

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RELIEF OF SAMAWAH.

WHILE the operations in the Baghdad vilayat and those which led to the isolation of Samawah were in progress, the situation in that part of the River Area which is inhabited by the Muntafiq Confederation was steadily deteriorating. As the weeks went by and the prospect of an outbreak in this area trembled in the balance, Political Officers were ordered to withdraw, as otherwise their lives might have been forfeited. On the 6th August one of them, Captain W. F. Crawford, an Australian, a Rhodes Scholar and an Oxford prizeman, was ambushed when returning to Galat Sikar after dining with a friendly shaiikh, but fortunately he and his escort escaped, though two of their horses were wounded. Thereafter he was removed by aeroplane to Nasiriyah, and though he manifested a desire to resume his charge when for a brief space the aspect of affairs improved, he was not permitted to do so.

Several times I was definitely informed that in the course of a few days some of the tribes were certain to revolt, and on one occasion the actual date was volunteered. Jihad was being preached with frenzied fervour by the numerous emissaries from the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala. Mirza Muhammad Taqi Shirazi, the chief mujtahid of the latter place, had offered prayers on the corpse of an Arab killed in battle—an act which he performed in public, and which conferred on the inanimate warrior the crown of martyrdom, free sepulture in sacred ground, a passport to the celestial regions, and certain indulgences on arrival there. Parts of the country,

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stirred by the insidious propaganda, were in an uproar, and at any moment there might be thrown into the scale on the insurgents' side the majority of the tribesmen, who were credited with possessing approximately 43,000 rifles, of which over 30,000 were modern weapons.

So serious a menace was beyond my power to meet. Every man at my disposal was fully occupied in efforts to smother the insurrection further north, and, except the occasional despatch, for purposes of demonstration, of at most two aeroplanes—all that my limited resources in that respect allowed—nothing could be done to stay the growing trouble. Reinforcements from India were arriving, but the new situation which might arise at any moment had not been contemplated when demands for troops were made.

The possibility of serious friction with the Muntafiq had been brought to the notice of the War Office in my daily situation telegrams, in which communications I, however, carefully avoided anything that was calculated to create alarm.

On the 26th August the Secretary of State for War, Mr Winston Churchill, who with the Army Council was not only sympathetic but helpful, so far as resources and commitments in other directions than my own allowed, telegraphed as follows: "I take this opportunity of sending you my earnest good wishes for your success in the difficult task you are discharging. The Cabinet have decided that the rebellion must be quelled effectually, and I shall endeavour to meet all your requirements." He then went on to say what troops and air squadrons were coming to Mesopotamia, and concluded by inquiring if I had any further needs, which he would meet if possible.

Scarcely had I received and gratefully acknowledged this telegram than affairs in the territory of the Muntafiq went from bad to worse. On the 27th August the remaining Political Officer, who was stationed at Shatrah, where the first display of uneasiness with regard to British administration in the district in which it lies had shown itself, had to be withdrawn. That town, which has always been the barometer of the political situation on the Middle

Gharraf, possesses a long history of anarchy and plunder, and boasts, as a melancholy tribute to the past, a Turkish cemetery for Gaimagams (in a civil sense, district officers), which is conveniently and somewhat suggestively situated close to the government offices. This uneasiness was due to the system of revenue collection which had been instituted by a Political Officer some time before during his period of office at Shatrah. The system in question was that of measuring the crops by chain; and when it is borne in mind that the Gharraf tribes for fifteen years prior to the arrival of the British had defied all attempts at the collection of revenue, it is hardly to be wondered at that a persistence in so bold a policy was not endured with the complacency which seems to have been expected.

About the 27th August also a report was received that some Kurdish tribes, who for long had been a menace, were on the point of breaking out, and were likely to be followed by others, on the principle that fighting is to be preferred to idleness.

On the 28th I telegraphed to the War Office that should these threats, now more marked than ever, come to anything, I should require forces from overseas—in addition to the troops in the country, on the way, or promised—amounting to two complete divisions, each with a cavalry brigade. A rising of the Muntafiq would imperil the Tigris line, my only means of communication with the sea, and from Basrah upwards the country would have to be reconquered. I added that I would do the utmost I could with the troops at my disposal to falsify my estimate of probable developments, and endeavour to reduce to order the areas which were then disturbed.

Three days later I followed up this telegram by another, in which I explained in some detail the gravity of the situation and the dangers with which we were threatened.

When these telegrams were sent I was fully aware what a great strain my demands would put upon the resources both of the United Kingdom and India. It is at crises such as these that a temptation may assail a commander similarly situated to myself. The authorities at home will

probably have taken pains to impress upon him the fact that they are beset on all sides by demands for troops and war material, or that they are being urged with vehemence to effect drastic reductions in military expenditure. The commander consequently finds himself on the horns of a dilemma. If his requirements seem to be excessive—and it is difficult for those at a distance to put themselves in his place—they may be met with a refusal; nay, his command may be taken from him and given to another, or the enterprise on which he is engaged may be abandoned as too costly or beyond the military resources available. On the other hand, he may compromise with his conscience and ask for something less than he feels the circumstances necessitate, and trust to luck or a favourable change in the situation to bring matters to a successful termination. Should he be so unwise as to adopt this course, he may later discover that he has not only imperilled the safety of the troops entrusted to him and sacrificed his own military reputation, but has gambled with the honour and credit of his country.

For the commander who finds himself in such a quandary, come what may, there is one course, and one only: he must make a rigid examination of his conscience, and frame his recommendations strictly in accordance with military requirements.

The earlier of these telegrams produced another from the Secretary of State, dated the 31st August, which made me feel that, despite my daily telegraphic reports, the true state of affairs in Mesopotamia was only partly understood. His telegram, however, gave me an opportunity for removing such misconceptions as evidently prevailed. Certain comments were made and questions put to me, and the gist of my replies I give below, as they may help the reader to appreciate many points which bear on operations in Iraq.

Thus I stated that, owing to the situation on the Lower Euphrates, which might involve the Tigris line, I had only been able to bring to Bagdad three of the ten battalions which had so far come from overseas. I then went on to

explain that since the outbreak of the insurrection, as may have been observed by those who have perused the preceding chapters, the operations had been carried on without a break. I pointed out that it was possible that I had failed to convey a clear picture of what had taken place—though reported every twenty-four hours—through the purposely moderate terms in which my telegrams had been couched. I then gave a summary of the previous operations, which had been carried out in a shade temperature sometimes exceeding 110 degrees, and which, on a conservative and carefully-checked estimate, had so far cost the insurgents at least six thousand casualties. Desirable as a decisive battle was—and no one recognised that fact more strongly than myself—the elusiveness of our adversaries, their great mobility, knowledge of the country, and power of quick assembly and dispersion, made such a consummation unattainable. It seemed possible that, with the capture and occupation of the Hindiyah Barrage, the tribesmen might be forced to quit their attitude of evasion and stand to fight; but that I doubted, for the Arab has no leaning for the attack of strong positions. I then explained that the difficulty of operating in Mesopotamia was largely due to the question of water, food supplies and fuel, and the necessity for guarding communications throughout their length, as otherwise a column became transformed into little else than a convoy, and in the open country a particularly vulnerable one. Movement was hampered by the numerous water-channels, wet and dry, which were passable only by single-track native bridges, and by the inefficient narrow-gauge railways and strictly limited amount of rolling-stock.

As I knew that Mr Churchill had experience of fighting in South Africa, I stated that "Mesopotamia is a vast plain devoid of features except the two main rivers and the old banks of disused and other canals, which afford strong positions for the Arabs. Campaigning in this country is not unlike the fighting in the later stages of the Boer War, with this difference, that then our forces were greatly in excess of those of our enemy, and we had large mounted

forces, while here (in Mesopotamia) our forces available for operations are exceeded by those of the insurgents, and it is impossible to compare our mobility with theirs."

