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**Around the World on a Bicycle -
Volume II From Teheran To
Yokohama**

Thomas Stevens

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CAMBRIDGE, MASS., April 10, 1887.

FROM TEHERAN TO YOKOHAMA.

CHAPTER I.

THE START FROM TEHERAN.

The season of 1885-86 has been an exceptionally mild winter in the Persian capital. Up to Christmas the weather was clear and bracing, sufficiently cool to be comfortable in the daytime, and with crisp, frosty weather at night. The first snow of the season commenced falling while a portion of the English colony were enjoying a characteristic Christmas dinner of roast-beef and plum-pudding, at the house of the superintendent of the Indo-European Telegraph Station, and during January and February, snow-storms, cold and drizzling rains alternated with brief periods of clearer weather. When the sun shines from a cloudless sky in Teheran, its rays are sometimes uncomfortably warm, even in midwinter; a foot of snow may have clothed the city and the surrounding plain in a soft, white mantle during the night, but, asserting his supremacy on the following morning, he will unveil the gray nakedness of the stony plain again by noon. The steadily retreating snow line will be driven back-back over the undulating foot-hills, and some little distance up the rugged slopes of the Elburz range, hard by, ere he retires from view in the evening, rotund and fiery. This irregular snow-line has been steadily losing ground, and retreating higher and higher up the mountain-slopes during the latter half of February, and when March is ushered in, with clear sunny weather, and the mud begins drying up and the various indications of spring begin to put in their appearance, I decide to make a start. Friends residing here who have been mentioning April 15th as the date I should be justified in thinking the unsettled weather at an end and pulling out eastward

again, agree, in response to my anxious inquiries, that it is an open spell of weather before the regular spring rains, that may possibly last until I reach Meshed.

During the winter I have examined, as far as circumstances have permitted, the merits and demerits of the different routes to the Pacific Coast, and have decided upon going through Turkestan and Southern Siberia to the Amoor Valley, and thence either follow down the valley to Vladivostok or strike across Mongolia to Pekin—the latter route by preference, if upon reaching Irkutsk I find it to be practicable; if not practicable, then the Amoor Valley route from necessity. This route I approve of, as it will not only take me through some of the most interesting country in Asia, but will probably be a more straightaway continuous land-journey than any other. The distance from Teheran to Vladivostok is some six thousand miles, and, well aware that six thousand miles with a bicycle over Asiatic roads is a task of no little magnitude, I at once determine upon taking advantage of the fair March weather to accomplish at least the first six hundred miles of the journey between Teheran and Meshed, one of the holy cities of Persia.

The bicycle is in good trim, my own health is splendid, my experience of nearly eight thousand miles of straightaway wheeling over the roads of three continents ought to count for something, and it is with every confidence of accomplishing my undertaking without serious misadventure that I set about making my final preparations to start. The British Charge d'Affaires gives me a letter to General Melnikoff, the Russian Minister at the Shah's court, explaining the nature and object of my journey, and asking him to render me whatever assistance he can to get through, for most of the proposed route lies through Russian territory. Among my Teheran friends is Mr. M— —, a lively, dapper little telegraphist, who knows three or four different languages, and who never seems happier than when called upon to act the part of interpreter for friends about him.

Among other distinguishing qualities, Mr. M— — shines in Teheran society as the only Briton with sufficient courage to wear a chimney-pot hat. Although the writer has seen the "stove-pipe" of the unsuspecting tenderfoot from the Eastern States made short

work of in a far Western town, and the occurrence seemed scarcely to be out of place there, I little expected to find popular sentiment running in the same warlike groove, and asserting itself in the same destructive manner in the little English community at Teheran. Such, however, is the grim fact, and I have ventured to think that after this there is no disputing the common destiny of us Anglo-Saxons, whatever clime, country, or government may at present claim us as its own. Having seen this unfortunate headgear of our venerable and venerated forefathers shot as full of holes as a colander in the West, I come to the East only to find it subjected to similar indignities here. I happen to be present at the wanton destruction of Mr. M— —'s second or third importation from England, see it taken ruthlessly from his head, thrust through and through with a sword-stick, and then made to play the unhappy and undignified part of a football so long as there is anything left to kick at. More than our common language, methinks—more than common customs and traditions—more than all those characteristic traits that distinguish us in common, and at the same time also distinguish us from all other peoples—more than anything else, does this mutual spirit of destructiveness, called into play by the sight of a stove-pipe hat, prove the existence of a strong, resistless undercurrent of sympathy that is carrying the most distant outposts of Anglo-Saxony merrily down the stream of time together, to some particular end; perchance a glorious end, perchance an ignominious end, but certainly to an end that will not wear a stove-pipe hat.

