

Travel.

L'OISEAU ROUGE.

By U. P. A.

(Continued from p. 465, vol. *xlviii.*)

The third day out and we're on the Grand Trunk Road.

About halfway to Nowshera we crawl through the village of Pubbi. Literally "crawl" because it's ten chances to one that a cattle fair will be in progress; and the chief place of exhibit and centre of bargaining is on the G.T.R. itself. For a mile or so the road is packed with a dense mass of men and cattle, and it is quite impossible to move at more than 3 m.p.h. Pubbi is also a favourite haunt of bad characters; hence the strong police post.

At Pubbi a side road leads from the G.T.R., due south to Cherat.

Cherat is on the top of a ridge which runs east from the Kohat Pass, Afridis' Hills. Height about 4,000 feet. It is the summer station for the British battalions at Nowshera and Peshawar. It is a quaint place. A road runs along the ridge, and barracks cling to the steep slopes on each side. Note:—

(a) Disposal of rubbish and sullage water. By shoots; there is a clear drop of over 3,000 feet and no cantonment anywhere near the landing-ground.

(b) The distant view. On a clear day this is superb. To the north the Kabul River and the Himalayan snows. To the east the gorge of the Indus, where the mighty river cuts through the range on its way south to Khushalgarh.

(c) Chief occupation of inhabitants in midsummer. *Leit motif*, how to keep cool. The only solution is to adopt a waiting policy.

(d) The discovery of Cherat. When old General Roberts commanded at Peshawar his son—the late well-beloved Bobs Bahadur—was a very young officer and was his father's A.D.C. Sick rates amongst the British troops at Peshawar were very high, so the old general sent his A.D.C. and another youngster out to prospect. They found Cherat. They also found it was a good place for shikar; but in that respect it has now deteriorated a good deal.

Nowshera is twenty-seven miles from Peshawar. It stands on the banks of the Kabul, which is spanned by a road-railway bridge and two boat bridges.

The following observations may be made regarding Nowshera:—

(a) The town-planning scheme is of commendable simplicity, as the cantonment is built for a distance of two to three miles on each side of the G.T.R.

The residents are therefore able to see everyone who passes from east to west. They are also able to see everyone who passes from west to east.

(b) The golf course is constructed of bricks below, and sheet iron covered with a thin layer of sand on top.

It is roofed with an overhead catchment net to prevent the balls from hitting the moon when they bounce.

(c) The hotel and messes are famed for their fish. From the Kabul? No. No—from Karachi.

(d) There is a dāk bungalow. . . .

L'Oiseau Rouge leaves the G.T.R., crosses the first bridge of boats with a terrific series of clatters and bumps, climbs the steep bank on the far side and heads due north for Risalpur. This is a pleasant cantonment which is not built on each side of the main road. Its inhabitants sometimes eat and sleep, but mostly they play polo.

Forty-four miles from Peshawar we enter Mardan and, for reasons too numerous to mention here, we halt.

The Hop beams on the waiting multitude, Georgina is greeted with laughter, waving and cheers, and U. P. A. gets out and gets under in view of the run on the morrow.

Mardan is like Kohat. To do it justice it should have a special article to itself. So, for the moment, this inadequate notice must suffice:—

(a) Mardan is the home of the Guides, F.F.

Q.V.O.C. of G. is the only regiment in the Indian Army. Did I say "the only"? Sorry. *The only*.

It is famed for:—

(1) Christmas carolling. It is the custom on Christmas Eve for the subalterns of the regiment to pay a round of visits to the bungalows of the married officers, and to sing carols in the compounds. The married officers are quartered in the redoubts of the old fort. To enter the compounds you have to cross a deep, wide moat on plank bridges. When the last bungalow has been visited, the last carol sung, and the last wassail bowl emptied, the senior subaltern secretly removes the planks of the last bridge. The returning carol singers then plunge into the moat, bicycles and all. It is considered a point of honour with the subalterns to appear at church on Christmas morning on crutches and swathed in bandages. The regiment is so fond of music that, in the hot weather, the mosquitoes are trained in carol singing. That is why the married officers' bungalows are built on the edge of the moat.

(2) A museum registered under the Department of Archæology. When this building is not being used as a museum it is used as an officers' mess. As a rule it is used for both purposes at the same time. Of course the archæological exhibits comprise the *in-animate* contents of the building only; they are mostly Hindu-Grecian sculptures dug up during the construction of the great Swat Canal.