Before concluding I remarked that, "For a rebellion, such as is in progress, the country was totally unprepared, and in order to prevent great imperilment of the situation, much work, besides operations, has been necessary. As I have frequently pointed out, my resources debarred me from acting at more than one point at a time. This had led to the spread of the insurrection elsewhere before it could be dealt with. For penning in the enemy and cutting him off from water, other than his wells, my numbers are quite inadequate. If able to do so his submission, dismounting and disarming, could be effected. This would be a lengthy but a certain process."

On the 7th September the Secretary of State for War replied: "I have received your telegram with great satisfaction, as it makes it possible for me to obtain a clear view of the situation. Anything we can do to assist you we shall not hesitate to do."

These telegrams had the effect of clearing the air, and mutual understanding was established.

But to return to the River Area and its portentous possibilities. As Nasiriyah lies on one flank of the Muntafiq country, and from its situation seems to block the entrance from the west, it might be thought that to occupy that town would have served to keep that unruly confederation in check. Gladly as I would have adopted such a course and concentrated a strong force there, I felt debarred from doing so until its communication with Basrah could be made secure. To have assembled a force might have helped to keep the tribes in order, but should troops at a distance of one hundred and forty miles from Basrah become invested, their relief by land must be an operation difficult and slow, and one for which a force far exceeding my resources present or prospective would be essential.

I therefore made the place itself secure by strengthening the garrison, and on the 1st September ordered the defences of the railway line from Nasiriyah to the Base—the more

important sections first—to be proceeded with. The line had already been cut south of Ur Junction on the 18th August, and again on the 2nd September, after which date, though threatened, it had been left alone.

For military reasons it proved fortunate that, unlike the tribes in other areas, those of the Shatt-al-Gharraf were much less under our administrative sway. There the Pax Britannica had not yet found its way to the same extent, nor had blood-feuds been compounded and the road made smooth for tribal combination. Indeed it may be said without fear of contradiction that it was very noticeable that, where British administration was most strict and, to our way of thinking, more efficient, tribal combination was most effective against us. On the other hand, in wilder districts, which were ruled with a lighter hand, such combination failed to materialise at all or proved ineffective.

Thus internal strife at length showed itself among the tribes of the Shatt-al-Gharraf, for which I felt heartily thankful. This was probably encouraged by the paramount shaykh of the Abudah tribe, Khayyun al Obaid, a past-master in the methods by which the Turks had ruled the country. When on the 27th August the Assistant Political Officer, Captain B. S. Thomas, was forced to leave his post, he entrusted the interests of government to this personage, who deserves much credit for his good work with these tribes, over whom he wields great influence, especially round Shattrah and to the south. Khayyun, who is a firm believer in Captain Thomas, I afterwards met on two occasions. He seemed to me to be little over thirty years of age, of somewhat striking appearance, strong, reticent, and not inclined readily to unbend. He displayed great force of character during the rising, for he refused to pay heed to all appeals to join in the jihad, and, continuing to maintain a friendly attitude, kept his followers in order. The situation thus became alleviated, but the marsh Arabs who are to be found on both banks of the Euphrates south-east of Nasiriyah, and who had raised their banners on the 1st September, remained a menace to the railway thence to Basrah.

It is indeed greatly to the credit of the Political Officers concerned that, along the whole line of the Tigris south of Bagdad, equilibrium was preserved, and this more especially on the Gharraf, where the tribes were in direct contact with the Diwaniyah insurgents.

Meanwhile Samawah was cut off, and the *Greenfly*, as mentioned, had run aground, and could not be extricated, and her crew of one British officer, four British and thirty Indian other ranks, was beset by hostile Arabs on both banks. When rations began to fail, food was several times dropped by aeroplanes, and at great risk a small proposition was picked up by the crew. The process of delivery was attended by such danger that after several aeroplanes had been damaged and one shot down and her pilot and observer murdered, I ordered that no further attempts to supply the crew in this manner were to be made, and that heavy bribes were to be offered to any Arab who would undertake to smuggle food on board. The relief force, but for disturbances on the north-west frontier of India, which delayed the arrival of troops and obliged me to postpone the advance for a week, could have reached the vessel in time to effect a rescue, for, so far as could be ascertained, she held out till the 2nd or 3rd October.

Several weeks earlier than these events, on the 24th July, I had telegraphed to the War Office for a Divisional General and Staff to command the troops which were arriving from India. As, however, their arrival was delayed, I selected my very able Chief Engineer, Major-General E. H. de V. Atkinson, to command the force which was to carry out the relief, and improvised a staff for him from many quarters. Although he had never commanded a force which approached in numbers those of a division, I knew his great organising qualities, and the speed and driving-power—so necessary and yet so often lacking east of Suez—which he would put into the work allotted to him.

As the actual fighting would devolve on a more junior commander, and as I knew nothing regarding the two brigade commanders who had come from India, except that neither had as yet led a brigade in actual contact

with an enemy, I decided later to send Brigadier-General Coningham as soon as he could be spared from the operations north-east of Baghdad. He had proved himself to be cool-headed, courageous, and resourceful, and with the certainty before me of a Muntafiq or even greater rising should the operation fail, the risk of using untried leaders had to be avoided. I must admit that before taking this decision I reflected several days, as I was loth to hurt the feelings of those selected by the Commander-in-Chief in India, who, so far as I knew, may have possessed every qualification but experience of Arab warfare.

What actually decided me in the end, and I mention it as others in a similar position may find the example useful, occurred as follows:—

On the afternoon of the 14th September I happened to be reading, not for the first time, Lord Roberts's 'Forty-one Years in India,' and there I came across the following note, which I quote in full, regarding the commanders who took part in the Relief of Lucknow: "Sir Colin Campbell's selection of commanders caused considerable heartburning, especially among the senior officers who had been sent out from England for the purpose of being employed in the field. But as the Chief explained to the Duke of Cambridge, the selection had been made with the greatest care, it having been found that an officer inexperienced in war in India cannot act for himself . . . as it is quite impossible for him to weigh the value of intelligence . . . he cannot judge what are the resources of the country, and he is totally unable to make an estimate for himself of the resistance which the enemy opposed to him is likely to offer." Sir Colin wound up his letter as follows: "I do not wish to undervalue the merits of general and other officers lately arrived from England, but merely to indicate to your Royal Highness the difficulties against which they have to contend. What is more, the state of things at present does not permit of trusting anything to chance or allowing new-comers to learn except under the command of others."

The last sentence settled the matter in my own mind.

I at once walked over to Brigadier-General Stewart's house, which adjoined my own, and invited him to take his pencil and some telegraph forms. A telegram was sent to Major-General Atkinson, who was far from complaining at the change, and Brigadier-General Coningham with his staff, after replacement by Brigadier-General Beatty, was ordered to come to Baghdad by the 16th September with a view to his taking command of the relief force. The brigade commander, who was for this purpose solely superseded, was not forgotten, and a soothing message was sent to him. He later did good work in connection with the relief and in command of a column which carried out punitive measures.

Lest the opposition which might be met in the advance from the south should prove to be severe and a call have to be made for troops beyond those that were allotted—the number of which had to be limited by water facilities—I ordered that twelve of the twenty battalions, most of which had now arrived from overseas, should, if required, be at the disposal of the commander of the relief force. To have drawn to Baghdad the units not wanted in the first instance for the relief, though they would have helped in the operations in the vicinity of that place, might possibly have been followed by their forced return to the River Area, a transfer which would have involved considerable delay. As events turned out, the precaution of retaining them in the River Area proved to be unnecessary, but it is impossible to gauge the effect which their presence may have had there at so critical a time.

The arrangements to be made by Major-General Atkinson before it was possible to begin the movement on Samawah were numerous and demanded considerable forethought, but by the 23rd September they were completed. By that date, however, all the troops necessary for the operation had not arrived. The cause of the delay I have already mentioned, and this was aggravated by the fact that none of the units which arrived from India was fully equipped, and these had to be fitted out, as far as the stores in reserve at Basrah permitted, before they could take the field.

