A NEW ART OF TRAVEL.

(An impression of Gertrude Lowthian Bell's books, "The Desert and the Sown" and "Amurath to Amurath."

THERE is a natural freemasonry among travellers. Even he whose journeying has been brief, and scarce beyond the borders of his native land, will nevertheless come home with a better knowledge, not of other places only, but of his own relation to his fellow-man; so little can the best-equipped carry with him, so much at every turn does he find himself in need of the knowledge and goodwill of those he meets.

No amount of couriers or maps will relieve the traveller of dependence upon those he goes amongst. The situation in which he finds himself, abroad, sets in a high, clear light certain facts that only the stay-at-home may disregard.

I am moved to these reflections by a journey I have just made under conduct of the person whose name is at the head of this paper. The lands through which she led me were as strange to me as they could be to any pilgrim. That they are strange no longer, that I know my way now to new sources of beauty and refreshment, that I come home with a sense of exhilaration so keen, bringing memories of adventure in the desert and *Arabian Nights* entertainment in Khans and Palaces, I owe to the two volumes named in my sub-title.

Now, the world is yet more full of books than the earth's surface is of roads and bye-paths and blind alleys. "Show me the way," says one traveller. "What shall I read?" says another.

In the name, then, of that confessed freemasonry I am constrained to constitute myself on this occasion a kind of guide-post.

I am here to say: This is the way—and a right good way it is.

The journey in *The Desert and the Sown* begins where so much else began, at Jerusalem—with a ride round the walls of the Holy City on a stormy February morning. Is your ardour chilled by the strong west wind that comes sweeping in from the Mediterranean? The leader of the expedition says, "No one with life in his body could stay in on such a day." The alternative to "staying in" is to set forth on a journey of many weeks over mountain, river and desert in a land asserted by the local authorities, and reported by special correspondents to *The Times*, to be unsafe for the European traveller. At dawn the muleteers Miss Bell brought with her from Beyrout had been

sent forward with tents and a month's supplies. The only one of her servants with her at the start is Mikhail, native of the Lebanon, engaged as cook, upon the recommendation of "not caring twopence whether he lives or whether he is killed."

That qualification sets the note.

The conversation of this desert *chef* would seem to bear out his "character." He tells his new employer how with his last he was shipwrecked on Lake Van: "We were as near death as a beggar to poverty, but your excellency knows a man can die but once."

And so, past groups of Russian pilgrims to the Mount of Olives, these two gallop down the road that winds through the wilderness of Judæa. They escape out of those slime pits of Genesis to catch up with the caravan on the slope of the last hill which overlooks Jordan valley and the Dead Sea—"backed by the misty steeps of Moab." The first halt is by the Holy River, near what Miss Bell calls "the most inspiring piece of architecture in the world."

Now we have heard that, amongst other things, Miss Bell has been twice round the world. She has visited

> "The awful ruins of the days of old:
> Athens and Tyre and Balbec, and the waste
> Where stood Jerusalem, the fallen towers
> Of Babylon, the eternal pyramids,
> Memphis and Thebes. . . ."

We are given, therefore, some measure of what lies before us when we hear that no one of these other wonders is so inspiring as—a wooden bridge across the River Jordan, "because it is the Gate of the Desert." In this tremendous neighbourhood the tents are pitched that first night, and a bonfire lit of tamarisk and willow. In the light of it one of the little handful who shares the solitude of the Turkish toll-taker, dances and lifts his voice out of the babel of Syrian dialect to tell the stranger the latest gossip of the desert.

As by Jordan Bridge you are prepared in some sort for the desert, so are you promptly given a measure of the human experience that lies before you. Your acquaintance in *The Desert and the Sown* ranges, even in these early hours, from a ragged and renegade Arab recruit, to persons of consideration, like the family at Salt. The region where they dwell on the hem of the desert, has been famed, you are told, since the fourteenth century for its gardens. Not only in the matter of grapes and apricots would the ancient order seem still to be upheld. A magnificent old man in full Arab dress comes out to meet the stranger, who had been commended to his good offices by his kinsman. Habîb

Fāris takes the horse by the bridle; he, and no other, he declares, shall offer the lady hospitality. In the guest chamber, where floor and divan are covered with thick carpets, she is soon established before an excellent supper. Others of the family (one she calls "an old acquaintance") come in to "honour themselves" with an evening of talk. "God forbid," says she, "the honour is mine." And so they seat themselves to drink the bitter black coffee of the Arabs, which is better than any nectar. The cup is handed with "deign to accept," you pass it back empty, murmuring "May you live!" As you sip, someone ejaculates, "A double health," and you reply, "Upon your heart."

Presently she introduces her business: How was she to elude the vigilance of the authorities and make her way to the Druze mountains?

It is hers to tell that story, and all that befell in the circuitous route she follows to Damascus, turning aside wherever there were castles or ruined villages to inspect, or sheikhs to gossip with over the coffee cups.

From Damascus she makes her way to Heliopolis, skirting anti-Lebanon to Homs, then with a wide detour westward to the Nosairiyyeh, and so back to the Orontes at Hama; thence northward to Aleppo, and after that following an irregular course westward, by way of Antioch, to the sea. When in a tea-shop of Damascus she calls for her score, the red-bearded Persian *patron* answers: "Your Excellency is known to us. For you there is never anything to pay." At Serjilla, Sheikh Yunis presents her with a palace and its adjacent tomb, that she may live and die in his neighbourhood.

Small wonder when, all unwilling, she left unvisited that mysterious castle east of the Ruhbeh and the Sheikh of Ghiath had said, "When you next return, oh lady——" she answered promptly, "Yes, when I return."

Her new book[1] shows how she kept the spirit of that pact, and how she did much more.

The advance made in the volume just published is one of the most interesting things about it. *Amurath to Amurath* is not only better written. It is better thought. It is more than a spirited record of wandering in the East interspersed with random notes on archæology. The traveller comes home from her last five months in the cities and waste-places of Syria and Mesopotamia with an archæological feather in her cap that alone would proclaim her journey memorable.

