GERTRUDE BELL AS A LITERARY ARTIST

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Gertrude Margaret Lowthian Bell, historian, traveller, archaeologist, author, and king-maker, lives today in the memory of the people of Iraq who are fighting to preserve that independence as a nation which she helped them to achieve.

Especially to the average American, the Middle East is a vague section of the world's surface shrouded in mystery and enchantment. However, with the Middle East assuming ever greater importance in this second world war, attention is focused on these lands, and answers are being sought eagerly to pertinent questions relating to their history.

Scholars long have been interested by the study of the Middle East. Travellers invariably find it fascinating. Published works concerning the life and thoughts of the varied groups dwelling in this territory are, for the most part, written for the reader who possesses an adequate background - for example, the books of Charles M. Doughty, Edward G. Browne, and David Hogarth.

In this thesis I shall discuss Gertrude Bell as a literary artist and show why her writings on the Middle East provide for the average reader an excellent introduction to that little known region. In the chapter "Gertrude

Bell as a Descriptive Artist," excerpts are given from both the letters and travel books. In the chapter, "Gertrude Bell as a Story Teller," is a discussion of Miss Bell's travel books, which include The Desert and the Sown, Amurath to Amurath, and Persian Pictures, which was originally published under the title Safar Nameh. The two volumes of letters edited by Mrs. Florence Bell in 1927 and the volume of earlier letters edited by Elsa Richmond in 1937 provide the basis for the chapter, "Gertrude Bell as a Letter Writer."

As a literary artist Miss Bell is not in the front ranks, but the very qualities and characteristics which prevented her from attaining that position were those which enabled her to write so charmingly in a lighter vein.

Who was this woman who interpreted the solitude of the desert vastnesses, who won the confidence of sheiks and tribal chieftans, who found the study of the ancient seats of civilization so enthralling that she preferred it to life in England? Not the first Englishwoman to succumb to the mood of the Middle East, she was, nevertheless, the one who most appreciated it.

Exactly seventy-nine years after the storming of the Bastille, July 14, 1868, Gertrude Bell was born in Washington Hall, Durham County, England. As the granddaughter of Sir Lowthian Bell and the daughter of Hugh Bell and Mary

Shield, she was born into a family where wealth and intellectual brilliance were part of the environment. When Gertrude was three years old her mother died. Five years later Florence Olliffe became her step-mother. The social gifts and diplomatic relationships which she presented her step-daughter paved the way for Gertrude's acceptance of "all the advantages cosmopolitan society could offer".[1]

Private tutors were Gertrude's first teachers, but her parents believed something more was required by their red-haired daughter. Although it was unusual for girls of Gertrude's position in English society to be sent away to school, she entered, at the age of fifteen, Queen's College in London, which was presided over by a friend of Mrs. Bell. In 1886 her university days began when she matriculated at Lady Margaret Hall, one of the two Oxford colleges admitting women. Two years later she received a brilliant first class in modern history.

Keenly alert, eager, intelligently curious, she enjoyed life. The opportunity to travel and to live in various countries came when her uncle, Sir Frank Lascelles, was appointed British Minister to Rumania. She was invited to spend the winter of 1888 at the legation in Bucharest as the guest of the Lascelles family, which included three children near her own age. In this Balkan capital she met

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1 Courtney, Janet, "Gertrude Bell", The North American Review, Dec., 1926. 223, p. 657.

the members of the various legation staffs. Life was gay, and "society" thought little about practical problems.

When Sir Frank Lascelles was transferred to Persia she was invited to join the happy family at the British legation in Teheran. The entirely different environment of age-old Persia fascinated the young historian. She was eager to see everything and to take part in all the activities of this remote capital. In the charming settings of ancient Persia Gertrude fell in love with Henry Cadogan, First Secretary of the British legation. Despite the fact that Gertrude was somewhat ahead of her time in many of her thoughts and practices, when it came to the matter of marriage she followed the conventional Victorian procedure by writing to her parents asking their permission. When the answer was unfavorable she accepted it, returned to England and there finally won their consent. In the meantime the plague, dread scourge of the East, revisited Persia, and Henry Cadogan was one of its victims. The following years were spent in writing, in travelling over Europe, in passing a season at the British embassy in Berlin where her uncle had been transferred, and in making a round-the-world trip. Although disappointment had come to her, she refused to let it dominate her.

Meanwhile, her interest in the Middle East continued to grow. In November, 1899, she started for Jerusalem, and from this date until her death her life was in and of the

East. Numerous journeys into the desert were made in 1900. During March, April, and part of May, 1902, she was in Syria. Gertrude's second trip around the world occurred in 1902-03. Nevertheless, Syria called again to her; and the first five months of 1905 were passed travelling in that historic land and in Asia Minor. One of her most important desert excursions was made in 1909 when she visited the castle of Ukhaidir. The Syrian desert was crossed during the first months of 1911. Later, in 1913-14 she made the important journey to Hayil. When the World War broke out, she volunteered her services to the army. Her travels in the Middle East, which had been gratification of personal desires heretofore, now loomed into significance as she was the English person best acquainted with the Arabs and their form of government. She was sent to Cairo with the British Military Intelligence and from there was transferred first to Delhi and then to Basrah.

In the spring of 1917 she returned to Bagdad. During the succeeding nine years her life was vitally associated with officialdom, and her efforts in behalf of the people of Iraq to form and maintain their own government, gave her the title "king-maker".

Miss Bell's books are five in number: Persian Pictures, originally published under the title Safar Nameh in 1894; Poems from the Divan of Hafiz, 1897, a collection of Persian poems which she translated; The Desert and the Sown,

1907, which was translated into German in 1908; Amurath to Amurath, 1911; and Palace and Mosque at Ukhaidir, 1914. Gertrude Bell collaborated with Sir William Ramsay in the writing of The Thousand and One Churches in 1909, and was responsible for Parts II and III. She contributed the second chapter, "Asiatic Turkey", to the volume The Arab of Mesopotamia, which is a series of essays on subjects relating to Mesopotamia published in 1916. Miss Bell wrote the section on the "Political History of Iraq" for the thirteenth edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica. It is worth noting in passing that the same article is reprinted in the fourteenth edition of the Britannica. A detailed report on Mesopotamia which she wrote was published in 1920 by H. M. Stationery Office. Part of her work as Oriental Secretary under the British High Commissioner for Iraq was to write the annual reports for the League of Nations.

Most widely read and enjoyed today are Miss Bell's letters written to the members of her family and several close friends. Two volumes were edited by her step-mother, Lady Florence Bell, and one volume, The Earlier Letters of Gertrude Bell, by her step-sister, Elsa Richmond.

Gertrude Bell died peacefully in her sleep July 12, 1926, and was buried in Bagdad. Tributes were numerous in the publications of various countries.

> In her passing this nation most certainly lost an empire builder and one of the most remarkable women of a race of remarkable women. 2

In 1940 a distant relative to Gertrude, Ronald Bodley, wrote this interesting statement.

> All her interests were centered in Arabia. This was an exceptional character in an Englishwoman; for whereas the male Briton either stays at home for love or else expatriates himself completely to settle in some distant part of the empire, the female always wishes to get home. There are few so fundamentally unhappy women as the wives of officers in the Indian Army or of planters in the Malay states. Gertrude never showed the slightest desire to return to life in Yorkshire, and while keeping in touch with her family she rapidly assimilated herself to Arabia. 3

The French, too, expressed appreciation for her work.

> Avec Miss G. Bell, disparaît un des représentants les plus caracteristique de la grande politique impériale, qui a déterminé l'Angleterre à s'assurer d'une manière définitive, la possession de la route terrestre de l'Inde, la maîtrise du Kurdistan et la haute main sur les pétroles de Mésopotamie...Miss Bell est morte en pleine gloire, au moment où le traité anglo-turc fix au jeune royaume irakien les frontières qu'elle avait toujours préconisées pour lui, au moment où l'autonomie kurde, un de ses projets favoris, recevait un début de réalisation.

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2 Roberts, Cecil, "Letters of Gertrude Bell", The Bookman, Nov. 1927, vol. 73, p. 112.

3 Ronald Bodley and Lorna Hearst, Gertrude Bell. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1940, p. 68.

> Secrétaire orientale du haut commissaire brittannique en Irak...elle a rendu à la Grande-Bretagne d'eminents services...une perte irréparable par l'Intelligence Service et par le Foreign Office, dont Miss G. Bell fut l'un des plus brillants agents ...La doctrine panarabique dont s'est inspirée la politique anglaise depuis dix ans était son oeuvre. La création du royaume d'Irak lui est due...Elle meurt à la tâche, elle meurt sur la brèche comme un soldat...Depuis l'arrivée de Sir Percy Cox à Bagdad, elle était devenue le conseiller oriental et l'Egérie du haut commissariat...La Syrie, la Palestine, la Mésopotamie, la péninsule arabique, encore opprimées par le régime d'Abd ul Hamid, furent, par elle, visitées, scrutées, jaugées et approfondies dans leur variétés ethniques, religieuses, économiques et sociales. 4

An English prophecy is being fulfilled.

> The legend of Gertrude Bell is a remarkable one: it will grow, it has solid foundations, but they are in Iraq, in the tributes and memories of those who had personal contact with her. 5

Lady Florence Bell edited two volumes of her stepdaughter's letters. Her own tribute appeared at the end of the second volume.

> But let us not mourn, those who are left, even those who were nearest to her, that the end came to her so swiftly and so soon. Life would inexorably have led her down the slope--Death stayed her at the summit. 6

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4 Georges Ducrocq, "Obituaire," Journal des Débats, 33 pt. 2:145, July 23, 1926.

5 Cecil Roberts, "Letters of Gertrude Bell," Bookman, 73:111-12, Nov. 1927, p. 112.

6 Florence Bell, editor, Letters of Gertrude Bell, London, Ernest Benn Limited, 1927, II:780.

CHAPTER II

GERTRUDE BELL AS A DESCRIPTIVE ARTIST

Description played a large part in Miss Bell's writings. By means of comparisons, contrast, simple narration, she painted word pictures of the people and places she saw. More candid is the description in the letters because she felt it was for the eyes only of those dearest to her. The most elaborate descriptions are found in the volume, Persian Pictures, which was originally published under the title Safar Nameh in 1894. Added to Gertrude's usual interest in strange places, her youthful zest, and her keenness of observation, is the fact that she fell in love while in Persia. This may account for the exceptionally colorful and romantic descriptions. Although the descriptions in The Desert and the Sown, Amurath to Amurath, Palace and Mosque at Ukhaidir, and Parts Two and Three in The Thousand and One Churches are good, yes, excellent in some instances, there is a restraint easily recognizable which is lacking in Persian Pictures and the letters. Perhaps this is because she was consciously writing for the public in the other books and hesitated to follow where her imagination and inspiration led her. Examples of Miss Bell's descriptions arranged chronologically according to subject matter will show in

in what topics she was most interested and how her accounts differ from year to year.

Flowers

Miss Bell was well-known for her fondness for flowers. In a letter to Miss Florence Olliffe, soon to become her step-mother, written in the spring of 1876 when Gertrude was eight years old, is the sentence,

> I think you will like the garden very much, the flowers are all coming out. 1

While in Scotland on a vacation when she was twelve, Gertrude wrote to her step-mother, using a wrong form of the verb eat,

> We took our shoes and stockings off, eat a lot of bilberries and picked flowers. Then we went on Loch Meickle. There are a lot of lovely white lilies in the middle of the Lock, I got heaps. 2

From Lakefield, Inverness-shire, August 3, 1880, she again wrote to her step-mother. Verbs still gave Gertrude trouble four years later. In some letters there are misspelled words,and although there was improvement in spelling later, her step-mother wrote that "Gertrude never entirely mastered the art of spelling". 3

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1 Elsa Richmond, editor, The Earlier Letters of Gertrude Bell, Ernest Benn Ltd., 1937, p. 2.

2 Ibid., p. 6

3 Florence Bell, editor, Letters of Gertrude Bell, Ernest Benn Ltd., 1927, I:9.

> In the afternoon we went a beautiful drive...and went a long walk and got lots of beautiful heather, flowers and cotten-grass, if you know what that is...This morning we gathered a lot of flowers. I enclose a white bell which is very rare, a blue-bell, a piece of cotton-grass, some heather and a golden ball. All these things, except the white bell, we find in great plenty, as well as lots of meadowsweet, ferns, bracken and heaps of other common flowers, so that you see our bouquets of wild flowers are very pretty. 4

In the letter of September 10, 1884, written from the Bell country home at Rounton Grange, to her father, she told about a visit to a married friend and made a suggestion for the flower garden at her home.

> She has some of the most lovely dahlias I ever saw. The one I liked best was one called "glare of the garden", a small half double one, bright scarlet, most beautiful. She is going to give us cuttings. She had another very nice thing a kind of accacia. It has yellow-brown flowers, blooms very freely she says and grows fast. She had it in what looked to me a very bad place so I presume it's hardy. I should think it would do beautifully on our south wall. Her chrysanthemums promise to be very good, the wood ripe up to the very top, but I like the way we grow ours better, her's are so tall and thin, though they are very strong. 5

In a lengthy letter to her step-mother, written from Bucharest, March 26, 1889, she told about a ball she attended where the Rumanian king and queen and "corps diplomatique" were also present.

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4 Elsa Richmond, editor, The Earlier Letters of Gertrude Bell, pp. 6-7.

5 Ibid., p. 23.

> The only nice thing was that there were heaps of real flowers which one was expected to take away with one. Everyone had a glass-full opposite him; my men gave me all theirs and Urbu and some other people brought me more after dinner, and upstairs more flowers were handed to us in china dishes so that we came away laden. 6

There is a noticeable change in the descriptive style of the letters from Persia. From Tehran, May 9, 1892, was written to her step-mother this "rosy" picture which indicated her delight in the country famous for its gardens.

> We arrived on Saturday afternoon in the Garden of Eden with a very comfortable house built in the middle of it...You can't think how lovely it all is--outside trees and trees and trees making a thick shade from our house to the garden walls, beneath them a froth of pink monthly roses, climbing masses of briers, yellow and white and scarlet, beds of dark red cabbage roses and hedges of great golden blooms. It's like the Beast's garden, a perfect nightmare of roses...I have a beautiful big room, cool and dark; three narrow windows opening onto the garden, the tops of the trees rustling against them and nodding in, and such a sweet smell of roses. In the evening the nightingales sing and never stop; it's delicious. 7

In Persian Pictures there is a chapter called "In Praise of Gardens" from which the next two quotations are taken. The first one tells about the Shah's garden.

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6 Ibid., p. 205.
7 Ibid., pp. 266-7.

> We crossed a little entrance-court and came into a long dark avenue, fountains down the middle of it, and flower-beds, in which the plants were pale and meagre for want of light; roses, the pink flowers which scent the rose-water, and briars, a froth of white and yellow bloom, growing along its edges in spite of the deep shade of the plane-trees. Every tiny rill of water was fringed with violet leaves--you can imagine how in the spring the scent of the violets greets you out in the desert when you are still far away, like a hospitable friend coming open-armed down his steps to welcome you. 8

A deserted garden belonging to the Shah's eldest son is partially described as follows.

> The night had brought tall yellow evening primroses into flower, and their delicious smell mingled with that of the jessamine, which covered the decaying walls. The light of our lanterns shone on the smooth tree trunks, between the leaves glimmered a waning moon, and behind us the mountain-sides lay in sheets of light. 9

Delightful is the description of the garden of a Persian merchant.

> The garden ran straight up the hillside; so steep it was that the parallel lines of paths were little but flights of high narrow stairs--short flights broken by terraces on which flower-beds were laid out, gay with roses and nasturtiums and petunias...We toiled up the stairs till we came to the topmost terrace, wider than the rest. Here the many-coloured carpet of flowers gave place to a noble grove of white lilies, which stood in full bloom under the hot sunlight, and

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8 Gertrude Bell, Persian Pictures, Ernest Benn Ltd., 1928, p. 37.

9 Ibid., pp. 39-40.

> the more the sun blazed the cooler and whiter shone the lilies, the sweeter and heavier grew their fragrance. 10

This interest in flowers was by no means diminished during her solitary journeys in the Middle East from 1899 to 1914. Flowers frequently were not to be found on her trips, but when they were, she did not fail to mention them. When possible, her camp was pitched near flowers. Several times her continued interest in the garden at home was shown when she stated that she was sending seeds or bulbs.

The months of January through April, 1900, represent her sojourn in Jerusalem and her first desert journeys. She wrote from Jerusalem, January 11.

> I am sending you a little packet of seeds. They are more interesting for associations sake than for the beauty of the plant--it is the famous and fabulous mandrake. By the way the root of the mandrake grow to a length of 2 yards, so I should think somebody shrieks when it is dug up--if not the mandrake, then the digger. 11

The next month she told about a walk during the course of which she saw the banks of a river

> carpeted with red anemones, a sheet of them...When we got to Ain Tulma we found the whole place covered with cyclamen and orchis and a white sort of garlic, very pretty, and the rocks out of which the water comes were draped in maidenhair. 12

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10 Ibid., pp. 44-5.
11 Ibid., p. 37.
12 Florence Bell, Letters of Gertrude Bell, I:65.

In March she gave a more detailed description.