In order that no time should be wasted, and that the advance when it did take place should be carried out without pause, the construction of blockhouses from Ur—the junction for Nasiriyah—towards Samawah was begun, and as the first few miles of the advance would pass through an area which was not disturbed and is at a little distance only from the Euphrates, the work progressed satisfactorily. Indeed, it was found possible to establish an advanced railroad at Bathah, which is some eighteen miles north-west of Ur Junction.

By the 30th September the force under Brigadier-General Comingham was assembled at Nasiriyah. It was composed as follows:—

- 10th (D.C.O.) Lancers (less two squadrons),
- 10th (How.) Battery R.F.A.,
- 13th Battery R.F.A.,
- 69th Company, 2nd (Q.V.O.) Sappers and Miners,
- 8th Battalion Machine-gun Corps (two and a half sections),
- 1st Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry,
- 3/5th Gurkha Rifles,
- 3/8th Gurkha Rifles,
- 1/11th Gurkha Rifles,
- 3/23rd Sikh Infantry,
- and certain medical and other details.

Next day the column marched to Ur, where it was joined by Major-General Atkinson and his staff.

The troops which formed it were specially selected, and, as just stated, included two squadrons of the famous 10th Lancers (Hodson's Horse), under Lieut.-Colonel Kemmis, which had been mounted on artillery remounts at Basrah, and which were to take part in this, after a long spell in Mesopotamia, their final operation, before leaving for India. A portion of another unit, one and a half companies of the 114th Madras, which had been specially brought from Hillah, joined the column shortly after Ur was left, so as to be in time to share in the relief of their invested comrades at Samawah.

Before reaching this stage in the narrative, it will probably have been observed that I had been obliged, even in the case of the troops which were in the country when the insurrection broke out, to depart from the brigade organisation and form columns of such units as happened to be at the moment available. I had less compunction with the reinforcements from India in continuing this usually objectionable procedure, as I knew that, though on paper they possessed a brigade organisation, the units had never served together.

The line of communication in front of Nasiriyah and the defence of that place were in charge of Brigadier-General A. le G. Jacob, and from Ur to Basrah under Brigadier-General A. I. R. Glasford. As the railway line, which beyond Darraji station was known to require extensive repairs, is, except at Kihidhr, at some distance from the Euphrates, the column was accompanied by two trains, each train carrying thirty thousand gallons of water in tanks, besides numerous other requirements. In addition, an armoured train, with a 13-pdr. gun, a machine-gun, and a searchlight, formed part of the column, as also a blockhouse train, which, based on Ur, carried sufficient materials for ten blockhouses, a number which it was intended daily to construct.

On the 3rd October a friendly shaiikh reported that the crew of the *Greenfly* had surrendered owing to want of food. Next day, after the column had reached Darraji, where it was found that two thousand five hundred sleepers and a thousand yards of track had been removed, the same shaiikh stated that the commander of the vessel and the British soldiers had been murdered some days earlier and the Indian ranks made prisoners. Cooped up in the unbearable heat of summer in what was little more than a tin box, with nothing to drink but the hot muddy water of the river, slowly to starve and not know that every effort was being made to relieve them, such was the fate of those on board. Rumours were for a time rife of treachery on the part of the crew, but though more than a year has elapsed since the incident, no absolute proof of this has

been obtained. On the 6th, Khidhr was reached, a strong force of insurgents being driven off by the 3/5th Gurkha Rifles and 3/23rd Sikh Infantry, who inflicted upon them losses which included forty-seven killed. In this affair, in which our own casualties were only two killed and seven wounded, and daily throughout the march, aeroplanes dropped messages containing information for the column, while bombs and machine-guns were used from them against the insurgents whenever opportunity offered.

On the 7th, while the railway was being repaired and the debris from the two armoured trains, which had collied on the 13th August, was being removed, two squadrons of the 10th Lancers, two sections of artillery, two machine-gun sections, with the 1st Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and the 3/8th Gurkha Rifles, under the command of Colonel A. Paley, 1st Battalion Rifle Brigade, whom I had sent from Baghdad for work in connection with the relief, carried out punitive operations against numerous villages on the right bank of the Euphrates.

On the 8th punitive operations were continued on both sides of the Euphrates against the tribes who were known to be responsible for the ill-treatment of the crew of the *Greyfriar*, and the 3/23rd Sikhs, under Lieut.-Colonel P. G. Carey, were sent to visit that vessel. She was found stripped of everything movable, and littered with dirt and debris. Both of her guns had been rendered useless, and all detachable parts had disappeared. One body, that of a European, probably one of the British soldiers, showing marks of three wounds, was discovered just forward of the bridge superstructure, and according to the opinion of the medical officer present death had occurred about eight days earlier. The ship was much scarred with bullets, but nothing remained to indicate what had happened to the crew.

On the 9th, the line ahead not yet having been repaired sufficiently for the advance to continue, search was made for railway material, and one village, where several thousand sleepers were found, was burned.

By the 12th the railway was repaired, and blockhouses

were built as far as Hadbad, four and a half miles short of Samawah, which was reached that day by the column. The insurgents, in strength exceeding seven thousand men, were reported to be holding a strong position running through palm gardens and walled enclosures. It was evident that they did not mean to relax their hold on Samawah and the invested garrison without a final struggle.

On the 13th it had been intended to push through to that place, but the permanent way had been considerably damaged and every sleeper taken away. Moreover, as the troops advanced in battle formation, the insurgents, numbering from two thousand five hundred to three thousand rifles, were seen to be holding a position across the railway line. At 8 A.M. four aeroplanes arrived, and by their bombs and machine-guns caused considerable numbers to bolt and offer splendid targets for the artillery. The 1/11th Gurkhas, directed against the palm gardens near the river, whence a heavy fire came, and the 3/8th Gurkhas on their left, supported by the 1/114th Mahattas, pushed forward, covered by the artillery, in the face of stubborn resistance. To help the advance the 1st Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry was thrown into the fight on the right, and was fired on heavily from the palm gardens; but fortunately the insurgents' shooting was erratic, and the casualties were few. At 1.30 P.M. the troops nearest the river reported that large numbers still opposed them, and as the repairs to the line could not be carried out that day more than one mile further to the north, General Coningham decided that, after driving the insurgents from their position, he would camp for the night, and not enter the enclosed ground near Samawah until the following day. The infantry now continued the advance, and soon the insurgents were seen retiring in large numbers to the west under shell fire. Their losses included eighty killed, of whom twenty were drowned in an attempt to cross the river.

On the 14th October the column entered Samawah without opposition, only twenty-five Arabs and as many Jews being found in the town, and the repairs to the railway allowed the train to arrive at 11 P.M.

The work of the relief force, which, except on the 13th, met with less opposition than was anticipated, had won deserved success, for the arrangements both prior to the advance and during it were such that they worked with admirable smoothness.

From the 8th September to the 12th October, when a point one and a half miles south-east of Samawah was reached, two hundred and fifty blockhouses, some made of bricks and others of sandbags and gabions, had been constructed, and but for the considerable help given by the railway personnel and the expeditious manner in which they provided rolling-stock for construction trains and organised the traffic, so large an amount of work would have been impossible.

I had laid down the 23rd September as the latest date by which the blockhouses between Basrah and Nasiriyah were to be completed, and by the 20th all were ready.

The only unfortunate incident which can in any way be associated with the relief was the sad end of the British portion of the crew of the *Greenfly*. I have explained why they were not relieved before their food gave out, and the date of the letter, a copy of which will be found in Appendix V, shows that but for ill-fortune the lives of the gallant British who were on board would have been saved.

