our host of the frontier village had also carried a large revolver in his belt. Evidently, the days of carrying weapons, or at any rate keeping them within reach, were not yet over in this country.

Having finished his tea and been given the last instructions concerning the next day's purchases, my Kirkuk host rose and, dressed in his long white nightshirt, with a revolver in his hand, strode out of the courtyard, through the ante-room, out through the front door, and in to his other wife in the adjoining house.

'*Wainana, wainana,*' the poor woman complained all night long, getting no rest from her pain. In the face of all my objections, I had been allotted the place of honour in the iron bedstead, and I enjoyed it.

The previous night we had not been very comfortable. We had spent the night at a hotel in Erbil, and it seemed that there were no other women staying there. The rooms were disposed round a large courtyard, where innumerable beds in serried ranks were occupied by sleeping men. We two women and the little brother were given a room together inside; but though there was an electric fan in the room, we had all slept very badly owing to the heat. Of course, as the only women we could not have slept in the courtyard.

10—*The Waterless Village*

Over all the roofs of Sulaimaniyah storks would circle. *Lek-lek*, they were called by a descriptive name which imitated their clacking. The slow wheeling flight of these elegant birds is as much a feature of the town scene as the sunflowers and the low, bare, rather pyramidal surrounding mountains.

It followed that somewhere there must be a place where they could find the frogs and similar food which storks live on, but it was some time before I located it.

At some distance from the town there was a river, which supplied the town with water and where a large cement factory had been built.

Round the place (Sarchinar) where the purified water came up was a sort of pleasure park, to which an admission charge was made; and ranged along the water-side were summer-houses, where families would spend a whole day at a time. There were neither tables nor chairs in the summer-houses, but of course these are unnecessary to a cultural pattern in which life is led at floor level. The families would go there in cars crammed to bursting point with men, veiled women, and children. They would take with them all they needed for a day's stay, though no

cooked food because of the heat; even at home the food for the two main daily meals was always freshly cooked. And so families coming to the pleasure park for a day out, on a Friday or some other Moslem holiday, would bring charcoal for a fire, pots for cooking, the samovar, tea-glasses and crockery, meat, rice, and fruit. Wafers of bread were the only articles taken ready made. The fire would then be lit and the samovar filled for tea. Water of the finest quality flowed green, fresh, and clear past the summer-houses. The whole arrangement was slightly reminiscent of an old-fashioned charabanc outing.

An excursion to this pleasure park was looked upon as a great enjoyment; so much so that it was one of those entertainments which were not permitted for a certain period after a death in the family.

Water and green trees in this dry land represent more than the highest degree of scenic beauty: water is life itself. The soil is fertile enough; what is lacking in most places is water. It is one of the most appalling experiences to see a stream cease to flow and rivers dwindle day by day.

I once spent a few days in the village of Mirza Rustum, the ferry-stage on the Little Zab river. There was a plain in front and mountains behind it. The river had dwindled to such an extent in the heat of the summer that a broad bed of shingle lay exposed on either side. Early one morning I went down to it. I had to wade across a small arm of the river which had branched off before I could continue on my way on the white shingle. I had a particular reason for going, as I wanted to count how many steps the women had to walk when fetching the daily supply of water in petrol cans or earthenware pitchers.

It was at the end of June when I stayed in the village, and there were three hundred steps each way. From the house I was staying at, which stood on the bank of the river, I had several times watched a woman approach across the shingle. On reaching the small branch of the river she would take the petrol can from her shoulder and remove her shoes. Then she would carry the can across and leave it, wade back for the shoes, put them on, pick up the petrol

can again, and climb the low slope which was the original river bank. After this walk she would be no farther than the first houses of the village. Many lived higher up and had a further walk with their heavy burden. And how far would a single petrol can go towards supplying the needs of a whole family for drinking, cooking, and washing, though the last was the least? And it was only the end of June.

The fields alongside the river were watered by ingenious water wheels, which baled the water into canals. The wheel was worked by a horse or a mule, driven round by a woman or a boy.

But the domestic water supply was carried home from the river on the shoulders of women, and the flow dwindled as the heat rose.

In the house at which I stayed they had a more practical arrangement. Here we had a man with a donkey, and they went, with as many cans as the donkey could carry, in regular service between the river and the house, which had a large metal tank installed in the yard. At the bottom of the tank was a tap, and this was where one washed. A big horse, ridden by the master of the house, was tethered just beside the tank. It had an attack of colic, so had to be kept under special observation. I had not reckoned with the wide range of such a horse's tail when it whisked it in the air, and so was nearly knocked over when I squatted down to wash before going to bed.

The night spent at the village by the ferry-stage was the first time I had been away from a house where I had had my own bedroom. It was also the first time I had slept with a whole family. So I still had the wrong idea that you should undress before going to bed. True, I was given a bed to sleep in, but it stood out in the courtyard. To get undressed in the evening raised few problems; it was done in the dark. My troubles started the next morning, when I awoke and found myself surrounded by a lot of people who were dressed while I was not. From that day I saw the practical point of sleeping with my clothes on, as the other women did.

The water in this village had to be brought up to the houses—mainly by women—from the river, which got smaller and smaller. Yet it was by a comparatively flat track that the water had to be transported. Up in the mountains I stayed in another village, Balkha, where all water had to be carried up from the valley. Among those we visited here was the local mullah. His wife rightly complained that it was getting beyond her powers to fetch three or four goatskin sacks full every day up the steep climb of at least half an hour to the house.

At Sulaimaniyah we had been visited by a man from here, as usual a relation. I had by this time a feeling that the family ties in their furthest ramifications extended over most of southern Kurdistan. The man, in spite of his youth, looked tired and worn out. His pale-brown costume, of material woven from goat's wool, was stained and ragged, his shoes shabby. He was also on a strenuous trip. With two donkeys laden with leather sacks full of dried mulberries he had made the long journey from his small mountain village to Kirkuk, to trade his mulberries for corn. The journey took a fortnight, and on the way he slept anywhere out of doors. It was on the return journey that he visited us at Sulaimaniyah, half way between Kirkuk and his own village.

Some time later we paid him a visit, staying as guests in his home with him and his young wife. We had only just arrived and been given seats on mattresses up on the roof when an urgent message was received asking if we would move over to one of the larger houses of the village, where there would be more carpets and it would be more comfortable. Carpets, or rugs, for sitting on were a mark of prosperity in this village so near to Persia. Of course we stayed with the young couple.

And so, occasioned by our stay, the little home was visited by all the local notables, who came up one by one on to the roof, with the result that in the end we were surrounded on all sides by dark masculine figures drinking tea. The next day it was the women's turn to call, and they were no less numerous.

I was the first European woman who had ever visited this

village, and so I could only regret that my hair, which I let down and allowed to hang down my neck at the request of the women, was no longer what it had once been. Incidentally, there were children who were both fair and blue-eyed, though they had darker complexions than Europeans.

We spent two nights at this house. The best quilts were spread out on the roof in the evening and, with the only rug for a groundsheet, made a single bed for me and my interpreter. That afternoon the rug had been carried on the back of a mule the long and laborious way from the village up on the mountain down to the terraces of the mulberry orchards, where it had been unrolled for us to sit on. The best of all that the house possessed was proudly spread before us. On our departure I hung a small necklace of white beads round my young hostess's neck; it was only a cheap little necklace which I had bought in the bazaar at Sulaimaniyah, but it was all I had. How I wished that I could have given something more valuable in return for her Oriental hospitality!