Miss Bell has been the first to make a scientifically-ordered report of that castle-fortress in the desert which, on first seeing its

(1) Published by William Heinemann, Bedford Street, London.

vast mass against the sky-line, she took for a natural feature of the landscape. She, and now the learned world as well, have come to know it for the finest example of Sassanian architecture which has yet been discovered.

"Of all the wonderful experiences that have fallen my way," she says, "the first sight of Kheidir is the most memorable. It reared its mighty walls out of the sand, almost untouched by time, breaking the long lines of the waste with its huge towers, steadfast and massive, as though it were, as I had at first thought it, the work of nature, not of man. We approached it from the north, on which side a long low building runs out towards the sandy depression of the Wâdy Lebay'ah. A zaptieh caught me up as I reached the first of the vaulted rooms, and out of the northern gateway a man in long robes of white and black came trailing towards us through the hot silence.

"'Peace be upon you,' said he.

"'And upon you peace, Sheikh 'Ali,' returned the zaptieh. 'This lady is of the English.'

"'Welcome, my lady Khân,' said the sheikh."

And so she enters one of those "palaces, famous in pre-Mohammedan tradition, whose splendours had filled with amazement the invading hordes of the Bedouin, and still shine with a legendary magnificence, from the pages of the chroniclers of the conquest. Even for the Mohammedan writers they had become nothing but a name."

The sheikh who welcomed her was himself in some sort a guest, having, with his friends and followers, taken refuge there upon some political disturbance in his native Nejd. "He and his brothers passed like ghosts along the passages, they trailed their white robes down the stairways that led to the high chambers where they lived with their women, and at night they gathered round the hearth in the great hall where their forefathers had beguiled the hours with tale and song in the same rolling tongue of Nejd. Then they would pile up the desert scrub till the embers glowed under the coffee-pots, while Ma'ashi handed round the delicious bitter draught which was the one luxury left to them. The thorns crackled, a couple of oil wicks placed in holes above the columns, which had been contrived for them by the men-at-arms of old, sent a feeble ray into the darkness, and Ghânim took the rebâbah and drew from its single string a wailing melody to which he chanted the stories of his race."

So little of the significance of that singing was lost upon his English guest that she could cap his verses with one from his own poet :

We wither away but they wane not, the stars that above us rise;
And the mountains remain after us, and the strong towers when we are gone.

For all the distinguished entertainment offered, she works at her plans of the vast edifice from sunrise until dark—just as later, she turns from contemplation of the glittering domes of that little town of Samarra, "set down like a child's toy upon the waste"—and descending from the spiral tower of the ruined Abbasid city, she sets to work upon the mosque. "To measure a wall would not seem to be a complicated business, yet I do not care to remember how many hours I spent upon the mosque."

A peasant comes to her among the ruins of the elder city, whose bazaars and palaces in the bygone days stretched without a break along the Tigris for one-and-twenty miles. The modern representative of this departed glory comes asking, would she like to see a picture he had just unearthed? It proves to be a beautiful piece of plaster work, doomed to destruction that the bricks behind it might be removed. A reward is offered for any further specimens, and these are duly brought. In the same way the peasants supply the traveller with basketsful of patterned potsherds, innumerable examples of which she drew and photographed.

At Tell Ahmar, where she found a Hittite epigraph cut in basalt, "The whole village turned out to help in the work of making moulds of the inscriptions, those who were not actively employed with brush and paste and paper sitting round in an attentive circle."

She tells the Arabs at Abu Sàîd what is the origin of the stones they use to mark the graves of their dead. For these bits of basalt are the ancient hand-mills in which the living, long ago, were used to grind their corn.

Near one of Layard's pits at Nimrûd she comes across a stone statue projecting "head and shoulders out of the ground, the face of the king or god which it represents being already terribly battered. The number of Assyrian statues known to us is exceedingly small—not more than seven or eight have been brought to light—yet this splendid example is allowed to fall into decay for want of a handful of earth wherewith to cover it." Not so perhaps, for with fair words and with bakhshîsh she extracts a promise of a sheikh of the Jebbûr that he would bury it.

And so with those "seeing eyes," that do not fail to note any such resemblance as may exist between Mar Behnam beyond Nineveh and the Coptic Monasteries of Egypt—with the stored mind familiarised by the Orient Gesellschaft with the pictures of Ashur before ever she sets foot in Assyria, on she goes,

skirting in the Tûr Abdîn the ancient battle-ground of Persian and Byzantine.

"Into this country I came, entirely ignorant of its architectural wealth, because it was entirely unrecorded. None of the inscriptions collected by Pognon go back earlier than the ninth century; the plans which had been published were lamentably insufficient and were unaccompanied by any photographs. When I entered Mâr Yakûb at Salah and saw upon its walls mouldings and carved string courses which bore the sign manual of the Græco-Asiatic civilisation I scarcely dared to trust the conclusions to which they pointed. But church after church confirmed and strengthened them. The chancel arches, covered with an exquisite lacework of ornament, the delicate grace of the acanthus capitals, hung with garlands and enrichèd with woven entrelac, the repetition of ancient plans and the mastery of constructive problems which revealed an old architectural tradition, all these assure to the churches of the Tûr Abdîn the recognition of their honourable place in the history of the arts."

Work so thorough as that recorded in these pages is not achieved without a price. The archæologist relieves her feelings on one occasion by frankly calling the measuring and planning a "labour of hatred."

Such an outburst emboldens the lay mind to hope that her pursuit of mathematical exactitude was enlivened by the resultant ability to point out the inaccuracies of other folk. If to do this is, as Theodore Hook maintains, the business of a traveller, Miss Bell is not the person to fail him. Kiepert himself she catches out now and then, though she is usually found singing his praises. Herzfeld's plans, on the other hand, are discovered to be "exceedingly inaccurate and his architectural observations seldom to be trusted." Even Ammianus Marcellinus is caught tripping in his march down the Euphrates with the Emperor Julian. Miss Bell discovers at Carrhæ that his account is "irreconcilable with the facts of geography"—which dictum, if he hears of it, must a little disconcert the Græco-Roman shade accustomed for a matter of fifteen centuries to see his authority unquestioned.

Miss Bell's disposition to examine testimony and to try conclusions brings her home, then, with something more than a collection of traveller's tales, however aptly told; something more than an addition to existing stores of archæological knowledge.

