

ON THE SHORES OF  
THE CASPIAN

COMMERCE AND CULTURE IN  
NINETEENTH CENTURY PERSIA



WILLIAM RICHARD HOLMES

INTRODUCTION BY MORRIS ROSSABI



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**I.B. TAURIS**

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# INTRODUCTION

Morris Rossabi

William Richard Holmes (1822–82) would appear to exemplify Edward Said's concept of an Orientalist. Said described Orientalism as a "web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism, [and] dehumanizing ideology."<sup>1</sup> Holmes' condescending observations that "it would be difficult to find a better travelling servant than a Persian" and "the voracious manner in which they swallow their food is disgusting" seem to reflect the Orientalism that Said described as typical of Westerners who wrote about the Middle East. Holmes' description of Persians as vain and ostentatious evince the same stereotypes to which Said referred. To be sure, Holmes' attitudes are to modern sensitivities, crude, and offensive. His air of superiority, even at the age of twenty-one, when he wrote these words and had scarcely accomplished very much, can irritate the modern reader and characterizes the colonialist mentality that Said repeatedly mentioned. Yet Holmes was young and on his first foreign travels. The Caspian sights he witnessed and the adventures he encountered in the early 1840s not only puzzled him but also offered a great opportunity to observe life outside his earlier relatively limited society.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, this experience set the stage for an eventual productive career in foreign service.

## *1. Life and career*

Born in the north of Ireland in 1822 to a comfortable though not elite family, he remained around his birth place throughout his childhood. His voyage to the shores of the Caspian seems to have been his first travel experience beyond Europe. In 1841, he had been appointed to the consulate at Erzeroum in Eastern Turkey. His education and avocation entailed exposure to painting and drawing, which offered him great pleasure during his travels and his sojourns abroad. He must have performed well at the consulate because he was granted the responsibility of undertaking his most renowned trip. His reports and his book impressed his superiors because he was promoted

to Vice Consul at the port city of Samsoun in Turkey in 1846. Returning to Ireland for home leave, he married Adele Louise Zohrab (ca. 1825–1910), who had been born in Malta, on 5 May 1847. The remainder of his career was devoted to foreign service postings outside the British Isles. By 1860, he was the British Consul in Bosnia and was a delegate to the European commission that settled the Bosnian boundary with Herzegovina. One of his principal concerns was defense of the Serbian Christians. In 1861, the Ottoman Sultan agreed to allow Serbians in Herzegovina to build churches, but Holmes reported that not only were they not permitted to do so but they were prevented from buying land. He was still alive in 1867 when some of the Serbs rebelled against the Ottomans and achieved their independence as the Principality of Serbia, and he retired from the Consular Service in July 1877 at the time the Russo-Turkish War erupted. He must have been delighted that the Bosnian Serbs simultaneously declared their independence and joined the Principality of Serbia.

The Queen knighted Holmes on 13 August 1877 for his exceptional service, and he returned to his birth place, as a landowner, on a comfortable estate where he resided until his death on 10 January 1882. His wife outlived him by three decades and died in 1910, and his only child, William James Holmes, born around 1863, survived until 6 June 1945 and witnessed the prominent role that Serbia played in events leading to World War I.

## *II. Objectives of his travels*

Holmes was already in the Consular Service when he set forth on his travels along the shores of the Caspian. His lengthy journey must have required his superiors' approval. In fact, did the Consulate send him to gather information about the region? Russia had capitalized on the weakness of the Qajar dynasty (1785–1925) in the nineteenth century to detach territory from Iran. The Russo-Persian War of 1804–1813 resulted in Russian annexation of modern Dagestan, Georgia, and parts of Azerbaijan, and the Russo-Persian War of 1826–1828 permitted the Russians to make additional gains in the Caucasus, with the occupation of the rest of Azerbaijan, as well as Armenia, all near the Caspian. The Aras River became Iran's northernmost border with Russia. Many Persians, Armenians, and Azeris fled to Iran, which thus had a considerable population of minorities. It is likely that the Consulate assigned Holmes to travel in these regions, which were adjacent to India, the Crown Jewel of the British Empire, to ascertain the extent of the Russian gains in the area and to garner information about Russia's other objectives. Thus, the stirrings of the later – and more overt – Great Game between Russia and Britain may have emerged at this time. Would the Russian advance threaten British interests in India? The British needed to know much more about Persia, the Caucasus and the Caspian, as well as about Russia's involvement in these regions.



Holmes' travels along the Caspian at a time when the British government required intelligence may have been coincidental. They may have reflected his own personal interest and spirit of adventure and may not have had a specific policy motivation, yet the text includes considerable data that could have proved valuable to British statesmen and military officers. Holmes offers precise directions, with indications of approximate distances from one location to another on his travels, which provide unusually rare information for the British. His descriptions of the landscapes include significant strategic insights. He mentions the conditions of roads and bridges, and he identifies the rivers and lakes he traverses or sees as he journeys from one town or city to another. British officials would certainly profit from such descriptions.