In the mulberry orchards it was cool and refreshing. The ground under the trees was as clean as a stone floor; it has to be, or the mulberries cannot be gathered. The small yellowish-white fruit lay scattered on the ground and it was the women's job to gather it in baskets and take it to a circular, sunlit drying-yard. The site where the fruit was spread to dry was covered with a layer of clay, which had been smoothed down with stones so as to make it hard and polished. The mud roof on which we slept had been treated in the same way, a mixture of lime, clay, and water having been rubbed and polished by a stone. The surface was easy to clean by sweeping, but would not stand the least drop of water. If anybody happened to spill tea or water on it it had to be re-polished with a stone which was always to hand, and all the roofs had to be gone over once a year.

A spring rose below the mulberry terraces, and from it, immediately after our arrival, we were given a bowl of water to drink. That in Kurdish homes you are at once given something to drink unasked is not only a sign of courteous hospitality, it is, more than anything, characteristic of a land of drought.

My hostess had brought from the village, besides her three-year-old son who had come riding down the path on her back, a bundle which turned out to contain flour wrapped in a skin and salt in a carpet-woven bag. She had come to do some open-air baking in the mulberry grove, where the baking things were kept.

First, however, she went down to the spring, where she thoroughly washed herself. In a village as waterless as this, women must wash when they get the chance, regardless of the time of day. When she had finished she tied her white head-veil tightly round her skull-cap and down over her face and neck. The women of this village did not wear a turban with ornaments but only the skull-cap, this being spangled with sewn-on silver coins and fringed with blue beads. Then she loosened her sleeves, stepped on the hem of her gown so as to conceal her feet, and carried out the prescribed obeisances.

Her prayers over, she filled a goatskin bag with water and came up to the rest of us to make the dough. The baking was to take place in the shade of the big mulberry-trees in a hollow on one of the terraces.

Before starting to work she had with fabulous skill assembled everything she would require within reach. Nothing was forgotten. The filled water bag lay behind her. It was thrown over in a very special way so the water would not run out. On her right were three stones arranged in a circle; here lay a curved iron plate the size of a large pot lid.

Between the stones she then laid long branches with their tips crossed. The fire was lit by means of dead leaves and kept going by pushing long branches into the fire as time went on. The flour was sifted over the skin which had been brought. The dough was kneaded from flour, water, and salt until smooth and even. With a small, flat iron spoon a lump was taken into the hand and shaped into a ball, which was laid with others at the woman's side. The small, short-legged table was sprinkled with flour; and a ball of dough was patted flat on the table and picked up and swung between the hands vertically from side to side, so that the

sheet of dough grew bigger and bigger by its own weight. It was then clapped on to the baking pad and still further stretched, whereupon it was slapped on to the hot iron plate, which was waiting over the fire.

The first sheet of bread was baked by itself. The next were always topped by the previous one, which thus retained the heat like a cover. It was all done with amazing speed. The young woman never once stopped. Steadily she worked away like a delicately adjusted machine with many hands, a sheet of bread being ready on the baking pad when the one on the iron plate was just finished. The baked wafers piled up in the flat basket. The dough diminished in the flat, internally tinned copper dish. At no time did the woman change her position as she sat cross-legged among all her utensils. Only her nimble fingers worked at an astonishing and constant speed. She sat like a coloured flower in the shade of the mulberry-trees, apparently unencumbered by all her feminine garments.

The next day we visited the waterfall. It was below the village, and it was there that the village drinking water was obtained. The water cascaded down the mountain-side, which was covered with fine grass and green ferns. Here there was one of the usual washing pools. After asking some boys and young men to go away, we proceeded to enjoy the fresh and plentiful water and its washing facilities. My young hostess washed her motley cotton gown, as well as that could be done without taking it off. Yet she divested herself of her long flowered cotton trousers and thrust first one and then the other strong and supple leg into the water in order, in this rather complicated way, to have some sort of a bath. To undress and bathe, even though we women were alone, was unthinkable.

A little way off some other women were fetching water in large goatskin bags. When the bag was full the woman would lay it on the ground over a big triangular, folded shawl and then lie down on top of the bag on her back. Lying thus, she pulled one corner of the shawl over her right shoulder and the other under her left arm, and then tied the corners across her chest. Then with

a jerk she got up, pushed her heavy burden into position over her loins, and began her laborious climb up the narrow path which went meandering to the village. It was a long way, at least half an hour's walk, from this paradisial waterfall up to the houses, and every drop of fresh, pure water was fetched from there.

The village lies on a steep mountain-side. In the low-lying part there is, it is true, a spring and an extremely dismal and gloomy washing place inside a dilapidated clay house, but the water here is unfit for drinking and cooking.

When the clay roofs are to be smoothed down the women work in company. When, outside the village, they meet the village goat-herd with all the goats, there is also a form of fellowship. All, of course, know their own livestock. In a motley crowd the women separate among the animals, giving them a little salt and milking them into their skin bags. But as the milk is not obtained in large quantities, they take it in turns to hand over their day's yield, so that there are always a few who bring home a good portion.

But to systematize the endless and toilsome work of fetching water and combine to hire a man with a donkey to carry their bags of water has not occurred to them. This work is literally a Danaidean task, the women of the village being Danaids every day of the year.

In this village the women have to work very hard. It is not so hot that it is necessary to break the day with a siesta. On top of their ordinary domestic duties there is also the work in the mulberry orchards.

In the mulberry regions, where girls also work in the plantations, it is the custom, as already mentioned, to marry them off very early. In this village I saw several small girls of no more than twelve or thirteen, flat in front and behind, but already wearing the skull-cap festooned with coins of the married woman.

I also met a girl from here in another village. Married at the age of twelve, she had been so small when, as they said, 'the family had got her', that they had had to hold her on to the horse

which had carried her to the bridal house lest she fell off. Her fate had been a sad one. She had given birth to four children, and two had died. This she had taken rather calmly, as they were girls; her tragedy lay in the fact that the two surviving children also were girls. She was very good-looking, charming, graceful in her every movement, capable about the house; but because she could only give birth to baby girls she lived on the edge of a volcano. Owing to the pressure of local public opinion, and also perhaps because her husband wanted a change, the threat of a second wife hung perpetually over her head. The man must have a son. Though polygamy is permitted by the Koran and the woman must have been well aware of the risk thereby involved, she seemed determined not to acquiesce in her fate but to make things hot both for her husband and any concubine. The tragic part for her was that the struggle was lost from the start. If a first wife does not take kindly to another, the husband sends her back home. He can easily get a divorce.

We spent two nights in this waterless village. The conveniences were the goat-shed below the roof on which we slept. But a fact that was more remarkable was the absence of a jug of water for washing in. That, perhaps, was the most striking evidence of the shortage of water in this village.