Mr. M— —'s linguistic accomplishments include a fair knowledge of Russian, and he readily accompanies me to the Russian Legation to interpret. The Russian Legation is situated down in the old Oriental quarter (birds of a feather, etc.) of the city, and, for us at least, necessitated the employment of a guide to find it. On the way down, Mr. M— —, who prides himself on a knowledge of Russian character, impresses upon me his assurance that General Melnikoff will turn out to be a nice, pleasant sort of a gentleman. "All the better-class Russians are delightfully jolly and agreeable, much more agreeable to have dealings with than the same class of people of any other country," he says, and with these favorable comments we reach the legation and send up my letter. After waiting what we both consider an unnecessarily long time in the vesti-

bule, a full-faced, sensual-looking, or, in other words, well-to-do Persian-looking individual, in the full costume of a Persian nobleman, comes out, bearing my letter unopened in his hand. Bestowing upon us a barely perceptible nod, he walks straight on past, jumps into a carriage at the door, and is driven off.

Mr. M— — looks nonplussed at me, and I suppose I looked equally nonplussed at him; anyhow, he proceeds to relieve his feelings in language anything but complimentary to the Russian Minister. He's the — well, I've met scores of Russians, but — him, queer! I never saw a Russian act half as queer as this before, never!"

"Small prospect of getting any assistance from this quarter," I suggest.

"Seems deucedly like it," assents Mr. M— —. "I said, just now, that, being a Russian, he was sure to be courteous and agreeable, if nothing else; but it seems as if there are exceptions to this rule as to others;" and, talking together, we try to find consolation in the thought that he may be merely eccentric, and turn out a very good sort of fellow after all. While thus commenting, a liveried servant presents himself and motions for us to follow him in the wake of the departing carriage. Following his guidance a short distance through the streets, he leads us into the court-yard of a splendid Persian mansion, delivers us into the charge of another liveried servant, who conducts us up a broad flight of marble stairs, at the top of which he delivers us into the hands of yet a third flunky, who now escorts us into the most gorgeously mirrored room it has ever been my fortune to see. The apartment is perfectly dazzling in its glittering splendor; the floor is of highly polished marble, the walls consist of mirror-work entirely, as also does the lofty, domed ceiling; not plain, large squares of looking-glass, but mirrored surfaces of all shapes and sizes, pitched at every conceivable angle, form niches, panels, and geometrical designs — yet each separate piece plays well its part in working out the harmonious and decidedly pretty effect of the whole. All the furniture the large apartment boasts is a crimson-and-gold divan or two, a few strips of rich carpet, and an ebony stand-table, inlaid with mother-of-pearl; but suspended from the ceiling are several magnificent cut-glass chandeliers. At night, when these Persian mirrored rooms are lit up, they present a scene of

barbaric splendor well calculated to delight the eye of the sumptuous Oriental; every tiny square of glass reflects a point of light, and every larger one reproduces a chandelier; for every lamp he lights, the Persian voluptuary finds himself surrounded by a thousand.

Seated on a divan toward one end of this splendid room, with an open box of cigarettes before him, is the man who a few minutes ago passed us by on the other side and drove off in his carriage. Offering us cigarettes, he bids us be seated, and then, in very fair English (for he has once been Persian Minister to England), introduces himself as "Nasr-i-Mulk," the Shah's Minister for Foreign Affairs; the same gentleman, it will be remembered, to whom I was introduced on the morning of my appearance before the Shah. (Vol. I.) I readily recognize him now, and he recognizes me, and asks me when I am going to leave Teheran; but in the gloomy vestibule of the other palace, my own memory of his face and figure was certainly at fault. It turns out, after all, that the wretch whom we paid to guide us to the Russian Legation, in his ignorance guided us into the Persian Foreign Office.

"I knew — yes, dash it all! I knew he wasn't the Russian Minister the moment I saw him," says Mr. M — — as we take our departure from the glittering room. His confidence in his knowledge of Russian character, which a moment ago had dropped down to zero, revives wonderfully upon discovering our ludicrous mistake, and, small as he is, it is all I can do to keep up with him as we follow the guide Nasr-i-Mulk has kindly sent to show us to the Russian Legation. A few minutes' walk brings us to our destination, where we find, in the person of General Melnikoff, a gentleman possessing the bland and engaging qualities of a good diplomatist in a most eminent degree.