The casualties in the relief force from the 1st to the 18th October, and including those of the *Greenfly*, only amounted to—

	Killed or died or wounds.	Wounded.	Missing.
British officers	5	1	1
British other ranks	6	15	4
Indian officers	6	14	24
Indian other ranks	2	2	...
Followers	11	32	29

As regards the garrison of Samawah, which, as mentioned earlier, was commanded by Major A. S. Hay, 31st Lancers, attached to the 1/114th Maharattas, and numbered six hundred and seventy in all, they were found to be in good

health and spirits, having suffered little by the two months' investment. Their casualties too were small.

The garrison had been strengthened on the 28th August by the escort of forty-five men of the 2/123rd Rifles, under Captain C. E. Norton, who had arrived with the river convoy on that date; while the presence of the *Grayfly* and the *Sandfly* exercised considerable moral effect on the insurgents. The garrison were therefore better able to withstand the attacks on the main camp which followed the loss of the armoured train. These attacks were invariably delivered at night, and preferably when there was no moon; and determined efforts were made to capture posts held by the piquets and destroy the barbed wire in their neighbourhood by men carrying bombs, who were supported by heavy fire from their flanks.

On three occasions the leader of the insurgents, Saiyid Hadi of the Bani Haichaim, sent in a letter in which he promised safe conduct for the garrison if carried by their own boats to Nasiriyah. His attempts to negotiate were ignored, and the investment ran its course, until the operations for relief liberated the garrison. These operations, which saved the third and largest of the invested garrisons from falling into the insurgents' hands, had at last given me freedom of action to deal with those who still opposed us when and where I chose.

It is fitting here that I should state that on the 18th October I received a telegram from Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, who had been most sympathetic and helpful throughout a very trying period. It ran as follows:—

“Hearty congratulations on the relief of Samawah, which materially improves the situation, and reflects great credit on the troops, which have had to march and fight under such trying conditions.”

This telegram, which was at once published for the benefit of the troops, was followed by one from the Secretary of State for War, Mr. Winston Churchill, which began:—

“During these difficult months your patience and steadfastness have been of great value, and I congratulate you

upon the distinct improvement in the situation which has been effected by you."

Previous to receiving either of the above telegrams I had informed the War Office that I should not require the additional reinforcements which, about two months earlier, it seemed possible would have to be sent.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE OPERATIONS NORTH OF BAGHDAD.

WHEN the insurrection broke out in the Euphrates valley there was a strong probability that it would spread north of Baghdad, where, as previously described, disturbances had occurred in May and June. At that time, by promises of gifts of arms and ammunition and other inducements, external propagandists had striven to incite the Kurdish and Jezireh Arab tribes to take hostile action against us, and it seemed certain that their efforts would shortly be repeated, as indeed they were. Fortunately the country lying north of Baghdad, and the district which is known as the Mosul vilayat, provide less material for the political incendiary than the regions further south, and it was hoped that the small force under Major-General T. Fraser, commanding the 18th Division, would suffice to maintain the area in order.

The considerable calls on the troops of that division which I had been forced to make in July and August for operations in the Baghdad vilayat necessitated a redistribution of the units left, which was arranged so as to hold the more important railway stations with detachments capable of dealing with minor raids, guard all posts on the Shergat-Mosul road, and retain at the latter place for offensive action as strong a reserve as possible.

July passed quietly but for the activities of small raiding parties such as are prone to make their appearance during the summer months. The immediate despatch, however, of aeroplanes and small columns either from Mosul or Tel Afar to deal with any concentration served to keep in

check attempts to commit serious breaches of the peace; and this action, combined with a firm attitude, political and military, in the area produced at least a temporary settlement, and kept rebellion among Kurds and Arabs in suspended animation.

But on the 10th August the officer commanding at Tel Afar reported that two sections of the Northern Shammar, a nomad tribe whose annual movement north and south in a portion of the region which lies between the Tigris and Euphrates is a fruitful source of minor trouble, had crossed the Mosul-Sinjar road. As these sections had been implicated in the Tel Afar rising in June, they had been warned that, until the terms imposed on them had been complied with, they were prohibited from moving south of the above-mentioned road. Major-General Fraser had also laid down bounds at a little distance on either side of the railway, and trespass by the tribesmen within those limits would be punished by the speedy arrival of unexpected and unpleasant visitors in the shape of bomb-carrying aeroplanes.

On the 11th August a small column under Lieut.-Colonel G. B. M. Sarel, 11th (K.E.O.) Lancers, consisting of three squadrons of that regiment and a section of the 44th Battery R.F.A., left Mosul, and found the defaulting sections camped some eleven miles south-east of Tel Afar. The Assistant Political Officer of that place, escorted by a squadron, now rode forward some three miles, while the remainder of the column halted lest the knowledge of the presence of a force of such size should cause a failure in the negotiations.

While the Assistant Political Officer was discussing with the shaikh of one of the sections his breach of orders, the leader of the other section was observed to ride from the camp, followed by some mounted Arabs, who were headed off by a troop sent out from the squadron.

Hardly had this movement been successfully effected when heavy rifle fire was opened on the remainder of the squadron from the Shammar tents, and from a village which was close to the encampment. The squadron, which

was under the command of Captain J. C. Hanwell, now found itself being fired into from three sides, whereupon it was withdrawn without loss of time to a position about eight hundred yards distant from the tents, on which fire was then directed. The remainder of the column had meantime ridden forward to cover the withdrawal of the squadron, and the guns which were unlimbered and in action opened fire.

As the Arabs in their usual fashion next began to work round the flanks of the column, Captain Hanwell was ordered to fall back and rejoin headquarters, being assisted in that operation by a troop of the second squadron. Eventually as the Arabs showed that they far exceeded the numbers of their opponents, and as the latter were some fourteen miles from Tel Afar, the column was withdrawn to that place.

Lieutenant A. L. Hanna, who came up with the reinforcing squadron, behaved with gallantry on this occasion, and was awarded the Distinguished Service Order. While passing over the open he saw a wounded sowar lying on the ground, who had been stripped of his equipment and clothing by the Arabs. While endeavouring to lift the man on to his own horse, the insurgents opened fire, and a bullet passed through his coat. However, he persisted in his intention to prevent the sowar from falling into hostile hands, and eventually carried him off in safety.

Further south the eloquence of two of the most troublesome agitators, Yusuf al Suwaidi and Saiyid Muhammad Sadr, who had escaped arrest at Baghdad on the 12th August, and who were traced to the Diyalah district, was giving rise to trouble at Samarrah. Here, some years after the death of the caliph, Harun al Rashid, known to most of us through the pages of the 'Arabian Nights,' stood for some sixty years the Capital of the Moslem world. Baghdad, which had earlier held that proud position, lost its supremacy owing to the civil wars which followed the death of the reputed hero of so many night adventures.

Of its successor, Samarrah, which is now a place greatly revered by shiaks, little remains but a walled city and a

gilt-domed mosque, with some interesting remains to the north and east. Here local elements of the Azzah tribe, stirred by the propaganda which had reached their ears, concentrated, and on the 28th August sent a threatening message to the notables of the town. The townsmen, who, here as everywhere in Mesopotamia, are the most pusillanimous section of the population, and are incapable of protecting themselves and their belongings, terrified at the prospect of tribal lawlessness, begged the Political Officer, Major Berry, who displayed courage and good sense at a trying crisis, not to abandon them.

Early on the 30th Major E. T. W. McCausland, 1/3rd Gurkha Rifles, with two platoons of his battalion and a platoon of the 106th Hazara Pioneers—in all one hundred and twenty rifles with two machine-guns—arrived from Shergat to relieve Samarrah, in which were thirteen British soldiers under Lieutenant R. F. Garrons-Williams, 4th Battalion Royal Fusiliers, and some Indian and Burmese motor drivers, all of whom had recently arrived from Kirkuk with motor transport. The insurgents opened fire from trenches on our troops as they advanced from the railway station, which is on the opposite side of the river to the town. Two aeroplanes appeared from the direction of Baghdad, and their presence, combined with the rapidity with which the infantry pushed forward, caused the insurgents to fly, when the aeroplanes following them broke them up with bombs and machine-guns.