To prevent dogs and cattle from straying on to the roof, which was level with one of the ditch-like village paths, a barricade of thorny branches was erected every evening. During the night I was wakened by some sounds of rustling and creaking leather on the other side of the fence. As far as I was able to make out in the dark, a big four-legged creature was going on to one of the low roofs: a man had arrived on horseback. Dark figures unloaded things which they carried into the house, whereupon the horse, which loomed immense in the darkness (and whose creaking harness I had heard), was led away. We were near to the Persian border, and it was tempting to imagine that some smuggled goods had arrived. Then peace descended once more on the village, until the day began to dawn and people round about stirred under their quilts.

We departed later that morning. Leaving the village, we made for the road which passed a short distance away. There we sat waiting for the bus at a small *chaikhana* under shady trees by a little brook in which green water melons had been placed to cool in the limpid water.

11—Illiteracy

It is a strange feeling, being unable to correspond with the women I stayed with. Back home in Denmark, I have a natural desire to write to those who were my friends in Kurdistan, especially to the women in whose homes I spent so much time.

I cannot correspond with them for the simple reason that they cannot read. Not even a scrap of paper with my name written on it would have any meaning for them. Girls' schools are something new in Kurdistan. There is one in Sulaimaniyah. My interpreter, who had been educated at the teachers' training college in Baghdad, was the excellent teacher of English there. Her sisters had also gone to school. But they were exceptions.

In many villages there is not even a junior school for boys. Several villages which I visited had no school at all. There is a desire to establish more schools for boys in the country, but the plans are hampered by a shortage of qualified teachers. The establishment of village schools for girls is also contemplated; but it is a remote ideal, and in any case cannot alter the fact that the women whom I met are all grown up, and that in their childhood no one ever dreamt of teaching girls anything so useless as to read and write.

This ignorance of the written word would have seemed less strange if the cultural pattern of the people I had lived and worked

among had been fundamentally different from my own. But Islam, the Kurdish faith, is, like Christianity, a literary religion. The Kurds live in villages as European peasants used to live and their lives are well-nigh empty of the technical resources to which we have grown accustomed. They wear folk costumes. Unlike our fashion clothes, widely distributed but undergoing change, if not year by year at least decade by decade, national folk costumes remain pretty well unchanged from one generation to the next. On the other hand, every region has its distinctive features. The Kurds do not look very 'foreign'. Among the black-haired and black-eyed people who formed the majority there might be some who were both fair and blue-eyed, though not Scandinavian in appearance. They spoke a language akin to our own: an Indo-European language unlike Arabic.

I was thus with people I had every chance of feeling at home among. And so I feel doubly poor at being unable to write to them. I should so much like to thank them for the generous way in which they overlooked the breaches I committed of all the ceremonies associated with the arrival and departure of a guest. Just as I felt big and clumsy when a group of Kurdish women slipped, easily and elegantly, into position on the floor and sat swaying their bodies like a bed of pansies, in the same way I felt my European manner of going straight to the point and getting a thing over as quickly as possible both primitive and ungracious.

Whether shopping in the bazaar or paying a visit, one had to observe certain rules, which were complicated; such as who might talk to whom, and who might be seen by whom. Everything here took place as it did in the Rococo period, in that most conventional eighteenth century. And to take account of the present was not enough; one's actions were based on past tradition.

To build up a reputation for hospitality takes generations. The mutual family relationships are determined by marriages so carefully planned that we have nothing to equal them except in our royal houses. A person's reputation is something tangible, to be handled with care. One thinks in terms of family kinships, rather than of individuals.

At Sulaimaniyah I attended various marriage negotiations between families. There was a young man who was old enough and had saved up enough money to think of getting married, and for his future bride he was ready to pay a sum equal to about five hundred pounds. So one day he inquired of the women in his family if they knew a family who had a daughter of the right age. I was staying in the house at the time, and I saw him discuss the delicate matter in whispers with his female relations. Marriage would not entail leaving the patriarchal home. The house was big enough to allow a room for the newly wed couple. Food was cooked daily for from fourteen to sixteen persons, so that one more or less would make little difference, while in the new addition to the family the women of course would have an extra pair of hands to share in the housework.

The young man's elder sister and his father's younger wife promised to see what they could do. His own mother, his father's older wife, was not considered to be skilful enough to conduct such delicate negotiations.

The sister had her eye on a friend of one of her younger sisters, who was said to be both clever and 'polite', which no doubt meant that she was pleasant and friendly to get on with. The young man had actually caught a casual glimpse of the girl in question during a visit she had paid to the house. She, in turn, had heard that the young man seen going out was her friend's brother. Of course they had never spoken to each other.

The elder sister and the father's younger wife could not, however, go alone to the girl's family and initiate negotiations. I was unable to lend lustre to the family on this occasion, though I was allowed to go with them because they knew me to be interested in all kinds of ceremonies. So we took an older friend of the family, the wife of a very rich man. This could be seen from the wealth of gold ornaments she was able to hang on her turban, under her chin, and round her neck. She had been solemnly requested to join the party and provide a flattering social and economic background to the ladies of my family.

And so the three black-hooded figures and I set off along the

unpaved streets of the town to the house of the desirable bride. Here we negotiated with the mother alone. I was present at two stages of the negotiations. During the week which elapsed between the first and the second meeting, the bride's family tried by all the devious means of gossip to obtain information about the bridegroom-to-be. This was quite legitimate. At the next meeting they discussed what the gossip had been able to tell. Among the Kurds marriages were made neither in Heaven nor by two lovers on earth. Love or affection has nothing at all to do with it. Marriages are arranged by the young couple's families, both of which are interested to ensure that the new member of the family shall be of as high and as choice a quality as possible. Therefore they make thorough inquiries as to whether there is the least fault to find in the persons concerned.

In this case there was a suggestion of perhaps a little too much interest in gambling and frequenting cafés, to which the future mother-in-law took exception. All accusations of this nature were, however, vigorously repudiated by the young man's sister, stepmother, and older friend of the house. In so far as my knowledge of the language allowed me to follow the excited and dramatic discussion about the intended, and as yet quite unknown, son-in-law's qualifications, the mother-in-law-to-be was gradually re-assured and promised to put the matter to her husband. In the Moslem women's world, as regards marriage at all events, it is the women who hold the threads. The men are told no more than is good for them. But that sometimes happens with us too.

We then proceeded to discuss the amount of the marriage portion, and how much of this was to be spent on the bride's ornaments.

I must here interpose that I had seen no glimpse of the young bride-to-be at the first meeting. And she did not appear at this one. I thought at first that she was the young woman who entered the guest's reception room where we were negotiating; but she was only a cousin who was staying at the house, and who wished to contribute to the discussion. At this stage it concerned the application of the marriage portion. The girl herself was entirely

excluded from the negotiations on her future partner and fortunes, and on the ornaments she was to wear and the furniture she was to surround herself with.

Finally, the mother-in-law-to-be inquired about the marriage candidate's appearance. Now, it is a little difficult to describe a person so he almost seems to grow alive out of the ground. Strangely enough, no photographs were used on such occasions, as would have been natural. There are photographers in Sulaimaniyah, and a few days after a wedding I attended, the bride put on her white European wedding dress again and the man his light European summer suit, whereupon the young couple were photographed as well as any European couple and in the same style.