"Which is Mr. Stevens?" he exclaims, with something akin to enthusiasm, as he advances almost to the door to meet us, his face fairly beaming with pleasure; and, grasping me warmly by the hand, he proceeds to express his great satisfaction at meeting a person, who had "made so wonderful a journey," etc., etc., and etc. Never did Mr. Pickwick beam more pleasantly at the deaf gentleman, or regard more benignantly Master Humphrey's clock, than the Russian Minister regards the form and features of one whom, he

says, he feels "honored to meet." For several minutes we discuss, through the medium of Mr. M— —, my journey from San Francisco to Teheran, and its proposed continuation to the Pacific; and during the greater part, of the interview General Melnikoff holds me quite affectionately by the hand. "Wonderful!" he says, "wonderful! nobody ever made half such a remarkable journey; my whole heart will go with you until your journey is completed."

Mr. M— — looks on and interprets between us, with a fixed and confident didn't-I-tell-you-so smile, that forms a side study of no mean quality. "There will be no trouble about getting permission to go through Turkestan?" I feel constrained to inquire; for such excessive display of affection and bonhommie on the Russian diplomat's part could scarce fail to arouse suspicions. "Oh dear, no!" he replies. "Oh dear, no! I will telegraph to General Komaroff, at Askabad, to remove all obstacles, so that nothing shall interfere with your progress." Having received this positive assurance, we take our leave, Mr. M— — reminding me gleefully of what he had said about the Russians being the most agreeable people on earth, and the few remaining clouds of doubt about getting the road through Turkestan happily dissipated by the Russian Minister's assurances of assistance.

Searching through the bazaar, I succeed, after some little trouble, in finding and purchasing a belt-full of Russian gold, sufficient to carry me clear through to Japan; and on the morning of March 10th I bid farewell to the Persian capital, well satisfied at the outlook ahead. While packing up my traps on the evening before starting, it begins raining for the first time in ten days; but it clears off again before midnight, and the morning opens bright and promising as ever. Six members of the telegraph staff have determined to accompany me out to Katoum-abad, the first chapar-station on the Meshed pilgrim road, a distance of seven farsakhs. "Hodge-podge," the cook, and Meshedi Ali, the gholam, were sent ahead yesterday with plenty of substantial refreshments and sun-dry mysterious black bottles—for it is the intention of the party to remain at Katoum-abad overnight, and give me a proper send-off from that point to-morrow morning.

Some little delay is occasioned by a difficulty in meeting the fastidious tastes of some of the party as regards saddle-horses; but there is no particular hurry, and ten o'clock finds me bowling briskly through the suburbs toward the Doshan Tepe gate, with four Englishmen, an Irishman, and a Welshman cantering merrily along on horseback behind.

"Khuda rail pak Kumad!" (May God sweep your road!), All Akbar had exclaimed as I mounted at the door, and as we pass through the city gate the old sentinel, when told that I am at last starting on the promised journey to Meshed on the asp-i-awhan, supplements this with "Padaram daromad!" (My father has come out!), a Persian metaphorical exclamation, signifying that such wonderful news has had the effect of calling his father from the grave.

The weather has changed again since early morning; it is evidently in a very fitful and unsettled mood; the gray clouds are swirling in confusion about the white summit of Demavend as we emerge on the level plain outside the ramparts, and fleecy fugitives are scudding southward in wild haste. Imperfect but ridable donkey-trails follow the dry moat around to the Meshed road, which takes a straight course southeastward from the city and is seen in the distance ahead, leading over a sloping pass, a depression in the Doshan Tepe spur of the Elburz range. The road near the city is now in better condition for wheeling than at any other time of the year; the daily swarms of pack-animals bringing produce into Teheran have trodden it smooth and hard during the ten days' continuous fine weather, while it has not been dry sufficiently long to develop into dust, as it does later in the season. Our road is level and good for something over a farsakh, after which comes the rising ground leading gently upward to the pass. The gradient is sufficiently gentle to be ridable for some little distance, when it becomes too rocky and steep, and I have to dismount and trundle to the summit. The summit of the pass is only about nine miles from the city walls, and we pause a minute to investigate a bottle of homemade wine from the private cellar of Mr. North, one of our party, and to allow me to take a farewell glance at Teheran, and the many familiar objects round about, ere riding down the eastern slope and out of sight.

Teheran is in semi-obscurity beneath the same hazy veil observed when first approaching it from the west, and which always seems to hover over it. This haziness is not sufficiently pronounced to hide any conspicuous building, and each familiar object in the city is plainly visible from the commanding summit of the pass. The different gates of the city, each with its little cluster of bright-tiled minars, trace at a glance the size and contour of the outer ditch and wall; the large framework of the pavilion beneath which the Shah gives his annual tazzia (representation of the religious tragedy of Hussein and Hassan), denuded of its canvas covering, suggests from this distance the naked ribs of some monster skeleton. The square towers of the royal anderoon—which the Shah professes to believe is the tallest dwelling-house in the world—loom conspicuously skyward above the mass of indefinable mud buildings and walls that characterize the habitations of humbler folk, but perhaps happier on the whole than the fair occupants of that seven-storied gilded prison.