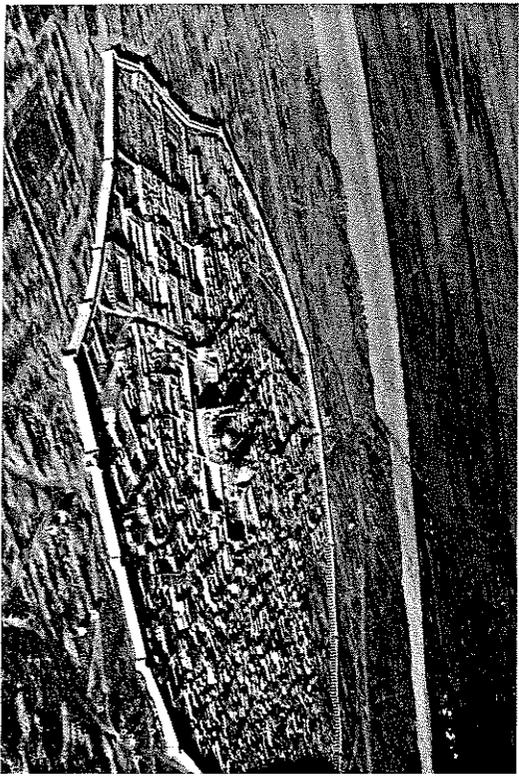
During the next fortnight the disturbed state of the country between Samarrah and Baghdad and a little to the north of the former place, which is seventy-six miles north of the capital, was a constant source of worry.

The line between those places and on to Shergat, over which trains for some months had run only by daylight, and which, for lack of men and labour, it was impossible to make secure by means of blockhouses, was of importance for several reasons, to explain which a lengthy digression is unavoidable.

In the first place, the question of the supply of the garrison of Mosul was a vital matter. The situation on



Fadhah gorge, looking up-stream.



Samarrah from the east.

the Euphrates and elsewhere was such that on the 14th July the Acting Civil Commissioner had put forward the idea of giving up the whole of the Mosul vilayat. His view was that the inadequate force in Mesopotamia and the time that must elapse before reinforcements from India could arrive would allow the situation in other parts of the country to become so aggravated that only the withdrawal of all troops from the north would suffice to secure the other two vilayats. He considered that, unless I could guarantee the supplies of Mosul for a period of from six to nine months, the prospects of relieving it were small.

On the date to which I refer matters everywhere bore an extremely serious aspect, and the advantages of adding to the small reserve at Baghdad were indisputable. Still, from a civil and military point of view—and my position compelled me to consider both—though the recommendation may have been in accordance with sound principles, I was loth to give up a square mile of the country for which I was responsible. I felt that the officer on the spot knew far better than I, brief as was my acquaintance with the country, whether such a withdrawal, if indeed it was advisable, was feasible, and even without a local opinion the difficulties seemed to be immense. As the Acting Civil Commissioner had telegraphed to the India Office on the matter I took similar action as regards the War Office, and was given a free hand to act as I thought best.

Before the answer from London came the commander of the 18th Division expressed his strong dislike to such an impracticable operation, and as my own inclinations were entirely in accordance with that view, the matter was put aside and the chance of isolation was accepted. Thus the necessity for pushing through to Mosul supplies and munitions of all kinds, to which I have referred in an earlier chapter, became of primary importance, and, as opportunity allowed, train after train was sent to Shergat, whence their contents were conveyed to Mosul by almost every kind of transport.

The next consideration which demanded the keeping open of the line was the repatriation of the Assyrian and

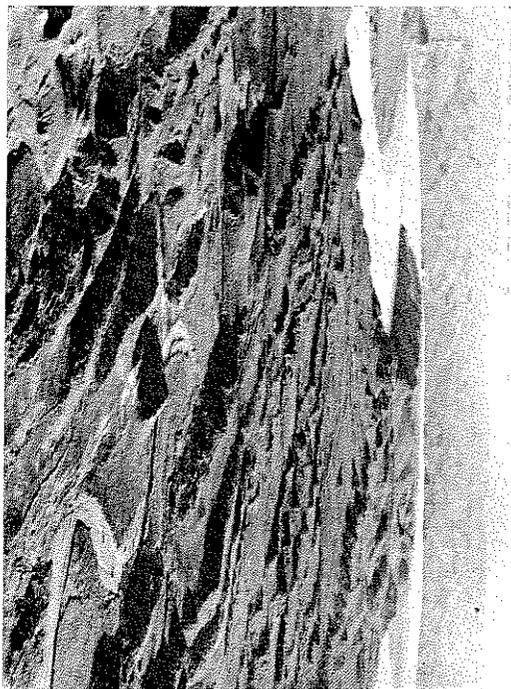
Armenian refugees, which was already under way when the insurrection began. The Armenians were sent to a spot near Basrah, whence if conditions allowed they would be shipped to their homes. On the other hand, the Assyrians, who numbered nearly twice as many as the Armenians, had to be transferred to the vicinity of Mosul, which involved a railway journey over a line liable to be cut and a march of seventy miles from its terminus at Shergat.

These refugees have been so frequently mentioned that some explanation as to their presence in Mesopotamia seems to be necessary.

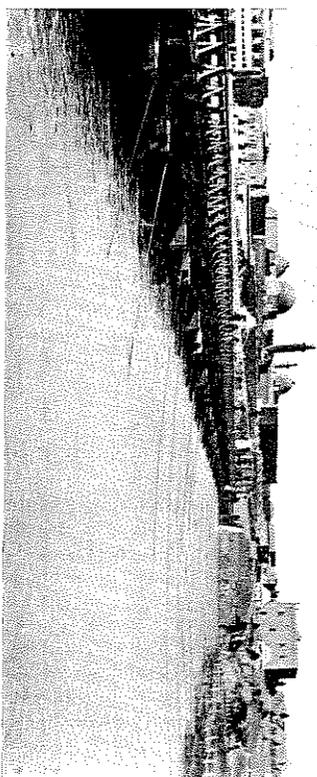
As regards the Armenians, who were Turkish subjects from the Lake Van district, all was quiet in their area at the outbreak of the European war; but in the spring of 1915, when the Russians advanced towards the town of Van, the inhabitants severed their connection with their Moslem rulers, and threw in their lot with their fellow-Christians.

In June of the same year, when the Russians withdrew from Van and returned to the Caucasus, they were followed by the whole body of the Armenians. Two months later, however, when the Russians again advanced to Van, many of those who had followed them in their withdrawal accompanied them, intending to settle again in their deserted homes. But they had reckoned without the upheaval which had now begun in Russia, and which led to the evacuation of Turkish territory by their protectors. Slaves of circumstances, and fearing to remain with the cruel Turk, they turned their backs on their homes for the second time, and fled for refuge to their compatriots in Persia.

The Assyrians, or, as they are sometimes called, on account of the mountainous nature of the country of Hakkari in Turkish Kurdistan, the Hill Assyrians, to distinguish them from their brethren of the Plains, are the remnant of the oldest Christian body in existence. Prior to the war they numbered approximately one hundred thousand souls, and were distributed into tribal and subject people. The former, for the most part lawless shep-



Country near Shergat.



Mosul from the east.

herds armed with obsolete weapons, lived in semi-independence in their rugged rocky fastnesses which are to be found near the upper waters of the Greater Zab, a tributary of the Tigris. They acknowledge no allegiance except to their Patriarch and their chiefs, and the Turks had no direct dealings with them. Their fellow-nationalists of the plains frequented a less inhospitable country, where they were subject to the control of their overlords, paid taxes, and provided recruits for the Turkish Army.

Both hill and plains-men lived on friendly terms with their rulers, as well as with their Kurdish neighbours, until the arrival of the Russians in Kurdistan in the summer of 1915. They were then persuaded to join in attacking the Turks, and when the Russians withdrew they were forced to quit their homes and fly to Persia.