### *III. Holmes' travels*

Holmes began his travels from the city of Tabriz, which had been the capital of the Mongolian Il-Khanate in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Lake Urmiya, the product of the merging of the waters of three rivers, provided Tabriz with water for drinking and irrigation. The city's location in a valley resulted in a moderate summer climate. During the Mongolian era, it boasted a bountiful agriculture and produced beans and fruits, among other products. It benefited, in particular, from its location along the major East–West trade routes. Caravans could stop and rest in the city and either could obtain supplies for their further travels or could sell their commodities to the local inhabitants. The bazaars were stocked with goods from many parts of Eurasia. Thirteenth and fourteenth-century Tabriz was a thriving multicultural center of trade, an ideal capital for the Mongolian government. As Marco Polo observed:

[Tabriz] is a great city and very noble, which is between Armenie and Persie... the men of Tauris...live by trade and by crafts, that is for the most by working cloth, for there are made many cloths with gold and of silk...And the city is set in so good a place that the other merchandise comes there conveniently from Indie... and from Mosul and from Curmos [Hormuz]...and therefore many Latin merchants and specially Genoese come there often to buy of those foreign goods that come there from strange distant lands and to do their business.<sup>3</sup>

However, by the time Holmes visited, Tabriz had lost much of its luster and status. It was no longer the capital of one of the world's greatest empires. Instead it was a provincial city with poorly maintained structures, including minarets and mosques. The buildings that the Mongolians constructed had been destroyed over the centuries. The land around the capital itself was parched, and a drought threatened the inhabitants. The bazaars that traditionally displayed an array of goods from much of Eurasia had lost much of their vitality. The Silk Roads had withered away, and goods from China

could not be found in the bazaars. Russian products were available, but Western European commodities did not generally reach Tabriz, which had become somewhat of a backwater.

Holmes' next destination was Ardebil, a crafts center. Approximately thirty miles west of the Caspian it, too, had lain along the major trade routes from Tabriz to the Caspian. The decline of Silk Roads commerce had subverted the city's prosperity and prevented its proper maintenance. Holmes writes that the streets are filthy and the buildings are in poor repair. Yet he is impressed with the town's beautiful silks and carpets. In the late nineteenth century, the British would purchase the renowned Ardebil Carpet for a pittance because the inhabitants were so poor that they could use any amount of money the British offered.

The city owed its prominence to Shaikh Safi al-Din, the Sufi ancestor of the Safavid (1501–1736) rulers of Iran. Upon his death in 1334, he was buried in an elaborate tomb in Ardebil. Shah Abbas the Great (1571–1629), one of his descendants, added to the tomb and shrine, and in 1611 placed a spectacular collection of Chinese porcelains in the shrine. As of 1950, 805 of the original 1,162 porcelains had survived, and John Pope, the Director of the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, surveyed the collection and wrote a book illustrating the most significant of these porcelains.<sup>4</sup> Holmes describes the deplorable conditions of the shrine and also notices: "the china...consisting principally of large dishes, vases, drinking cups and flagons, spread out on the floor; the numerous recesses in the walls originally intended for their reception, being left empty."<sup>5</sup> Moreover, he states that the Russians had purloined 160 manuscripts or books after the Russo-Persian War of 1826–1828. In short, a glorious splendid city with a spectacular history of production and appreciation of foreign objects of great beauty, including Chinese porcelains, had deteriorated into a provincial town and had lost its previously glorious status.

#### *IV. Holmes' view of the regions*

Holmes attributes the difficulties of the lands along the shores of the Caspian to disasters and corruption. He mentions the plague of 1830–1831, which had depopulated many areas. He claims that two-thirds of the population in regions adjacent to Ardebil had perished. The evidence for this figure is uncertain. Since Holmes could not read the native languages, he could not have obtained this data from perusal of government documents and probably derived his statistics from anecdotal sources. The veracity of the statistics may be dubious; nonetheless, the plague did damage the region around the Caspian. Holmes then blames two other sources for the parlous conditions he observed. He writes that "Mohammedanism and bad government are the two effective bars to the prosperity and civilization of Persia."<sup>6</sup> Informants, or perhaps he himself, witnessed the government's expropriation of land or

other property from its subjects. Corrupt officials bedeviled the population at large and undermined the economic and legal systems and exacerbated income inequality. Exploitation of the peasants further damaged the economy. Holmes repeatedly cites the poverty throughout the Caspian region that was, according to him due, in large part, to corruption and exploitation. He is also appalled by the government's seeming lack of concern for human life. He tries to dissuade a local official from executing a hapless criminal and was disturbed by the grisly character of executions. He believed that this "backward" and "barbaric" treatment of humans subverted efforts at economic development.