In sum, her achievement is that she has developed a new art of travel.

It is an art at which only the dry-as-dusts may cavil, and only because this new kind of traveller returns with other spoils in

her saddlebags, besides the notebooks full of plans and measurements, many hundred photograph films, the rubbings of fading inscriptions and moulds of decoration motif, faint perhaps and crumbling fast—doomed to oblivion but for the timely rescue—yet so full of significance for the instructed eye, that it is traceries such as these that yield up the age-long secrets, telling of the great race movements, of an unguessed efflorescence of human glory, of its blight and ruin.

But these are matters for the expert.

From the point of view of the general reader, *Amurath to Amurath* is, first and foremost, a many-sided study of a people—or rather of that medley of races, faiths 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. In *The Desert and the Sown* the traveller makes her way through Syria amused by the picture of contemporary life, and quick to seize upon vestiges of a many-storied past. In *Syria* she was the spectator. In *Amurath to Amurath* she is friend and partisan.

The motif of the new book is Freedom.

Freedom for the Young Turk, and through him freedom, or some semblance of it, for the motley populations which have hitherto been harried and robbed in the name of the Sultan, and in his name, or his despite, done equal deeds of blood and ruth. Freedom is the immediate jewel, it appears, even of the soul of a Turk. He must be free, we are told, to bring back fertility to his abandoned fields—free to govern without passion, soberly, wisely, as his statecraft-loving soul dictates.

Miss Bell makes out a striking case for the bad economy of social disorder. We hear continually of cornlands lying waste, of folk not daring even to drive the goats to pasture, of every man in the district sitting with his loaded rifle across his knees on watch for the coming of the raiders. Amongst the sorry wealth of similar pictures we have such as this, catching desolation in the act: "Shetâteh is an oasis of 160,000 palms. The number is rapidly diminishing, and on every side there are groups of headless trunks from which the water has been turned off. This is owing to the iniquitous exactions of the tax-gatherers, who levy three and four times in the year the moneys due from each tree, so that the profits on the fruit vanish and even turn to loss."

Finding corn at famine prices, and no fresh meat obtainable for man, nor grass for beast, she is haunted by a sense of that majestic presence of "the river in the midst of uncultivated lands, which,

with the help of its waters, would need so little labour" to make those lands productive. That vast tracts of the desert used formerly, and might be made again, to blossom as the rose, is the hopeful reminder reiterated from page to page.

Towards the end of her journey, coming upon the village of Shahr, she finds "its sheltered fields covered with corn, its gardens planted with fruit-trees, but the streets and houses were no less ruined than the temples of the Great Goddess. The hot breath of massacre had passed down the smiling vale and left Shahr a heap of ashes. I found the inhabitants huddled together on a bluff where half a dozen of their dwellings had escaped destruction. A young school-master from the American college of Tarsus told me the story."

For my last extract upon the theme of bad economy in social disorder take this : Miss Bell's caravan is passing through a well-watered valley. "The deep grass through which we journeyed, both on this day and on the next, is looked upon as a sore peril, since it tempts the Kurds down into the lowland pastures. To avoid this annual reign of terror, the peasants are wont to set it on fire as soon as it ripens, leaving but a small patch round each village. For a week the plain is wrapped in flame and smoke, and the stifling heat of the burning rises up to the hill-top monastery of Mâr Yakûb, where the Catholic priests are witnesses to the appalling destruction of what might have been a rich harvest, and to the bitter oppression which turns the bounty of nature into a recurring threat. Jûsef, whose imagination is not to be roused except by considerations of a soundly practical character, cast his eye over the fields and observed thoughtfully : 'The muleteers of Baghdad must starve this year to buy fodder for their cattle, yet here is enough to feed all the Jezîreh.'"

Few things in modern politics are more striking than the evidence that, even in Asia, there is a growing disposition to weary of that old liberty to waste and to be wasted. "No sooner had I landed in Beyrout," says Miss Bell, "than I began to shed European formulas and to look for the Asiatic value of the great catch-words of revolution." Her acquaintance with the Turkey that came into being in July, 1908, she dates from the time of her arrival in Aleppo—that Aleppo which she loves for its architecture and for being the Gate to Asia.

It was there, "sitting at the feet of many masters, who ranged down all the social grades, from the high official to the humblest labourer for hire," that she learnt of the outburst of enthusiasm which had greeted the granting of the constitution—of some of the disappointments that followed, and of their cause. "The Government," she says with a fine discrimination, "was still to

the bulk of the population a higher power, disconnected from those upon whom it exercised its will. You might complain—just as you cursed the hailstones that destroyed your crops, but you were in no way answerable for it, nor would you attempt to control or advise it, any more than you would offer advice to the hail-cloud." "Many a time," she says, "I searched for some trace of the Anglo-Saxon acceptance of a common responsibility in the problems that beset the State." She goes through village after village, listening to the echoes of revolution while she looks at tombs and shrines.

Already among the Weldeh tribe she has heard the plaint: "We have neither camels nor sheep, for the Government has eaten all!" Then one asks about the new Government—and "liberty, what is that?"

About an hour from Bâb her caravan was joined by a Circassian "wrapped in a thick black felt cloak, which, with the white woollen hood over an astrachan cap, skirted coat with cartridges ranged across the breast, and high riding-boots, is the invariable costume of these emigrants from the north."

She asks him about the recent elections and finds that he takes a lively interest in the politics of the day. They ride along together, discussing the Arab view of franchise.

And so, past Roman milestones, one bearing the name of the Emperor Septimius Severus, by mosque and pool she follows towards Hieropolis, the same road travelled by that faithful Apostate of whom Anatole France says: "Nourri dans la violence romaine et dans la cruauté byzantine, il semble n'avoir appris que le respect de la vie humaine et le culte de la pensée."

Near Manbij, two days later, she hears a chance-met traveller asking one of her party the meaning of hurrîyeh (liberty). For his part, if it means the right to vote, he has no use for it. He thanks God that no one there is "and el hukûmeh" (on the official register). For to be upon the list of voters is to be compelled to do military service, and too often in Turkey to be marked down for official extortion as well.