> The river valley is wider on the other side and was full of tamarisks in full white flower and willows in the newest of leaf, there were almost no slime pits and when we reached the level of the Ghor (that is the Jordan plain) behold, the wilderness had blossomed like the rose. It was the most unforgettable sight--sheets and sheets of varied and exquisite colour--purple, white, yellow, and the brightest blue (this was a bristly sort of plant which I don't know) and fields of scarlet ranunculus. Nine-tenths of them I didn't know, but there was the yellow daisy, the sweet-scented mauve wild stock, a great splendid sort of dark purple onion, the white garlic and purple mallow, and higher up a tiny blue iris and red anemones and a dawning pink thing like a linum. 13

Comments during the remainder of this period are much shorter. Some of the references are good word pictures, but others merely name the flower and its habitat. The mention of color stands in bold relief to the more frequent descriptions of the desert itself.

> I found the loveliest iris I have yet seen--big and sweetscented and so dark purple that the hanging down petals are almost black. It decorates my tent now. 14

> Oh, my camp is too lovely tonight! I am in a great field of yellow daisies by the edge of a rushing stream full of fish and edged with oleanders which are just coming out. (I have a bunch of them in my tent)...There is a very pretty white broom flowering. 15

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13 Ibid., pp. 67-8.
14 Ibid., p. 69.
15 Ibid., p. 72.

During May and June, 1900, Gertrude made excursions into the desert from Jerusalem which was her headquarters. For the greater part of the year the scenery was drab,but during those months when the flowers were at their best, there was partial alleviation of the monotonous gray landscape.

> We rode up a long winding grassy valley, very pretty, with plenty of corn in it and all the fields full of lovely pink hollyhock and flowering caper, which is like St. John's wort, but with pink stamen and white petals. 16

> There were some exciting clumpy Alpine things growing--one a very dwarf broom covered with yellow flowers, the others, pink and white and purple, I didn't know. There was also a charming tiny tulip, purple outside, and white within, with a yellow centre, and a lovely pale blue scilla. 17

> There were pale periwinkles growing on the edge of the wood and a sweetscented pink daphne inside. 18

> There is a very lovely broom in this country with flowers much larger than ours. On the very highest col, from which the snow had just melted, the ground was blue with sweet violets. 19

March and April, 1902, were passed in Syria. In the following quotation she referred to the Persian poet she admired. In 1897 she had published Poems from the Divan of Hafiz which she translated into English from the Persian.

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16 Ibid., p. 116.
17 Ibid., p. 117.
18 Ibid., p. 118.
19 Ibid., p. 119.

> I gathered a bunch of scarlet tulips, the lovely little tulips with the curling green leaf; it is the same as the one of which Hafiz says that, thus doubting the promises of Fate it carries always a wine cup through the wilderness ...I rode over ridge after ridge of rolling hill, and round the top of valley after valley, rocky slopes covered with wild flowers running steeply down into waterless hollows and the whole mountain was heavy with the scent of gorse and the aromatic herbs that my horse crushed through from time to time to avoid an unusually slippery bit of rock in the path. 20

After an absence of three years during which time she travelled round the world the second time, she returned to Syria and Asia Minor and from January through May, 1905, she continued her solitary journeys. She liked spring in this part of the world, hence her return for this season.

> When you come near, the valleys are full of tiny niches which are gardens of anemones and cyclamen, and the rocks are full of beauty. 21

> I have discovered in Jerusalem a German who has started a market garden and collected all the bulbs of the country. I have ordered from him 6 wonderful sorts of iris and a tulip which he is to send to Rounton in the summer. It will be most delightful if they grow. I learned them nearly all for I have seen them flowering at different times. One is the black iris of Moab, and another a beautiful dark blue one, very sweet-scented, which grows in Gilead. 22

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20 Ibid., p. 132.
21 Ibid., p. 176.
22 Ibid., p. 179.

> The wild hollyhocks are out and today I saw the first fat old pomegranate bud. 23

> There were patches of snow still on Kara Dagh with crocuses on the edges of them and there were snowdrops in the oak scrub of the higher slopes, and a whole hillside of orange red tulips lower down and the most beautiful frittillary in the world, a bright deep yellow with brown spots. 24

Descriptions of flowers are less frequent in The Desert and the Sown. There are, however, four which may be mentioned for purposes of comparison. The third quotation referred to a scene between Damascus and Beyrout. The last one portrayed a multi-colored area en route to Masyad.

> At the end of March the eastern Ghor is a carpet of varied and lovely bloom, which lasts but a month in the fierce heat of the valley, indeed a month sees the plants through bud and bloom and ripened seed. 25

> An extremely scanty scrub pushes its way between the stones, hamad and shih and hajeineh, and here and there a tiny geranium, the starry garlic and the leaves of the tulip, but generally there is no room even for the slenderest plants, so closely do the stones lie together. 26

> The anemones were of every shade of white and purple, small blue irises clustered by the path and yellow crocuses by the banks of the stream. In

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23 Ibid., p. 216.
24 Ibid., p. 222.
25 Gertrude Bell, The Desert and the Sown, William Heinemann, 1907, p. 16.
26 Ibid., p. 115.

> the eyes of one who had recently crossed southern Syria the grass was even more admirable than the flowers. 27

> the hill tops grew the alpine cyclamen, crocuses, yellow, white and purple, and whole slopes of white primroses; lower down, irises, narcissus, black and green orchids, purple orchis and the blue many-petalled anemone in a boscage of myrtle. 28

In 1911 during the months of January through May, Gertrude crossed the Syrian desert. The intervening six years had been occupied by travels in Europe, visits to her home in England, the further study of eastern languages, and archaeological studies in Italy. There is only one reference of note.

> It is a delicious camp, all green with grass and flowering weeds, and I have a cup full of yellow tulips on my dinner table. 29

When describing the mound of Nimrud near the banks of the Tigris in Amurath to Amurath, Gertrude referred to the excavations at Nimrud in 1847 by Sir Austen Henry Layard. On other expeditions Layard explored the ruins of Assyria and investigated the ruins of Babylon and the mounds of southern Mesopotamia. Some of his books dealing with this work are among the best written travel books in English. 30

> The holes and pits of Layard's diggings were filled to the brim with grass and

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27 Ibid., p. 198.
28 Ibid., p. 218.
29 Florence Bell, editor, Letters of Gertrude Bell, I:293.
30 Arnold Glover, "Sir Austen Henry Layard," Encyclopedia Britannica, 14th ed., vol. XIII, p. 816.

> flowers, and the zigurrat of the war god Ninib reared its bare head out of a field of poppies. But except for the flowers, Nimrud, whence we obtained many of the treasures of our museum in London, is a pitiful sight for English eyes. 31

En route to Hayil in February, 1914, there is one reference to flowers which were found at her camp in Jebel Rakkam.

> I climbed into the top of one of the peaks and found flowers growing in the crevices, small, white and purple weeds and thistles and a dwarf asphodel--not a great bounty, but it feasted the eyes in this bare land. 32

Writing to her father from Basrah, April 16, 1916, Gertrude expressed her joy in the new appearance of the city.

> Even Basrah has a burst of glory in April. The palm gardens are deep in luxuriant grass and corn, the pomegranates are flowering, the mulberries almost ripe, and in the garden of the house where I am staying the roses are more wonderful than I can describe. It's the only garden in Basrah, so I'm lucky. 33

On December 15, 1916, again writing to her father from Basrah, she described another season in the same community.

> The world continues to look autumnal--scarcely wintry yet--in spite of the eternal green of the palms. There is a yellow mimosa in flower, fluffy, sweet-smelling balls, a very heavenly little

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31 Gertrude Bell, Amurath to Amurath, p. 229.
32 Florence Bell, ed., Letters of Gertrude Bell, I:340.
33 Ibid., p. 373.

tree, albeit thorny. 34

A letter from Bagdad, October 26, 1917, to her step-mother recorded the purchase of plants and seeds for her own garden. This typically English characteristic was one of the ties between her old and new environments.

> I've bought 7 pots of geraniums and 4 of carnations besides sowing carnations and eschscholtzia. I wish I had snapdragon seeds. A clump of chrysanthemums is coming into bloom, and my rose trees are flowering. Everything comes to life when the summer is over, even the washed out European. 35

During a Persian holiday in July, 1918, she wrote from her camp on the way to Kirmanshah.

> The gentians and tulips were seeding--I send you some tulip seed which will you kindly give Hanagan--but the dianthus was still out, and gorgeous thistles and pedicularis--all the great garden of mountains. 36

Writing to her father from Bagdad, April 15, 1924, Gertrude mentioned her garden which by this time had become well-known in the capital of King Faisal.

> I've never had so many roses in my garden before--it blushes with them. And lovely carnations, stock, larkspur and things as well. 37

One year later Gertrude wrote to her father from Bagdad telling about a trip to the king's farm. There was no question about what she thought of it.

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34 Ibid., p. 391.
35 Florence Bell, ed., Letters of Gertrude Bell, II:429.
36 Ibid., p. 460.
37 Ibid., p. 694.

> It was so heavenly to be riding through grass and flowers--gardens of purple salvia and blue borage and golden mullein, with scarlet ranunculus in between. 38

Two sentences written to her step-mother from Bagdad, April 6, 1926, three months before her death, composed a fitting climax to flower descriptions. The simile is good. Could not that thought have been part of her philosophy through the years?

> In 30 years I don't suppose there has been such a spring--slopes and rivers of scarlet ranunculus, meadows of purple stock and wild mignonette, blue lilies, black arums and once a bank of yellow tulips. These and commoner things make the world look like a brilliant piece of enamel. 39

Trees

References to trees are almost as numerous as those to flowers in the period 1899-1914. Appreciating the beauties of nature, she permitted them to refresh her. When reading her letters one feels that Miss Bell looked with favor upon the scenes which greeted her eyes and found goodness and beauty in all that she saw, whether it was a famed cathedral in Europe or a miserable hut in an eastern village, a noted scholar or a humble servant. By means of the written word she shared the pictures which gave her pleasure.

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38 Ibid., p. 731
39 Ibid., p. 755.

For comparative purposes two examples are given from Persian Pictures: one about the cypress trees of Constantinople, the other about a Grecian scene.

> The cypresses cast their shadows over this page of Turkish history, springing upwards in black and solemn luxuriance, nourished by dead bodies. The cypress-trees are like mutes, who follow the funeral procession clothed in mourning garments, but with sleek and well-fed faces. They rear their dark heads into the blue sky and beckon to their fellows in Scutari across the Bosphorus. 40

> The beech coppices whispered graceful legends in our ears, the glades, thick-set with flowers, seemed to us to be marked with the impress of divine feet--it was the Huntress and her train who had stirred the fritillary bells, Pan's pregnant footing had called the golden crocuses to life, the voices of the nymphs who charmed away Hylas the Argonaut still floated on the air, and through the undergrowth what glimpse was that of flying robe and unloosed shining locks? 41

One of the most interesting remarks about trees was recorded in 1900. These people needed no efficiency expert to guide them.

> It was so wet here that we rode on to a place where there were a few thorn trees peopled by immense crowds of resting birds--they seize on any little bush for there are so few and the Arabs come and burn the bush and catch and cook the birds all in one! 42

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40 Gertrude Bell, Persian Pictures, p. 156.
41 Ibid., p. 167.
42 Florence Bell, ed., Letters of Gertrude Bell, I:68.

During the desert excursions from Jerusalem in May and June, 1900, a chatty tone was maintained. Fruit and shade trees played an important part in the everyday life of the Arabs.

> We went on to the River Awaj, where we watered man and beast under the poplars and willows, a charming spot. 43

> I had a very beautiful ride into Damascus. The air was sweet with the smell of figs and vines and chestnuts, the pomegranates were in the most flaming blossom, the valley was full of mills and mill races bordered by long regiments of poplars--lovely, it must be at all times, but when one comes to it out of the desert it seems a paradise. 44

Descriptions of the ancient cedars of Lebanon are detailed. Actually, one real cedar of Lebanon is growing on the lawn at Rounton, her home in England, at the present time. Another is growing on the lawn of a friend at Wallington.

> We then rode up the cleft, a deep valley full of corn and scrubby trees which had expended most of their energy in growing along the ground, and got into our camp at 6...Below us lay the cedar clump, protected by an amphitheatre of hills, and the great gulf of the Wady Kadisha running down to Tripoli with villages scattered along its brink...We got down to the cedars at 1:30, after a very rough descent, and found our tents pitched under the trees. After having been told so often that they are ragged and ugly, I am agreeably disappointed in them. There are about 400 of

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43 Ibid., p. 100.
44 Ibid., p. 114.

them, some very fine old trees, grass and flowers growing under them--a heavenly camping ground. At this moment it is too delicious; a low sun, birds singing in the great branches and the pale brown, snow-sprinkled hills gleaming behind. 45

We spent a delicious lazy morning at the cedars, breakfasted and lunched under the big trees and photographed and drew and listened to the birds. The ground is covered with tiny cedars, but they never grow up under the shadow of their parents (how different from the Belgian Hare!) but wither off when they have reached the height of about 2 inches--which is small for a tree. There were, however, outside the big trees a few saplings which had sprung up of themselves and were growing extraordinarily slowly; they were five years old, said the guardian of the wood, but they were not more than 18 inches high. I have brought a lot of cones away with me. Shall we try and make them grow at Rounton? It would be rather fun to have a real Cedar of Lebanon--only I believe they don't grow more than about 20 feet high in 100 years, so we at least shall not be able to bask much under their shadow. 46

Visiting the reputed scene of an incident recalled in mythology augmented interest in these desert excursions. Especially good was the choice of verbs expressing quick action. The reader seems to feel and see the river.

> We reached Aflea, which is one of the wonders of the Lebanon. The river Adonis--for this is the site of the Venus and Adonis legend--springs out of a great cave high up in the cliff and round the cave are several other

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45 Ibid., pp. 117-8.
46 Ibid., p. 118.

> springs, starting straight out of the rock and foaming down into the valley, falling in 3 or 4 cascades into deep blue pools and hurrying away under planes and walnut trees. The water is ice-cold; I have just been bathing in it. 47

From January to May, 1905, extensive trips were made in Syria and Asia Minor. These descriptions are not particularly good, but they emphasize the improvement made during the years which followed when compared to those written in 1921-22.

> After lunch I rode down to the river, the Orontes, to see the fashionable lounge, a delicious stretch of meadow and willow trees by the water side. But the trees are not yet in leaf nor the flowers out. 48

> It was more exquisitely beautiful than words can say, through gardens of fruit trees and olives with an unbelievable wealth of flowers everywhere. 49

From Isbarta, April 28, 1907, was written the following picturesque account.

> We rode and rode over the hills and down to the edge of a great lake of Buldur. Bitter salt it is and very blue, and the mountains stand all round it, white with snow, and the fruit gardens border it, pink and white with peach and cherry. 50

The landscape of the lower Euphrates valley, February 25, 1911, presented a most unusual scene.

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47 Ibid., p. 119.
48 Ibid., p. 201.
49 Ibid., p. 209.
50 Ibid., p. 231.

> All the palm trees have been killed by the snow; they are miserable brown patches instead of the old vivid green. 51

Within sight of Hayil, February 24, 1914, Gertrude said much in few words about the traveller's view of Arabia.

> We finished with the Nefud for good and all yesterday, and today we have been through a charming country--charming for Arabia--of great granite rocks and little plains with thorny acacia trees growing in them and very sweet scented desert plants. 52

In Bagdad, December 20, 1919, she depicted a rare scene.

> I delight in our strange winter landscape. The apricots and mulberries dropping golden leaves into the brilliant green carpet of the springing barley. 53

The letter from Bagdad, October 17, 1921, told about the gardens of Fakhri Eff above Baquban which Gertrude had recently visited. This example and the next prove her descriptive ability (regarding trees) improved the older she became.

> The dates are late in ripening this year and are still hanging in great golden crowns on the palms; below them the pomegranate bushes are weighed down with the immense rosy globes of their fruit and the orange trees laden with the pale green and yellow

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51 Ibid., p. 283.
52 Ibid., p. 341.
53 Florence Bell, ed., Letters of Gertrude Bell, II:475.

> of ripening oranges--it was a paradise of loveliness; I walked about in a bewilderment of admiration. 54

Writing to her father from Bagdad, August 15, 1922, Gertrude made an engaging comparison.

> I walked with the King through the wonderful palm gardens and out to the desert. For the sixth time I've watched the dates ripen. Six times I've seen the palms take on the likeness of huge Crown Imperials, with the yellow date clusters hanging like immense golden flowers below the feathery fronds. 55

Food and Hospitality

Although food and hospitality are not necessarily linked together, they are here joined because an insight into native methods of preparing and serving foods is provided in addition to characteristic manners and customs.

Miss Bell retained various English habits, but she entered heartily into the native entertainment proffered her. Not all new dishes met with her approval. The opinion of them reached not the ears of the host, but the relatives in the island kingdom.

Closely observant of the terrain over which she rode, she noted with equal candor the crops of the cultivated fields as well as the desolate, waterless areas. Twenty times she remarked about the corn fields and five times each about barley fields and vineyards. Ordinary items of

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54 Ibid., p. 626.
55 Ibid., p. 646.

food she mentioned were bread, meat, beans, olives, mulberries, almonds, chestnuts, pomegranates, figs, apricots, grapes, dates, and duck.