Holmes asserts that Islam retarded economic growth and undermined prosperity. He presents rather skimpy evidence for his views about the evils of "Mohammedanism" and devotes more space to descriptions of mosques and madrassas than other aspects of Islam. Holmes notes the deterioration of some of these religious sites. On the other hand, he is impressed with the beautiful architecture of some of the buildings. Parenthetically, he appears dazzled by Shah Abbas' pleasure house, with its lovely paintings of flowers and its splendid dance and musical performances. His negative views of Islam may have been based on observing the rituals, including self-flagellation, associated with commemoration of the death of Al-Husain ibn 'Ali (626–680), the prophet Muhammad's grandson and the Second Imam of the Shi'ites who was killed by one of the Ummayyad (661–750) caliphs. These Shi'ite practices disturbed him and may have shaped his perception that Islam was a pernicious system of thought. Yet he does not offer many examples for this view.

The information he provides about Russia and its presence along the Caspian would certainly be considered valuable. Even as early as the 1840s, some British officials recognized that competition with the Tsarist empire in various regions in Asia would develop. Holmes seems to be one of the perspicacious officials who understood the possibility of Russo-British conflicts. Russia had persisted in incorporating territory in Asia from its very first colonization of Siberia in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. It would come into conflict with other states in Asia and the Middle East, and in the nineteenth century often succeeded in attaining its objectives. By the time of Holmes' travels, it had detached Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan from Iranian control or influence and planned to capitalize on China's weakness to define its lengthy border with the Qing dynasty in its own interests. These territorial gains would challenge Britain's aspirations in Asia.

It is no accident therefore that Holmes mentions the Russians whenever he encounters or learns about them. He noticed the considerable amount of trade between Russia and the various places he visited – a natural development since Russia was the major and closest neighbor to areas along the Caspian. Ardebil was one center for such commerce, but Russian merchants were found in many other locations. Russian fishermen sought fish for caviar,

and Russian merchants also attempted to trade with Iranians for caviar. The local inhabitants acknowledged that Russian merchants paid promptly for the goods they wanted, but they remained suspicious of what they perceived to be interlopers from the North. They had observed and were shocked by Russia's expansion in the Caucasus and were aware of the Russian navy's ships in the Caspian, which could be an intimidating force if disputes arose. Their fears were heightened because, in some areas, they did not have the resources to purchase weapons for the military forces that would presumably defend against Russian incursions.

Holmes' descriptions of the products of the region would be of value to British merchants. He found that many of the bazaars and caravanserais had either disappeared or were in poor repair, but he identifies the prosperous ones. British merchants could reach these locations, although Russians would remain the most important foreign traders. Carpets and traditional crafts earn his plaudits, perhaps due to the contrast with the increasing number of machine-made products of Britain's Industrial Revolution. He also reports on cotton and caviar, both of which might have a market in Britain. Rice and sugar are other goods that attract his attention, and he enjoys the peaches, pears, cherries, and pomegranates, although they could not be shipped to Britain.

His descriptions of housing, music, and superstitions are precise and not judgmental, but his observations about women reveal his condescending attitudes. He notes that "the women were not very scrupulous about concealing their faces; but the few I saw had better remained covered." They had "nothing but the most unmitigated sun-burst ugliness."<sup>7</sup> Only the Turcoman women, most of whom were pastoral nomads, escaped his withering scorn and disapproval. They were not veiled, and Holmes did not comment on their "ugliness." The table manners of both women and men repelled him. They ate with their hands, and "the voracious manner in which they swallow their food is disgusting."<sup>8</sup>

It is perhaps unfair to conclude with what would, in modern times, be considered offensive views. Holmes' sexism and his scornful attitude toward the local inhabitants were unattractive, but he reflected the tenor of his times. Britain and indeed other parts of Europe had made great economic strides forward as a result of the Industrial Revolution. The British navy was the world's best; the Reform Acts in Parliament had offered suffrage to a larger percentage of the male population; the status of the entrepreneurial and middle classes had risen; British troops had defeated a China, with the world's largest population, in the Opium War of 1839–1842, and the government was determined to have greater commercial and diplomatic sway in China; and Britain began to dominate India, which had the world's second largest population. British culture developed apace with its economic, political, and economic successes. The British Museum had opened to the public

in 1759 and was poised to build up its collections of foreign arts and artifacts. The great nineteenth-century British novels of Charles Dickens, the Brontës, and Jane Austen had appeared. Concern for hygiene was rapidly taking hold. Under these circumstances, Holmes' superior attitudes are more understandable. He was traveling in areas that had not experienced an Industrial Revolution and where the military was weak relative to the powerful British navy and the technologically advanced British army. This powerlessness had permitted Russia to detach region after region from the local inhabitants' control. Buildings were deteriorating; education centered on the Koran and a few other religious texts; the standards of hygiene were deplorable; and women had fewer rights than in Britain. In short, Holmes believed that he derived from a superior civilization.

These observations are not designed to justify Holmes' views but merely to provide the context for his perceptions of non-Western lands and peoples. Only a few Westerners of his generation overcame the prevailing stereotypes. Holmes did not do so, but he did supply useful information about the places he visited. The reader will determine whether such information outweighs his prejudices. Either way his book is worth reading and reflecting upon.