Hundreds of women-wives, concubines, slaves, and domestics are understood to be dwelling within these palace walls in charge of sable eunuchs, and the fate of any female whose bump of discretion in an evil moment fails her, is to be hurled headlong from the summit of one of the anderoon towers—such, at least, is the popular belief in Teheran; it may or may not be an exaggeration. Some even assert that the Shah's chief object in building the anderoon so high was to have the certainty of this awful doom ever present before its numerous inmates, the more easily to keep them in a submissive frame of mind. Off to the right, below our position, is the Doshan Tepe palace, a memorable spot for me, where I had the satisfaction of first introducing bicycle-riding to the notice of the Persian monarch. Off to the left, the Parsee "tower of silence" is observed perched among the lonely gray hills far from human habitation or any traversed road; on a grating fixed in the top of this tower, the Guebre population of Teheran deposit their dead, in order that the carrion-crows and the vultures may pick the carcass clean before they deposit the whitened bones in the body of the tower.

Having duly investigated the bottle of wine and noticed these few familiar objects, we all remount and begin the descent. It is a gentle declivity from top to bottom, and ridable the whole distance, save

where an occasional washout or other small obstacle compels a dismount. The wind is likewise favorable, and from the top of the pass the bicycle outdistances the horsemen, except two who are riding exceptionally good nags and make a special effort to keep up; and at two o'clock we arrive at Katoum-abad. Katoum-abad consists of a small mud village and a half-ruined brick caravansarai; in one of the rooms of the latter we find "Hodge-podge" and Me-shedi Ali, with an abundance of roast chickens, cold mutton, eggs, and the before-mentioned mysterious black bottles.

The few Persian travellers in the caravansarai and the villagers come flocking around as usual to worry me about riding the bicycle, but the servants drive them away in short order. "We want to see the sahib ride the aap-i-awhan," they explain, no doubt thinking their request most natural and reasonable. "The sahib won't let you see it, nor ride on it this evening," reply the servants; and, given to understand that we won't put up with their importunities, they worry us no more. "Oh, that I could get rid of them thus readily always!" I mentally exclaim; for I feel instinctively that the farther east I get, the more wretchedly worrying and inquisitive I shall find the people. We arrive hungry and thirsty, and in condition to do ample justice to the provisions at hand. After satisfying the pressing needs of hunger, we drink several appropriate toasts from the contents of the mysterious black bottles— toasts for the success of my journey, and to the bicycle that has stood by me so well thus far on my journey, and promises to stand by me equally as well for the future.

About four o'clock two of the company, who have been thoughtful enough to bring shotguns along, sally forth in quest of ducks. They come plodding wearily back again shortly after dark, without any game, but with deep designs on the credulity of the non-sporting members of the company. In reply to the general and stereotyped query, "Shoot anything?" one of the erring pair replies, "Yes, we shot several canvas-backs, but lost them in the reeds; didn't we, old un?" "Yes, five," promptly asserts "old un," a truthful young man of about three-and-twenty summers. After this, the silence for the space of a minute is so profound that we can hear each other think, until one of the company, acting as spokesman for the silent reflections of the others, inquires, "Anybody know of any reeds

about Katoum-abad?" Some one is about to reply, but sportsman No. 1 artfully waives further examination by heaping imprecations on the unkempt head of a dervish, who at this opportune moment commences a sing-song monotone, in a most soul-harrowing key, outside our menzil doorway.

A slight drizzling rain is falling when the early riser of the company wakes up and peeps out at daybreak next morning, but it soon ceases, and by seven o'clock the ground is quite dry. The road for a mile or so is too lumpy to admit of mounting, as is frequently the case near a village, and my six companions accompany me to rideable ground. As I mount and wheel away, they wave hats and send up three ringing cheers and a "tiger," hurrahs that roll across the gray Persian plain to the echoing hills, the strangest sound, perhaps, these grim old hills have ever echoed; certainly, they never before echoed an English cheer.