The future mother-in-law then suggested that she would drive past the shop belonging to the young man's father (which was in the main street), in the hope that the young man would be there and she would be able to have a look at him, unseen herself. She then promised to speak to her husband, who thus came into the picture for the first time. If he took the same view as she did, they would proceed. Unfortunately, the subsequent negotiations were to take place after I had left, so I was unable to attend them. But I heard that they had decided to allow a little time to elapse before proceeding, that being the proper thing to do. In the fullness of time there was to be a big wedding. They would request permission to use the large courtyard of the neighbouring house, in order that there might be music and dancing, for hours on end, for the men.

I have already mentioned that the men always danced alone. One of the things which the women in whose homes I stayed were most interested to hear about, therefore, was European dancing by couples. It happens to be very difficult to demonstrate this to the accompaniment of Arab or Kurdish music, but many of the women had seen Europeans and American dancing in films. Incidentally, my ideas of geography got completely upset during my stay in Kurdistan; in the end America seemed quite near and Europe an inexplicably long way off. The cars were American, as

were the films chiefly shown at the two cinemas in Sulaimaniyah. One of these was a closed building, with the result that the fantastic din which the audience made in the interval, talking against the music (which was played at full blast), was almost ear-splitting. The other cinema was open to the sky; a luxury only permissible in a climate as dry, hot, and constant as this was.

With my Kurdish friends in Baghdad I saw, for once, an English film, one of the best in recent years, and one which, more completely than any other, must have been outside the comprehension, ethics, and moral ideas of a Kurdish woman. It was the film version of *Romeo and Juliet.*

To the Moslem conception of marriage and love the conflict must have been more strange and incomprehensible than words can tell. It was not commented upon when the lights went up in the auditorium; but I had a sudden feeling that more than a whole continent separated me from the friends with whom, earlier that evening, I had eaten grilled fish with my fingers on the bank of the Tigris.

How odd it feels to be among women who can neither read nor write and who do not miss it, when one's own life is hedged in with books and papers full of printed and written words.

Many of the women I met in the villages were highly intelligent. But their intelligence had never been applied to assimilating written ideas and facts. Even in homes where the women had attended school and could read and write, reading for the sake of reading was strangely unknown. Newspapers were read by men at their business but not taken home. Books were non-existent, except for a few school books stacked on the top of a wardrobe.

When my interpreter first arrived at my village her luggage contained an Arabic-English dictionary, which she had borrowed at the library in Sulaimaniyah, in order to be as well equipped for interpreting as possible. We managed to get on without it, however. We spoke equally good or equally poor English.

On our first round of the village and the various houses where I had got into the habit of going while alone in the village, she had brought this thick dictionary with her so as to be on the safe

side. Fortunately, it was the first and last time that she did. In the little clay huts of my illiterate village the book in her hand caused a most alarming sensation. I doubt if a loaded revolver would have been less welcome.

While we were in my village a written invitation arrived. It was in Arabic and invited the family I was staying with to pay a day's visit to an Iraqi engineering family attached to the Dokan dam.

None of the men of the family was at home when the invitation arrived; but my interpreter read it out to the women, who looked gravely at the paper with writing on it. It was decided that she should write and say that they would be pleased to go if the invitation could be made to include us guests. The reply when it came was positive. We were to drive there in the uncle's Land-Rover the following Sunday at ten o'clock.

At half past eleven the mother and daughter had still not made up their minds how to divide their joint apparel between them. Clothes were pulled off and clothes were put on. We two other women did not have so many problems; we had less to choose from. In the end, the mother decided on a flame-coloured gown and green brocade trousers, which suited her dark beauty admirably. The daughter went chiefly in pink and looked no less well in her blossoming seventeen years. Atja, the little step-daughter, should originally have stayed at home to attend to the milking of the sheep, or some other dull work. It grieved me to see the little unwashed Cinderella looking miserable amid all the confusion of changing. Happily, counter-orders were given at the last moment. Atja and I rushed round to the pool at the back of the house in order to make her fairly presentable. Despite copious water and a large comb, it was impossible to straighten out her tangled hair. I made do with combing the surface hair of her mop, and at incredible speed she washed her own face, hands, and feet. We then ran back into the house. Like lightning she slipped out of the dress she was wearing and into another and cleaner one, taken out of her private little metal chest which she pulled out on the clay floor from a hook in the room. Clothes do not get neater by being

packed like this, though they were protected from moths by the material of the chest and by sprinkling with tobacco.

At long last the richly ornamented family and I set off and arrived at our destination, a brick villa of the type occupied by British engineers at the Dokan Dam Site.

The women of my family, and the men in their light woollen costumes with wide trousers, sat down on a European drawing-room suite. At a pinch this was all right as far as the men were concerned, but Kurdish women's costumes certainly do not go well with such an environment. The mother-in-law of the house entered in a black robe of Turkish type, black stockings, black shoes, and a black head-cloth—and looked just as wrong among the upholstered furniture. Only the hostess and her daughter in European summer clothes looked as though they belonged.

I had an errand at the British Resthouse. Inside it had been cool, thanks to a punkah in the ceiling and a powerful air-cooling apparatus. The heat outside was prodigious. Of course I was driven the hundred yards I had to go; it was too hot to walk out of doors. I was gone less than half an hour, and when I returned the scene had completely changed. Now only the host and the men of the party were sitting on the upholstered furniture. All the women had gone. I found them in the bedroom of the house, where they appeared to be very comfortable. At last they had found themselves and were at home.

Two mattresses had been laid on the bedroom floor at right-angles in front of the marriage bed, and here sat all the women, talking, laughing, and smoking cigarettes. The male and female worlds had been separated again in my absence, and both men and women seemed well pleased with the arrangement.

At length the time came for eating. A plastic cloth was laid on the floor, and an imposing meal grew up on it, consisting of rice cooked in butter, boiled fowl, fried chicken, vegetables, and much else. The drink was sour curdled milk mixed with water and iced. The "table" was laid with plates, knives, and forks, but most of the women preferred to eat with their fingers. Later we were

shown into the dining-room, where the men had finished their meal and had left. Here were fruit and sweets. After the meal hands were washed in the bathroom, where the mother-in-law partly washed her face and feet also, in preparation for her prayers. This washing seemed to be considerably more difficult to perform in a European-style bathroom, where there was both bath and wash-basin, than in the usual garden pool. One of the women of my village family found the bathroom sanitary arrangements too complicated to cope with and had to summon assistance. We returned to the bedroom in order to follow the admirable custom of the country and take a siesta in one large happy group. Here the hostess offered me a European silk nightdress. I was never more astonished in my life; here, in a country where people slept for the night with all their clothes on, I was being given a nightdress for a noontide siesta—the one occasion when in Europe we would sleep with our clothes on.

After saying her prayers energetically for some little time in a corner of the room, the mother-in-law handed the prayer rug to the others, who each used it in turn. In time we all settled down on the beds and the mattresses on the floor, and silence fell on the room, especially when we had managed to stop the noise of the air-cooling system.

I was awakened from my sleep by the faint clinking of tea-things which were being laid out on the floor. There was the usual arrangement of samovar and metal bowls containing tea-glasses, tea-spoons, and saucers clean and ready for use. But the arrangement happens to be a little bit awkward on a parquet floor. After a meal, and again after tea has been served, a floor-cloth has to be used in order to remove the traces. The arrangement is more appropriate to a beaten clay floor, cement floor, or paved courtyard.