#### Notes

1. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978), p. 27.
2. Curiously, he does not mention the first Anglo-Afghan War of 1839–1842, which was taking place not far from his travels. I wish to thank Professor Sarah Covington of Queens College of the City University of New York for bringing this point to my attention.
3. A. C. Moule and Paul Pelliot, *Marco Polo: The Description of the World* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1938), pp. 104–105.
4. John Pope, *Chinese Porcelains from the Ardebil Shrine* (Washington, DC: Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1956).
5. William Richard Holmes, *Sketches on the Shores of the Caspian* (London: Richard Bentley, 1845), p. 38.
6. Holmes, p. 183.
7. Holmes, pp. 8–9.
8. Holmes, p. 64.



## PREFACE.

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A VERY young Author presents this his first attempt to the ordeal of public opinion, with no small amount of fear lest he should be accused of presumption for offering himself and his production to the world at all. In his own justification, however, he ventures to assign the following reason for so doing. His position in the house of his relative, Mr. James Brant, Her Majesty's Consul at Erzeroom, afforded him an opportunity of visiting a country, interesting indeed, and but little trodden. He availed himself of it; and now places before the public the result of his enterprise, in the persuasion that he will meet with that indulgence always so generously awarded in his own happy land to efforts which are designed to convey a more perfect knowledge of countries hitherto but partially explored.

The English works on the Persian provinces on the shores of the Caspian Sea, already published, are, the Author believes, limited to two or three: one by Jonas Hanway, who travelled there in the time of Nadir Shah, early in the last century; another by Fraser, entitled "Adventures on

the Shores of the Caspian," written about twenty years ago, which in truth contains but scanty information,—since which, also, many changes have taken place; and a short paper, by Major Tod, published in the Journal of the Geographical Society.

In committing the following Sketches to the press, the Author claims to himself only one merit, namely, that they were written on the spot of which they profess to give a description, and that they are a faithful account of what passed under his observation.



# SKETCHES

ON THE

## SHORES OF THE CASPIAN.

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### CHAPTER I.

Departure from Tabreez.—Our Party.—Borrings.—Character of the Mountains.—The Adgee Chai.—Khodjeh.—Departure from Khodjeh.—Breakfast.—Position of Villages.—Kuzi Kapan.—The inhabitants.—Ke-khoda.—Vermin.—Buying a Holiday.—Mountains of Karadaugh.—Old Caravanserai.—The Roads.—Ahar.—Mines of Urghurt.—Copper Mines.—Seyeed Khan.—Tomb of Shahaub-u-deen.—Superstition.

ON the afternoon of the 4th of November, 1843, we left Tabreez accompanied by our English friends, who, as is customary in Persia, came a short distance with us before taking leave. The weather was lowering, and a little rain fell, which was considered peculiarly lucky by the Persians; for, as it is of such vital importance to agriculture in this dry climate, they have connected with rain a superstitious idea of general good-fortune.

Our party consisted of Mr. A., Her Majesty's Consul at Tehraun, his Meerza (scribe), five servants, and a Gholaum, Mohamed Rahim Beg, who had

been sent by the prince, Bahman Meerza, as our mehmandar, to procure lodgings and provisions, and to see that we were treated with proper attention. We were all armed; but our servants were so loaded with weapons, that in case of an attack they would have proved more an incumbrance than a protection. Their formidable appearance alone would have sufficed to keep a party of double their number at a respectful distance; and we might reasonably congratulate ourselves on the prospect of travelling unmolested, and arriving safe at our journey's end, provided our followers possessed one tithe of the courage and devotion they boasted while quietly riding through the suburbs of the town. The Meerza, however, was essentially a man of peace, and seemed to entertain a profound antipathy to anything warlike; instead of sword and dagger, he carried in his girdle a roll of paper and a calemdaun (Persian inkstand), the peculiar type of the professors of the pen.

Our baggage had preceded us to the village of Borringe, about six miles from Tabreez, accompanied, and supposed to be defended in case of need, by four grooms, the cook, and the muleteers.

The road from Tabreez to Borringe leads in an easterly direction, through gardens and orchards, the high mud-walls of which almost concealed the beauty of the foliage; and the view is generally confined to the limits of a narrow, dusty lane.

On arriving at Borringe we found a small, square chamber prepared for our reception; carpets were spread, and a solitary chair was standing dejectedly

in a corner, making an hospitable effort to give the room rather an European appearance, but seemingly convinced that it was a hopeless failure. However, on the whole, things appeared cheerful, particularly as dinner was immediately forthcoming; which having discussed with due solemnity, we retired to rest, in anticipation of a journey in which something of the pleasant was expected by me, but a great deal of the disagreeable was predicted by my friend.

We left Borringe at half past seven the next morning, and proceeded in a northerly direction towards a steep pass, through hills composed of red sand-stone and granite. On emerging from this pass, we travelled east, through a mountainous country, almost totally uncultivated; the soil being so strongly impregnated with salt that no vegetation exists, save some few plants peculiar to land of that description.