(3) The mess plate. This magnificent collection is kept in a special

strong room which is guarded by newly-joined recruits. The idea here is to keep temptation away from the older soldiers; it takes a man six months to realize that the contents of the strong room are, in truth, made of genuine precious metals.

(4) Certain renowned names. But in this connexion, although you may talk of "Lumsden of the Guides" or "Sam Browne of the Guides," you must not say "Battye of the Guides." "The Battyses" is correct, for every Battye belongs to the Guides. If there is a Battye who isn't in the Guides, well, he needn't be mentioned, poor fellow.

(b) Mardan is where Micky lives.

To mention Micky after the Guides may seem like descending from the sublime to the ridiculous. "May seem," yes; but not if you know Micky Sahib.

Micky, too, belongs to the F.F. He is pink-cheeked and chubby; he is always smart and soldier-like; his character is exemplary, with lapses; he rules the depot with a rod of iron, and yet there isn't a man in it who wouldn't cheerfully lay down his life for him at any moment if need be. He is in love with Georgina, and she—like all the rest—adores him.

I'm very busy on a most important job on the back axle but I've got to stop *now*. Micky wants to play mah-jong. There is no greater tyrant than a small boy, aged 5.

L'Oiseau Rouge begins the fourth day in good fettle. Yesterday's short run allowed the Hop time for some safkarna, and that does a car as much good as it does a horse.

We make for the north and bowl along through a fertile land covered with heavy crops and watered by innumerable irrigation channels, offshoots of the Swat Canal. Before the canal was made this country was an arid desert which produced nothing but trouble and crime. Now it is peaceful; a great tribute to British occupation.

We soon reach the railhead at Dargai (Malakand) and begin the climb to the top of the Malakand Pass; not unlike the ascent up to the Kohat Pass, but longer. On the way up you can see the head-waters of the Swat Canal emerging from the tunnel which has been bored through the mountain-side from the Swat Valley above, a fine piece of engineering.

The collection of buildings known as Malakand Fort cling to the steep hill-sides at the summit of the pass, surmount the neighbouring peaks and behave in a sort of mediæval, decorative fashion. A most attractive sight.

Leaving the fort behind, L'Oiseau Rouge runs down a steep hill into the valley of the Swat River, where is situated the birthplace of the canal. This valley is green and prosperous and leads by pleasant ways to Chakdarra, our outpost over against Swat.

The Kohat Pass is savage, the Khyber is scientific and the Malakand-Swat is smiling. And as for the effect of environment—compare the sullen,

quarrelsome-looking Afridi with the contented-looking Swati; or the former's gloomy wrappings with the latter's gay blankets. There must be something in it.

After tiffin Mrs. Micky and Georgina sketch Chakdarra Fort. Mr. Micky tells me how the Service is going to the dogs. Then he forgets about this when he talks of the great day when Micky junior will join the regiment (F.F.).

The Hop regards the wayfaring Swatis with a toleration bred of a conscious superiority and audibly wonders when it will be time to return. A hint from such a high personage cannot be ignored, so we pack up and amble home, to be greeted at sunset and, alas! at little boys' bed-time, by a very wide-awake chotta sahib, aged 5.

To-day's run : just under eighty miles.

The fifth day begins in a minor key. Georgina hates saying good-bye to Micky, and her mood affects me, for the Mickys of Mardan are the sort of folk one likes to be with; and of how many folk can one say that in a whole-hearted and sincere way? Not many when you come to count 'em up.

In forty-five minutes we have run back through Risalpur, recrossed the Kabul and left Nowshera behind. We are now on one of the best stretches of the G.T.R., tree-lined and alongside the Kabul. A cheerful and high-spirited river.

About sixteen miles from Nowshera this stream joins the mighty Indus just short of Attock. "Mighty" is the word in common use. No wonder; no other word would do.

Few people know their own limitations. I'm sure I don't. But this limitation I *do* know: I cannot adequately describe this meeting of the waters. It is all so beautiful that the average man can but gaze and must perforce leave his impressions unsung. Isn't it depressing when you have seen something worth seeing, and you start to describe it with enthusiasm, and that bored look spreads over your listener's face?

Halt for a few minutes two miles short of Attock Bridge and you will know what I mean.

Attock presents the following features of interest:—

(a) A fine bridge; the only possible sleeping-place when the weather is at its hottest.