In collecting the opinions of all sorts and conditions, Miss Bell has not only at her service the gift of tongues, she has the knack of grasping instantly who (from her point of view) are the people, as well as the things, best worth seeing. She had these advantages already in working order several years ago at Hamah. Without loss of time she learns which are the most powerful Mohammedan families of the town. She has pleasant experience of their feudal hospitality, and on her way home encounters in the street an aged Afghan, with whom she discusses English foreign relations. It might be supposed an aged Afghan would

know little of such matters. This one showed himself as well, possibly better, informed than the average Briton. Miss Bell found him cognizant even of the then recent interchange of visits and civilities between Kabul and Calcutta. Here, and later, she is apt at drawing the moral : "The East is one vast sounding-board." Varying the symbol to iterate the truth : "All Asia," she says, "is linked together by fine chains of relationship"—the bond between the western and central parts being the faith of Islam.

That may account, in part, for the fact that she found, even among the intractable hordes in the remote fastnesses of the desert, men as ready to take an interest in Egyptian finance as was the Arab to whom she explained the principles of the Fellahin Bank in Cairo. When she had finished he inquired if such an institution might not be introduced into Syria. Five years earlier still, a similar question had been put in the mountains of the Haurān. "The Druze sheikhs of Kanawāt had assembled in my tent under shadow of night, and after much beating about the bush, asked whether, if the Turks again broke their treaties with the Mountain, the Druzes might take refuge with Lord Cromer in Egypt, and whether I would not charge myself with a message to him."

On this later journey, as she rides toward Tell esh Shaïr, the zaptieh and she began to talk of the prospects of good administration under the new order. Mahmud placed great confidence in the Young Turks, and said that every one except the effendis was in favour of the dastùr (the constitution). "The effendis fear liberty and justice, for these are to the advantage of the poor. But they, being corrupt and oppressors of the poor, set themselves in secret against the dastùr, and because of this we have confusion everywhere."

After being two weeks without news she goes to certain friends of hers at Deir, Mahommedan gentlemen of good birth and education. "They told me that the Grand Vizir, Kiamil Pasha, had fallen, which was true; and that the Mejlis had quarrelled with the Sultan and were about to depose him, which was only prophetic. They made me realise how different an aspect the new-born hopes of Turkey wore on the Bosphorus, or even on the Mediterranean, from that which they presented to the dwellers on the Euphrates : I had already passed beyond the zone that had been quickened by the enthusiasm of European Turkey into some real belief in the advent of a just rule. One of my friends had received an invitation to join the local committee, but he had refused to do so. 'I am lord over much business,' said he, 'but they are the fathers of idle talk.' All thinking men in Deir were persuaded that a universal anarchy lay before them; the old rule

was dead, the new was powerless, and the forces of disorder were lifting their heads."

At Baghdad light is shed upon the power of the Press to check corrupt practices. And again, at Baghdad the traveller is impressed that "He who holds the irrigation canals, holds the country," is a maxim which can be applied as well to Mesopotamia as it was to Egypt. An irrigation system, justly administered, would, by general admission, be a better means of control than an army corps.

On the way to examine the ruins of Khmeida Miss Bell discusses with a couple of Arabs the incidence of the sheep-tax—a passage of significance.

If she has to wait for the boat in which to cross the Euphrates she goes into a neighbouring coffee house and joins the circle. The talk is of ravage and extortion and the hopeless failure of the old Government as administered by the fourteen different Kāimmakāms they had had in six years.

The English stranger reminds the circle that the new Government was sending them a new Kāimmakām to administer according to juster laws. The new Kāimmakām was on his way. But the information was neither new nor altogether cheering. One of the coffee-drinkers explained that "When the telegram came last summer telling of liberty and equality, the people had assembled before the seràya, the Government house, and bade the Kāimmakām begone, for they would govern themselves. Thereat came orders from Baghdad that the people must be dispersed; and the soldiers fired upon them, killing six men. And we do not know what the telegram about liberty and brotherhood can have meant."

Stopping at Kal' at Sergât, where the Germans are excavating the mound of Ashur, she gets news not only of how things went on in the Parthian period, in the late Assyrian, and in those earlier times without a name. She has news of nearer happenings —all the more disquieting because as yet nothing but rumour. "Constitutional Government had foundered suddenly, and it might be for ever. The members of the Committee had fled from Constantinople, the Liberals were fugitive upon their heels, and once more Abd ul Hamid had set his foot upon the neck of Turkey."

At Mangul she meets an Effendi on horseback with an escort of zaptiehs.

"What tidings have you from Constantinople?" she asks.

The Effendi drew his brows together.

"We hear that troops from Salonica have entered the town and captured two barracks."

As she approached Mosul—"a sound that made our hearts stand still." The boom of cannon. They meet an old man and ask, "Why are they firing cannon in Mosul?"

"God knows," he answered, and wrung his hands together.

The whole passage is extraordinarily well done. For contrast see the page where the traveller, after many adventures, lies down on the clover underneath a hawthorn bush to wait for the Tigris boat. "It was here," she says, "that we were to bid a final farewell to the Greeks who had accompanied us from the outset of the journey." She finds the passage: "'So at length we parted, and Cheirosophus in advance with the light-armed troops scaled the hills of the Finik and led slowly forward, leaving Xenophon to bring up the rear with the heavy-armed men. Their shields and corselets glittered upon the steep they climbed, and reached the summit of the ride, and disappeared . . .'

"'Effendim!' Fattûh broke into my meditations. 'Effendim, the boat is ready.'

"'Oh, Fattûh,' said I, 'the Greeks are gone.'

"Fattûh looked vaguely disturbed.

"'The Greeks of old days, who marched with us down the Euphrates,' I explained. Fattûh can neither read nor write, but he searched his memory for fragments of my meaningless talk.

"'Those?' he said. 'God be with them!'"

If a large portion of Miss Bell's last book embodies a plea that the Turk shall (under the blessings of representative government) be left free to stay at home and cultivate his lands, both books celebrate the joy in the writer's own freedom to wander at will over the wide earth.