Having ridden about six miles, we passed Gheunbund, a village of apparently twenty houses, situated on the left, at the foot of the hills here bounding the small barren plain through which our road lay.

The rugged crests of some of the surrounding mountains rose in wild confusion, while others of a less severe character presented a beautiful variety of colouring. They principally consisted of sand-stone.

Continuing through this scenery in a north-east-erly direction, small patches of cultivation being here and there visible, we crossed a rivulet, the water of which, though brackish, was drinkable; and, a mile or two further on, we forded the Adgee,

or Bitter River. At this season it is very shallow, and not more than thirty yards broad: the water is clear and extremely salt. After making many windings, it flows at this point in a north-westerly direction, over a bed of sand and gravel, and, continuing its course through the plain of Tabreez, falls into the lake of Oroomia. In the spring, on the melting of the snows, it is a rapid and considerable river; later in the season, most of its water is exhausted in irrigation; and in the summer its bed near the lake is frequently dry. The water of the stream becomes more and more salt on its approach to the lake, owing to the extensive saline marshes surrounding it.

At half-past eleven A.M. we arrived at our resting-place, the village of Khodjeh, bearing north-east at about sixteen miles from Borringe. With some little noise, a house was cleared for our reception, though the inhabitants seemed reluctant to turn out. Our Gholaum, however, expedited matters very efficiently, by a few cuffs and a torrent of abuse. This, to a person unacquainted with the East, might appear rather too arbitrary a measure, but it is indispensable as the sole means of procuring a lodging; and perhaps often resistance is only made to enhance the value of what is at last conceded. Sometimes it arises from the fear of being compelled to furnish, gratis, everything that may be required; but if, on departure, the inhabitants be well paid, all the harshness that may have been used is forgotten, and they will generally beg you to come to their house, should you ever again hap-

pen to pass their village. The inconvenience they experience is trifling; the furniture, consisting merely of a few carpets, mattresses, coverlets, and some cooking utensils, is removed directly, and, with the inmates, is taken to a neighbour's house. I may further add, that civility and compliance are in this country taken as implying a sense of weakness and inferiority: nothing can be done without bluster; and, the more overbearing one appears, the greater degree of importance is inferred, and consequently the greater attention and respect are shown.

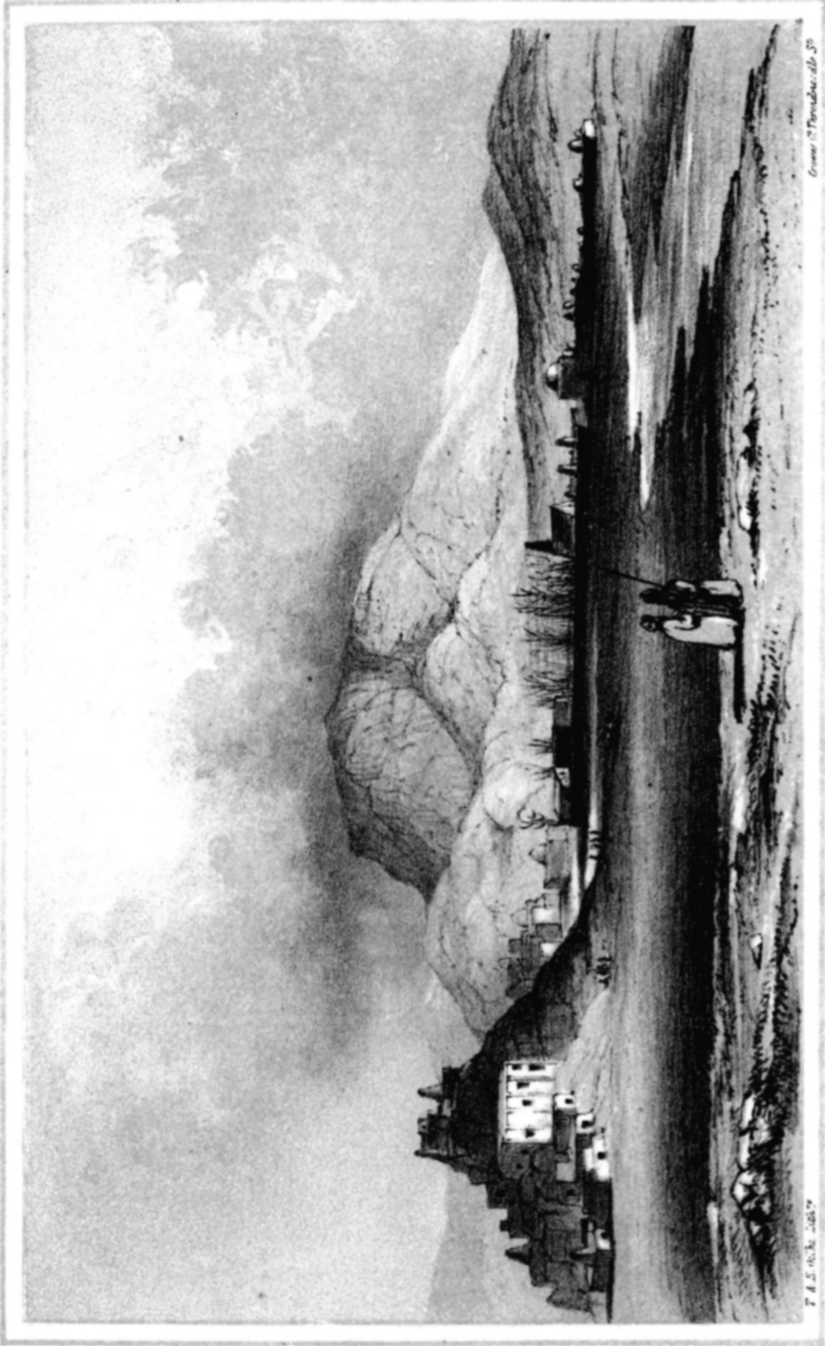
On arriving here, we ordered tea: no one but he who has experienced it, can imagine the luxury of a cup of tea after a hot and fatiguing ride. It soon made its appearance, but, to our astonishment, was so salt that it was scarcely drinkable. Having inquired of one of the servants whether there was no fresh water to be procured in the village, he protested that he had used fresh water, and brought us some cold to taste. I could not detect the least saltiness, and the man affirmed that it was from the same water he had made the tea; and on further examination we found that it only became salt when boiled. Our head servant had formerly been here with Sir John Macdonald, and he now remembered that he was obliged to throw away the tea made on that occasion. The people drink no other water, and consider it extremely wholesome. From their healthy appearance I should imagine they were correct.