Only the more unusual foods are mentioned in the excerpts. In the letter from Tehran, May 22, 1892, Gertrude told about a call on the Shah Abdul Azim.

> So we sat down and were given tea and coffee and Kalyans and flowers and unripe green plums which is a Persian delicacy we do not appreciate! 56

That buoyant, gay spirit, so evident in Persian Pictures is well illustrated by the quotation about the pomegranates.

> Meagre poplars shivered in the sun, stunted pomegranate bushes carpeted the ground with yellow autumn leaves, their heavy dark-red fruit a poor exchange for the spring glory of crimson flower. Persians love pomegranates, and on a journey prize them above all other fruits, and even to the foreigner their pink fleshy pips, thick set like jewels, are not without charm. But it is mainly the charm of the imagination and of memories of Arabian Night stories in which disguised princes ate preserved pomegranate seeds, and found them delicious. Do not attempt to follow their example, for when you have tasted the essence of steel knife with which a pomegranate is flavoured, you will lose all confidence in the judgment of princes, even in disguise. And it is a pity to destroy illusions. But for beauty give me pomegranate bushes in the spring, with dark, dark green leaves and glowing flowers, thick and pulpy like a fruit, and winged with delicate petals, red as flame. 57

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56 Elsa Richmond, ed., The Earlier Letters of Gertrude Bell, p. 279.

57 Gertrude Bell, Persian Pictures, p. 108.

In describing a Persian host, Gertrude, if she were living today, might say that the man ate chicken in a manner which even Emily Post would approve. He

> set out before us on a sheet of bread a roast chicken, an onion, some salt, a round ball of cheese, and some bunches of grapes; then, seeing that we hesitated as to the proper mode of attacking the chicken, he took it in his fingers, delicately pulled apart wings, legs and breast, and motioned us again to eat...Never did roast chicken taste so delicious! I judge from other experiences that he was probably tough; he was, alas! small, but, for all that, we look back to him with gratitude as having furnished the most excellent luncheon we ever ate. 58

After telling about shops and shopkeepers Gertrude wrote:

> On our way home we stopped before a confectioner's shop and invited him to let us taste of his preserves. He did not, like the confectioner in the Arabian Nights, prepare for us a delicious dish of pomegranate-seeds, but he gave us Rahat Lakoum, and slices of sugared oranges, and a jelly of rose-leaves (for which cold cream is a good European substitute), and many other delicacies, ending with some round white objects, which I take to have been sugared onions, floating in syrup--after we had tasted them we had small desire to continue our experimental repast. 59

This section includes passages from Gertrude's letters of 1900-1914. During the five-month period of

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58 Ibid., p. 111.
59 Ibid., pp. 173-4.

desert excursions from Jerusalem in 1900, first-hand information was gained about foods hitherto unknown to her.

> I then went up to the Sheikh's house and was given a most excellent breakfast...It consisted of 10 or 12 leaves of their delicious thin bread, a bowl of milk with sugar and a little brown meal in it, and a bowl of laban. Coffee began and ended the meal. 60

> A Christian lady sent me a delicious dish for breakfast--some flat thin bread with cream rolled up in it, slightly salted. 61

> Before leaving this morning I went to the house of my friend, Ali el Kady, to drink a cup of tea--these were the terms of his invitation. He was very vague about the tea making, consulting me as to whether he ought to boil the water and the milk together. I said that wasn't the way we did it usually. He gave me an extraordinary variety of foods, a pudding, some very good fried cakes, dipped in honey and almonds and raisins, both of them swimming in a sweet syrup--the almonds were excellent. 62

In the bazaars of Damascus about the middle of May, 1900, she wrote that she ate

> ices made of milk and snow and lemonade from a china bowl half full of snow and half of lemon juice and water--nothing was ever so good. 63

When the guest of Sheikh Ahmed at Jarad, May, 1900, she wrote that the entertainment was satisfactory.

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60 Florence Bell, ed., Letters of Gertrude Bell, I:93.
61 Ibid., p. 95.
62 Ibid., p. 99.
63 Ibid., p. 100.

> The time was filled in by the good Sheikh's giving us an excellent meal, bread and olives, and dibbis and butter, laban and eggs. 64

Comparing Arab travellers with those of other nationalities with whom she had been acquainted, she stated her astonishment.

> They eat surprisingly little, these Arabs, when they are travelling. Nothing but bread and dates and milk and coffee, and little enough of that. Often the bread runs short, and only dates and milk remain. 65

The letter dated April 22, 1902, presented an amusing incident.

> On Monday I went to lunch with my Persians ...we had a very good lunch, rice and pillau and sugared dates and kabobs. It was all spread on the table at once and we helped ourselves with our forks at will, dilating the while on the absurdity of the European custom of serving one dish after another so that you never knew what you were going to have, also of whipping away your plate every moment and giving you another. 66

Sheikh Muhammad ibn Nassar lived in the Druze country and provided the following meal in February, 1905, to his distinguished guest.

> Presently came dinner on a big tray, bowls of rice and chicken and a curious sort of Druze food made of sour milk and semen (which is grease) and vegetables, a kind of soup, not very good. 67

Breakfast the next day consisted of

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64 Ibid., p. 102.
65 Ibid., p. 111.
66 Ibid., p. 134.
67 Ibid., p. 193.

> tea and Arab bread and a sort of treacle they make from grapes, dibbis is its name, and I like it particularly. 68

Six years later in March, 1911, a frank comment described a meal tendered by Mustafa Pasha, a Kurdish chief of high repute.

> I was beginning to feel rather hungry when fortunately the Pasha called to his servants to bring food. Some 8 of us went into the next room where we found a table spread bountifully with a variety of meats and we ate from the dishes with our fingers as best we might. It was all very good, if messy. 69

Returning to the Middle East for the last time before the outbreak of the first World War, Gertrude wrote from Damascus, December 5, 1913.

> I have got much fatter than when I came, idleness partly, I suppose, and partly an abundant diet of sour curds which is without doubt the best food in the world. 70

After spending most of her time during the past fourteen years in the Middle East, the account written from the Nejd country, February, 1914, lends emphasis to the magic spell which absorbed her attention.

> Long after dark, the 'nagas,' the camel mothers, would come home with their calves and crouch down in the sand outside the open tent. Muhammad got up, drew his robes about him, and went out into the night with a huge wooden bowl, which he brought back to me full to the brim of camel's milk, a most delectable drink. And

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68 Ibid., p.194.
69 Ibid., p. 294.
70 Ibid., p. 311.

> I fancy that when you have drunk the milk of the naga over the camp fire of Abu Tayyi you are baptised of the desert and there is no other salvation for you. 71

How different is the tone of the above passage about milk from the one about bread which was written in April, 1900, when her great venture was just beginning. Bread and milk are found throughout the world, but the kind and quality differ.

> I have just been watching my people make bread. Flour was fortunately to be got from the mill below us; they set two logs alight and when they had got enough ashes they made an immense cake, 2 ft. across and half an inch thick, of flour and water and covered it over with hot ashes. After a quarter of an hour it had to be turned and recovered and the result is most delicious--eaten hot; it becomes rather wooden when it is cold. The flour is very coarse, almost like oatmeal. 72

In Amurath to Amurath there is mention of a guide who spread a savory

> meal of omelets and bread and bowls of iran (a most delectable drink made of sour curds beaten up in water). 73

An interesting comment on food is contained in the letter written from Bagdad, April 27, 1917, where war conditions were not yet acute.

> At Basrah one could get nothing--lived on tinned milk and butter for a year, and at last I lived without them because one grew so sick of tinned things. Here I have fresh milk and butter and sour

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71 Ibid., p. 333.
72 Ibid., p. 79.
73 Gertrude Bell, Amurath to Amurath, p. 299.

> curds every day. A bowl of sour curds is my lunch, and it's the nicest possible meal in this weather, that and a cup of Arab coffee. 74

Six months later in Bagdad, October 12, 1917, the tone was different. A serious food problem had become worse.

> I can match you at food--we've had no butter all the summer and when we have it its turned and I would rather be without it. I've forgotten what potatoes taste like--the meat is almost too tough to eat, chickens ditto; milk turned--how sick one gets of it! Bread I never eat; what one gets is fairly good, quite good indeed, but that doesn't affect me much. 75

In November, 1923, Gertrude had lunch with Faiq Eff who has been previously mentioned. She statedthat

> very good it was, a ragout, sour curds and burghul, a sort of crushed wheat. 76

There is no steady progression in descriptive style regarding food. The foregoing selections attract attention because of the humorous observations. One wonders if the cook at Rounton ever tried making some of the dishes Gertrude described.

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74 Florence Bell, ed., Letters of Gertrude Bell,II:407
75 Ibid., p. 427.
76 Ibid., p. 674.

Animals

Just as carefully as Miss Bell noted flowers and trees did she take cognizance of the members of the animal kingdom. Only a few excerpts are necessary to indicate how they aided or hindered her. A list of the living creatures encountered in the Middle East from 1899 until 1914 range in size from fleas to buffaloes, and it includes mosquitoes, flies, locusts, frogs, fish, butterflies, eagles, partridges, hawks, ostriches, screaming owls, cuckoos, vultures, snakes, sheep, foxes, a grey wolf, white gazelles, jackals, hyaenas, donkeys, mules, cows, jerboa, goats, rabbits, storks, horses, and camels.

On the first desert journeys in March and April, 1900, storks beguiled her.

> We all cantered off together through many flocks and past companies of dignified storks walking about and eating the locusts, till we came to the road, the pilgrim road to Mecca. 77

> My camp is pitched half way up the hill, with the head of the spring at my door and in front, deep corn fields where the barley is standing in the ear and the storks walking solemnly up to their necks in green. There has been an immense flock of them flying and settling on the hillside, and when I took a stroll I soon found what was engaging the attention of the Father of Luck. (Father of Luck refers to name given to storks by the natives.) The ground was hopping with locusts; on some of the slopes they have eaten every leaf and they are making their way down to the corn. 78

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77 Florence Bell, ed., Letters of Gertrude Bell, I:71.
78 Ibid., p. 79.

Purification of drinking water was not practiced at Kuteifeh, May 15, 1900.

> At the top of the pass there was a well of rain water, very good, said Ali, and I made Hanna fetch me a cupful. It was, however, full of little red animals swimming cheerfully about and one must draw the line somewhere, so I did not partake. 79

Almost two years later, April 2, 1902, while living in a hotel in Haifa, Gertrude shared her lodging with feathered friends.

> the birds fly into my room and nest in the chandelier. 80

While climbing to the top of a ruined castle at Anavarza, April, 1905, unwelcome fowl were encountered.

> We dislodged the vultures who were sitting in rows on the castle top--they left a horrid smell behind them--and in a small deep window I found a nest with 2 evil-looking brown eggs in it. It is not often that one finds vultures' nests. 81

At Miletus, April, 1907, was recorded the event about the buffaloes.

> There was no bridge--if there had been one it would have been broken--the water was deep and the ferry-boat was a buffalo cart. The river came nearly over the buffaloes' backs; we had to take everything off the horses and lead them behind us--the buffaloes didn't care, they plodded steadily on and held up their noses very far; a little more and they would have been drowned, but they did not think of that. 82

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79 Ibid., p. 102.
80 Ibid., p. 133.
81 Ibid., p. 216.
82 Ibid., p. 229.

Photographing, taking rubbings of inscriptions, and drawing plans of ancient ruins were among Gertrude's chief delights. A slight inconvenience occurred on one occasion.

> I came in and changed all my things, for the houses and stables were, as always, alive with fleas. Very great travellers would no doubt think nothing of this, but I find it an almost intolerable vexation, yet one can't leave a church unplanned because there are fleas in it. 83

Instructions for riding a camel across the Syrian desert were forwarded to England in February, 1911. It reminds the reader of the instructions for riding an elephant* in India.

> I got on my camel and rode her for the rest of the day. She is the most charming of animals. You ride a camel with only a halter which you mostly tie loosely round the peak of your saddle. A tap with your camel switch on one side of her neck or the other tells her the direction you want her to go, a touch with your heels sends her on, but when you wish her to sit down you have to hit her lightly and often on the neck saying at the same time: 'Kh kh kh kh,' that's as near as I can spell it. The big soft saddle, the 'shedad,' is so easy and comfortable that you never tire. You loll about and eat your lunch and observe the landscape through your glasses: you might almost sleep. 84

Eleven years after the first mention of storks the following comment appeared.

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83 Ibid., p. 249.
84 Ibid., p. 270.
* See p. 96.

> The ruined bastions of Mayafarkin, walls, towers of unrivalled Arab masonry, rise out of all this sea of green; the storks nest in every tower and the world is full of the contented clapping of their beaks. 85

No doubt Gertrude found emotional relief in narrating the untimely decease of Peter and Sally. From Bagdad, February 11, 1925, she wrote to her father saying that she was

> suffering under the shock of a domestic tragedy with which I feel sure you will sympathise--the death of my darling little spaniel, Peter, and of his mother, Sally, who was Ken's dog. I don't know which of them I loved most, for Sally was with me all the summer while Ken was on leave. But I shall now miss Peter most--he was always with us, in the office and everywhere, and he adored me, and I him. Sally had a cold a few days ago and as Ken was going out shooting with the King I offered to take her--we neither of us, nor the vet, had any idea that it was distemper which it really was, the very worst kind that ends in pneumonia. Peter caught it and died after agonies of stifled breathing at 4 a.m. this morning--I had been up with him all night--and Sally died after the same agonies at 5 p.m. Ken and I were both with her. So you will understand that I am rather shattered. My whole household was affected to tears--they all loved them. One should not make trouble for oneself by unnecessary affections, should one, but without affections what would life be? It is difficult to know where to draw the line. Well, that's that. They are both buried in my garden. 86

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85 Ibid., p. 320.
86 Florence Bell, ed., Letters of Gertrude Bell, II:722-3.

Weather Conditions

Gertrude Bell was acutely conscious of weather conditions, and as the weather may be discussed always, she did not overlook it. She cited instances of frost, hail, wind, thunderstorms, snow, sleet, ice, and mud. She, too, was a victim of atmospheric delusion, mirages. The weather is the most often discussed topic in the entire group of her published letters. Travelling on horseback, or on camel, and camping for months in succession, explains why the weather was an element to be considered. When delays were caused by inclement weather, the time was occupied in becoming better acquainted with the people nearby, in writing, and in replenishing the stock of provisions.

Two excellent descriptions of morning were included in Persian Pictures. In the first one the sunrise is witnessed from horseback.

> We rode out of sleeping Tehran, and took our way along the deserted track that skirts its walls; to our left lay the wilderness, wrapped in transparent shadow, and sloping gradually upwards to the barren foot-hill over which winds the road to Meshed. Before we had gone far, with a flash and a sudden glitter, the sun leapt up above the snow-peaks, and day rushed across the plain--day, crude and garish, revealing not the bounteous plenty of the cornfields and pastures which encircled Rages, but dust and stone and desert scrub, and the naked, forbidding mountains, wrinkled by many winters. 87

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87 Gertrude Bell, Persian Pictures, p. 30.

No where else did Gertrude describe the salutary effects of rainfall in such glowing terms. Throughout Persian Pictures the first person plural pronoun is constantly used--meaning Gertrude and Henry Cadogan. One reads between the lines in the following selection, hearing the throbbing heart and feeling the accelerated pulse beat of romance.

> Rain had fallen in the night, and had called the wilderness itself to life, clothing its thorns with a purple garment of tiny flowers; the delicious sun struck upon our shoulders; a joyful little wind blew the damp, sweet smell of the reviving earth in gusts towards us; our horses sniffed the air and, catching the infection of the moment, tugged at the bit and set off at racing speed across the rain-softened ground. And we, too, passed out of the silence and remembered that we lived. Life seized us and inspired us with a mad sense of revelry. The humming wind and the teeming earth shouted 'Life! life!' as we rode. Life! life! the bountiful, the magnificent! 88

Not unusual is a word about the sunset. One expression of a favorable response to a picturesque setting was found in a letter dated, December, 1913, which was written at her camp.

> The new moon is just setting in a wonderful clear sky, the fires are all alight in the Arab tents; it's all very lovely and primeval, but I prefer a solitary camp. 89

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88 Ibid., p. 32.
89 Florence Bell, ed., Letters of Gertrude Bell, I:319.

Brief, but adequate, is this one sentence picture of night.

> Night fell as we made our way along the valley; the moon rose, turning the mountainsides into gleaming sheets of light, filling the gorges with deepest, most mysterious shadow. 90

Roads

Roads were few in the Middle East in the first decade of the twentieth century. If roads were articulate what history they could relate. Gertrude's keenness of observation is revealed in the letter of February, 1905.

> Presently I discovered that the narrow track we were riding in was a road as old as time. It was marked at intervals by piled up heaps of stones and at one place there was a stone which had been a well stone, for it was worn a couple of inches deep with the rub of the rope --it must have served a respectable time, for this black rock is extraordinarily hard--and in another there was a mass of rock all covered with inscriptions, Nabathaean, Greek, Kufic, and one in a babel which I did not know, but it was very like the oldest script of Yemen Sabaean; and last of all the Arabs had scrawled their tribe marks there. So each according to his kind had recorded his passing. 91

Roman roads endured to May, 1907, and, in fact, still exist. Their influence made a vivid impression on the Asiatics during the centuries.