I find myself wondering as I read her pages, what do these Turks, Arabs, Chaldeans, Devil-worshippers and the rest, what do they think of this fair-haired apparition out of the West, this woman equally concerned about current politics and Hittite inscriptions? What, for instance, was in the mind of Hassan Beg Nā'i that day Miss Bell interrupted his coffee party? He, unlike most of the men she met, conducted her forthwith to the ladies of his house and left her with them. We can well believe that this was luck for the harem, since "Hassan Beg is a strict master, and neither his wife nor his mother, nor any woman that is his is allowed to put her nose out of doors." One would like to know what the harem thought of Miss Bell. But most of all one wonders at the indiscretion of Hassan Beg. Surely his ladies might have walked abroad from dawn till "evening prayer," and never once encountered so instructive an example of all that the Hassan Begs most fear and deprecate. But what looks like daring may be but the measure of a sore perplexity.

The Guardian of the Tomb of the Shi'ah sanctuary was a more liberal soul. To this charming and cheerful Mullah in the long robes and white turban the traveller must needs apply for permission to explore the sacred precincts.

"Not only did he grant my request, but he presented me with a bunch of pomegranate flowers and entertained me with coffee and sherbet.

"'Why,' said he, 'do you travel so far?'

"I replied that I had a great curiosity to see the world and all that lay therein.

"'You are right,' he answered. 'Man has but a short while to live, and to see everything is a natural desire. But few have time to accomplish it—what would you? We are but human.' And he drew his robe round him and sipped contentedly at the sherbet."

His impressions would also be of interest.

But I am bound to admit that Miss Bell does not seem to share my curiosity on this theme. She is too full of what she thinks about it all to bother about what others think of her. As she hastened over broken lava into that "ghostly stronghold of a world of ghosts," the ruined fortress of Kal' at el Beida, the one or two Arabs she finds sauntering there are noted with less concern than if they were *Iris susiana* growing in the stony courts. The turbans, too, without doubt, added the indigenous touch, but they gave her no more pause than would the antlered heads of deer above a crag in Anti-Taurus. The discreet turbaned figures paid, she thinks, "as little attention to me as I to them," and instantly she concentrates upon the matter in hand. "Who reared this famous citadel that guards a dead land from an unpeopled?" "Whose art fashioned the flowing scrolls on doorpost and lintel; whose eyes kept vigil from the tower?" She balances one learned speculation against another. "The fact remains that we are not certain of its origin—the desert may give up its secrets, the history of the Safa and the Ruhbeh may be pieced together from the lettered rocks, but much travel must be accomplished first, and much excavation on the Syrian frontier, in Hira, perhaps, or in Yemen."

And, meanwhile, I, in my limited way, keep wondering what was going on underneath those turbans.

All the gravity and reserve of the East is not proof at times against the speculation, the stark bewilderment she must constantly have roused.

Once, in the valley of the Orontes, her tents were pitched in a favoured spot where a great Persian water-wheel filled the air with pleasant rumbling. A coffee maker came and set up his

brazier by the edge of the road. A sweetmeat seller spread his wares by the water side. On a stretch of grass ". . . in the delicious sun . . . some gaily dressed youths galloped and wheeled Arab mares." It turned out to be a holiday, and the unmounted rabble, to the tune of many hundreds, kept the festal day by surrounding and watching every movement in the lady's camp. The men were bad enough, she says, the women were worse, and the children worst of all. The excitement of the populace was further stimulated by the coming of the richest dweller in the district, bringing the Kadi to call upon the stranger. When later she reciprocated their polite attention, her progress to the Pasha's house was impeded by an escort of at least three hundred people.

"Please God," says the Pasha, "the populace does not trouble your Excellency; for if so we will order out a regiment of soldiers."

She admits that her refusal of this drastic measure was half-hearted. So obviously so, the great man added that the Kaiser "when he was in Damascus gave orders that no one was to be forbidden to come and gaze on him." And so with an ill grace she submits to the tyranny of august example. Two years later, at Tomarza, her interest in Cappadocian ruins was held by her Armenian host to be the thinnest of cloaks wherewith, in his opinion, she was trying to cover some political purpose. "By all Tomarza I was regarded as an itinerant missionary collecting evidence with regard to the massacre." Beyond doubt, she was less plagued than most would have been—by reason of her sure knowledge of when to apply the extinguisher to a curiosity grown flagrant. She seems to have dealt gently with the Druze who questioned her upon her social status—what was the extent of her father's wealth, and did she, at home, ride with the King? But another of that tribe found his catechism cut short:—

"'Listen, oh you! I am not "thou," but Your Excellency.' He laughed," she says, "and understood, and took the rebuke to heart."

All the same, one must needs sympathise with the bewilderment of priest and pasha, sheikh and zaptieh, at a young woman as able to give as to demand information, whether about the new laws or the ancient inscriptions built at hazard into the mosques—a traveller able to cap their quotations from their own classics, able to check their account of their own roads and mountain ranges, by comparing what they say, now with the map of Kiepert, now with "*le doux Ammian*," and now with Xenophon. In an effort to adjust one's focus to catch a glimpse of the traveller as she passes before Eastern eyes, one recalls the

two young Seijari women, "wonderfully beautiful, wearing blue cloths hanging from their heads fastened with heavy gold ornaments like the plaques of the Mycenæan treasure, one behind either temple." They walked with the English stranger through the ruins of the castle, but when they reached the great outer gate they stopped: "Allah," said one, "you go forth to travel through the whole world, and we have never been to Hamâh."

Even the men-folk, and guides professed, offered in vain their symbolic warning: "Wallah, we have never heard of anyone who wished to go by that road." Our traveller is quite ready to be the first foot there. But, unlike those who would dissuade her, she has heard of the others who went that way. And in spirit she bears them company—I shall dare say to their honour.

If any tell me that I rate too highly the achievements of this traveller, it will be one who has not read her books. I may not speak of Miss Bell's technical accomplishments. I am ready, however, to maintain that she belongs not merely to the little groups of the learned in this land or in that. As one loving well the earth and the sun, a swift horse and a storm, a knotty problem in politics or the nice conduct of caravans, creature of quick humour and infinite resource, teller of tales and painter of memorable pictures, she belongs to the larger world.