Khodjeh contains about one hundred houses, and, I was informed, three hundred inhabitants. It is

built on two small hillocks, situated in a plain, the greater part of which is cultivated and appears to be fertile: barley and wheat are produced, and the people pretend that the soil returns twenty-fold. The Adgee flows through the plain and close to the village, which belongs to a daughter of Abbas Meerza, and yields her a revenue of 300 tomauns. The houses are of mud, and are all on the ground-floor: in the interior, the walls have recesses, which answer the purpose of open cupboards; the roofs are flat, formed of cross-beams and dried bushes covered with earth. Khodjeh possesses one large mosque built of sun-dried bricks; it has no minaret, and is a heavy ugly building. Carpets are made here, as in most of the hamlets in this part of Persia.

There are four villages on the plain; Gogherjin, Emitcheh, Armendeh, and Khodjeh: the two former, belonging to some families of the Sheghau-ghée, a wandering tribe, are left uninhabited when they go to their summer pastures.

At half-past seven in the morning we left Khodjeh, and, at first travelling a short distance in a north-east-erly direction, afterwards turned east, and continued our route through numerous small plains, separated by low rocky hills of the same formation and colouring as those already described. At distant intervals patches of cultivation were to be seen, but in general the country presented a dreary and barren appearance. We crossed several times the stream which had yesterday spoiled our tea, and about one o'clock came to the banks of a rivulet, the waters of which were said to be fresh and good, whether



**KHODJEH.**

Richard Bentley New Burlington Street.





hot or cold, and dismounted for breakfast. A few dried thistles and some dead grass afforded fuel; and a fire was lighted, eggs boiled, and all the *et cetera* prepared with wonderful celerity. It would be difficult to find a better travelling servant than a Persian: he is active, untiring, and excessively ingenious, never seeming at a loss for anything.

After breakfast we recommenced our march, going east, over some low hills more rounded and not so craggy as those we had hitherto traversed. The weather, though threatening, was cool; and the rain which had fallen during the night having laid the dust, rendered travelling agreeable.

We now crossed another wide barren plain, and entered a more cultivated district, where numerous teams of oxen were busily employed in ploughing.

Until arriving at the village of the Shah-soowar (king's horse-man), about eighteen miles from Khodjeh, not a vestige of a habitation was visible; and it was a matter of no small astonishment from whence the people came who were labouring in the surrounding fields. The villages, however, were concealed among the neighbouring valleys, and had been built as far as possible from the high road, in order to avoid many inconveniences, the chief of which is the necessity of entertaining and lodging travellers and government messengers, most generally without any remuneration.

Shah-soowar, on the right of the road, belongs to Nedjef Kooly Khan, lately governor of Khoi, and most of the land we had traversed during the last hour is cultivated by its inhabitants. Half

a fursuck (two miles) further, we came to the village of Kuzi-Kapan, an insignificant place, containing between thirty and forty houses. It belongs to the Sheik-ul-Islam, at Tabreez, and pays yearly, in money, forty tomauns besides, in kind, one-tenth of its produce, which is considerable. From this part of the country, Tabreez is supplied with wheat and barley; the corn grown in the immediate vicinity of that city not being sufficient for its consumption. Carpets and saddle-bags of carpetting are made at Kuzi-Kapan. The houses are built of mud in the manner already described, and, being of the same colour as the earth on which they stand, look like heaps of rubbish and ruins, and, instead of enlivening, rather increase the dreary and desolate aspect of the surrounding country. There is a small stream supplying the inhabitants with excellent water, and its banks planted with willow-trees form the only refreshing feature of the landscape. I was informed that the people owned about seven hundred head of sheep, and three hundred of oxen and cows: on each ewe a tax of ten shahis (sixpence) is levied, and on each cow a réal of twenty-five shahis (one shilling and threepence). The land usually yields plentiful crops, but they had failed this year on account of the drought.