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90 Gertrude Bell, Persian Pictures, p. 135.
91 Florence Bell, ed.,Letters of Gertrude Bell, I:196.

> Monotonous, colourless, lifeless, unsubdued by a people whose thoughts travel no further than to the next further, who live and die and leave no mark upon the great plains and the barren hills--such is central Asia, of which this country is a true part. And that is why the Roman roads make so deep an impression on one's mind. They impressed the country itself, they implied a great domination, they tell of a people that overcame the universal stagnation. 92

Ancient Ruins

Great enthusiasm marked Gertrude's study of archaeology. Equally great was the exactitude with which this English woman made detailed records, drawings, and photographs of ruins, remnants of the past. Palmyra was described May 20, 1900.

> As we drew near Palmyra, the hills were covered with the strangest buildings, great stone towers, four stories high, some more ruined and some less, standing together in groups or bordering the road. They are the famous Palmyrene tower tombs. At length we stood on the end of the col and looked over Palmyra. I wonder if the wide world presents a more singular landscape. It is a mass of columns, ranged into long avenues, grouped into temples, lying broken on the sand or pointing one long solitary finger to Heaven. Beyond them is the immense Temple of Baal; the modern town is built inside it and its rows of columns rise out of a mass of mud roofs. And beyond all is the desert, sand and white stretches of salt and sand again, with the dust clouds whirling over it and the Euphrates five days away. It looks like the white skeleton of a town, standing knee deep in the blown sand. 93

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92 Ibid., p. 237.
93 Ibid., p. 108.

A thumb-nail history of the ruins at Arak el Emir (Arabia), May 30, 1900, presented a mental picture enclosed in a mist of far-off enchantment.

> Now this place is very interesting. It was a palace built by an enterprising gentleman called Hyrcamus about 200 years before Christ, and Josephus describes it so accurately that one can to this day trace the lines of the moats and tanks and gardens. Of the palace little remains except a great 'pan de mur' built of enormous stones, the upper ones carved with lions. You can trace a long road leading up to some cliffs about a quarter of a mile behind (from these the place takes its name, Arak meaning cliff) in which are cut a regular town of caves, one of them being an enormous stable with mangers for 100 horses cut in its walls. 94

An odd way for a native of England to spend Christmas day* was that which Gertrude passed at Burqa in 1913. She was really a part of the East by this time.

> Late in the afternoon I discovered that the boulders were covered with Safaitic inscriptions and I copied them till night fall. They are pre-Muhammadan, the rude inscriptions of nomad tribes who inhabited these deserts and wrote their names upon the stones in a script peculiar to this region. So you can picture the history of Burqa--the Byzantine outpost with Safaitic tribes camping round it; the Muhammadan garrison of the 7th century; then a gentleman who passed along in the 8th century of the Jejira and wrote his name and the date upon the walls; then the Bedouin laying their dead in the courtyard of the fort (it is full of graves) and scratching their tribe-marks on the stones; and lastly we to read the meagre tale. 95

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94 Ibid., p. 116.
95 Ibid., pp. 317-8.
* See p. 80.

People

Descriptions of at least fifty different groups of people representing numerous nationalities, classes, colors, and creeds compose the most interesting, the most fascinating topic discussed in the letters, or so the writer believes. Space forbids an enumeration of these people who helped cause the pulse of the world to beat, who bought and sold, who experienced joys and sorrows, who lived and died, a few remembered, most forgotten. A valuable paper might be written on these people.

One day in January, 1900, Gertrude wrote about the large group of people she had seen assembled on the banks of the Jordan.

> Bedouin and fellaheen, kavasses in embroidered clothes. Turkish soldiers, Greek priests and Russian peasants, some in furs and top boots and some in their white shrouds, which were to serve as bathing dresses in the holy stream and then to be carried home and treasured up till their owner's death. 96

Two months afterward the reader recalls the curse sent upon Nebuchadnezzar when he reads that

> We were soon surrounded by Arabs...While we bargained the women and children wandered round and ate grass, just like goats. The women are unveiled. They wear a blue cotton gown 6 yards long which is gathered up and bound round their heads and their waists and falls to their feet. Their faces, from the mouth downwards, are tattooed with indigo and their hair hangs down in two long plaits on either side. 97

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96 Ibid., p. 63.
97 Ibid., p. 69.

Although slavery in most parts of the civilized world had been abolished by 1914, a letter dated March of that year disclosed that it existed in the more remote and inaccessible parts of the globe.

> Here I sat and one of the slaves with me. These slaves, you must understand are often very important personages. Their masters treat them like brothers and give them their full confidence. Also when one of the Rashids removes the reigning prince and takes his place (which frequently happens) he is careful to murder his slaves also, lest they should revenge the slain. 98

The story of a Circassian woman met during Gertrude's enforced delay at Hayil in the spring of 1914 recounts that she

> was sent to Muhammad al Rashid by the Sultan as a gift. Her name is Turkuyyeh. Under her dark purple cloak--all the women are closely veiled here--she was dressed in brilliant red and purple cotton robes and she wore ropes of bright pearls round her neck. And she is worth her weight in gold, as I have come to know. She is a chatterbox of the first order and I passed an exceedingly amusing hour in her company. 99

Numerous are the accounts of eastern people in Persian Pictures, and here again, one finds the vivid, unrestrained descriptions. At this time Gertrude viewed the world through rose-colored glasses. In none of her other writings can the descriptions of people equal them. She stated that the soldier in the Shah's army

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98 Ibid., p. 342.
99 Loc., cit.

> is not calculated to inspire much alarm in the breast of his enemies. His gait is slouching, his uniform torn and discoloured; not infrequently he wears his shirt outside his trousers, and the ragged flounce of brownish-grey linen hanging below his tunic lends him an air anything but martial. His temperament seems to be childlike and peaceable in the extreme. 100

Keen criticism characterizes the next paragraph. A statement regarding the man's position in life concludes it.

> Towards the cool of the evening the King of Merchants appeared on the threshold of his breeze-swept dwelling, a man somewhat past the prime of life, with a tall and powerful figure wrapped in the long brown cloak, opening over the coloured under-robe and spotless linen, which is the dress of rich and poor alike. He was of a pleasing countenance, straight-browed, red-lipped, with a black beard and an olive complexion, and his merry dark eyes had a somewhat unexpected twinkle under his high, white-turbaned forehead. A hospitable friend and a cheerful host is he, the ready quip, the apt story, the appreciative laugh, for ever on his lips; a man on whom the world has smiled, and who smiles back at that Persian world of his which he has made so pleasant for himself, strewing it with soft cushions and glowing carpets, and planting it round with flowers. 101

Not too complimentary is the description of one of her own sex.

> The Princess was a woman of middle age, very fat and very dark; her black eyebrows met together across her forehead; on her lips there was more than the suspicion of a moustache; the lower part of her face was heavy, and its outline lost itself in her neck. 102

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100 Gertrude Bell, Persian Pictures, pp. 21-2.
101 Ibid., pp. 46-7.
102 Ibid., p. 79.

In describing the older daughter of the princess mentioned above, Gertrude remarked that she was

> dark, like her mother, though her complexion was of a more transparent olive, and in her curly hair there were lights which were almost brown. Her lips were, perhaps, a little too thick, though they were charmingly curved, and her eyes were big and brown and almond-shaped, with long lashes and a limpid, pathetic expression as you see in the trustful eyes of a dog when he pushes his nose into your hand in token of friendship. 103

An entire chapter in Persian Pictures is devoted to Sheikh Hassan. He was drawn concretely and carefully. The following excerpt provides an introduction to him.

> He looked like a very part of his surroundings, for his woollen cloak was of a faded gray, the colour of Persian dust, and his underrobe was as green as the plane-leaves, and his turban gleamed like the sunshine; but his face was his own, brown and keen, with dark eyes, deep set under the well-marked brows, and his thin brown hands were his own too, and instinct with character. If you had only seen the hands, you might fairly have hazarded a guess at the sort of man he was, for they were thoughtful hands, delicate and nervous, with thin wrists, on which the veins stood out, and long fingers, rather blunt at the tips; and the skin, which was a shade darker than the sun can tan, would have told you he was an Oriental. 104

Unfamiliar customs pertaining to the dead were encountered from time to time. In this paragraph Gertrude figuratively ascribed thought to the deceased.

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103 Ibid., p. 81.
104 Ibid., pp. 95-6.

> In the shadow of a neglected corner behind it, supported on a couple of trestles, lay something swathed in coarse blue linen, with a stick planted into the ground at its head, and surmounted by a discoloured fez. It was the corpse of a man which lay waiting there until the midday prayers should be concluded, and his relations could find time for his burial. The wind flapped the corners of his blue cotton coverings to and fro, and shook the worn-out fez, but the dead man waited patiently upon the pleasure of the living--perhaps he knew that he was already forgotten and was content. 105

It will be noticed that the men are more admirably portrayed by Gertrude than the women. One reason for that is the fact that in the Mohammedan lands she saw few unveiled women in comparison to the number of men she met. There is a good simile in the last sentence.

> The man who carried the most amusing wares we ever examined was a Russian officer, and he spread them out for our inspection as we steamed round the eastern and northern coasts of the Black Sea. He was a magnificent creature, fair-haired, blue-eyed, broad-shouldered, and tall; he must have stood six feet four in those shining top boots of his. His beard was cut into a point, and his face was like that of some handsome, courteous seventeenth century nobleman smiling out of a canvas of Vandyke's. 106

Two passengers on the same Black Sea trip with Gertrude were described frankly.

> They were Persians; they wore long Persian robes of dark hues, and on their heads the Persian hat of astrakhan; but you might have guessed their nationality by their

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105 Ibid., p. 159.
106 Ibid., p. 190.

> faces--the pale, clear-cut Persian faces, with high, narrow foreheads, deep-set eyes and arching brows. 107

In a letter from Bucharest, 1889, Gertrude told about an entertainment at the palace to which she had been invited. Her comments about the queen were candid enough. No envy for majesty is apparent or hidden in this excerpt.

> I had a long crack with the Queen whom I suddenly became conscious of immediately in front of me. However, I don't really think it was my fault and she need not have talked to me unless she liked. She told me how she spent her winters--it sounds dreary enough, poor lady; she hates the cold and never goes out at all from one end of the winter to the other, but spends her time indoors and for exercise walks up and down the long galleries and ball rooms at the Palace. 108

While in Berlin in 1897 Gertrude was presented to the German emperor and his wife. Evidently her preconceived idea of them had to be modified.

> The Empress sits very upright and is rather alarming. He flashes round from one person to the other and talks as fast as possible and is not alarming at all. 109

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107 Ibid., p. 197.
108 Elsa Richmond, ed., The Earlier Letters of Gertrude Bell, p. 205.
109 Florence Bell, ed., Letters of Gertrude Bell, I:43.

Miscellaneous Descriptions

The citations in this section of the chapter have been arranged chronologically and have been selected to present a wider scope of Gertrude Bell's descriptive ability.

By a westerner, palace would not be given the name of the Shah's residence in Enzeli, a lesser port on the Caspian.

> A curious savour of mingled East and West hung about the little palace. We slept in bare Persian rooms, the loaded orange boughs touched our verandas, and the soft air of the Eastern night rustled through the reed curtains that hung over them; but the brisk, fresh smell of the sea mixed itself with the heavy Oriental atmosphere; beyond the garden walls the moon shone on the broad Caspian, highway to many lands, and the silence of the night was broken by the whistling of steamers. 110

Describing Constantinople during the month of fasting Gertrude emphasized the appearance of this historic city during a Mohammedan festival.

> The whole city is bright with twinkling lamps; the carved platforms round the minarets, which are like the capitals of pillars supporting the great dome of the sky, are hung about with lights, and, slung on wires between them, sentences from the Koran blaze out in tiny lamps against the blackness of the night. As you look across the Golden Horn the slender towers of the minarets are lost in the darkness, rings of fire hang in mid-air over Stamboul, the word of God flames

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110 Gertrude Bell, Persian Pictures, p. 141.

> forth in high heaven, and is reflected back from the waters beneath. Towards morning the lamps fade and burn out, but at dusk the city again decks herself in jewels, and casts a glittering reflection into her many waters. 111

A one sentence description of Constantinople in ordinary times pictures the city as an enduring landmark.

> Constantinople the Magnificent gathers her rags round her, throws over her shoulders her imperial robe of sunshine, and sits in peaceful state with her kingdom of blue waters at her feet. 112

An authentic description of the Arab counterpart to a home was given in three sentences in a letter written in February, 1905.

> I hope you realize what an Arab tent is like. It's made of black goats' hair, long and wide, with a division in the middle to separate the women from the men. The lee side of it is always open and this is most necessary, for light and warmth all come from a fire of desert scrub burning in a shallow square hole in the ground and smoking abominably. 113

Almost unnoticeable is the sharp criticism of class distinctions in England. Although Gertrude was a member of the privileged group at home, her range of interest extended to the welfare of the underprivileged wherever she met them. Seldom did Gertrude attend a church service, hence the importance of the paragraph written in Damascus,

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111 Ibid., p. 149.
112 Ibid., p. 157.
113 Florence Bell, ed., Letters of Gertrude Bell, I:186.

March 3, 1905. A reverent attitude pervades it. Contrary to the usual archaeological reference to a church, this one records a few words of the service and silently lends assent to the ceremony.

> I made my way at last to the great mosque--which was a church of Constantine's--left my shoes at the door with a friendly beggar and went in. It was the hour of the afternoon prayer. In the courtyard, men of all sorts and kinds, from the learned Doctor of Damascus down to the raggedest camel driver --Islam is the great republic of the world, there is neither class nor race inside the creed--were washing at the fountain and making the first prostrations before they entered the mosque. I followed them in and stood behind the lines of praying people some two or three hundred of them, listening to the chanting of the Imam. "Allah!" he cried, and the Faithful fell with a single movement upon their faces and remained for a full minute in silent adoration, till the high chant of the Imam began again: "The Creator of this World and the next, of the Heavens and the Earth, He who leads the righteous in the true path, and the evil to destruction. Allah!" And as the name of God echoed through the great colonnades, where it had sounded for near 2,000 years in different tongues, the listeners prostrated themselves again, and for a moment all the church was silence. 114

Evaluation

If one considers these word pictures in the light of the words written at Isbarta, April 28, 1907, Gertrude Bell's approach to the various topics will be readily understood.

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114 Ibid., p. 198.

> I don't suppose there is anyone in the world happier than I am or any country more lovely than Asia Minor. I just mention these facts in passing so that you may bear them in mind. 115

A short time after returning to the Middle East in the fall of 1913 Gertrude Bell began her famous journey to Hayil.

> Already I have dropped back into the desert as if it were my own place; silence and solitude fall round you like an impenetrable veil; there is no reality but the long hours of riding, shivering in the morning and drowsy in the afternoon, the bustle of getting into camp, the talk round Muhammad's coffee fire after dinner, profounder sleep than civilization contrives, and then the road again. And as usual one feels as secure and confident in this lawless country as one does in one's own village. 116

From Bagdad, March 29, 1914, she wrote:

> I love Bagdad and this country much better than Damascus and Syria. 117

Little did she realize then that the war into which the world was to be plunged four months later would give her the opportunity of serving the British government by placing at its disposal her intimate knowledge of the Middle East at the time it was most needed.

As a descriptive artist, one who draws word pictures by imagination and taste, Gertrude Bell was somewhat above the average. Descriptions of flowers and trees

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115 Ibid., p. 231.
116 Ibid., pp. 313-4.
117 Ibid., p. 349.

frequent in her letters increased in quality the older she became. She probed personalities with a remarkable skill. Seldom did she exaggerate. Undue caution is noticed often after 1900. The peak of her ability was demonstrated in Persian Pictures, written from deep within her heart, before she was thirty. What she did was to give many comparatively vague descriptions which necessitated completion of the scene by the reader.

CHAPTER III

GERTRUDE BELL AS A STORY TELLER

Gertrude Bell's life was extraordinary. Only two English women before her, Lady Hester Stanhope (1776-1839) and Lady Anne Blunt (1837-1917) had found the Middle East which fascinated them to the extent that they lived among, travelled with, and wrote about the people who dwelled there.

Five years after receiving a brilliant first in history at Oxford Gertrude Bell published her first book, Persian Pictures, which was a collection of descriptive essays recounting some of her experiences in 1892 while in Persia for the first time. Except for the chapter referring to Murray there are no historical or archaeological references similar to those which occupy so much of her later books. The tone and style of this book are utterly different from her other works. Part of this book was written while in Persia as a record of her visit. Upon her return to England she was urged to publish the collected essays, but for quite some time she refused believing that they were too personal. Finally, however, she consented, and then she wrote additional essays to complete the work. The sections written in England have not the same vivacity as those composed earlier.

This volume is characterized by a light,airy, gay quality which is not to be found in succeeding works. The closest approximation to this style elsewhere in her writings is found in her letters which she never expected to be published. In the chapter "Gertrude Bell as a Descriptive Artist" are found numerous excerpts from Persian Pictures which illustrate those qualities. It is true that this volume is a record of first impressions, but that is one of the qualities which makes it delightful light reading carrying the reader from his everyday affairs to a land of enchantment. There is no continuous story in this book except the one easily read between the lines--the author is in love for the first and only time, and that finest of human emotions is returned with equal ardor. All the joys and hopes it engendered are reflected in the series of pictures of gardens, cities, palaces, shops and shopkeepers, tent dwellers, hosts, and Persians of varying degrees of class distinctions. At that time Gertrude was drinking from the cup of happiness, filled almost to overflowing. What others had expressed in poetry she made known in prose. Persian Pictures is not a great travel book although it belongs in that division of literature known as travel records. It is a true love story slightly veiled by exuberant description.