But besides those Assyrians above referred to, there were others in Persia who formed a highly prosperous and peaceful community of agriculturists, and who, before the outbreak of war, had been for some years under Russian protection. These had also lived on good terms with their Moslem neighbours, but the arrival of their mountain brethren wrought a complete change in those relations. The Russians organised the hillmen during 1916 into bands of irregulars, who, under the leadership of Agha Petros, were used on various punitive expeditions against the Kurdish tribes on the Persian border, and who, from their racial traditions and martial temperament, required no urging on to raid, loot, burn, and kill.

Their leader, Agha Petros, is possessed of ability and force of character, but not overburdened with scruples. In earlier years he had to leave his village in Kurdistan on account of a blood-feud, which was probably the cause of his entering the American mission school at Urmia. After completing his education there and touring the world he returned to Urmia, having in the meantime become possessed of considerable wealth, and settled there as a trader. He now came into favour with the Turks, was made Vice-Consul, and gained considerable prestige in the country. In 1908, on the arrival of the Russian troops,

he forsook his former masters, and after serving for a time with the Army was given a commission at the outbreak of war.

When the Russian Army broke up the Assyrians were visited by British and French delegates, and were induced by them to hold the Urmia front. Unfortunately, although arms and other war material were provided in plenty, the lack of foresight and want of capable European officers led to the non-seizure of the Russian base at Sharif Khana, on the northern shores of Lake Urmia, which would have made the Assyrians masters of the situation. However, for several months the Turks and Kurds were not only kept at bay, but several times defeated. The Persians now came on the scene, and on the Assyrians refusing to disarm, an attempt to compel them to do so by force was made. Disturbances followed in several places, and at Urmia, where the Christians routed the Persians and Kurds, the chief of the Shikah Kurds, Simko Agha, a well-known personage, sued for peace. A conference between both sides took place, at the conclusion of which the Assyrian patriarch and his followers were treacherously murdered. Retaliation speedily followed, for, as soon as the news of what had occurred reached Urmia, the Kurds there were massacred by the Christian population. The Assyrians next organised a force which defeated Simko and killed many of his people. Unfortunately for the peace of the country, where he continues to be a source of perennial trouble, Simko escaped to Khoi, and in conjunction with the Persian democrats massacred some four thousand Christians.

The Assyrians were now face to face with a combined force of Kurds, Turks, and Persians, which greatly outnumbered and threatened to annihilate them. An urgent appeal to the British was made, which resulted in an agreement that the Assyrians would meet the British mission at Sain Kala. There they would take over a convoy of Lewis guns, ammunition, and money, with which would be twelve British officers, who were detailed to accompany the Assyrians to Urmia, where they were to organise the

troops. Owing, however, to the opposition of Turkish troops south of Lake Urmia, the meeting that had been arranged to take place at Sain Kala was delayed by one week, when Agha Petros marched there with his men. In the meantime, during his absence, the Turks had broken through the line and occupied Urmia town, which forced the Christians in the Urmia plain to leave their homes and make their way as best they could through hostile country to join the British. Of the Christians, some ten thousand, who may have been cut off and so failed to join in the general exodus, have not since been heard of, and it is conjectured that most of them were massacred. Pursued by the deadly enemies of their religion and an easy prey to the ferocity which recognises no distinction of age or sex, many more fell victims before Hamadan was reached. But from Sain Kala onwards the horrors of the journey were somewhat mitigated by the gallant efforts of the handful of British troops who met them, and day by day alone kept the pursuing Moslems at bay and covered the retirement of the remnant of the demoralised Assyrian army and the hordes of refugees.

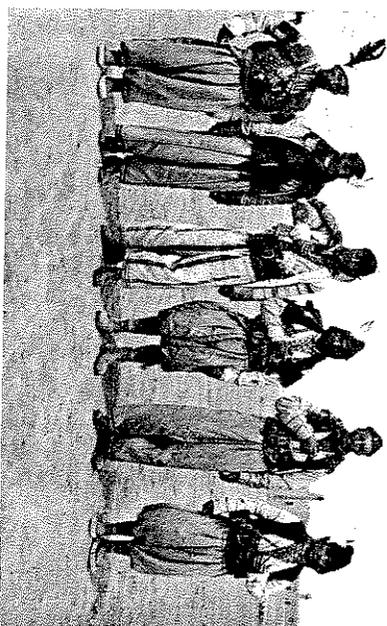
But before the refugees could be placed in security many difficulties had to be overcome. The sudden arrival at Hamadan of tens of thousands of fresh mouths would have led to a grave food crisis, and the supply of the British on the long line from Baghdad to the Caspian Sea was alone a sufficiently intricate problem. The hordes had to be dealt with in detail, and spread as much as possible, and with that object in view speedy efforts were made to raise four battalions of Assyrians for employment in Persia under British officers. Others of them were formed into Labour Corps for work on the roads, while the remainder were despatched from Hamadan to Mesopotamia by stages in batches of a thousand. Supplies, local and other, were secured as quickly as possible, and were collected at the several stages, and as the refugees passed along the line rations were issued under the supervision of British officers.

Meanwhile Bagubah, thirty-three miles north-east of Baghdad, which is situated on the Diyalah river and on

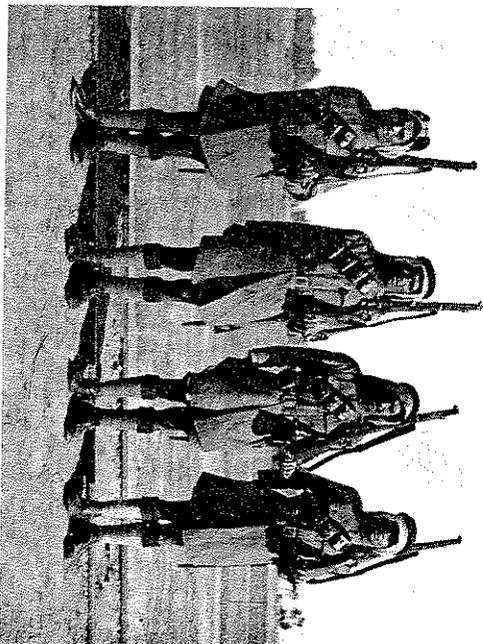
the rail and road routes to Persia, had been chosen as the concentration camp. Here, towards the end of August 1918, the refugees, exhausted by their march of many hundred miles, and suffering from a multitude of diseases, began to arrive. For two months the influx went on steadily, until about the end of October some forty-five thousand persons were accommodated in tents. The camp, which at first was organised and commanded by Brigadier-General H. E. Austin, who was assisted by a very limited staff of British officers, and British other ranks, covered an area of one square mile, and the utmost care was taken to secure the welfare, cleanliness, and discipline of the several sections into which it was divided. Not only were the refugees tended in every possible way, but many thousands of emaciated and sorry animals—ponies, mules, cattle, and donkeys, besides flocks of sheep and goats and one solitary camel—were cared for by the veterinary staff, and eventually discharged from the segregation camp and sent away for agricultural purposes, while the remainder formed the transport of the camp.

By Christmas 1918 the camp had reached the zenith of its organisation, and resembled a small town, complete with well-laid-out streets, a water supply, electric lamps, a bazaar, hospitals, churches, orphan schools and playgrounds for the children, a post office, labour bureau, and a railway station; while a club, a theatre, canteen, and Y.M.C.A. reading-room met the requirements of the British and Indian personnel. In June 1919 the camp, now fully organised and in smooth-running order, was taken over by the civil administration with a new headquarters staff, under Lieut.-Colonel F. Cunliffe-Owen, who carried on the good work of his predecessor.

During the time the camp remained at Bagbah I paid several visits to it, meeting the Patriarch and inspecting the armed men, boy scouts, and establishments. No sight more picturesque could well be imagined than a parade of the fighting men in their quaint garb, which seemed to be a combination of the dress of the pantomime harlequin and Joseph's multi-coloured coat. The rugged manliness



Assyrian warriors.