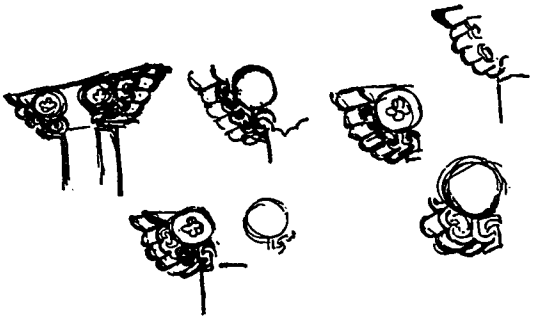
It is curious to see Oriental customs in an English house of bricks and mortar. As we rose from our siesta I could see through the open doors into the drawing-room, where the men had had their siesta and were changing back from their pyjamas into the clothes they had worn on their arrival.

I could also see into the kitchen, where there was a large white refrigerator, as well as an electric oven and a steel sink. This last was not used. A large plaited basket which contained the washing-up had been placed in the middle of the floor, with a stool and a tub beside it. The crockery would be washed, not at the steel sink, but on the floor according to the national custom. At this house they also slept on the roof out of doors, which was the only sensible thing to do when the nights were hot. But none of the Europeans did.

Late that afternoon my Kurdish village friends and I drove down to see the Dokan dam. For the first, and the last, time I crossed the narrow suspension bridge over the river-bed on foot, after having crossed it more than once by car. It was just wide enough for a car to get by, and it was so narrow it had to be driven slowly and with concentration, or the wheels would skid over the edge. To speak to the driver during the crossing was forbidden, a prohibition which, for some inexplicable reason, was enjoined particularly on me. Once a car had toppled over the side into the river, though the passengers had been extricated while it was still hanging from the bridge—a fact which was not mentioned to me until later. But the information that the car had gone over the top was given to me just before my first crossing.

You got used to crossing the bridge in a car; there was no need to look down. To walk across was much worse, because the bridge swayed slightly when you stepped on it. It felt like being suspended rather carelessly between heaven and earth. I myself saved my reputation by holding tightly to the shoulder of the next member of the party. My little friend Atja, however, walked across this ruler of a bridge, high up above the surging river, by herself. After going part of the way, she took off her shoes so as to get a better grip on the planks (through which one could see down into the depths) with her bare feet. A little further out she was overcome by an attack of giddiness. First she staggered a little, and then she got down on all fours to crawl the rest of the long way to safety, whimpering faintly as she did so. By this time we had fortunately caught hold of her.

I shall never be able to write to my friends in that distant land, though it is possible that they may write to me. Outside the mayor's office at Sulaimaniyah there were scribes to help people who could neither read nor write. One of these scribes had gone all out: skipping the hand-writing stage, he typed straight on to a machine.



12—*Allah's Daughters*

There is a chapter of this book which has yet to be written and perhaps it is the most important chapter. Its subject is the status of the Moslem woman under the law of Islam—all that we generally understand when we refer to the 'harem' system. I have already touched on this question and have given glimpses of the life of women in connection with the account of my various experiences. But the status of women is a feature of the Moslem social pattern which is worthy of separate discussion.

A traveller through the Bosporus crosses not only a geographical frontier, between Europe and Asia, but also a cultural frontier; from the Christian into the Moslem world. Down to the middle of the nineteenth century this extended into the Balkans, and there are still population groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina, now a part of Yugoslavia, which subscribe to Islam, as do the inhabitants of Istanbul, the former capital of Turkey, on the European side of the Bosporus.

Where Islam prevails, the principal social distinction is not between rich and poor, between different social classes, but between the sexes. Society and the family are divided into two halves, the male and the female. Men lead an external life, living outside the home from boyhood. The life of the women, like the walls of

their houses, has no windows on the world outside; or, at most, it has grated windows from which the life outside can be glimpsed, but through which no one can see inside.

The division between the male and the female worlds is associated with the religion established by Mohammed at the beginning of the seventh century. It is a remarkable fact, however, that it was originally unknown to the Arabs—and to the Prophet. We need only recall the widow of the rich merchant with whom the young Mohammed took service as a camel-driver and traveller. She ran her own business until she became his first wife.

During the expansionist years after Mohammed's death, when the Arabs and their new religion conquered Syria and parts of present-day Iraq, they came into contact with Byzantine culture, which in its turn had a basis in Hellenist culture. The Arabs here encountered a conception of the status of women which was quite different from their own; one which segregated women from the work and outside activities of men. In ancient Greece as early as the time of Socrates and Pericles women led a secluded life not very different from that which was to become the lot of women under Islam. While learning from Byzantine culture, the Arabs gave to the social seclusion of their women a religious signification.

In *sura* 24, verse 31, of the Koran, Mohammed commands the women faithful to cover themselves well and to refrain from displaying their adornments to any but their husbands and nearest relations. Opinions have been divided as to whether by 'adornments' he meant ornaments or physical charms; but it is this *sura*, so frequently quoted, which has been taken as the religious justification of the harem and its associated phenomena.

Among all the peoples which were converted to Islam during the first centuries after the Prophet's death there was this sharp social division into two halves. The Arab *harim*, meaning 'the forbidden' (that is, the women's) part of the house, the Turkish *haremlik* (which is the counterpart of the men's *selamlik*), the Persian *enderum*, and the Indian *zenana*, closed on Allah's daughters and their daily lives. If in a town or in urban surroundings they

went outside their homes they wore long wide cloaks which concealed their figures in the folds, while their faces were covered by veils large or small. Among the most important of these garments are the Persian *chaddur*, with its long white veil and lattice-work for the eyes; the Arab *aba* and Turkish *charchaf*, both with a black veil; the Egyptian *habarah*, with a white veil covering the lower part of the face but leaving the eyes exposed; and the Indian Moslem woman's white *burqa*, hanging round the figure from a small skull-cap. The meaning of these various terms is 'tent' or 'covering', which explains the function.

The cloak and veil were urban features. In the villages, and among nomads, both the harem and veils were impractical as well as impracticable. But the women's status was nevertheless the same as it was in the towns; the social and family division just as definite. Though the veil was absent, the idea behind it governed the lives of women wherever Islam advanced.

So it has been for over a thousand years; and it is only in our own time that a change is taking place. In Egypt the veil has been abandoned, as it has in certain circles in India. 'Reveal your faces and look the world in the face,' proclaimed Kemal Atatürk to the women of Turkey when the veil was abolished there in 1925. Since 1951 the Moslem women of Bosnia and Herzegovina have been forbidden to wear the veil under pain of imprisonment. But why threaten imprisonment? Surely women would be happy to drop the veil, leave home, and go into the world free and independent, with a chance of education and of work outside the confines of their homes?

Why also was the abolition of the veil in Persia in 1936 framed as a series of police regulations, which in the capital, Teheran, were spread over three weeks? During the first week women were forbidden to appear veiled in the outlying districts of the city. In the following week the prohibition included the main streets. Finally, in the third week, no woman might any longer be veiled in the centre, the bazaar. A Danish lady who at that particular time kept house in Teheran and whose maids lived in their own homes, relates that the girls during the first few days after the

prohibition refused to show themselves in the street unveiled and demanded to be taken to and from their work in taxis. Why were the women not overjoyed to be released from all the restrictions which had hitherto encompassed their lives?