(b) A big Moghul fort which houses the bridge guard; and now one of the very few places in N. India where there is elbow-room in cantonments.

(c) Ruins of an old Moghul city, now occupied by rats, dogs and mosquitoes.

A photograph of Attock is always unsatisfactory, because the charm of the place lies in its colouring: yellow, brown, black, red, greens and the great silvery river.

From here to Rawalpindi is a matter of sixty miles, and the road is varied and interesting the whole way. Not only the road, but the distant view as well.

To the north the Himalayas stand clear against the sky. The snows of this huge range can be seen from the G.T.R. for practically the whole distance—275 miles—from Peshawar to Lahore. I doubt if even America can surpass that.

Running eastwards, L'Oiseau Rouge carries us to the Haro River, Kala Serai and Hasan Abdal.

The Haro is a sturdy stream flogged by the anglers of 'Pindi. A fine new bridge is being built to carry the G.T.R. over the river and provide a secure stance for the bigger mahseer rods.

Kala Serai has fallen on evil days. It used to be the old posting headquarters for Abbottabad before the railway was pushed up to Havelian. It is a convenient starting-place for the trip to the ruins of the ancient Græco-Hindu city of Taxila.

At present Taxila is only half-exposed. Some day, when an expedition with capital and equipment arrives, Taxila will fill the illustrated papers. But we won't be there to see. Georgina abhors chunks of broken pottery and dirty old coins and things like that.

Hasan Abdal was a saint whose shrine is now a place of pilgrimage and repute. Near the village is the grave of Lalla Rookh.

If you wish to imbibe the atmosphere of the East in poetry, read "Lalla Rookh" and "The Light of Asia." I haven't read either myself, but you may take Georgina's word for it.

Hasan Abdal is also a jumping-off place for Abbottabad, the Hazara country and Kashmir. Indeed, this route into Kashmir is even more interesting and beautiful than the usual (because more convenient) one via Murree.

A word about Abbottabad:—

(a) It contains a regiment of Gurkhas. Also a lot of other troops; but they don't count.

(b) There are more rose trees in Abbottabad than in any other place of its size in the world.

The very hedges are made of rose trees; the famous Mardan rose, a magnificent white bloom.

(c) The name of this station is never mentioned by officers of the I.M.S. in mixed company.

The reason for this is to be found in the old tag—"The R.A.M.C. *always* get the best stations."

There are no R.A.M.C. personnel in Abbottabad. Better not mention the place at all. . . .

L'Oiseau Rouge leaves Hasan Abdal behind and the Hop heaves a sigh of content. Clear of the Frontier at long last!

Much thought and treasure and many lives have been expended on this small portion of our Empire, and the riddle of peace and security isn't solved yet.

There is a chronological table in "Campaigns on the North-West Frontier," by Captain H. L. Nevill, D.S.O., R.F.A. (1912). Here it is brought up to date. Probably nothing could better illustrate the magnitude and complexity of the Frontier problem than this bare recital of tribal names and dates :—

1849	Baizais.	1878	Zakka Khel.
1850	Kohat Pass Afridis.	"	Mohmands.
1851	Mohmands.	"	Zaimukhts.
1852	Ramzais.	1879	Zakka Khel.
"	Utman Khel.	1880	Marris.
"	Waziris.	1881	Mahsuds.
"	Black Mountain Tribes.	1883	Shirams.
1853	Hindustani Fanatics.	1888	Black Mountain Tribes.
"	Shirams.	1890	Zhob Valley.
"	Kohat Pass Afridis.	1891	Black Mountain Tribes.
1854	Mohmands.	"	Miranzai.
"	Afridis.	"	Hunza and Nagar.
1855	Orakzais.	1894	Mahsuds.
"	Miranzai.	1895	Chitral.
1856	Kurram.	1897	Tochi.
1857	Bozdars.	"	Malakand.
"	Hindustani Fanatics.	"	Mohmands.
1859	Waziris.	"	Orakzais.
1860	Mahsuds.	"	Afridis.
1863	Ambela.	1900	Mahsuds.
"	Mohmands.	1908	Zakka Khel.
1868	Black Mountain Tribes.	"	Mohmands.
"	Bizotis.	1919	Wazirs, Mahsuds, etc.
1872	Tochi.	1921	Wazirs.
1877	Jowakis.	1922	Mahsuds.
1878	Utman Khel.	1923	

But let us press on. The Hop has sighed again.

(To be continued.)