Arab levies.

of their appearance, their handsome faces and military bearing, roused strong feelings of sympathy with a race which had gone through so fierce a struggle for existence, and seemed likely yet to have far to go before it reached a Promised Land.

As it had been decided that the repatriation of the Assyrian refugees to their former homes near Lake Urmia should be effected before the autumn, the movement to a camp some twenty miles north-east of Mosul had, as already mentioned, been begun. To ensure smoothness in the arrangements a steady flow northwards from Baghdad was essential, and this must evidently depend on secure rail communication.

The last and least important reason for endeavouring to keep open the Baghdad-Shergat line, was the moral effect which the refusal to accept the frequent interruptions by raiders as a cause for closing it to traffic for a time would have on the surrounding tribes. They must be taught that if the line could be cut it could also be repaired; and fortunately the more permanent nature of this, the first railway that was laid in Mesopotamia, and laid by the Germans in their usual thorough manner, was not so easily destructible as were our own more hastily constructed lines. Nevertheless the annoyance caused by the continual rail-cutting was considerable, and had it not been for the unremitting efforts of a detachment of the 26th Punjab Labour Corps under Lieutenant J. A. H. Devlin, the early resumption of the train service would not have been possible.

In the neighbourhood of Samarrah and between it and Baghdad the disturbed nature of the country, as has been said, was causing inconvenience. On the night of the 31st August a determined attack was made on Balad railway station, which is fifty-one miles north of the capital, by several hundred insurgents collected from both sides of the Tigris. After several hours' fighting they were driven off by the garrison of twenty-three men under a havildar of the 1/3rd Gurkha Rifles. Next day the line was reported to be cut at a point five miles north of Samarrah. Two

platoons of the same regiment, under Captain T. A. Foster, were despatched from that place, and an armoured car detachment was sent to co-operate with them. The Arabs, who were firing from some villages between the railway and the river, were driven back, and left behind them several killed. Balad station was again attacked on the 1st and 4th September, but without success.

On the 31st August an armoured train and a train carrying Assyrian refugees had left Baghdad, and reached Sumaichah, forty miles to the north. Between that place and Balad station, about eleven miles further on, the line was damaged at intervals throughout its length, but by nightfall the latter place was reached. On the 1st September attempts were made to get through to Samarrah, but at Istabulat station, which is thirteen miles short of that place, it was found that the line immediately to the north had been seriously damaged. The trains now proceeded southwards, but found that the track behind them had in the meantime been cut.

That night a report came that the trains were isolated at Istabulat station, whither they had returned, that Arabs were holding trenches north and south of them, and that the passengers, who included a proportion of women and children, had practically no water. An armoured relief train was ordered to proceed at daylight to the scene, and an aeroplane which was also sent returned with the report that people had been observed standing on the ground beside the train. As troops were difficult to spare for the work of rescue, I ordered Colonel A. Paley, commanding the 1st Battalion Rifle Brigade, to take one company of his regiment, four hundred Assyrians (only one hundred and eighty actually entrained), and two field artillery guns, one of which was placed on a truck at the head of the train and the other at the tail, to proceed to the spot, drive off the insurgents, and withdraw the refugees and armoured train. Railway delays occurred, as usual, but at 3.45 P.M. the train of forty-three trucks and carriages—all the remaining rolling-stock that remained at Baghdad for work on the Shergat line—reached its destination.

When Balad station, fifty-one miles north, was reached it was too dark to proceed further, and the train was halted and broken into two portions, which were placed for safety parallel to each other. Later, forty Assyrians were sent forward, and fortunately arrived at an important bridge in time to prevent its total destruction by a party of Arabs who had arrived before them.

Next day at 5.20 A.M. the train moved forward, and on reaching the bridge fifty minutes later it was found that, except for the girders, nothing remained of it, sleepers and rails having been thrown into the ravine below. At 8.25, the bridge having been repaired, the train started again, but a few minutes later encountered another breach, which had been effected by using teams of camels which hauled away the line by ropes. The armoured train from Istabulat station now arrived at the northern end of the breach, and it was ascertained that the officer in command, Captain W. H. Butcher, Royal Engineers, attached to the Mesopotamian Railway Service, who was mainly responsible for saving the refugees, and who was awarded an immediate Military Cross for his behaviour on this occasion, had made several attempts, under fire, to effect repairs, which, owing to extensive damage, had not been successful. His casualties at Balad and Istabulat had amounted to six killed and eight wounded.

The armoured train now moved north again to Istabulat station to fetch the refugees, and was to be followed by Colonel Paley as soon as the break between the trains was mended, when he would push on and cover the return journey. By 10.20 he was able to advance with fifty to sixty Assyrians skirmishing ahead on either side, twenty-five of the remainder having been left as a post at the bridge in rear.

A plan had been thought out in the eventuality of opposition being met, but on approaching the refugees it proved to be unnecessary. Both Arabs and Kurds have a wholesome dread of the Assyrian, whose drastic methods in dealing with his enemies recall those of Old Testament days. As soon as the train was found to have Assyrians

and not supplies on board, the Arabs had sheered off and kept at a respectful distance from it. Thus at half-past ten, when Colonel Paley's train was moving in a northerly direction, and though the Arabs kept on firing, nobody was hurt.

The train, followed by the two which had been isolated, now proceeded to Balad station, where the turbulent nature of the Assyrians displayed itself. Some time earlier two Arab men, two women, and a child had been captured, and, except one of the men who carried a revolver, they were ordered to be released. That man tried to escape, and was rightly shot by the escort. But a large number of the refugees saw the remainder of the prisoners moving off, and jumping from the train chased and killed the other man, and with considerable difficulty were prevented from killing the women.

This incident of the isolation of the refugees' train has been mentioned as one typical of the troubles on the northern line, which, had the Arabs proved tenacious, would have caused us considerable inconvenience.

The next incident on that line was a second attack on Samarrah, near which, on the right bank of the Tigris, a large body of Arabs was reported to be concentrating on the 11th. This was dealt with by the 1/3rd Gurkha Rifles and two aeroplanes, which were sent from Baghdad, and did good work in chasing fleeing insurgents, bombing and firing on them as they ran.

From that date onward no further disturbances occurred between Baghdad and Mosul, and it is probable that, as regards the southernmost section of the line, the absence of raids was due to the operations which were taking place north-east of the capital, and later to the occupation of Deltawah and Sindiayah.

Elsewhere, however, in the district, which fell within the command of Major-General Fraser, including the Kirkuk area, which was added to it on the 22nd August, the situation was unsatisfactory. The disturbances in the Diyalah Division had spread through the Kurdish tribes round Kifri, and communication between that place

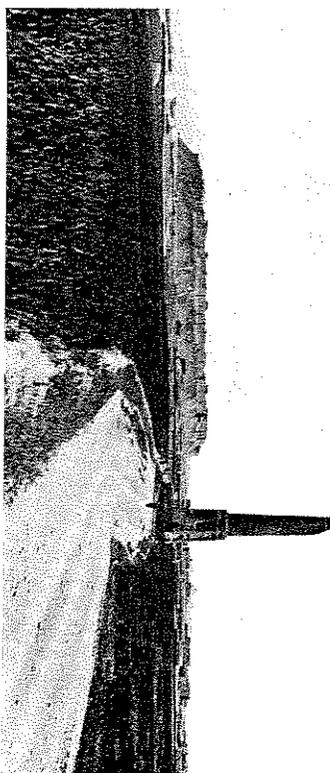
and Kirkuk was in danger. Kingarban station, which is the railhead and is about six miles distant from Kifri, was, like some other places, indifferently defended; and besides the fact that, owing to lack of compactness, the perimeter to be held by the garrison was almost two miles, the water supply came by a series of karezes or roughly-made tunnels from the pumping-station, which was distant from the camp about one thousand yards. The troops holding the place consisted of two and a quarter companies of the 94th (Russell's) Infantry and the 113th Infantry, besides some details, the whole being under the command of Major B. I. H. Adler of the latter regiment. As the protection and supply of two posts at important bridges on the railway line devolved upon that officer, the force at his disposal at Kingarban was liable to be reduced, and was so on the 17th August to only two platoons. The Political Officer, Captain G. H. Salmon, who with his wife was at Kifri, was pressed to move his quarters to the railway station on the 15th August, but he declined, as also did his wife, alleging, probably with good reason, that the moral effect of his presence among the inhabitants, who were hostile to the local tribesmen, was great, and that unless the situation became very grave he would not quit his post. Eventually on leaving the town to parley with some tribesmen on a hill close by he was captured, after which his wife came to the military camp. On the 28th he was killed by his captors, and on the day following a small column under Major N. F. C. Molloy, 32nd Lancers, consisting of five troops of that regiment, a section of the 49th Pack Battery, and a few details, reached Kingarban from Kirkuk, whence it had been sent to co-operate with the garrison against the Kifri insurgents. On the way there on the 27th Major Molloy, who met with opposition during his march, relieved one of the posts on the road at Tuz, which was held by a detachment of the 113th Infantry. This small post had been invested since the 18th August, and had sustained several attacks from a party of some two hundred tribesmen, who twice forced their way through the defences, and were driven out with bomb and bayonet.