The men were athletic, and apparently healthy: the women were not very scrupulous about concealing their faces; but the few I saw had better have remained covered—that, at least, would have left room for imagination. The specimens exhibited, however, showed nothing but the most unmitigated

sun-burnt ugliness. Quantities of half-naked children were playing about, and seemed to regard me with peculiar alarm.

From Kuzi-Kapan the Savalaun Mountain bears exactly east: to the north, about two miles off, lies the village of Djighere; and to the south, some seven miles distant, in the plain below that of Zarf, Kuzi-Kapan, being situated between the two on a gentle slope.

All the villages in Persia have their Ket-khoda or Ked-khoda, which literally means the lord or master of the house, and is applied to the head of a village, perhaps because his is generally considered the principal house: he is answerable for the revenues, and is sometimes the collector of them; and is referred to, and acts as judge, in all cases of dispute between the villagers.

When we arrived here, a house was in readiness for our reception, as we had sent forward the Gholaum for that purpose. We found, however, that the room swarmed with fleas; and, as we were then quite strangers to this cheerful little insect, and by no means wished to form an intimate acquaintance with him, owing to certain narrow-minded prejudices which greatly wore off as we gained experience on our travels, we preferred an open shed in front of the house; and, having excluded the wind and weather as much as possible with heavy cloths and carpets, we slept tolerably well, though the rain fell in torrents all night, and the air was rather too cool to be pleasant.

The morning was cloudy, and, though it did not

actually rain, yet appearances were so unfavourable, that we prepared ourselves for a regular drenching during our ride. While we were at breakfast, a fine healthy-looking boy, about ten years old, brought us a petition for a holiday, written, as he informed us, by the schoolmaster himself. This appeared curious, but the sequel was more so. The boys had asked the Moollah for a holiday. "That's all very well," said he, "but you must pay for it." The boys had got no money, and their countenances fell. The old gentleman, however, immediately relieved them from their embarrassment, by writing the petition, and suggesting, that when presented to the Sahib Inglese, the purchase money might also be solicited. About a shilling was given to the child, and he went away delighted.

We left Kuzi-Kapan at a quarter to nine, and proceeded in a north-easterly direction towards Karadaugh. The word means "black mountain;" and the province has been well named, for nothing can possibly look more black and forbidding than its mountains, chiefly owing to the sombre colouring of the rocks and earth, which in some places have the appearance of cinders; and also to the dark bushes of blackthorn, hawthorn, rose, and juniper, with which their sides are covered.

As we ascended, we became enveloped in a thick fog and drizzly rain, totally obscuring the scenery, which, judging from the steep descents, the narrow deep gullies we traversed, and the bare rocks starting in gigantic masses from the edge of the road, must have been peculiarly wild.

After an hour's descent from the summit of the pass, we got clear of the mist, and half an hour more brought us to an old caravanserai at the foot of the mountains. There was nothing picturesque in this ruin, of which the walls and a few broken-down cells alone remained, occasionally affording shelter to wandering dervishes or other vagabonds. It stands on the right of the road: on the left runs a small rivulet, flowing from a cleft in the hills, and becoming a considerable river as it approaches Ahar.

The roads we had hitherto travelled were generally hard and level. Across the plains, and, indeed, over some of the hills, it would not be difficult to drive a carriage; here they became more stony, and sometimes passed through small patches of marshy ground. We continued our course along a broad and fertile valley, watered by the above-mentioned stream, on the banks of which I observed several water-mills.

After travelling twenty-five miles in continual rain, we forded the river, here about twenty yards broad, and, ascending a slight rise for half a mile, arrived wet and tired at Ahar. The lodgings prepared by our Gholaum proved tolerably comfortable, being the anderoon, or women's apartments, of a house standing alone in a garden. The room we occupied was in the form of a parallelogram, having at one end a large window with a close wooden grating: a tandour and very dirty frame over it occupied the centre; and a swing, in which the cradles of the children are placed, was suspended at the other extremity. The walls were of mud,

furnished, as usual, with two rows of square recesses edged with white plaster; and the whole had very much the appearance of a large brown-paper box relieved with lines of white. The ceiling was composed of twelve cross-beams, supporting a kind of lath-work of split willow-stems placed closely side by side, upon which rested the bushes covered with earth, forming the flat roof.

We dried our wet clothes, and then, finding the weather a little clearer, sallied forth to see the town.