Three years later, in 1897, after death had dissolved the romance without granting its happy culmination, Persian poetry proved a solace. For more than seven years Gertrude had studied Persian and then she published an English translation of some of the poems of Persia's noted poet whose nom-de-plume was Hafiz. A remarkable skill in poetry was demonstrated in Poems from the Divan of Hafiz which was a fairly literal translation. Few occidentals study Persian, fewer still acquire the technical mastery and sympathetic interpretation required for adequate translation. Had she pursued this interest longer and with more scholarly attitude, it is probable that her poetic translations would compare even more favorably with those of Edward Fitzgerald.

A decade elapsed. A woman of thirty-nine published another book, but it lacked the youthful outlook and spontaneity of the prose volume which had preceded it. The Desert and the Sown is a travel book in the full sense of the meaning. Here the story is really a series of short stories loosely joined together by a thread--the road--which the author followed on her journey. Gertrude Bell's intense interest in people is shown on each page. Her method has been not so much to state her views of the trip, but to let the story of the country through which she rode be told by the people she met rather than through the eyes

of a European, friendly, sympathetic, and understanding though they be. In carrying out this idea she recorded numerous short conversations which presented an insight into the thought, attitudes, and philosophy of the natives. Typical ejaculations and exclamations add to the interest of the book. Gertrude's fine sense of humor saved many a situation, but more than that, it unlocked unnumbered doors for her.

By this time Gertrude's interest in archaeology had assumed the proportions of scientific investigation. Throughout The Desert and the Sown ruins vie with people for the place of honor. Many pictures aid the reader in acquainting him with the various styles of architecture representative of the civilizations which thrived and then sank into oblivion except for the work of a few historians and archaeologists. Although numerous ruins are described, they are discussed in the layman's language so that they in no way detract from the enjoyment of the book by those who are unfamiliar with that branch of knowledge. Simplicity of style is one of Gertrude's best characteristics. Practical application of her years of study of eastern languages and ancient history was made when she wrote this book.

Evidence that the author of The Desert and the Sown was mature in outlook and judgment is abundant. She had

the ability to see a situation with its implications and could quickly form a decision regarding it, a decision which was seldom wrong. This book was written with the intention that it should be published. Its style is neither stilted nor pretentious, but informal and conversational. Something of Gertrude's personality pervades the book because it is written as if she herself were sitting beside the reader relating her experiences. Especially is it this quality which draws readers to it because most occidentals know little about that section of the world and care less. Since most people who were or are interested in this subject have been scholars of the first rank their writings have been erudite, outside the ken of the average reader who seeks a smattering of information without too great mental exertion.

In 1911 appeared Amurath to Amurath* a volume describing a five-month journey of suspense. The motif of it is freedom for the young Turk. Like The Desert and the Sown it contains many photographs and a few drawings of ancient ruins. It is better written than its predecessor. Elizabeth Robins wrote that

> Miss Bell's disposition to examine testimony and to try conclusions brings her home...with a new art of travel. From the point of view of the general reader Amurath to Amurath, is, first and foremost, a many-sided study of a

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* William Shakespeare, Henry IV Part Two, Act V, Sc. 2, l. 48.

> people--or rather of the medley of races...and problems bound up in the Ottoman Empire. This part of the book seems to be offered as a contribution towards Western understanding of the unprecedented political crisis through which the Turks have newly come. 1

Palace and Mosque at Ukhaidir, a study in early Mohammedan architecture, was published in 1914. For four years Gertrude had been studying archaeology as her principal occupation, and the study of early Mohammedan architecture was the special field. This book is mainly exposition. The only story in it is the one that the reader makes for himself from the historical and religious information presented.

How different is this book from Persian Pictures published twenty years earlier! Palace and Mosque at Ukhaidir is a serious work, carefully planned and executed after years of study and preparation to take a place among the standard books on the architecture of this early period. Throughout this volume the first person singular pronoun was used, while in Persian Pictures the first person plural pronoun was employed. Numerous drawings and photographs are included to substantiate Gertrude's conclusions. This book is well written proceeding directly from point to point. As one reads he has the feeling that he is being taken on a conducted tour of Ukhaidir by a guide.

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1 Elizabeth Robins, "A New Art of Travel," The Fortnightly Review, March, 1911, p. 475.

CHAPTER IV

GERTRUDE BELL AS A LETTER WRITER

or

ONE-HALF CENTURY OF LETTER WRITING

The literature of personal revelation--diaries, journals, letters, and memoirs--unlocks the door to the inner feelings, thoughts, and desires of individuals. In those instances where the writers are outstanding in their time, their private records illumine the more studied accounts recorded in histories and official documents. If these personal records have been written without any thought of their being published, the subject matter is yet more interesting and valuable.

Diaries and journals need only one person to maintain them. Letters are an indication that the author's joys and sorrows are shared, in most cases sympathetically; that there is an abiding faith in a trusted dear one; that the entire process is reciprocated when a reply is received. Friendships are made and renewed by letters. Letters form the best substitute for actual conversation and companionship. The mere fact that a person writes letters shows that self-interest is not one of his chief characteristics, but that in his soul there is a responsive chord to one of his fellow-men. The person who writes his memoirs experiences a conscious retrospect, but is careful not to write about his mistakes and the shady side of his life, because

he realizes posterity will remember them. Instead of being a partner as in a correspondence, the memoir writer attempts to place himself on a pedestal, if only a slight one, so that between the author and the reader there is a pronounced gulf.

According to Saintsbury, "Women write the best letters and get the best letters written to them".[1] Delicacy, grace, and exquisiteness in letter writing are expressed by women. Mme. de Sévigné was the greatest letter writer. De Quincey in his essay on style commented on the charm women put in letters.

In the field of letters by English women those of Gertrude Bell are valuable because they show how a young woman brought up in the latter half of the Victorian period early showed signs of objections to conventionalized living. At the end of the Victorian era she began a series of solitary journeys through the Middle East, smoked cigarettes, questioned religion as it was being practiced, and in other ways was a forerunner of the type of woman who emerged after the first World War--independent, well-educated formally, capable of maintaining her own in competition with men. She was endowed with the courage and stamina to proceed on her own way in the face of opposition, and finally, was victorious.

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1 George Saintsbury, A Letter Book, London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1922, p. 12.

The published letters of Gertrude Bell cover a period of fifty-two years, 1874-1926. From the first letter which was dictated at the age of six to Miss Florence Olliffe, who was soon to become her step-mother, to her last letter written five days before her death in Bagdad to her father and step-mother, there is a stirring story of one-half century lived with earnest zest and enthusiasm.

The first half of her letter writing period included the records of childhood experiences, the years of study at Queen's College in London, and Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, a summer in Germany, extended visits in Bucharest, Teheran, and Berlin while a guest of the British diplomat, her uncle Sir Frank Lascelles; and a round-the-world trip. These letters reveal the typical life of the well-to-do English during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

After 1899 Gertrude became part of the Orient. One who wishes to read about the territory which was to comprise Iraq as well as the area generally known as the Middle East in the fifteen years immediately preceding World War I, without reading dry-as-dust facts, will find the letters of Gertrude Bell a source of delightful information written with a charming air of informality. The warmth of family affection, the lack of literary pretensions, the tone of passionate sincerity, and the conversational quality make

these letters most readable.

Miss Bell wrote about her experiences in a simple, direct style as a means of keeping her family informed about herself and her activities. Spontaneous, rather frank, they indicate her great interest in the people inhabiting this section of the world as well as their modes of life and their history.

During 1914-1917 Gertrude was engaged in war work at Boulogne, London, Cairo, Delhi, and Basrah. From 1917 until her death in 1926 she resided in Bagdad although there were short trips back to England. It was not until this period that she was

> to find herself confronted with the East as a modern reality--as an element in world politics; and compelled by necessity to treat these picturesque and romantic denizens of Oriental towns and deserts as ordinary mortals.
>
> The strenuous years in Baghdad, where most of her work was far from romantic, never wrought any change in her enthusiasm for the East, and it was perhaps fitting that she should end her days...in the land she knew and among the people she loved with so much understanding. 2

Self-willed, impatient, infinitely loving, she lived every moment to the full. Fortunately for us she found it stimulating to write accounts of her experiences. Usually she wrote very soon after their occurrence and so

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2 E. Denison Ross, "Preface", Persian Pictures, London, Ernest Benn Limited, 1928, p. 11.

has preserved a freshness, a spriteliness, and a vivacity which gives the reader facts in an extremely palatable manner. At the same time she expressed her attitude--light-hearted and gay for the most part until the outbreak of the war, but growing more serious each year afterward--and her satisfaction of intellectual curiosity.

Most of her letters exhibit a lack of paragraphing. Occasionally there are misspelled words. Her step-mother wrote that "Gertrude never entirely mastered the art of spelling".[3] Not always did she write complete sentences. Frequently her sentences are long, too long; but the reader gets the feeling that a story is being told with as much ease and rapidity as a swiftly flowing stream, with each new paragraph representing the water's dashing against a rock, then leaping forward. Freedom and naturalness, requisites for letters according to one authority, are in evidence throughout the half-century of letters in spite of the fact that people of the school of Laura Riding claim that naturalness is impossible in letters.[4]

The oldest letter of Gertrude's which has been preserved shows the interest of a six year-old-girl in the activities of her Persian cat Mopsa which she considers important enough to be related to her father's friend. The complimentary closing is indicative of the esteem in which

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3 Florence Bell, editor, Letters of Gertrude Bell, London, Ernest Benn Limited, 1927, I:9.

4 Laura Riding, Everybody's Letters, London, A. Barker Ltd., 1933, p. 234.

Florence Olliffe was held before she became Gertrude's step-mother.

Redbarns, Coatham, Redcar, Sept., 25th, 1874.

My Dear Florence,
Mopsa has been very naughty this morning. She has been scampering all over the dining-room Cilla says. I had a great chase all over the hall and dining room to catch her and bring her to Papa. She bit and made one little red mark on my hand. During breakfast she hissed at Kitty Scott. Auntie Ada had her on her knee and Kitty was at one side. As Auntie Ada let Mopsa go down she hissed at Kitty and hunted her round to my side of the table. Please Papa says will you ask Auntie Florence if she will order us some honey like her own. I gave Mopsa your message and she sends her love. I forgot to say Kitty was very frightened. I send you my love and to Grandmamma and Auntie Florence.
Your affectionate little friend
Gertrude Bell. 5

During the following decade Gertrude was tutored, visited Scotland, participated in the pastimes and recreations incidental to the period, and became an excellent horsewoman an accomplishment which was later to be valuable on her trips through the Middle East.

In the fall of 1884 Gertrude became a student at Queen's College in London. From this time forward there is a steady progression of thought and opinion expressed on a wide variety of subjects. Conciseness was never one of Gertrude's strong points. Two letters written during the first year at Queen's give evidence of the easy, conversa-

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5 Florence Bell, Letters of Gertrude Bell, I: 7

tional style which she used when writing to the members of her immediate family. She always kept her father and step-mother, referred to in this thesis as her parents, well informed about the incidents of her new life. Delight in advancement is shown in the letter of October 24, 1884.

> Oh I have something so nice to tell you. Last dancing lesson Mrs. Birch--the mistress you know--who is most terribly strict, called me aside and told me that she was so pleased with me because I had improved so much and so fast. I am bound to say that she also told me that at the beginning she thought I danced very badly. I was so pleased, but I'm rather afraid she makes favourites and that I am one. 6

Expectancy is well illustrated in the letter of November 7, 1884.

> Tomorrow evening Auntie Bessie and I are going to the House of Commons* to hear a debate. Uncle Hugh wrote to me saying he had two places in the Ladies' Gallery and asking me if I would like to go. You may imagine, or rather you cannot imagine how happy I am! Uncle Hugh said that there would very likely be a division on the Franchise Bill, I do so hope there will be. 7

Straightforwardly, without mincing words, in the letter of December 1, 1884, to her step-mother, Gertrude stated the facts in a situation which any student will appreciate.

> Will you please send me £3. You owe me rather more but that is all I want just now. £2 for November and December, and £ 1 something, I've got it written down,

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6 Elsa Richmond, editor, The Earlier Letters of Gertrude Bell, London, Ernest Benn Limited, 1937, p. 31.

7 Ibid., p. 33.

* See p. 107.

> for my umbrella and shawl.) Some stamps too please, I already owe a girl several. 8

Urgency apparently dictated the terse request sandwiched in the letter to her step-mother written from Harley Street in March, 1885.

> Will you please send me a cheque for £20 6 d. which is what you owe me. I don't remember what 5s. of it is for, but I know that is what you owe me. 9

Art was one subject Gertrude addressed to her father.

> On Saturday we went to the Old Masters. There were lots more Gainsboroughs! A great many lovely Romneys and Sir Joshua's. I am ashamed to say I cannot always distinguish those two, but Romney's always. Isn't it you that like Murillo so much? There were three very nice Murillo's. Do you know that Mabuse that comes from Naworth? How beautiful it is. I don't like Rubens. I don't like him at all. I've no doubt that's very bad taste but I can't help it. There were some Turners of which I can say nothing. They are quite indescribable. I should think you've had enough of pictures by this time. Too much perhaps. But I have nothing else to tell you that interests me too. 10

Argumentation holds a conspicuous place in the letter to her step-mother dated Thursday, 1885. Although possessing an independent character, Gertrude at this time did not assert it fully as is shown in the last sentences.

> I really wish I might leave off learning the piano. I've been playing for years and years now and I don't believe that

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8 Ibid., p. 34.
9 Ibid., p. 40.
10 Ibid., p. 38.

> at this moment I can play any better than Hugo, perhaps not so well. I really do think it's waste of time. Though I've been lazy all this afternoon I generally am very busy indeed, and never find too much time on my hands. Fancy the amount more books I could read in the practising hour. I know what you'll say: that it would be such a pity to give it up now because I might learn to play some time. But I never never shall; I think I get worse and worse. It really is not out of laziness that I ask you this--I shall do more other work in its place. I am afraid, however, that my request will be sure to be refused. It's only a sort of forlorn hope so I shan't be a bit disappointed if you think I had better go on, but will resign myself to my fate! 11

The next letter accepted the refusal temporarily, but emphasized her disagreement.

> I was afraid you would say this. I don't see how my playing is to give me fresh interest I confess. I certainly shall never play to amuse myself, because I can't bear to hear myself play, it's so horrible; nor do I suppose I shall play to amuse my friends. Perhaps you would like me to practise scales in the morning while you are doing your accounts, instead of reading, I shall never get beyond that point. I don't see either how I can by playing fill in my time when I am talking to people--unless learning to play helps one to like sewing! I am very sorry you won't let me leave off because I think it's pure waste of time. I hope however, that before I'm 20 you will have found out how inconquerably stupid I am...This is written in class, that's why it's so more than usually untidy. 12

As much as any other student Gertrude enjoyed whiling away the seeming eternity of some classes by indulging in

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11 Ibid., p. 39.
12 Ibid., pp. 39-40.

the practical pursuit of letter writing. A typical example is the letter addressed to her step-mother, July 2, 1885.

> Dr. Weil is asking crucial questions all round the class, but he asks me only a very few, I hope he thinks I know them. I don't really at all. Will you send me my pound for this month, please?...Dr. Weil is so ugly, and he always wears a dirty shirt. I have never never seen him in a clean shirt yet. He smells of tobacco and he comes and pats you on the hand when you answer wrong (which you invariably do) and calls you his "dear child"!...There is still an endless 20 minutes of this class. 13

Evidently another letter was written during the twenty minutes. This one was sent to her brother Maurice.

> I am having a class but I am so consumedly bored that I'll pass the time by writing you a line. 14

February 8, 1886, Gertrude wrote to her father during another class.

> I'm writing to you in German class on a page of my note book. Luckily the lady visitor is at the other end of the room! 15

Although Gertrude enjoyed thoroughly her academic work and would have felt an aching void had it been interrupted, she disliked intensely the actual departure from home. Once the break was made, she was her cheery self. This feeling is expressed in a letter to her step-mother which was written on the train in September, 1885,

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13 Ibid., p. 45.
14 Loc., cit.
15 Ibid., p. 83.

when returning to Queen's for the two final terms.

> I hate going away! The weather is crying for me so that I am saved the trouble of crying myself if I felt inclined which is a great comfort. 16

History was Gertrude's favorite subject. Reason enough is there writing thus to her step-mother in September, 1885.

> I'm awfully proud of being first in History, for I'm above some Matriculation girls and a girl I always thought very clever indeed in history. 17

One wonders if the unusually affectionate salutation in a September, 1885, letter had any relation to the neatly-tucked-in request for her step-mother's collars.

> My Darling, Dearest Mother,
> ...In the big book-case in the schoolroom in I think the bottom drawer you will find a little brown box with my book plates in it. Will you send me them please. I also want my--your--stick up collars. Miss Croudace thinks she has never seen me so nicely dressed as in my Paris gowns and altogether they are a great success. 18

Evidently the denial by her step-mother for discontinuing piano lessons had caused Gertrude to seek redress from her father because the longed for permission came from him. She thanked him in the letter of October, 1885.