And now, as my friends of the telegraph staff turn about and wend their way back to Teheran, is as good a time as any to mention briefly the manner in which these genial lightning-jerkers assisted to render my five months' sojourn in the Persian capital agreeable. But a few short hours after my arrival in Teheran, I was sought out by Messrs. Meyrick and North, who no sooner learned of my intention to winter here, than they extended a cordial invitation to join them in their already established bachelors' quarters, where four disconsolate halves of humanity were already messing harmoniously together. With them I took up my quarters, and, under the liberal and wholesome gastronomic arrangements of the establishment, soon acquired my usual semi-embon-point condition, and recovered from that gaunt, hungry appearance that the hardships and scant fare of the journey from Constantinople had imparted. The house belonged to Mr. North, and he managed to give me a little room to myself for literary work, and, under the influence of a steady stream of letters and papers from friends and well-wishers in England and America, that snug little apartment, with a round, moon-like hole in the thick mud wall for a window, soon acquired the den-like aspect that seems inseparable from the occupation of distributing ink.

Three native servants cooked for us, waited on us, turned up missing when wanted for anything particular, cheated us and each other, swore eternal honesty and fidelity to our faces, called us infidel dogs and pedar sags behind our backs, quarrelled daily among themselves over their modokal (legitimate pickings and stealings—ten per cent, on everything passing through their hands), and meekly bore with any abuse bestowed gratuitously upon them, for an aggregate of one hundred and thirty kerans a month—and, of course, their modokal. Some enterprising members of the colony had formed themselves into a club, and imported a billiard-table from England; this, also, was installed in Mr. North's house, and it furnished the means for many an hour of pleasant diversion. Like all Persian houses, the house was built around a square court-yard. Mr. North had also a pair of small white bull-dogs, named, respectively, "Crib" and "Swindle." The last-named animal furnished us with quite an exciting episode one February evening. He had been acting rather strangely for two or three days; we thought that one of the servants had been giving him a dose of bhang in revenge for having worried his kitten, and that he would soon recover; but on this particular day, when out for a run with his owner, his strange behavior took the form of leaping impulsively at Mr. North, and, with seemingly wild frolic, seizing and shaking his garments. When Mr. North returned home he took the precautionary measure of chaining him up in the yard. Shortly afterward, I came in from my customary evening walk, and, all unconscious of the change in his behavior, went up to him; with a half-playful, half-savage spring he seized the leg of my trousers, and, with an evidently uncontrollable impulse, shook a piece clean out of it. He became gradually worse as the evening wore away; the wild expression of his eyes developed in an alarming manner; he would try to get at any person who showed himself, and he made night hideous with the fearful barking howl of a mad dog. Poor Swindle had gone mad; and I had had a narrow escape from being bitten. We lassoed him from opposite directions and dragged him outside and shot him. Swindle was a plucky little dog, and so was Crib; one day they chased a vagrant cat up on to the roof; driven to desperation, the cat made a wild leap down into the court-yard, a distance of perhaps twenty feet; without a moment's hesitation, both dogs sprang boldly after her, reck-

ing little of the distance to the ground and the possibility of broken bones.

Sometimes the colony drives dull care and ennui away by indulging in private theatricals; this winter they organized an amateur company, called themselves the "Teheran Bulbuls," and, with burnt-corked faces and grotesque attire, they rehearsed and perfected themselves in "Uncle Ebenezer's Visit to New York," which, together with sundry duets, solos, choruses, etc., they proposed to give, an entertainment for the benefit of the poor of the city. When the Shah returned from Europe, he was moved by what he had seen there to build a small theatre; the theatre was built, but nothing is ever done with it. The Teheran Bulbuls applied for its use to give their entertainment in, and the Shah was pleased to grant their request. The mollahs raised objections; they said it would have a tendency to corrupt the morals of the Persians. Once, twice, the entertainment was postponed; but the Shah finally overruled the bigoted priests' objections, and "Uncle Ebenezer's Visit to New York" was played twice in Nasr-e-Deen's little gilded theatre a few days after I left, with great success; the first night, before the Shah and his nobles and the foreign ambassadors, and the second night before more common folk. The two postponements and my early departure prevented me from being on hand as prompter. The winter before, these dusky-faced "bul-buls" had performed before a Teheran audience, and one who was a member at that time tells an amusing story of the individual who acted as prompter on that occasion. One of the performers appeared on the stage sufficiently charged with stage-fright to cause him to entirely forget his piece. Expecting every moment to get the cue from the prompter's box, what was his horror to hear, after waiting what probably seemed to him about an hour, instead of the cue, in a hoarse whisper that could be distinctly heard all over the room, the comforting remark, "I say, Charlie, I've lost the blooming place!"

The American missionaries have a small chapel in Teheran, and on Sunday morning we sometimes used to go; the little congregation gathered there was composed of strange elements collected together from far-off places. From Colonel F _____, the grizzled military adventurer, now in the Shah's service, and who was also with Maximilian in Mexico, to the young American lady who is said