Kifri was entered on the 30th with some slight opposition, but it was too late to save the life of Captain Salmon, who, like several other Political Officers, had gallantly remained at his post. The local shaikh was appointed governor, and a company of infantry was sent from Kin-garban, after which Major Molloy returned to Kirkuk, which was reached on the 4th September.

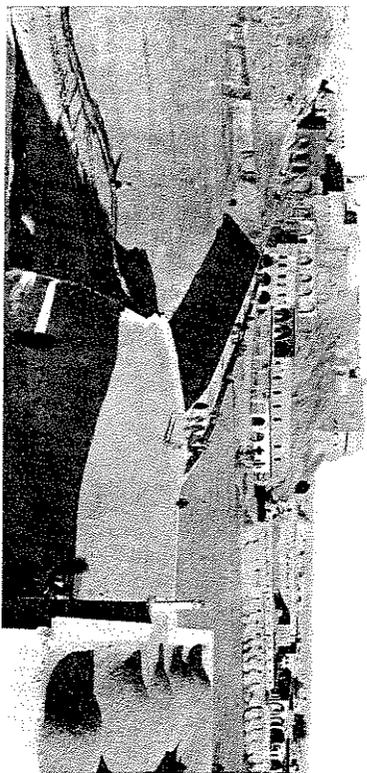
The despatch of his small column had an excellent effect on the tribesmen in and around Kirkuk, and also on the Arbil and Sulaimaniyah areas. In the former of these areas the Political Officer, Major Hay, had been attacked in the Rowanduz gorge on the 12th August, but had escaped, and after that the whole of the area became unsettled. A plot by a small disaffected element at Arbil to set up a local government was discovered and frustrated, and the depredations committed by the Kurdish tribes effectually cooled the revolutionary ardour of the inhabitants.

On the 1st September the position was that the Surehi of the Akra district, a tribe possessed of strong proclivities for making trouble, having crossed the Zob and overthrown the government at Batas, were on their way to Rowanduz, where there was a small garrison of Levies. On receipt of the news of the events at Batas, Captain Littledale, the local Commandant of Levies, at once set off with thirty mounted and seventy footmen, relying on promises of help from a local leader. But no help was forthcoming, and the small force of Levies, who attacked alone and with gallantry, failed, and had to withdraw to Arbil, with a loss of eighteen men.

This repulse naturally reacted unfavourably wherever the news of it was borne. The position of the Assistant Political Officer at Keui at once became untenable, and on the 3rd September he was forced to evacuate that place, leaving the government in the hands of certain of the leading men. Even before the reverse at Batas the position at Rowanduz had become so critical that the small Levy garrison there had to be withdrawn, reaching Arbil without serious loss or adventure. Thereafter Rowanduz was



Arbil from the north-west.



Kirkuk from the west.

attacked by the Surchi, and after some disorder a holy man was appointed, or appointed himself, governor.

In order to try and restore a semblance of order in the area, frequent bombing raids by aeroplanes were made from Mosul over Batas and other hostile villages, with the result that by the beginning of the first week in September the situation in Arbil appeared to be improving. The improvement there did not, however, continue, and at the end of the week matters grew so critical that the despatch of troops became necessary. Accordingly a small column under the command of Major G. B. Henderson (attached to the 52nd Sikhs), consisting of one squadron 11th (K.F.O.) Lancers, one section 8th Battery R.F.A., and fifty rifles of the 52nd Sikhs, left Mosul on the 11th September, and met at Arbil on the 14th half a squadron of the 32nd Lancers and one company of the 4th Battalion Royal Fusiliers from Kirkuk. The arrival of these troops had an immediate effect, and the area subsided into peacefulness.

In the Akra area hostile tribesmen were dispersed by bombing from aeroplanes the several villages west of the Greater Zab, where they were reported to be concentrating. On the 15th September about six hundred Surchi Kurds attacked an Assyrian repatriation camp at Jujar, where the refugees' animals were collected, thirty miles north-east of Mosul. The Assyrians, though heavily outnumbered, were better armed and disciplined, and made short work of the Kurds. With a loss of only four killed and eight wounded, they slew sixty of their opponents, and drove the rest back across the Zab, where one hundred and forty more are said to have been drowned.

But for this entirely fortuitous support it is possible that a large portion of the Mosul Division might have been swamped in the wave of anarchy.

This affair brought to a conclusion the operations in the 13th Divisional area, but during October small columns were sent wherever their arrival would have the effect of suppressing the first signs of disorder.

The possibility of the garrisons of Mosul and Kirkuk being cut off from Baghdad weighed on my mind, and

caused me to order the women and children at those places to be withdrawn and sent to the capital. In the case of Mosul the regular route to the south was open, and provided special precautions were taken it was reasonably safe. On the other hand, the route by rail to Kingarban and thence by road to Kirkuk was closed, and access to the garrison of the latter place was only possible by traversing the disturbed area which lay between it and Mosul. The question of moving some of the women by aircraft was considered, but aeroplanes were not available for the numbers to be carried, which comprised eight women, some children, a few men seriously ill, and a quantity of baggage. The only means of withdrawing them, therefore, was by the waterless desert route to Telcrit on the Tigris, a run of seventy miles by motor-car, and thence by a track along the left bank of the river to Samarrah, near which town there is a ferry. The Arabs, through whose country the party would pass, had so far remained friendly, but others from a distance, should they get wind of the move, might constitute a danger. Secrecy therefore had to be maintained; and the commander at Kirkuk was told only to warn, late in the afternoon, those who were to move next day. The party, which would require several cars, would be escorted by British soldiers, and aeroplanes were ordered from Baghdad to proceed to Samarrah and patrol that part of the desert route which is nearest to the river. A hospital train, with an escort of an officer and fifty men, and an armoured construction train, were sent to Samarrah, where the journey by motor-car would terminate. At 7 A.M. on the 19th a start was made from Kirkuk, and a little later two aeroplanes left the Baghdad aerodrome. At the hour when an air report was expected to the effect that the convoy had been seen, word was received that the planes had failed to get any trace of it. Throughout the day information continued to be negative in character, and all that was known was that the party had left Kirkuk and had disappeared into space.

During the war on the Western Front we used to consider no news as bad news, but in the East I have found

the contrary to be the case. There had news travels fast, confirming the adage, "For evil news rides post, while good news baits"; and though I felt anxiety at the ominous silence, I was confident that nothing serious had happened.

Next morning, the 20th, word came that the convoy had lost its way in the desert, and had been forced to spend the night there with a minimum of water. By 10 A.M. it reached Samarrah, and by 3 P.M. was safe in Baghdad. It was the small escort of British soldiers with this convoy who a little later helped to make Samarrah secure.