> I was very glad to hear from you and most delighted that I need not go on with my scales, though I expect a remonstrating letter from Mother. 19

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16 Ibid., pp. 54-5.
17 Ibid., p. 55.
18 Ibid., p. 57.
19 Loc., cit.

Interest in music had not waned, but had taken another form. Later in the same month Gertrude again wrote to her father and this time told about her singing lessons. Despite her desire to sing in English her teacher insisted upon giving her Italian songs.

Perhaps it is unfair to quote the following letter of November 13, 1885, which gives evidence that Gertrude's wrath had been aroused sufficiently by a letter from her step-mother. The difference in attitude toward her parents is clear. The question of her going out by herself is mentioned toward the end of the excerpt.

> Please I'm very cross this morning and your letter has made me crosser than ever. Next time you're going to "answer two long letters" of mine, think of my feelings and refrain--unless you are not going to write at all about me. It's a very uninteresting subject in the hands of anyone but one's own self--to one's self I mean--and it may, and very often does, become--as in your letter--an excessively disagreeable one. I wish you had only sent me the last page for the other three were quite horrid. I waded through them--which I consider a great act of self-discipline--but I avenged myself by burning them promptly... I don't suppose this is the sort of letter Miss Tennant writes to her mamma. I think perhaps you had better not show it to Papa. I'm not at all afraid of you--not so much as I ought to be perhaps, but I'm rather afraid of Papa. There, you may tell him that because perhaps if he is feeling nice to me he won't like it, and I remember you said that he had been discussing whether I was sufficiently educated to be allowed to go out by myself... I think you owe me a nice letter for all mine were nice but even if you think you ought to write another nasty one I am always your very loving daughter 20

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20 Ibid., pp.69-70.

Gertrude was never much in favor of organized religion as it was practiced in England. In the letter of November 23, 1885, she wrote to her father that she had heard Mr. Eyton preach at St. Paul's that morning. Instead of commenting on the service or the sermon she wrote that,

> I do loathe and detest St. Paul's. (Mother won't like that sentence, but if I had any stronger words I would use even them.) There is not a single detail which is not hideous not to say repulsive. 21

A long discussion of the architecture concluded the letter.

One of the last letters written from Queen's was that to her step-mother, April 8, 1886, recounting the achievement in her work.

> I have heard since I wrote this morning that I have 87 for English language and Literature and Miss Croudace says Mr. Morley was very enthusiastic about my paper and said it was the best he had ever had. So now I am an Associate in all but name for a formal ceremony has to be gone through next term. 22

In 1886 Gertrude matriculated at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, one of the two colleges which admitted women. The letters from this period do not relate everyday incidents in as great detail as did those from Queen's. Gradually Gertrude was settling problems for herself and using more and more of her independent character which was awaiting

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21 Ibid., p. 76.
22 Ibid., p. 92.

the final release from undue restraint imposed partly because of immaturity, but more for compliance with the Victorian ideals.

In one of the first letters from Oxford, June, 1886, to her step-mother, Gertrude recorded a keen observation which is timely today.

> The other day I did so want you to be here so that you might see Miss Wordsworth's best cap. To the uninitiated eye it looks like a bundle of flowers tied together by a ribbon of velvet and then a row of lace all round. It's very very little (and you know Miss Wordsworth's head is very wide and large) and generally it's crooked! All her best caps are as little as that, but they are not all quite so fine! 23

During August of that same year she was in Germany for the first time. The first letter, dated August 4, from Weilheim, told about an unexpected welcome, but this was merely a prelude to similar experiences* she was to meet years later in the Middle East.

> I wasn't so very miserable after all yesterday evening and when I came to bed I can't say I was lonely, for I was enlivened in my room by countless myriads of earwigs. They were everywhere--on the walls, on the floor, on the ceiling, and when they reached that point of vantage they dropped down on to my bed and began over again. I gave them a fairly strong hint that I didn't want them by killing between twenty and thirty, but they are very tactless animals and didn't dream of going away! 24

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23 Ibid., p. 104.
24 Loc., cit.
* See pp. 37-8.

How often has the following idea been expressed by every university student! This is an excerpt from a letter from Lady Margaret Hall, February 2, 1887.

> The amount of work is hopeless. Slave as one may, one never gets through the due quota of every week. (then followed work for that week)...Now I ask you, is that possible? One does only what one must and lets the rest go...Don't think I don't like it. I love the work itself, and if only one could work 12 hours a day, I could wish no better, but one can't. 25

Two letters in one month referring to church services was rare. February 9, 1887, Gertrude wrote to her father that,

> Mr. Creighton preached last Sunday afternoon at St. Mary's. I went to hear him and liked him very much. He doesn't preach like other people at all. His sermon was, I thought, very secular, but no worse a sermon for that. He was very uneven, saying some some exceedingly clever and well put things, and then sinking in places to quite uninteresting truisms. 26

When the opinion of the preacher was favorable, she wrote to her step-mother as in the letter of February 28, 1887.

> I have just been to hear the Bishop of Ripon who is Bampton lecturer this term. He is a very marvellous preacher. I'm glad there are some more Sundays of him. St. Mary's was fuller than I ever saw it before, all the Undergraduates' gallery and all the passages were packed close with men sitting and standing. I don't wonder at all! one would be willing to do most things to hear the Bishop of Ripon. 27

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25 Ibid., p. 124.
26 Ibid.,pp. 125-6.
27 Ibid., p. 132.

During May, 1887, her second year at Oxford, she described spring in a letter to her step-mother.

> You can't think how lovely Oxford is at this moment. This is the fortnight of all the year, and the place to see it in. We have nine o'clock lectures on Monday and Friday every week at University; it entails a somewhat insufficient breakfast, but the walk across the Parks is too delicious, for the mornings are nearly always fresh and sunny, and the rows of pollard willows across the Cherwell are just coming into leaf--that greenest softest leaf that only willows have. The meadows are full of cowslips and anemonies and primroses and at Iffley the Fritillaries are out--I must go and gather some next week. 28

Noteworthy today is Gertrude's reference to Janet Hogarth,one of her friends at Lady Margaret Hall, in the letter to her step-mother, February 26, 1888. Janet Hogarth, later Mrs. W. L. Courtney,* has written about Gertrude on several occasions giving in each a vivid word picture of the conscientious, intelligent Gertrude who remained her friend throughout life. Dr. David Hogarth* who became an authority on the Middle East was Janet's brother.

> Yesterday afternoon Janet Hogarth and I went to a meeting of the Archaeological Society which was held at Merton. You've seen all Merton I think so you know what a delightful College it is to have expounded to you. The Warden acted as guide and did it extremely well and with a great deal of knowledge. Freeman was there and very much in evidence; there was also a

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28 Ibid., p. 138.
* Hogarth, Janet, see pp. 107, 118.
Hogarth, David, see pp. 90, 103, 119.

> certain Canon Freeling to whom the great professor was persistently rude the whole afternoon. 29

At the beginning of her second year at Oxford, May, 1887, Gertrude wrote about history. In the last sentence quoted below is a pungent clause.

> We go to Mr. Johnson's lectures on 18th Century Constitutional History three times a week. They are so good. We think them quite the best lectures we have been to yet, and delivered with such fire, such enthusiasm and such interest that even the men are constrained to listen! 30

Pride in work well done was expressed in the letter of March 15, 1888, written to her step-mother.

> Now I must tell you about collections; on the whole they are satisfactory and Mr. Johnson says he thinks we shall be able to push them up half a class before June and so make them a full first. These are my marks:--
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | early constitutional | B+ |
> | late constitutional | B-- |
> | 18th Cent. English | A-- |
> | 18th Cent. Foreign | B++ |
> | Political Economy | B (I know none!) |
> | Political Science | A- |
>
> B is practically a first in the schools. 31

From December, 1888, to May, 1889, Gertrude was the guest of her uncle and aunt, Sir Frank and Lady Mary Lascelles, at the British legation in Bucharest, where Sir Frank was the British minister. Life in the Rumanian capital was a contrast to her recent years of studious activity.

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29 Ibid., p. 159.
30 Ibid., p. 135.
31 Ibid., p. 162.

Her thumb-nail descriptions of people she met at the court, balls, and other entertainments are amusing and witty. Social etiquette in this Balkan city was not nearly as rigid as that in London, hence the surprise mentioned frequently at the conduct of the women in particular.

Extant letters to her half-sisters are few. On Christmas day, 1888, her thoughts turned to the celebration at home. Delightful is the letter she wrote that day to her eight year old half-sister, Elsa. Twenty-five years later Gertrude was to spend Christmas* in a manner undreamed of at this time.

> What an amusing morning you must be having-- I wonder what you have got for Christmas presents. I came down to breakfast this morning with my arms full of all the presents from Sloane Street which were opened in the dining room. It's not at all a nice Christmas day here, for it is damp and rainy and the streets are inches deep in mud, in fact it is almost impossible to walk. All the poor women here wear short skirts and long top boots so that they don't get muddy at all. They don't wear hats but they tie little coloured shawls all round their heads. You should see the coachmen, they are so splendid! They wear long black velvet clothes exactly like a woman's dress, round their waist they tie scarlet woolen scarves and on their heads they have fur caps. The Roumanian language is so like French that one can understand all the words written up on the shops. This evening Auntie Mary is going to have a Christmas dinner party with a real English plum pudding. 32

While in Constantinople en route to England, May 21, 1889, Gertrude wrote to her seven year old half-sister

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32 Ibid., pp. 183-4.

* See p. 44.

Molly about the dogs she had seen. The common bond between Gertrude and Molly, an interest in pets, recalls Gertrude's letter when she was six in which the main topic was her cat Mopsa.*

> In Constantinople there are almost as many dogs as there are Turks. They sleep all day in little heaps in the gutters or the middle of the streets, I wonder they are not run over, but at night they wake up, the creatures, and bark like anything. There are regular families of them which live in particular streets; they choose the biggest dog of the family to be king over them and if any stranger dog comes along and wants to live with them in their street, the king dog flies at him and bites him till he goes away. That is what makes such a noise in the nights. In some nice warm corner you find little heaps of puppies lying curled up together to keep one another warm or wandering about looking for something to eat. They are all a kind of light yellow with longish rough hair, in some parts of the town they are yellow and white or black and white. 33

During the next three years Gertrude was in England spending most of her time at her home in Yorkshire or at her grandmother's home on Sloane Street in London. As a result, few letters to her family were written between 1889 and 1892. It is during this period that most of the published letters to her girlhood friend, Flora Russell, were written. Gertrude's parents took the entire family to Trois Epis in Alsace for a summer holiday in August, 1889. The unfamiliar living conditions found there are described in a letter to Flora.

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33 Ibid., p. 216.
* See p. 68.

> I must confess to you that we had a moment of horror when we found ourselves landed high and dry in the regular German pension kind of place amongst a band of little employés and people with their musty fusty old wives and greedy children...The first step towards our comfort was to persuade the landlady that our peculiar English habits forbade our all sleeping in one bed or spending the evening drinking beer in the smoking room! 34

In a paragraph discussing English writers of the day she remarked sadly on the passing of Browning whose poetry she had been writing about since 1882.

> What about dear Browning? I felt quite unhappy for two whole days after his death. One feels one has lost in him one of the links which bind us to the brilliant beginning of this century--and there are so few left and no one can take his place! 35

Typical of her social activities at this time are the letters of January 23, 1892, and August 13, 1892.

> We have spent a racketing fortnight dancing and acting. 36

> We spent a madly amusing five days at Canterbury, of which nothing remains to tell except that we danced every night, saw a good deal of cricket and talked a little...
> Do you remember discussing what other girls do with their days? Well! I have found out what one particular class does--they spend the entire time in rushing from house to house for cricket weeks, which means cricket all day and dancing all night; your party consists of an eleven and enough girls to pair off with--you discuss byes and wides and Kemp at the wicket and Hearne's

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34 Ibid., p. 219.
35 Florence Bell, editor, Letters of Gertrude Bell, p. 23.
36 Loc., cit.

> batting and any other topic of a similar nature that may occur to you. It seems to me to be rather a restless sort of summer... 37

Persia--oriental, ancient seat of civilization, steeped in centuries of traditions, picturesque in its contrasts of life, remote from the increasing tempo of the western world! This Persia formed the magic background for romance, but just as surely terminated it quickly when the recurrent cholera plague next struck. Gertrude's position was similar to that of Moses in that she had climbed the mountain top of experience and been granted a view of what lay ahead, but the opportunity for her to enjoy the happiness therein was withdrawn. The letters written from Persia are exceptionally long, colorful, and joyous teeming with life and action. Neither the letters nor the volume Persian Pictures is written in a style which could be termed stilted or restrained. Just the opposite is true. Especially characteristic is the tone of passionate sincerity. The letter written from Gulahek, June 18, 1892, to her cousin Herbert Marshall, is almost an informal essay. Its importance lies in the impressions she has received of Persia, and in the summary of her reactions to them. Part of it is quoted below, but the reader will wish to read it in its entirity either in Volume I of the letters edited by Lady Florence Bell or in the preface to Persian Pictures.

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37 Ibid., I:23.

Dear Cousin Mine,

Are we the same people I wonder when all our surroundings, associations, acquaintances are changed? Here that which is me, which womanlike is an empty jar that the passer-by fills at pleasure, is filled with such wine as in England I had never heard of, now the wine is more important than the jar when one is thirsty, therefore I conclude, cousin mine, that it is not the person who danced with you at Mansfield St. that writes to you today from Persia--Yet there are dregs, English sediments at the bottom of my sherbet, and perhaps they flavour it more than I think. Anyhow I remember you as a dear person in a former existence, whom I should like to drag into this one and to guide whose spiritual coming I will draw paths in ink. And others there are whom I remember not with regret but as one might remember people one knew when one was an inhabitant of Mars 20 centuries ago. How big the world is, how big and how wonderful. It comes to me as ridiculously presumptuous that I should dare to carry my little personality half across it and boldly attempt to measure with it things for which it has no table of measurements that can possibly apply. So under protest I write to you of Persia: I am not me, that is my only excuse...

.....

Ah, we have no hospitality in the west and no manners. I felt ashamed almost before the beggars in the street--they wear their rags with a better grace than I my most becoming habit...Is it not rather refreshing to the spirit to lie in a hammock strung between the plane trees of a Persian garden and read the poems of Hafiz--* in the original mark you!--out of a book curiously bound in stamped leather which you have bought in the bazaars. 38

Until almost the end of her visit in Persia there is found in these letters a rhythm, a delicacy, and a grace which is found in the letters of no other period. Her spirit is radiant. Further comment on her method of ex-

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38 Ibid., pp. 25-7.

* See p. 58.

pressing events of this time are found in the chapter, "Gertrude Bell as a Descriptive Artist", and in the chapter, "Gertrude Bell as a Story Teller", which discusses Persian Pictures.

Such an exalted feeling cannot be maintained for ever. A marked change is noted in the letter to her father written from Gulahek, July 30, 1892.

> I am in a panic lest you should never receive the letter I wrote to Mother on the 25th telling you that I was engaged to Mr. Cadogan--if you have not this will come with rather a shock! And in case you have I think I had better send you another notice of it by this bag. We all wrote to you by the post of the 25th--oh I hope you received all our letters but who is to know? and I begged that you would come out yourself to fetch me in the autumn or send Maurice, so that some way I might come home. I would much rather not stay here all the winter with all this unsettled, but of course if I can't be brought home, why I can't...
> .....
> I feel dreadfully worried by all these plans and by the possibility of having to stay here through the winter. But one must look things in the face though one does happen to be in love with someone!...Mr. Cadogan wrote to you on the 25th and also to his father whom you will want to see before you leave England. I wrote to Caroline who knows him very well and will therefore be a help to you--but please tell no-one else at all except Grandpapa while things are all so vague. 39

Uncertainty and suspense are foremost in the letter to her step-mother, September 12, 1892, six weeks after telling about her engagement. The former strong, deter-

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39 Elsa Richmond, editor, The Earlier Letters of Gertrude Bell, pp. 313, 314.

mined, self-confident young woman here cries out for parental sympathy and understanding.

> To-day or tomorrow I hope I shall get the much wished for letters from you and Papa. It is such a comfort to think that from now onwards one will have your letters to help me. I am longing to be with you but with every day that passes the dread of going grows and grows. Nothing could be much more unsatisfactory than this and yet I know that when I look back upon it I shall think I must have been happy because after all I had so much. But oh those miserable hours of wondering and straining one's eyes to see across weeks and continents--it's harder to wait than to do anything else in the world isn't it. No, it's hardest to go, almost unbearable and just not quite because you are at the end of this weary journey. And though I long to know, I am so afraid and there is so much at stake, that if it were left to me to choose, perhaps I might put it off and off, the possible sorrow being too great a risk to run. Thank heaven it isn't left to me but in your wise hands. I believe I'm forgetting how to be brave which I always thought I was--I shall remember again presently...Mr. Cadogan also wants us to go by Odessa, where again I think he is right. 40

Three days later she wrote again to her step-mother and in writing gained a partial release of pent up emotions. The crisis had approached its zenith--the crisis that was to be the dominant factor in deciding her future life. A matter as personal as this can best be told in Gertrude's own words.