Significant of many things is the picture she herself presents taking her caravan to and fro across the ruin-chequered waste, taking her eager challenging mind into citadel, palace and shrine, discussing the revolution with great officials; talking of liberty with judges, prisoners, and beggars; of religion with Armenian, Nestorian, and Moslem; of domestic life with jealously guarded wives; of the psychology of the raid with Bedouins, Arabs, and Druze robbers. Then at the end of the day sitting down in her tent, after ten hours in the saddle, to compare her march with that of the Ten Thousand.

Miss Bell's own record (apart from accounts of burning farms and decimated villages) is too honest to be all pleasant reading. Following hard upon that wonderful picture of the ride in the rain to the Crusader fortress, is a scene that might have served Euripides for his Trojan women. Late in the day the traveller leaves her caravan to follow the road, and with one of the Kāimmakāms horsemen she climbs the steep bridle-path. "And so at sunset we came to the Dark Tower and rode through a splendid Arab gateway into a vaulted corridor built over a winding stair. It was almost night within; a few loopholes let in the grey dusk. . . . At intervals we passed doorways leading into cavernous blackness. The stone steps . . . were much broken; the horses stumbled and climbed over them as we rode up and up—and

passed gateway after gateway, until the last brought us out into the courtyard in the centre of the keep." The lord of the castle is a man of letters, but he heaved a sigh of relief at her salutation. "Praise be to God, your Excellency speaks Arabic!" and thereupon the talk and the hospitality flowed in generous flood. At dinner the family party was augmented by the introduction of an ancient dame—"a friend who has come to gaze upon your Excellency."

Later, when the ladies were alone, the aged guest refused to sit on the divan, being more accustomed, as she said, to the floor, where she sat close to the brazier, holding her wrinkled hands above the coals. She was clad in black, and her head was covered by a thick white linen cloth bound closely above her brow—giving her the air of some aged prioress of a religious order. Outside the turret room the wind howled, the rain beat against the single window—and the talk turned naturally, we are told, to deeds of horror. A recent family tragedy was the theme: "The ancient dame rocked herself over the brazier and muttered, 'Murder is like the drinking of milk here! God! There is no other but Thou!' A fresh gust of wind swept round the tower and another woman took up the tale. 'This Khanum,' said she, nodding her head towards the figure by the brazier, 'knows also what it is to weep. Her son was but now murdered in the mountains. They found his body lying stripped by the path.'

"The mother bent anew over the charcoal and the glow was on her face: 'Murder is like the spilling of water!' she groaned. 'Oh Merciful!'"

As she says in another place, "How many thousand years this state of things has lasted those who shall read the earliest records of the inner desert will tell us, for it goes back to the first of them, but in all the centuries the Arab has bought no wisdom from experience."

The worst of it is the Arab has so many to bear him company.

Of all these scenes the one most significant, certainly the one most haunting, is one most lightly touched. With her police escort the traveller is riding towards Damascus, past Brak, where there is a military post. "Just before we reached it we met a little Druze girl, who cowered by the roadside and wept with fear at the sight of us. 'I am a maid!' she cried. 'I am a maid!'" One echoes the traveller's comment: "Her words threw an ominous shadow upon the Turkish *régime*." In the mind of the most defenceless, with what nameless horrors must be associated those guardians of the peace, the much-belauded soldiers of the Sultan!

When I see that I have come thus far without mention of the

theft and pursuit of Miss Bell's note-books, photographs, and money, with no whisper of her raid upon the Palace of the Khalifs, or even her visit to the Devil-worshippers, I recognise the hopelessness of trying to do more than fall back upon my original *rôle*. But if, in my capacity of guide-post, I proclaim to man or woman footing it on the dusty road: This is the way to Regions *Quellenreich* (as the best map of the desert has it); if I call out to the passer-by: "Here is refreshment and down yonder Romance"—I must not fail to set up some red triangle or other masonic sign adapted to new needs of warning.

These are not books to be lightly recommended. There's a spell in them. They are like to conjure holes in those stout walls behind which the town-dweller sits at his task; and in the breach, lo! pictures "steeped in the magic of sunset, softly curving hollows to hold the mist, softly swelling slopes to hold the light, and over it all the dome of the sky which vaults the desert as it vaults the sea." How shall eyes be kept on ledgers or on butcher's books when happier folk are turning their faces towards the wilderness. "I looked back upon the ancient mound of Hît, the palm groves, and the dense smoke of the pitch fires rising into the clear air.... Now no one rides into the desert, however uncertain the adventure, without a keen sense of exhilaration. The bright morning sun, the wide clean levels, the knowledge that the problems of existence are reduced on a sudden to their simplest expression, your own wit and endurance being the sole determining factors—all these things brace and quicken the spirit. The spell of the waste seized us as we passed beyond the sulphur marches; Hussein Onbâshi held his head higher, and we gave each other the salaam anew, as if we had stepped out into another world that called for a fresh greeting."

"At the pleasant hour of dusk I sat among the flowering weeds by my tent door while Fattûh cooked our dinner in his kitchen among the rocks, Sfâga gathered a fuel of desert scrub, Fawwâz stirred the rice-pot, and the bubbling of Hussein's narghileh gave a note of domesticity to our bivouac. My table was a big stone, the mares cropping the ragged grass round the tent were my dinner-party; one by one the stars shone out in a moonless heaven, and our tiny encampment was wrapped in the immense silences of the desert, the vast and peaceful night."

I repeat there's magic in these books. I have seen sober, anchored folk made strangely restless by these pages—seen them for the first time in my knowledge pulling at the chains of custom and duty. At moments when they should have been concerned with domestic routine, or the right administration of the Poor Law—behold them speculating, what would it be like . . .

to go wandering in the desert till one chanced upon deserted palaces? What like to come, in the land of the Devil-worshippers, upon Shalmaneser's kings and lion-mounted gods beside a flower-starred pool; and with that mighty procession for companioning to go swimming in the brown water that looked a disc of polished bronze in a setting of enamel—green and white and scarlet.