Having lived among Moslem women in Kurdistan, who still live as Allah's daughters have lived for the last thousand years, I have begun to have a feeling that the question may be a little more complex than one would immediately suppose. The abolition of the veil and harem and the removal of the traditional dividing line between the male and female worlds in a Moslem community cannot be compared with the freedom to study at universities and the political equality which women during the last two generations have desired and achieved in western civilization. For the Moslem woman her changed status has meant a far more radical change in her cultural pattern, a change which moreover conflicts with the religion she was brought up in.

During my stay in Iraq I had no contact with intellectual Arab women's circles in Baghdad. The women I lived with were Kurdish, belonging to the country's political minority, hidden away in the mountains of northern Iraq. Their language was Kurdish, not the Arabic of the administration. There were few roads leading to my Kurdish women. Not only few macadamized roads: the villages which I visited on horseback or on mules were just a few examples, among many, of small communities which in winter are completely cut off from the surrounding world. Iraqi railways to the north serve the oil districts. Sulaimaniyah was reached by bus or private car. No railways led there and few of its streets were paved. The motor cars of Kurdistan were many years ahead of the roads they drove on. But there was also an absence of another form of road: the path for ideas, knowledge, and education laid from person to person and from community to community by means of the written and printed word. Outside Sulaimaniyah none of the women I met could read or write, and many women in this little capital could not either. Even among those women who had gone to school, reading for the sake of reading was remarkably rare. That newspapers were unknown in my village home is nothing

to wonder at; but they were not found in my town home in Sulaimaniyah either. The men read them at cafés or in shops but did not take them home, and those women in the house who could read seemed, oddly enough, not to miss them. Of course there were daily news broadcasts, heard in town and country, but no one gave the impression of being particularly interested in them. Too many requirements were lacking for them to be properly understood and appreciated. The religious programme was the only one they were interested in.

This lack of knowledge of the written word, or, where there was a knowledge, lack of training in how to apply it and benefit from it, made the gulf between the Kurdish women—at least those whom I met—and other women of the world surprisingly great.

One of the strangest things to me was the fact that I never met a Kurdish woman who thought me enviable. On the contrary: just as they thought that in my ordinary European summer clothes I was both poorly and pitifully clad, so they were intensely sorry for me because I was obliged to travel about the world alone. Already in the village during my first stay in a Kurdish home, the women of the house offered to make me a costume to match their own, which went right down to the ground and covered the arms, and which had the brilliant colours and the silk and brocade fit for a woman. They would also have liked to provide me with a large and flattering escort who would have done for relations. For that matter, such an escort was invisibly present even when I travelled entirely alone. A woman nowhere travels more safely than in a Moslem country. Everyone she meets with knows that her whole family will come forward and settle accounts if anything should happen to her.

When, once in a while, my village women took the bus to Sulaimaniyah, they dressed themselves with visible pride in their black cloaks and black veils, along with their best clothes. They well knew what was proper in town. As her only luggage my interpreter carried her black *aba* when we visited distant villages on horseback or on mules. In vain I tried to persuade her to show herself just once without her black cloak in Baghdad, where no

one knew her and she was in my company. In a European blouse and skirt everyone would think we were foreigners. But no, bare one's hair and neck publicly in the street—impossible!

In Sulaimaniyah one evening I was going to see a new film with some of the many women of the family. The cinema had no roof; the starry sky formed the ceiling over the floor and balcony of the auditorium. The film was a Persian romance *á la A Thousand and One Nights*, and people were flocking to see it. We had, however, to return home without having seen the show; it was only possible to get separate seats instead of a box to ourselves. This seemed to me like making life difficult. Enveloped in black my women were unrecognizable, and as for me, I was used to sitting among a mixed audience. But I had no say in the matter, and could only defer to their view of what could or could not be done and sanction the rebukes which were showered on the poor big brother who had been despatched to get tickets. And so we strode off home in a body, followed by the miserable young man, who looked as though he felt the reproaches were justified.

As it happened, I had another chance of seeing the film. A few evenings later my interpreter and I were invited by one of the town's leading ladies, and this time we did sit in a box. The women of course wore their black cloaks, and they could have lowered their veils in the intervals; but the moment the lights went up the curtains were carefully drawn to. Not a glimpse of us should be seen by the noisy and motley throng of male spectators who occupy the floor and balcony seats.

The harem and veil are generally taken to mean that Moslem women are looked upon as second-class creatures, and it is assumed that they are kept confined just for the pleasure of their lords and masters. I felt deeply sorry for the first veiled women I ever met, at Mostar and Sarajevo in Yugoslavia in 1939. But sitting in the box behind drawn curtains I certainly did not feel that I was a second-class person. Rather I had the feeling that I was privileged and select; not to be displayed for anyone to see. I was reminded of the grated box pews of old country churches, where

the squire and his family used to sit, screened off from the inquisitive stares of the common herd outside. I tried to explain to my Kurdish ladies that we are of the opinion that women give grace to a dinner table and a theatre, and that the degree of festivity is proportional to the *décolletage* of the ladies. I was not understood.

I met young Kurds who had studied in Europe or America, and they wanted to have one wife instead of the four which they are allowed by the Koran on the understanding that they treat them all equally and are able to support them. They wanted to choose their own wives, and see them before their wedding. It is not really so strange, considering that in the act of drawing up the marriage contract the woman has been able to see her future husband through her veil, while she has been invisible to him. A Kurd who had never been abroad asked me if it was true that in Europe a man could approach a girl in the street and offer to marry her. His ideal of a partner for life was a woman who knew how to behave in a night-club. A somewhat distorted idea of the upbringing of western women, as well as a hint of what Kurdish women may have to live up to when their veils are abolished!

I had the impression that the female idea of these men did not imply a higher assessment of women than in the past. That they may have gained a strange notion of the western assessment of women is partly our own fault. My village sheikh, returning from a visit to Baghdad, brought back an Arabic edition of *Life*, or similar coloured magazine. On the cover, set against a flaming background, was an elongated film star wearing a sophisticated swimsuit. Had I possessed a greater command of the Kurdish language than I in fact did, I should have found it very difficult to explain to the men of the family, as they turned their eyes from this audacious picture of the flower of western civilization to their own decently dressed women, that we invariably rate our western view of women higher than the Moslem.

I took a great fancy to the daughter of my village home; and jokingly they suggested that I should take her home to my distant country as a bride for my son. She was of the right age. The joke meant different things to my Kurdish women and to me. To them

it lay in the idea of establishing a connection with a family they knew nothing about; to me, that a mother should choose her son's future wife. To my Kurdish women there was nothing strange in this idea. How else was a young man to get married? He had no means of meeting a girl on his own. The women of his family had to attend to that. They were the only women he knew; and incidentally, this results in a very fine relationship between a man and his mother, as between a man and his sisters. I shall long remember the young Kurd whom I saw climb the steep hill to the little hospital at Dokan, carrying his sick mother on his back. At the same time, the fact of a woman choosing her own daughters-in-law makes for strong female solidarity within the family.

In Kurdistan they have what is called the patriarchal family. Married sons stay at home and their wives—chosen by mother-in-law—join the female household. The social unit of father-mother-child is non-existent. Mother and infants belong to the female half of the establishment. But the father and bigger children are inseparable, all but the smallest of the children staying at home with the father in the event of a divorce. Later, the girls transfer to other families as daughters-in-law.