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40 Ibid., pp. 334-5.

I have just written a long letter to Papa, but I must write to you also to tell you how infinitely comforting your first letter was. You understand so well, as indeed I knew you would, but even when one expects it the joy of it when it comes is no less. Yes, I care more than I can say and I'm not afraid of being poor or even of having to wait, though waiting is harder than I thought it would be at first. For one doesn't realise at first how one will long for the constant companionship and the blessed security of being married, but now that I am going away I realise it wildly. One really ought not to be engaged very long, it's not a very good plan. It seems to me to combine all the disadvantages of strain and mutual forbearance with none of the advantages of being married. But I may be taking a gloomy view perhaps; you see our position is very difficult and we are very unhappy. You must not think I am losing heart at all at the end of two months; it's almost worth while to know how infinitely good and kind and gentle Mr. Cadogan can be and anything is worth while that gives us the least chance of marrying one another.
And in the middle of all one's heart burning comes your dear letter. I wonder if you can possibly know how much it was to me. I wonder why you care so much about me--no, I don't wonder. I only accept it as the thing at the back of all one's life that makes everything bearable and possible. 41

The last letter from Persia was written from Gulahek, September 18, 1892, to her step-mother. Another chapter in Gertrude Bell's life closed .

> I can't tell you how I long for these days to be over when I feel the least sensible, or how I cling to them when I don't. It's only the bitter pleasure of being within reach, for we have not seen much of each other since we came back from Lar, and especially since my father's letter we don't feel that we have any right to meet...The

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41 Ibid., pp. 338-9.

thing I can bear least is that you or Papa should ever think anything of him which is not noble and gentle and good. That is all of him that I have ever known, I wish I could pass on my impression to you untouched and unspoiled, the side of him he has shown a woman when he loved her--do you remember Browning.* He quoted that to me once long ago and I wondered vaguely if it were more than a form of words. Everything I think and write brings us back to things we have spoken of together, sentences of his that come flashing like sharp words; you see for the last three months nothing I have done or thought has not had him in it, the essence of it all.

It's very horrid of me to write like this, it will only make you sorry quite uselessly and needlessly. You must not think for a moment that if I could choose I would not have it all over again, impatience and pain and the going which is yet to come. It is worth it all, more than worth it. Some people live all their lives and never have this wonderful thing; at least I have known it and have seen life's possibilities suddenly open in front of me--only one may cry just a little when one has to turn away and take up the old narrow life again; I am so foolishly hopeful, not because I see any good way through our difficulties, but only because it is so impossible to believe that one cannot have the one big thing one wants more than life when one has had all the little things one didn't really care much about. But I know that's a bad argument! I wish I could go on and on writing to you, it's so consoling and I hate coming away from you and back to this place which is full of memories and things which are past, past. But you must have had enough of me--no not that, I can't call for more of your sympathy than you will give, can I? Oh Mother, Mother. 42

In December, 1892, Gertrude returned to England, but the next month found her in Switzerland and Italy with Mary Talbot, one of her friends at Lady Margaret Hall.

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42 Ibid., pp. 339-40.

* See p. 82.

She accompanied her father to Algiers in April, 1893, returned to Switzerland, and then joined her brother Maurice in Weimar, Germany. Then, for almost three years Gertrude remained in England. Unfortunately none of the letters from this time have been published.

For the third time the Lascelles invited Gertrude to join them in a capital city. This time they were residing at the British Embassy in Berlin. January 22, 1897, she shared with her half-sister a memorable experience.

> Dearest Elsa,
> I made my bow to the 'Kaiser Paar' on Wednesday. It was a very fine show. We drove to the Schloss in the glass coach and were saluted by the guard when we arrived. We felt very swell! Then we waited for a long time and with all the other dips. in a room next to the throne room and at about 8 the doors were thrown open. We all hastily arranged one another's trains and marched in procession while the band played the march out of Lohengrin. The Emperor and Empress were standing on a dais at the end of the room and we walked through a sort of passage made by rows and rows of pages dressed in pink. The 'Allerhochst' looked extremely well in a red uniform--I couldn't look at the Empress much as I was busy avoiding Aunt Mary's train. She introduced me and then stood aside while I made two curtseys. Then I wondered what the dickens I should do next, but Aunt Mary made me a little sign to go out behind her, so I 'enjambéd' her train and fled! 43

Soon afterward Gertrude wrote to her step-mother about attending a performance of Henry IV and being en-

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43 Florence Bell, editor, Letters of Gertrude Bell, I:40-1.

tertained by the Emperor and Empress at the end of the second act. The last sentence is particularly interesting. Gertrude was accompanied by her cousin, Florence Lascelles. They were conducted to

> a little tiny room behind the Emperor's box where we found the 'Kaiser Paar' sitting and having tea. We made deep curtseys and kissed the Empress's hand, and then we all sat down, F. next to the Emperor and I next to the Empress and they gave us tea and cakes. It was rather formidable though they were extremely kind. The Emperor talked nearly all the time; he tells us that no plays of Shakespeare were ever acted in London and that we must have heard tell that it was only the Germans who had really studied or really understood Shakespeare. One couldn't contradict an Emperor, so we said we had always been told so. 44

At the end of December, 1897, Gertrude and her brother Maurice left England for a six-month trip round the world. As usual letters to her parents were written frequently, but because most of the places visited had been described often by other travellers, her step-mother omitted these letters in the collection which she edited. In the spring of 1899 Gertrude went to Greece for the first time and was delighted to meet Dr. David Hogarth,* brother of her Oxford friend Janet Hogarth previously mentioned in this chapter, and Professor Dorpfeld with whom she discussed ancient Athens. In company with her half-

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44 Ibid., p. 42.

* See pp. 78, 103, 119.

brother Hugo, and Sir Frank and Florence Lascelles, Gertrude went to Bayreuth in August and later in the month went by herself to Switzerland where she climbed the Meije. A detailed account of the ascent is contained in a lengthy letter written at La Grave in August 28, 1899. By the middle of September she had returned to England.

A quarter century of letter writing has ended. She was now a woman of thirty-one who had the distinction of having earned a first in history at Oxford, who had travelled extensively, who had published a travel book, Safar Nameh now known as Persian Pictures, and a volume Poems from the Divan of Hafiz which she had translated from the Persian. She was a linguist, she had been entertained by royalty, she had participated in a gay whirl of society life. From a material standpoint there was nothing lacking to make her contented and comfortable. Dame Fortune had richly endowed her. Splendid as all these things had been, Gertrude knew what it meant to enjoy the good things of this world, to have loved and lost, and yet she realized that without a goal and a desire to perform satisfactorily her role in life, she would never be happy. One who possessed such boundless energy and intellectual curiosity, who loved people, who felt deeply, who maintained a strong, independent spirit, who was imaginative, could not continue the old type of life indefinitely. Seven years had elapsed

since she had been introduced to the wonders of the East, years of varied pursuits, but in a still small voice the Orient called her to return, to identify herself with it.

Gertrude's departure for Jerusalem in November, 1899, began the second quarter century of letter writing, similar in some respects to the previous one, but with purpose, stated objectives, and a mature outlook. An inner compulsion, an irresistable force drew her to the Middle East to execute alone the plans she and Henry Cadogan had made for travelling "the length and breadth of Persia and Mesopotamia and Arabia, exploring, excavating, studying the tribal customs and languages". 45

It has been stated that Gertrude's self-imposed exile was in desolate countries. Perhaps to the uninitiated they would have been desolate, but to her they issued a challenge to discover their secrets of ancient civilizations--their governments, art, architecture, religion, and social codes. Untold treasures lay buried within their boundaries. Along with the past to be revealed to the present and recorded for the future was the problem of understanding the current situation and interpreting it to the western world. A complete revelation was an impossibility, but Gertrude did much to continue the work of predecessors and to open new fields for successors.

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45 Ronald Bodley and Lorna Hearst, Gertrude Bell, New York, the Macmillan Company, 1940, p. 48.

Significant is the fact that Gertrude arrived in Jerusalem during the last month of the nineteenth century, studied Arabic, and made arrangements for desert journeys. When the twentieth century began its course, Gertrude was prepared to start a different life. Little did she dream that she was destined to become a potent influence in determining the nature of the Arabic influence with England and France.

A few pictures from this time until 1907 will serve as guide posts for a study of the development of her thought and activities. The letters from 1907-1914 continue in a similar vein, but each year she shared more and more of her archaeological experiences as they absorbed an ever increasing amount of her time. No quotations from her letters of this period will be given, because all references to ruins, ancient cities, and people she met are adequately dealt with in her travel books (see Chapter Three). Few, if any, descriptions from either of these periods will be quoted as sufficient examples for purposes of comparison are given in Chapter Two.

At the end of the first month in Jerusalem, January, 1900, Gertrude wrote somewhat despondently to her father after a walk one day with Ferideh, the Syrian girl who was teaching her Arabic.

> I should like to mention that there are five words for a wall and 36 ways of forming the plural. And the rest is like unto it. 46

A different note was sounded in the letter of February 18, 1900, to her step-mother, a note in which joy and permanency were expressed. It was rather prophetic, too.

> I have been reading the story of Aladdin to myself for pleasure, without a dictionary! It is not very difficult, I must confess, still it's ordinary Arabic, not for beginners, and I find it too charming for words...I look forward to a time when I shall just read Arabic--like that! and then for my histories! I really think that these months here will permanently add to the pleasure and interest of the rest of my days! 47

While residing in the Promised Land Gertrude visited the scenes of Biblical stories, but her interest was archaeological rather than religious. She could not properly be identified as an unbeliever, but rather as one who was seeking that for which she could find no satisfactory expression in the organized religion of her day. Religious tolerance was a virtue with her.

> At 7 it began to rain but I nevertheless started off for the top of Siagheh, which is Pisgah...I could see from it two of the places from which Balaam is supposed to have attempted the cursing of Israel and behind me lay the third, Nebo--Naba in

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46 Florence Bell, editor, Letters of Gertrude Bell, I:62

47 Ibid., p. 64.

> Arabic. The Moses legend is a very touching one. I stood on the top of Pisgah and looked out over the wonderful Jordan valley and the blue sea and the barren hills, veiled and beautified by cloud and thought it was one of the most pathetic stories that have ever been told. 48

On Gertrude's second round-the-world trip, 1902-3, she was accompanied by her half-brother, Hugo. Several quotations from letters of this period will compare and contrast these experiences with those of previous trips, especially those in Europe and the Middle East. The arrival in India was described in the letter dated December 12, 1902.

> Our servant met us at the quay; he seems a most agreeable party and he's going to teach us Hindustani. 49

Later that same month she wrote briefly about their progress.

> We have become almost unrecognisably Indian, wear pith helmets--and oh! my Hindustani is remarkably fluent! We no longer turn a hair when we see a cow trotting along in front of a dog-cart and we scarcely hold our heads an inch higher when we are addressed as "Your Highness". 50

As further evidence of her linguistic achievement was the sentence in the letter of January 18, 1903, while en route to Delhi by train.

> My thrice blessed Hindustani, though it doesn't reach to any flowers of

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48 Ibid., pp. 69-70.
49 Ibid., p. 152.
50 Ibid., p. 153.

> speech, carries us through our travels admirably and here we were able to stop where no one has a word of English, without any inconvenience. 51

In the same letter Gertrude gave instructions for riding an elephant.* With more practice she might have become as expert in this method of travel as she was with horses and camels.

> An elephant is far the most difficult animal to sit that I have ever been on. You feel at first rather as if you were in a light boat lying at anchor in seas a little choppy after a capful of wind--but the sensation soon wears off and you learn to dispose yourself with ease and grace upon the hoodah, and above all not to seize hold of the side bars when the elephant sits down, for they are only hooked and jerk out, landing you, probably (as they nearly landed me) in the dust a good many feet below. We soon discovered that the great tip for good elephantship is to grasp the front bar the moment you get on, for he gets up from in front (and very quickly too for he doesn't like kneeling at all) and the problem is how not to fall over his tail. 52

February 22, 1903, on board ship in the Bay of Bengal, Gertrude wrote to her father addressing him according to the accepted manner in the land where she was travelling.

> Thanks to your good wishes, we have hitherto escaped from the 96 diseases, the 24 dangers and the 11 calamities. (I'm commencing Buddhist, you see, before I get to Rangoon, and this is the proper Buddhist way of beginning a letter. 53

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51 Ibid., p. 155.
52 Loc., cit.
53 Ibid., p. 157.
* See p. 38.

Gertrude wasted no time on her journeys. The following example is typical of how she spent to advantage the time she was riding on trains.

> I spent my time in the train learning Japanese so that when we arrived at Miyajima I was able to explain that we wanted to leave our heavy baggage at the station! 54

From Lake Louise in Canada, June 30, 1903, she wrote that she was climbing the Rocky Mountains and that at Glacier she had met three Swiss guides she knew from the Oberland.

The round-the-world trip gave her new questions to ponder and opened new possibilities, but after a visit with her family in England she returned to Syria in January, 1905. February 27 she wrote from Damascus about her status in that country.

> I find the Government here has been in an agony of nervousness all the time I was in the Jebel Druze! They had three telegrams a day from Salkhad about me and they sat and wondered what I was going to do next. The governor here has sent me a message to say would I honour him by coming to see him, so I've answered graciously that I counted on the pleasure of making his acquaintance. An official lives in this hotel. He spent the evening talking to me and offering to place the whole of the organisation of Syria at my disposal. He also tried to find out all my views on Druze and Bedouin affairs, but he did not get much forrader there. I have become a Person in Syria! 55

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54 Ibid., p. 163.
55 Ibid., p. 197.

Pride in her archaeological work was expressed in the letter from Damascus, March 3, 1905.

> I went to tea with the American archaeologists...One of them, Dr. Littman, who is an old acquaintance of mine, is a real learned man and I won his esteem by presenting him with a Nabathaean inscription which he had not got, and one in the strange script of the Safah, which he said I had copied without a fault. 56

From Kalaat el Muddih, March 19, 1905, she wrote about an ancient city and told part of its history.

> Apamea, one of the many and a most beautiful place, standing on a great bluff over the Orontes valley. Seleucus Nicator built it and a fine thing he must have made of it, for there is near a square mile of fallen columns and temple walls and heaven knows what besides. Now think how Greece and the East were fused by Alexander's conquests. A Greek king, with his capital on the Euphrates, builds a city on the Orontes and calls it after his Persian wife, and what manner of people walked down its colonnades, keeping touch with Athens and with Babylon? That is the proposition in all the art hereabouts. 57

One of the delightful variations in Gertrude's letters is the use of conversation. Interesting is the one in the letter written from El Barch, March 20, 1905. On a recent journey she had been accompanied by several men. One of them began talking about his two wives, eight sons, and four daughters. Gertrude congratulated him on his family.

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56 Ibid., p. 197.
57 Ibid., p. 204.

> Yes, he said, but Wallahi! his second wife had cost him a great deal of money. "Yes?" said I. "May God make it Yes upon thee, oh lady! I took her from her husband and by God (may his name be praised and exalted!) I had to pay him 1,000 piasters (about 10 Napoleons) and to the judge 1,500." This was too much for Mahmud's sense of decency. "Wallahi!" said he, "that was the deed of a Nosairiyeh or an Ismailiyeh!" "Does a Muslim take away a man's wife? It is forbidden." "He was my enemy" replied Yunis in explanation. "By God and the Prophet of God! there was enmity between him and me even unto death." "Had she children?" said Mahmud, "Ey wallah" (i.e. of course), said Yunis, a little put out by Mahmud's approval. "By the face of God!" exclaimed Mahmud, still more outraged, "it was the deed of a heathen." "I paid 1,000 piasters to the man, and 1,500 to the judge," objected Yunis--and here I put an end to the further discussion of the merits of the case by asking whether the woman had liked being carried off. "Without doubt," said Yunis, "it was her wish." 58

Stronger and stronger became the evidence of Gertrude's intense happiness in the Middle East. From Konia, April 9, 1905, she wrote to her cousin Florence Lascelles.

> What a country this is! I fear I shall spend the rest of my life travelling in it. Race after race, one on top of the other, the whole land strewn with the mighty relics of them. We in Europe are accustomed to think that civilization is an advancing flood that has gone steadily forward since the beginning of time. I believe we are wrong. It is a tide that ebbs and flows, reaches a high water mark and turns back again. Do you think that from age to age it rises higher than before? I wonder--and I doubt. 59

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58 Ibid., p. 206.
59 Ibid., pp. 209-10.

By this time the list of languages which Gertrude spoke well enough for travelling purposes was impressive, but the end was not yet in sight. She told about a new one in the letter of April 18, 1905.

> The chief interest of this journey is that I find myself talking nothing but Turkish. It's the greatest lark...I've learnt piles to-day. I started off this morning with a soldier who could speak nothing else and I had to make the best of it. 60

Two sentences in a lighter vein appeared in the letter from Karaman, May 7.

> I wonder what the Kaimmakam thinks of the hats of English travellers of distinction. I have worn mine for 4 months in all weathers--you can scarcely tell which is the crown of it and which the brim. 61

From Binbirklisse, May 13, 1905, was mentioned an interpretation of the place name which she used several years later as a title for a book. Binbirklisse

> means The Thousand and one Churches and the learned have tried to identify it with the classic Barala, but as then the learned knew nothing of Barala but the name, it doesn't seem to me to matter much whether the identification is correct or no. It lies at the foot of the Kara Dagh, a great isolated mountain arising abruptly out of the plain and whatever it was in classic times, it must have been a very important early Christian city for it is full of churches dating back Strzygowski thinks to pre-Constantine times. 62

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60 Ibid., p. 213.
61 Ibid., p. 218.
62 Ibid., p. 220.