Who can count on safety against impressions that shall touch you like a flame? Take the end of the scene beginning: "The coffee beans were roasted and crushed, the coffee pots were simmering in the ashes, when there came three out of the East and halted at the open tent." The talk of Arab and Druze, of feud and raiding, is interrupted by the coming of this other guest: "A tall young man with a handsome, delicate face, a complexion that was almost fair, and long curls that were almost brown. As he approached, Nahar and the other sheikhs rose to meet him, and before he entered the tent, each in turn kissed him upon both cheeks. Namrud rose also and cried: 'Good, please God. Who is with you?' The young man raised his hand and replied, 'God.'"

"He was alone," says the traveller out of the West.

Again among the tents of Hamri: "The coffee was ready when I arrived, and with the cups the talk went round to desert politics and the relation of this sheikh with that, all through the Weldeh camps. The glow of sunset faded, night closed down about the flickering fire of thorns, a crescent moon looked in upon us and heard us speaking of new things. Even into this primeval world a rumour had penetrated, borne on the word Liberty." "The thin blue smoke of the morning camp fires rose out of the hollows, and my heart rose with it, for here was the life of the desert, in open spaces under the open sky, and when once you have known it, the eternal savage in your breast rejoices at the return to it."

Here, then, are some of the reasons. I say, flatly, these are books I shall not have it on my conscience to recommend to all. Rather will I maintain they should be put upon the Index. Not only are they beyond precedent "unsettling." They do not so much as pretend that any one of the traveller's rash and daring deeds has its proper evil following. Eloquent celebrant as she is of the necessity of strict obedience to the law, the Fates permit her to set authority at defiance from Babylon to Anti-Taurus—and no one a penny the worse! She will kidnap a zaptieh or two as soon as eat curds. She will join a raid, and if there isn't one handy she will invent one. If she compliments the Turkish official, it is as like as not for the way he accepts her refusal to obey his orders. When you

set them aside, as, she says airily, "you must from time to time," the Turkish officials "conceal their just annoyance and bear you no ill-will for the trouble you have caused them."

She congratulates herself on having handled matters with a firm hand at Rakkah. An official telegram came to the Mudir from headquarters directing that Miss Bell's progress down the left bank of the Euphrates should be arrested.

"The Vali commanded that I should be turned back across the river and conveyed carefully from guardhouse to guardhouse along the highroad."

I need hardly say this traveller did not alter her itinerary to please the Vali of Aleppo. She gets the bewildered Rakkah Mudir to send a telegram of remonstrance to his chief, inviting him to cancel his commands. The charming part of the story is that Miss Bell did not even wait to hear whether this recommendation found favour with the Vali. She pursued her journey, concerned only to remember at her next camp that somewhere near here Julian must have received his Arab reinforcements. Her meditations—historic and archæologic—are broken in upon by a breathless zaptieh from Rakkah, bringing an answer to the telegram. It sets forth the Vali's flat refusal to rescind his orders. His subordinate, the Mudir, also sends word by the same hand that if Miss Bell does not instantly return he will be obliged to recall the escort she had induced him to allow her. Her comment upon this is: "I fear that even those who cannot properly be numbered among the criminal classes catch an infection from the lawless air of the desert, but whatever may be the true explanation of our conduct, we never contemplated for a moment the alternative of obedience, and bidding a regretful farewell to friend Mahmud, we went on down the defile."

With pleasing effect comes her information a little later: "The region which we now entered is particularly lawless."

The flouting of authority on the part of this apostle of Law and Order is no matter of chance or sudden caprice. In the older book she tells how she faced the probability of the Government's refusing her permission to penetrate the country of the Druzes. If for a moment she hesitates, it is because on the road she means to travel there is a military post certain to be primed and ready to resist the progress of those who defy the Powers that Be. She weighs the chances: "At Bosra they knew me; I had slipped through their fingers five years before, a trick difficult to play a second time *from the same place*." But she evolves a plan. Yusef's two small sons sit, listening, open-eyed. One, discerning in her a kindred spirit, brings her a scrap of advertisement bearing on it—the map of America! It is a far cry. But

she understands him perfectly, and reciprocates the attention, showing the children her maps, and telling them how big the world is, "and how fine a place." What use to tell her in return that "parts of it" are unfit for her consumption? Mere waste of breath to sound their epitomised warning. If they have "never known anyone to go that road before!"—what's that but reason the more for her going? The escort is often hard to find. There was that difficulty in penetrating the remote region in the Syrian desert reputed waterless. At last the traveller induces a man of the reckless Deleim to join her, with an escort of five armed horsemen, in return for a handsome reward. We are less surprised that "the handsome reward" failed to keep the gentleman to his word when we read what the country looked like even to the person keen to travel it:

"The heavy smoke of the pitch fires hung round Hït, and the sulphur marshes shone leprous under the sun—a malignant landscape that could not be redeemed by the little shrines which were scattered like propitiatory invocations among the gleaming salts.

"'It is the road of death,' said Hussein Onbâshi, stuffing tobacco into the cup of his narghileh.

"'Wallah!' said another, 'if the water-skins leak between water and water, or if the camel fall lame, the rider perishes.'

"'By the truth, it is the road of death,' repeated Hussein. 'Twice last year the Deleimi robbed the mail and killed the bearer of it.'"

Miss Bell had by this time spread out Kiepert's map.

"Inform me," said the ruthless Englishwoman, "concerning the water."

"If this account is exact," she sums up the situation, "there must be four days of waterless desert on the road of death."

Do you think she turned aside? The Deleimi did. Not she.

The whole of the astonishing passage may be commended to the reader. As she says, it is only town-dwellers like Fawwâz who fear the desert. All the same, it has an effect of being none too tranquil.

It must be admitted that Miss Bell's servants gave her gallant support, though there was one whose 'arak bottle she was obliged on occasion to smash upon a stone.

But Fattûh was a pearl. Cheerful, unfailing, a man who, in Heine's phrase, "*das Herz auf der linken Seite hat, auf der liberalen,*" was as ready for adventure as his lady Khân.

"The soldiers of Musheidah," she says, "though they were unexceptionable as hosts, were inefficient as guides. When I announced that I wished to ride by the old Tigris bed, they exclaimed in horror that it was unsafe to leave the highroad. At

this Fattûh laughed outright, remarking that we had travelled over many a worse desert."