'Many families have wanted me,' my interpreter said, where we should have said 'Many men have wanted me.' She was unmarried, and as a teacher at the town school for girls she was self-supporting. I asked her if she had never thought of leaving home; she could have done so financially. My meaning was completely lost on her. Had she not helped her father, with the result that part of the house was no longer of sun-baked clay bricks but consisted of real bricks, and that it had a built-in *hamam* for the weekly hot bath as well as a bricked *adaphkhana*, a sanitary installation of which the family was justly proud? Did she not buy shoes and clothing for the whole swarm of younger sisters, take the sick by cab to the doctor, and direct the proceedings of the family weddings? She was an outstanding representative of the collective idea which thinks in terms of families and kinships rather than individuals. The welfare of her family, both in day-to-day affairs and on a long-term view, was more important to her than her own life.

There is a certain type of family unit which has gradually become an accepted part of our western cultural pattern but which is completely absent from the Moslem pattern. I refer to the one which consists of a mother of one or more children who is without a husband. In a Moslem community a divorced mother returns with her infant children to the patriarchal family. The unmarried mother and the illegitimate child are entirely unknown phenomena. The girls are too well protected and married too early, the bride's virginity too highly esteemed: this last a demand so absolute that if it is dishonoured the girl is put to death.

Thus the idea of a divorced woman living alone with her children is totally unknown, as also are old maids and old bachelors. Every man is expected to marry when he has saved up enough money for a marriage portion, and if he cannot provide the required sum himself his family will help him. The Koran allows a man to have more than one wife, and as divorce is easy there is never a surplus of unmarried women.

Children may change mothers, should their father remarry and for any reason return his first wife to her family. The commonest reason for sending a woman back home is the inability of the wives to get on together. But the home is not broken as a result, and sisters and half-sisters grow up happily together.

The housework in the two homes with which I became familiar was time-consuming and required many hands, owing to the complete absence of technical aids. Home was like a happy factory, in which the women cleaned, washed, cooked, baked, made butter, carried water, and so on, between them. Everything had to be done by human labour. But we, who now have a machine for practically everything, have forgotten that housework can be both pleasurable and enjoyable. That women in Europe prefer working in a factory to domestic service is often due to the fact that factory work, for all its monotony, is work done in fellowship. There was no place for loneliness and boredom in the Kurdish household as I learnt to know it.

Owing to the simple mode of life, with the two main meals of the day served for several persons on a tray placed on the floor

wherever they felt like eating, and with the uncomplicated bed consisting of a thin mattress and quilt spread in the courtyard, on the floor of one of the rooms, or on the roof, the number of guests that could be accommodated was almost unlimited: hence the extensive and almost limitless hospitality which was highly esteemed, and rightly so. Introduce what we call a higher standard of living, with tables, chairs, beds, individual crockery and cutlery, and the hospitality, together with the pleasure which flows from it, will automatically cease.

This hospitality, opening the door to a stream of people, brought relatives and friends into the houses in which I lived, thereby establishing a contact with the world outside that one would hardly have expected in view of the alleged secluded life of Moslem women. When for the first time one sees a windowless wall in the street, one has no idea that there is such a varied and animated life on the other side of it.

There was always a chance of interrupting the housework to welcome the arrival of guests, who came from early morning to late at night and were seldom absent. It follows that the women of the house knew everything worth knowing about their nearest society, though they knew of no world 'without Verona'. They were in contact with many other women, and many decisions vitally important to their immediate society were taken at their gatherings.

Of course, the husband was nominally the head of his patriarchal family. He made many decisions, such as allowing a member of the family to travel. In my interpreter's home I was present when her father's younger wife, two of her sons, two half-grown daughters, and the latest baby left the house by car to pay a family visit a few hours' distant, a visit which was to last for a certain number of days. The head of the family had given his permission. But the visit was prolonged, in time and distance, as the lady went on to visit some relations in a neighbouring village and absented herself a day or two longer than arranged. She was met on her return by violent reproaches from her incensed husband. But when my interpreter, the eldest and most intelligent of his

daughters, interposed, he beat an ignominious retreat. It was then that I realized in earnest how shaky the men were; how weak their position in the house when met with a combined female opposition. I got the impression that the women were united on the home front, the men isolated and on the defensive.

In that case, what was the use of their unlimited opportunities for leisure in cafés, in the streets, and in the Sulaimaniyah park, which once a week, incidentally, was reserved for women and children? They met only other men, whose positions in their respective homes were identical with theirs. The women never went to cafés. But why should they? They had a far better time at home, or visiting their friends.

Much of what our western civilization has to offer would be of great benefit to my Kurdish women friends; especially increased and improved medical aid to reduce the far too high infant mortality rate. But medical aid is one of the benefits which we are already conferring on what we know as the under-developed areas. Instead of enumerating the benefits which one would like to see extended to that part of Kurdistan where I stayed, I would rather point out certain values which I found there; certain positive features in the life of Allah's daughters. For me personally they made life vivid and harmonious, in an environment which lacked everything in the way of modern conveniences, and entertainment in the widest sense.

After my return home I received a letter from one of the young engineers at Dokan whom I had told of my village life. 'Do you remember,' he wrote, 'the real peace of your evenings on the veranda and on the roof? The samovar always ready, and the conversation coming of its own accord, quiet and meditative. You helped me so much to see this and appreciate it, and I often wonder if it can be created in my own home.'

These were the words of a young Englishman to whom I had tried to explain why I could sometimes be bored among his countrymen, in spite of every form of entertainment from club to swimming-pool, while time never dragged in my lonely village among my Kurdish women.

There was an absolute lack of efficiency in all they did, even when baking or engaged on similar jobs. Things which had to be done so the domestic wheels might go round were done as though they were pleasant entertainments and cheerful recreations, instead of being work to be performed in the most labour-saving way at so-and-so much an hour. Over all they did there was an aura of luxury, luxury in the sense that there was room for a little vital, beautiful un-necessity. It is an attitude related to the concealed forces which make primitive people decorate their costumes and household things in a way which satisfies purely æsthetic demands and has nothing to do with sheer utility.

This absence, not of ability—for the Kurdish women were often both able and skilful—but of efficiency, was as pleasurable as it was soothing. A gentle peace descended on me when I returned to my village from a visit to western civilization, where everyone worked with a great saving of labour but hardly knew what to do with the leisure which they had won.

My Kurdish women showed no trace of any preoccupation with the business of passing time. They spent their time as though they liked it, and lingered over whatever they happened to be doing. They lived always in a way relaxed and self-contained, as the various activities of the day slipped through their hands. The prevailing social convention was one of dignity, grace, and pleasantness. Nobody's nerves was on edge, and the children seemed to be happy in this atmosphere. Time neither flew nor dragged. It slipped by quietly and gently, as though every minute was vital and significant.

'How did you while away the evenings?' I was asked when I returned to Denmark. We did not while them away at all. We enjoyed them in conversation, in silence, with fruit, tea, cigarettes, with a feeling that life itself was good—a very rare sensation.

13—*Farewell*

No one believes me when I venture to assert that the Tigris was pink the first time I saw it: pink like the inside of a conch, and moreover completely opaque. They are quite incredulous if I go on to say that the palms on the banks of the Tigris were greyish-yellow, powdered a grey-yellow over their green by the dust from the endless desert north of Baghdad.