On May 16, 1905, Gertrude met Sir William Ramsay at Konia. This meeting led to their collaboration on the volume, The Thousand and One Churches, which was published in 1909.

In October, 1905, Gertrude was in Paris studying with Salomon Reinach again. In December she and her father took a trip through southwestern Europe and northern Africa. There are no letters from 1906. She was in England that year and it was then that she was writing The Desert and the Sown.

During January, 1907, Gertrude was in Cairo with her father and Hugo. In April she was back in Asia Minor.

Serious study is indicated in the April 12, 1907, letter from Miletus. She was determined that her knowledge of this era of history was obtained directly. She sought to learn what even the recognized authority had failed to discover.

> Often when one sets out on a journey one travels by all the roads according to the latest maps, one reaches all the places of which the history books speak. Duly one rises early and turns one's face towards new countries, carefully one looks and laboriously one tries to understand, and for all one's trouble one might as well have stayed behind and read a few big archaeology books. But I would have you know that's not the way I have done it this time. I said to myself: I will go and see the Greece of Asia, the Greece Grote didn't

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> know. And I have found it. The seas and the hills are full of legend and the valleys are scattered over with ruins of the great rich Greek cities. Here is a page of history that one sees with the eye and that enters into the mind as no book can relate it. 63

Gertrude enjoyed mountain climbing in Switzerland where she gained an enviable reputation for first ascents of several peaks and ascents of others by new routes. The letters dealing with this subject present a contrast to the others in this period 1900-1907, but they are evidence of yet another accomplishment and interest by this woman who possessed such great vitality and energy and daring.

Empire Builder

Gertrude Bell was a product of the period of empire expansion. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century imperialism waxed strong and continued to mount in a few places even after the golden jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897. The years Gertrude spent in the Middle East from 1899-1914 travelling, exploring, studying, and making the acquaintance of numerous tribal chieftans and government officials were passed in the gratification of personal quest for knowledge and fulfilment of a plan adopted in Persia in 1892. The outbreak of the World War altered the situation. From this time forward Gertrude became an active empire

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63 Ibid., pp. 228-9.

builder. It so happens that the initials for Great Britain and Gertrude Bell are both G.B. To many desert people the two names were synonymous. Her ability to think like the natives without giving them any thought that she represented a superior group of people won for her their esteem which made it possible for her to render valuable service to Great Britain in the trying days of the war and the years of reconstruction.

After returning to England in 1914 Gertrude offered her services to the British government and commendably filled positions in Paris and Boulogne before being sent to the Intelligence Service of the General Staff in the Near East at Cairo. From Cairo she was sent to Delhi to discuss eastern problems with the viceroy, Lord Hardinge, who had been one of her friends in Bucharest. Later she was transferred to Basrah and finally to Bagdad which became her home for the last decade of her life.

With T. E. Lawrence and Dr. David Hogarth,* two pro-Arab Englishmen, she attended the peace conference in Paris in 1919. Gertrude knew that the problems of the Middle East were relegated to the background at the conference, but she pressed the Arab claims and reminded the British of their promise and the Arab assistance which had helped to win the struggle. Astutely, she then went to the French government and presented facts regarding the solution of

* See pp. 78, 90, 119.

the questions involving both the English and French governments.

The British representatives in the countries of the Near and Middle East were summoned by the new Secretary of State for the Colonies, Winston Churchill, to a conference in Cairo in February, 1921. Again T. E. Lawrence and Gertrude met. Each was deeply interested in the welfare of this part of the world which meant so much to both, but they approached the matter from different angles. Gertrude had the faculty for getting along exceptionally well with people and for being practical in ideas and application. She lived to see many of her plans and aspirations for the rebirth of Arab nations materialize. In several respects the Cairo conference was successful: it approved the candidature of Faisal as king of Iraq (Gertrude's main objective), Mr. Churchill took to England an understanding of the problems facing the British, and as a result granted the administrators in these countries more authority.

As Oriental Secretary working directly under Sir Percy Cox, the High Commissioner, her task was to pave the way for him. All her accumulated knowledge of desert tribes, including their etiquette, outlook on life, philosophy, and attitude toward European countries, was employed in helping to establish the kingdom of Iraq. She was a veritable liason agent.

In 1923 Gertrude was appointed honorary director of antiquities for the Iraq, a position she held until her death. The establishment of the museum in Bagdad provided her the opportunity for continuing her work in archaeology. She supervised excavations, the building of the museum, and the arrangement of all objects for display.

Even though Gertrude was exceptionally busy during the last twelve years of her life, she continued to write informative letters to her parents at frequent intervals. Although a debt of gratitude is owed Lady Bell for editing the letters, it is regretted by historians and political observers particularly that the work was done so soon after Gertrude's death. The deletions in the letters before this period leave no yearning on the part of the reader because Miss Bell is still an independent traveller, but the moment she joined the ranks of Britain's empire builder's, the omissions regarding personalities and government policy persistently tantalize him. How interesting today would be her remarks about Winston Churchill, Edmund Ironside, and the Big Four at the Paris peace conference! This deficiency, however, serves the purpose of compelling the inquisitive reader to seek other sources dealing with this period.

In construction these letters are essentially the same as those of the previous periods: chatty, simple, and

direct. Through all of them there appears the feminine interest in clothes, solicitations for the welfare of her parents, her brothers and sisters and their families. The keynote is sincerity. Subject matter includes accounts of the visits to Bagdad of her father, Elsa and her family, and Molly's eldest son; vacation trips on one of which she retrod the memory-laden places of the Persia she knew when accompanied by Henry Cadogan in 1892; many references to her work, her household and entertainment, the latest books and plays she had read, her recreations, and last but not least the vagaries of the weather. Clarity was maintained throughout. Her approach was a happy one. Outstanding is the interest expressed in people regardless of color, creed, or station in life. Occasional bits of conversation, somewhat in the manner of Boswell, add humor to the missives. Quickly noticed is the fact that in the midst of alien communities she practiced with only slight modifications her English customs and mode of living. Organization in the letters is mediocre.

Gertrude found relaxation in swimming which she continued at least until the age of fifty-six according to several amusing accounts dealing with the changing styles of bathing suits which were sent her from England. Riding and duck shooting were sports in which she engaged with

government officials of Iraq. She who had utilized many forms of transportation experienced her first airplane ride in April, 1922, from Bagdad to Ziza. Enthusiastic is a mild way to state her approval.

The climate of Bagdad was hard on Gertrude even though she had a strong constitution. Seldom did she write a letter in which there was no mention of the weather so different from that in England.

During the last visit to her homeland in the summer of 1925 efforts were made to persuade her to remain in order to recuperate fully from the years of strenuous work in a difficult climate. While considering the proposition her friend from Oxford days, Janet Hogarth (Mrs. W. L. Courtney),* suggested that she stand for parliament. Significant is the letter opposing this plan. The objections were stated plainly and emphasized Gertrude's oneness with the Middle East.

> I have not, and I have never had the quickness of thought and speech which could fit the clash of parliament. I can do my own job in a way and explain why I think that the right way of doing it, but I don't cover a wide enough field and my natural desire is to slip back into the comfortable arena of archaeology and history and to take only an onlooker's interest in the contest over actual affairs. 64

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64 Florence Bell, editor, Letters of Gertrude Bell, II:736.

* See pp. 69, 78, 118.

In October Gertrude had returned to Bagdad. She was appreciated.

> It has been so wonderful coming back here. For the first two days I could not do any work at all in the office, because of the uninterrupted streams of people who came to see me. "Light of our eyes," they said, "Light of our eyes," as they kissed my hands and made almost absurd demonstrations of delight and affection. It goes a little to the head, you know--I almost began to think I were a Person. 65

Seven months before her death Gertrude wrote to her cousin Sylvia. The last sentence expresses an idea she had mentioned several times previously.

> If it weren't for love and friendship the world would be a bitter place, but thank God for them, and I will try to make my corner warmer and kinder. I feel I have so much more than I deserve. 66

Interesting from a historical viewpoint is the next selection when considered in the light of the intervening sixteen years. It would be a pleasant pastime to speculate on what Miss Bell's attitude would be regarding Iraq were she alive in 1942. On January 13, 1926, she wrote to her father that she had been

> writing an article for the Encyclopaedia * on the Iraq. The article would have been better if I had not been forced to compress so fearfully. Even as it is, I don't think it is so bad, but it has to be vetted by the Colonial office and per-

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65 Ibid., p. 739.
66 Ibid., p. 745.
* See p. 6.

> haps they will take the spark of life out of it. I'm now embarked on the Annual Report for the League*...
> The Iraq cabinet has accepted the new treaty and I don't think there will be any difficulty about it in our Parliament...
> You need not be alarmed about our 25 years' mandate. If we go on as fast as we've gone for the last two years, Iraq will be a member of the League before five or six years have passed, and our direct responsibility will have ceased. It's almost incredible how the country is settling down. I look back to 1921 or 1922 and can scarcely believe that so great a change has taken place...It's all being so interesting. Archaeology and my museum are taking a bigger and bigger place. 67

In the letter one week later is a statement expressing her satisfaction with the progress of the government.

> You will please note that the Iraq is the only eastern country which pulls together with Great Britain and the reason is that we have honestly tried out here to do the task that we said we were going to do, i.e., create an independent Arab state. 68

Less than a month before her death Gertrude wrote to her step-mother, not as the usual Gertrude, but as a middle-aged woman fatigued yet unwilling to relinquish an incompleted task.

> I wish I were coming home this summer but I feel sure that when I leave I shall not want to come back here and I would like to finish this job first--

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67 Ibid., pp. 747-8.
68 Ibid., p. 748.
* See p. 6.

> indeed, I feel that I must finish it, there being no one else. But it is too lonely, my existence here; one can't go on for ever being alone. At least, I don't feel I can. 69

One of the last letters Gertrude wrote was to her father, July 2, 1926, explaining that she could not leave for a much needed rest.

> You do realise, don't you, that I feel bound to fulfil the undertakings I gave when, at my instance the Iraq Government allowed excavations to be begun 4 years ago. The thing has grown and grown--it can't do otherwise...All the plans that were begun before...are now bearing fruit and I'm rather overwhelmed by them. Anyhow, father, give me a little time to get things into some kind of order and then if you want me to take what leave I can I will do so. 70

One-half century of letter writing, fifty-two years to be exact, was terminated on July 12, 1926, when Gertrude Bell died peacefully in her sleep in her Bagdad home. She was buried with the honors of a military funeral in Bagdad where the ten most important years of her life had been replete with work for the people she loved and the cause she espoused.

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69 Ibid., p. 770.
70 Ibid., p. 773.

Comparison

Among the more prominent letter writers prior to 1700 were Cicero, Pliny, Sidonius Apolinaris, Dante, Petrarch, Machiavelli, Erasmus, Luther, James Howell, and Dorothy Osborne.

The great age of letter writing was from the end of the Renaissance to the end of the eighteenth century. According to Saintsbury the eighteenth century was the "very palmiest day of the art"[71] of letter writing. "It was the 'letter-writingest' of ages from almost every point of view."[72] In France one of the forms of literature most representative of the age was letter writing. Outstanding examples were the correspondence of Voltaire, Rousseau, and Madame de Stael. By some people Pope is considered the chief letter of the age in England. Saintsbury, however, selects three Englishmen for the century: Walpole, Gray, and Cowper. In fact, he considers Walpole "one of the best letter writers in the English language".[73]

Interesting English letter writers in the nineteenth century were Southey who was "perhaps the best letter writer among the four protagonists of the Romantic Revival,"[74] Landor, Byron, Shelley, Keats, and Chesterfield.

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71 George Saintsbury, A Letter Book, G. Bell and Sons, Limited, 1922, p. 12.
72 Ibid., p. 12.
73 Ibid., p. 33.
74 Ibid., p. 47.

What is Gertrude Bell's rank in the history of letter writing? What is her position among women letter writers? Where may she be classed among English letter writers? What is her place in the half-century 1874-1926?

In the history of letter writing Gertrude's letters do not equal those of Cicero, greatest of the ancient letter writers; nor those of Petrarch, most important of the Renaissance letter writers; nor yet those of Madame de Sévigné, the greatest woman letter writer of all time.

Among the English letter writers Gertrude Bell holds a high position in regard to breadth of subject matter, spontaneity, and conversational style. Few have travelled as extensively or have written letters over a comparable period of years. No English woman letter writer has lived a more exciting life. Competition in letter writing from Lady Hester Stanhope and Lady Anne Blunt, English predecessors in the Middle East, is non-existent.

In the half-century, 1874-1926, no letter writer can equal Gertrude's record for writing from so many different geographical locations, or scope of interest, to say nothing of the self-revelation of a forceful, dynamic woman who pursued her study of the Middle East when

that was not the fashionable thing to do--at the time when so-called worldly progress was being made elsewhere on the earth's surface. Spain lost her new world possessions in the Spanish-American war. In southern Africa the Boer war began in 1899--the year Gertrude went to the Middle East. Technical advancements were being made rapidly in western Europe and in North America.

Gertrude's letters are a kind of report, written not from a sense of duty or compulsion, but from a heart-felt desire to maintain as close contact as possible with her beloved parents. There are no literary pretensions in them. They simply record her activities, running the gamut from difficulty in obtaining the services of a cook who can really cook to being an advisor to a king, from being a round-the-world traveller to a representative at an international peace conference, from a mountain climber to a museum director, from a brilliant university student to a gracious hostess in an ancient capital, from a devoted big sister to an archaeologist.

Scattered throughout the letters are sentences expressing her philosophy of life. An element of good humor pervades them. Jokes on herself and choice bits of conversation lend variety from time to time.

Gertrude's outstanding characteristic was her great

love for people. She delighted to help them, to be of service to them. Not a recluse who sought satisfaction in living without human companionship, she enjoyed being in the midst of the throng performing her allotted task. Her faith in the goodness of humanity was maintained to the end. Much of her success was due to her inherent ability to get along well with people.

Her accomplishments were numerous. Hers was an active life, a strenuous life, a purposeful life. She had ideals, but more important, she knew how to pursue practical means to attain them. Gertrude Bell was a great woman. She lived nobly, executed well her mission in life, and died gloriously. Unconceited, she loved life and eagerly met and fulfilled her responsibilities.

The letters are not without grammatical errors. They are not masterpieces of composition from a narrowly literary standpoint. They are splendid examples of following the spirit rather than the law, for they are good-will messengers in times of peace and strife and they reveal international friendships and cooperation in movements.

She lived deeply, not hers the life of scratching the surface. Fortunately, she was neither ahead nor behind the times in which she lived, but in the vanguard with those who set the pace for the present and planned for the future. Readily she made adjustments.

Letters which reveal such a person give encouragement to future generations. No published letters of women writers between 1874-1926 give such a well-rounded picture of life in such a thrilling manner. True, she had advantages which were and are unavailable to many people, but instead of accepting them selfishly, she used them for the good of others. Simplicity and sincerity are the two magnets which draw the reader of Gertrude Bell's letters to her and hold him firmly in a vicarious friendship.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

As a descriptive artist Miss Bell was not outstanding despite the fact that Persian Pictures published in 1894 approached excellence. In subsequent works description receded to ordinary levels except for occasional passages in the letters which rose almost to the quality of that in Persian Pictures.

As a story teller Gertrude Bell was little more than mediocre. The Desert and the Sown published in 1907 and translated into German in 1908, and Amurath to Amurath published in 1911, travel books of a high order, contain numerous short stories and tales related with vigor, piquancy, and understanding. Palace and Mosque at Ukhaidir and Parts Two and Three of The Thousand and One Churches are primarily exposition. Accuracy and detail make them valuable for the archaeologist. Only a thread of story is maintained. Her one volume of verse, Poems from the Divan of Hafiz, published in 1897, was a translation from the Persian in which sensitivity and sympathy were dominant. This translation was more literal than the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, but it has not the "melody, profundity of thought, or wealth of imagery"[1] of her pre-

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1 Tom Peete Cross and Clement Tyson Goode, editors, Heath Readings in the Literature of England, New York, D.C. Heath & Co., 1927, p. 1362.

decessor, Edward Fitzgerald.

As a letter writer she was outstanding; not to be classed with Cicero, Petrarch, or Madame de Sévigné, but with James Howell and Dorothy Osborne of an earlier day in English letters, and above all other English letter writers during the half-century 1875-1925. Most of Miss Bell's letters were addressed to her father and step-mother to keep them acquainted with her activities during years of study, travel, and empire building. They are characterized by a deep sincerity, spontaneity, a charming air of informality, splendid conversational quality, valuable comments from a historic point of view on prominent contemporary people and events, an exceedingly wide range of subject matter, scientific and travel information about the relatively unknown Middle East, and self-revelation picturing her as a forerunner of the emancipated woman which emerged after the World War in western Europe and North America.

Miss Bell may be called a literary artist upon the strength of her letters, with support from her travel books, belonging not to the ranks of the world's greatest representatives of literature, but to the goodly company of established but not immortalized artists.

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