The magnificent carelessness of that "many a worse desert" would be hard to beat. One hopes that in the "character" she gave Fattûh Miss Bell did not forget to say he was a mine of stories and delight. Fattûh it was who visited in prison the thief who had stolen all his money—yes, and lent him some more, "for he was very poor—and we ate together."

"Did you see him again?" Miss Bell asked.

"Eh, wallah!" replied Fattûh. "I met him in Deir, and there I feasted him in the bazaar. And now he lives in Deir, and I go to his house whenever I pass through the town, for we are like brothers. But he has not returned me the pound I lent him while he was in prison," added Fattûh regretfully.

In his estimate of the Western woman, Fattûh leaves the most "advanced" panting in his rear. Moreover, he seems to have no difficulty in getting other men to follow his spirited lead. When the craven Deleimi refused to risk himself and his horsemen on "the road to death," Fattûh, Miss Bell tells us, suggested that he should see what could be done with the Mudir. She, having a lively confidence in Fattûh's diplomacy, entrusted him with her passports and papers, and sent him forth with plenipotentiary powers. He returned triumphant.

"Effendim," said he, "that Mudir is a man." This is ever the highest praise that Fattûh can bestow, and my experience does not lead me to cavil at it. "When he had read your buyuruldehs he laid them upon his forehead and said, 'It is my duty to do all that the effendi wishes.' I told him," interpolated Fattûh, "that you were a consul in your own country. He will give you a zaptieh to take you to Kebeisah, and if you command, the zaptieh shall go with you to Kal'at Khubbàz."

All our cherished ideas of the impossibility of making the Oriental accept, or so much as comprehend, the Western view of woman—they are blown to the winds in these books. Of a hundred surprises on this head there is the case of the Mullah at Dûr. He refused to unlock the door of the shrine. One of Miss Bell's attendants took the old gentleman aside, "and explained that I was employed by the Government as a surveyor; upon which the mullah, with perhaps a silent reflection on the laxity of the age in the matter of official appointments, threw open the door and bade me enter."

Yet, despite the modernness of Miss Bell's attitude and her actions, there is more than a touch of the mediæval in her mind. These books show her accepting, with no misgiving, the old idea of what constitutes glory. They show her under the spell of

that faith so frayed and so discredited—faith in the power of ruling caste.

Elaborate ceremonial (other people's), fear and dread of kings, these are not to her a survival of the childishness of the average man, but proof of the power of the exceptional man. It naturally follows that she is open to all the old-time associations that gathered about the panoply of war. She thrills like a schoolboy at the name of Nero, at the thought of conquest by arms. She is profoundly stirred even at a petty raid over stolen cattle amongst tribes without a name. "I, too," she exclaims in that moment of exaltation, "thank God I, too, come of a fighting race." "My soldiers have told me," she says in one place, speaking of her police escort. Had one opened at the page by chance and read the phrase apart from context, one would think it either a fragment of military memoir or the words of some queen uttered in the Middle Ages.

But why not "Queen?" as the Sayyid called her.

"If I see truly, I am king of what I see." Let her account of what she sees be read by any reddest republican alive, and he will justify the Sayyid's vocative. In that it came so readily to his lips, we have but one reason the more why Miss Bell (apart from her equipment of language and history) was precisely the person to go amongst Orientals. They will hardly outdo her love of stately ceremonial, or her faith in the efficacy of the aristocratic idea. Her Eastern friends could not have dealt so understandingly with a more democratic mind. They found her meeting their Vali and their princes—hardly as equals, indeed, since she swept them and their edicts aside whenever she saw fit. Her way of ranging herself on the side of the ruling class was to do a little ruling in her own right. She passes judgment on their judges; she measures their Kadi and their Mudir as she measures their castles and their mosques. She sets down Ghishghash boastful, foolish, "extremely talkative, though all that he said was not worth one of Faiz's sentences."

She compliments the Kāimmakām of Drekish upon his use of Syrian Arabic; and Reshid Agha, she says with decision, is the chief magnate and also the chief villain of Salkin.

Yet you would be wrong to think she has forgotten that the forefathers of these folk "watched the stars before the English had begun to keep pigs." Nor must anyone do her the injustice of interpreting her attitude as one of mere personal arrogance. The power she thinks she conjures with is the power of the English. Her eager national pride treasures every sign of deference to Great Britain. In other matters, critical beyond most, she can take as simple-minded delight in a Moslem's compli-

ment to her race as though the Oriental, with his habit of courtesy, would not have turned a flattering phrase as easily for Teuton, Gaul, or Japanese. So far from such inconsistencies making the subject of this study a less interesting figure, any sketch of her would be incomplete that did not give some indication of the very human side of one whose reach and grasp are so much farther, and firmer, than that of most women or of most men. For the grave student is a lover of mountains; the severe critic is a good laugher. She not only thrills and waxes eloquent at sight of the Euphrates, she jibes at it for not being "a good table water."

Of the road to Saleh, she says in a burst: "I continue to call it a road for want of a name bad enough for it"—and when we have travelled with her for a space we are ready to share Muhammad's surprise:

"Oh lady, you have not laughed once, not when I showed you the ruins, nor when I told you the name of the hills."

To have deserved that reproach how often must she have betrayed the rapture with which she neared the high places, or set herself to study history on the spot where it was made.

If you think, therefore, to escape caring for her on one count, behold she will trip you up with its opposite.

Law-lover and law-breaker, she is a reactionary passionate for freedom.

Is there not something of all this in her name? I lay myself open to the charge of childishness in admitting that for me the queenly "Gertrude" falls fittingly on the ear like a ceremonious introduction. Wholly inconceivable that in her case the name should ever have been "nicked" or shortened. But hard upon the heels of this formal "Gertrude" comes Lowthian, with its music of Border ballad and its echo of Border raid; and finally, your wandering fancy is called smartly to attention by the last staccato note of the Bell.

Gertrude Lowthian Bell!

You are not of my camp nor of my nation—and yet, Wallah! in the words of the Sheikh of the Amarāt, "if you come to my tents, welcome and kinship."

ELIZABETH ROBINS.