I am not sure that I shall be able to make the assertions with the same conviction in the future; or shall I say, be able to remember the pink and yellow-grey tones which everywhere prevailed. So I must endeavour to fix the impression which I gained at the time. There is usually something right about the first impression, whether of a landscape or a person. The sky was overcast when I first saw the Tigris. A few big, warm drops were the first, and about the last, rain that I saw during the four months of my stay in Iraq.

Baghdad is a city of great contrasts: on the roads the smartest cars in the world; on the pavements donkeys and their drivers; and towering above them all the tense onion-shaped domes of mosques, covered with glazed tiles of pale blue, dark blue, yellow, and white.

During my first stay in the city I saw it from the home of a Danish family on the outskirts, opposite the high riverside embankment. Standing a little way back from the embankment was a villa. Every evening the iron gate, which was higher up than the house at which I was staying, was shut by an old man in a long white gown. It was like seeing St. Peter slowly and with dignity close the gates of Heaven. Early one morning a fisherman cast his large net in the water. Standing behind him on the bank

was a little boy in a long turquoise shirt adding a splash of colour to the scene.

On my second visit to Baghdad I stayed with the other members of the Danish Dokan Expedition at one of the large hotels which have gardens running down to the river. The garden lay rather high up. By the riverside men squatted down calmly to relieve themselves, and then washed in water from the river. There was a punkah and an air cooler in my room. This latter appliance I stopped at once. The advantage of having cold air pumped into the room did not seem to be in reasonable proportion to the nerve-racking din which the apparatus made, and which destroyed any attempt at sleep.

I also had my own bathroom. At that time I had lived so long in the villages of Kurdistan, where water was neither in unlimited supply nor available for private bathing, that it took me a whole day to realize that the hotel bathroom was mine and mine alone.

On my third and last visit to Baghdad I stayed at a hotel in the main street, where there were no other Europeans. Three of us were supposed to share the one room, I having come to the city with my interpreter and her grown-up brother. But it was the season for sleeping out of doors, and so the brother slept on the hotel roof. We two women thus had the room more or less to ourselves. A large Indian family occupied the next room. At night their door stood open on to the corridor and we had to take care lest we trod on one of the women as, wrapped in her *sari*, she lay fast asleep on the threshold. During the day the women could be seen through the open door, cooking on the floor. A veranda fronting the main street passed both our windows. The male members of the Indian family slept on this veranda.

On these hot evenings we had our meals by the riverside. They consisted of split fish barbecued over a fire, dressed with onions and tomatoes, and eaten with the fingers. Luckily, there was not enough light in the restaurant garden to spoil the view of the moon shining on the river.

As it happened, my homeward journey took the form of a violent encounter with the principal epochs of world art in almost

historically correct succession. Violent because the encounter with great art is always overwhelming; and particularly headlong in this case because I flew literally through the centuries from antiquity to the present day in barely a fortnight.

I stood face to face with ancient Babylon at Babili, as the site of the excavations of Babylon, on the Euphrates south of Baghdad, is called. Strange dragons with serpents' heads and eagles' legs walk with lions and bulls more nearly related to natural history over the delicate tiled surface of the Ishtar gate. Of fantastic size are the cubic features of this gate, but only over-dimensioned architecture will not have seemed dwarfed by the vast area between the twin rivers.

Assyria came to meet me in the mounds of the towns of Nineveh and Nimrud. Giant winged bulls with heads and closed eyes like the sleeping eyes of men, carved in Mosul marble, strode at the palace gates like sentries, pair by pair, into the centuries to come, having been delivered from the earth which had covered them in centuries gone by. The six-winged seraph in the alabaster relief fertilized the tree of life on the wall of the palace at Nimrud. All these creatures survived as the manifestations of a formidable and terrible imagination.

In Istanbul the thousand glittering stones of the Byzantine mosaics were concentrated in a limited range of colours on a golden ground in the holy figures of Christianity. To me the dome of Hagia Sophia, with all its size, seemed strangely flat against the swelling, onion-shaped domes of Baghdad. Once the fairest jewel in Christendom, it became later a mosque, with thousands of drop-shaped lamps suspended at an identical height above the heads of the worshippers, like a glittering, transparent, altogether flat roof low down over the spacious, carpeted plain of a floor. High up on the massive pillars could be seen the great Moslem shields bearing the names of the first four caliphs of Islam, inscribed with the never-excelled beauty of the Arabic characters. Today, Hagia Sophia is neither a cathedral nor a mosque—but a museum. Bare and empty lies the interior. Only tourists come there.

The next stage was Greece—Athens. I had forgotten how marvellously the great rock of the Acropolis stands out in all its bareness. Up there under the classical blue sky one realizes that the groups on the friezes and other features of Greek temples must of course have been painted. The Pentelic marble itself sparkles in every tone from reddish-yellow to ochre. To maintain order in the architectural features, to unify an individual figure and separate one figure from another, it must have been artistically right to employ colours. Marble when painted vermilion and a vivid blue must have looked splendid in the high lighting which will have given the colours their true values.

In Athens I was able to attend an orchestral concert in the Odeion of Herodes Attikos, the Roman theatre on the slopes of the Acropolis. After many months of shrill Arabic music I at last satisfied my longing for European music, so harmonious and so filled with sweetness.

That evening the full moon shone down on the theatre, of which the portico is so well preserved. The front of the building was floodlit like most of the ancient ruins of Athens. It was strange to witness the struggle between these two sources of light which were so absolutely at cross purposes, and one of which was moving.

Ancient Rome includes the Colosseum: such an immense curve of masonry when seen from outside; such vast sweeping tiers on the inside. More amazing than anything, perhaps, is the fact that the building was about as deep below ground as it rose up above. At the present day, with the floor of the arena no longer existent, one looks down into another, subterranean Colosseum: rooms and passages separated by curving walls one outside the other, so that from above they have the appearance of a huge bisected onion; cloak-rooms for gladiators, cages for lions, and cells for Christians.

In the Villa Giulia I came across Etruscan art in the most modern of museum displays. But I also saw there something else. Behind the museum, inside the villa itself, I found my way to a fine double flight of steps which led down to a tiny underground courtyard.

The rear wall, like a stage back-drop, rose behind several tiers of columnar architecture. Down in the courtyard between pillars along the rear wall was a curving pool. Water rippled through tiny inflows over stones and feathery foliage. At an angle on either side the pool lost itself in dark side compartments. It was full of flowering white lotuses with shining green leaves.

At Mosul I had seen an underground room where the family used to retire in the hours when it was too utterly hot to be above ground. The place in question was a closed basement with a punkah in the ceiling, an up-to-date American refrigerator, and floor mattresses. In Rome it was an open courtyard below ground level, and with some of the blue sky of Italy visible above.

Forgetting that I was back in Europe, I squatted Oriental fashion on the marble floor beside the little pool. In order fully to appreciate such a wonderful courtyard, its shade and its coolness, one must, I think, have lived through the heat and drought of Iraq. Alone in the stillness, sitting on the marble floor with my arms round my drawn-up knees, and with the gentle ripple of the water in my ears, I at last felt that I had said farewell to Kurdistan so far away out there.

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