Ahar, the capital of Karadaugh, is situated in a wide vale surrounded by lofty mountains, and is encircled by a decayed mud wall, flanked by numerous round towers. It is the residence of the governor of the province, Mahomed Rahim Meerza, a brother of the Shah by another mother. By far the greater part of the place is in ruins, and one would scarcely suppose it to be the abode of a prince, or a capital town; but the fact is, that, as a governor is seldom or never allowed to remain in one post longer than two years, he has no interest in the welfare of the people he governs, and makes the most of the time to enrich himself at their expense. Thus every wealthy man becomes a mark for extortion; and, consequently, whatever property there may be is carefully concealed, and everything is made to assume the aspect of poverty and wretchedness: even the palace itself, as it is called, is a miserable mud-house, only to be distinguished from the ruins which surround it by a pointed tiled roof. There is a small dirty bazar, but the trade

is limited to the supply of the town and adjacent villages. The city is said to contain 1500 families, 600 of which are taxed ; and to yield a revenue of a thousand tomauns per annum. In addition to the cultivation of wheat and barley, the gardens around the town produce apples, pears, plums, cherries, apricots, grapes, and several other fruits.

About twelve miles to the north of Ahar lie the iron mines of Urghurt, formerly worked, under the superintendence of Sir Henry Bethune, on account of the Persian government ; but since given up by him, from the difficulty he experienced in obtaining re-payment of the money he had expended. The ore is very rich and abundant ; and, though the government is in want of iron, and is obliged to purchase it from Russia, yet these mines are now totally neglected, on account of the false economy which withholds the advance of the money necessary to conduct the enterprise, although the result has been ascertained by experience to be certain. About the same distance further north are situated the copper mines, once conducted by Seyeed Khan. I believe they are still worked, but for want of funds and proper management the enterprise is profitless, and the produce insignificant. This province abounds in very rich veins of metal, iron, tin, and copper, which, under a better government, might become a source of incalculable wealth.

Seyeed Khan was the son of a small Armenian trader at Busheer, and was educated at a public school at Bombay. On his return to Busheer he engaged himself as a servant to Mr. Ellis, and

afterwards to Colonel Monteith; and, being an intelligent man, and speaking English, was subsequently employed by his Royal Highness Abbas Meerza. He was at that time called Sadik Beg, and went to England to open a trade, having a sort of commission from the prince to act as his agent. On his return he brought out a small stock of merchandize, which remunerated him wonderfully; was made a Khan by Abbas Meerza, who likewise invested him with the Order of the Lion and Sun, and sent him back to England under the name of Seyeed Khan, to execute some further commissions for his Royal Highness, as well as to advance the interests of trade.

On his arrival at Constantinople he endeavoured to supersede the Persian consul, assuming the title of ambassador; but the Turkish government, finding that he had no mission from the Shah, refused to acknowledge his pretensions. He, however, went on to England, still with the assumed title and rank of Persian ambassador, living on the credulity and generosity of the authorities of the countries through which he passed, and finally reaching London penniless. By his assumed character, a good and plausible address, and on the strength of a fine beard, and good shawls and clothes, he imposed on many noble and influential persons, and was introduced into the best society. He succeeded in persuading a rich East Indian house of business to engage in commercial speculations under his auspices, and to purchase a ship expressly for the purpose, giving her the name of "The Seyeed Khan;" then, after



investing a large sum in merchandize, incurring a heavy debt to the above-mentioned house, and to many others, he returned to Persia.

The enterprise did not answer the expectations of his friends ; the returns were small, and too high-priced to be profitable, chiefly from being obtained on credit. Abbas Meerza, however, still continued to him his favour, and made him a grant of the mines in Karadaugh. Soon afterwards, the death of his Royal Highness blasted the Khan's prospects, and he found he could only retain his position by large presents and bribery at the Court of the Shah. The remainder of his adventure was dissipated by these extraordinary demands, as well as by his own extravagance ; and, when he died, he was a debtor to English merchants of some 20,000*l*.

For a time his mines were productive, and he furnished some guns to the Persian government. Its berauts or orders, however, given to assist him in working the mines, and which were to be repaid by guns, were encashed at such a heavy discount, that he only became more deeply involved ; and, on dying of cholera at Tehraun in 1842, he left immense debts in Persia. His corpse was buried by night, lest the artillerymen, of whom he had borrowed money at a high interest, should seize it, and, by exposing it, oblige the Christians, through shame, to pay a sum of money for permission to inter it ; which money is, in such cases, applied to the discharge of the debt.

Seyeed Khan was a man of a certain kind of cleverness, great plausibility and address, and is not

an uncommon instance of the way in which Persians with similar talents have often succeeded in raising themselves from insignificance. In other characteristics he was a true Persian, vain and ostentatious; and these qualities his Mohamedan countrymen knew how to turn to their own account: they spoiled him of his money through flattery and feigned admiration, and, when he had no longer the means of paying them, they treated him with neglect and contempt. His history forcibly reminds one of the tale of Hadgee Baba; and, were his whole story told, it would probably form a series of as amusing and varied adventures, with the addition of their all having really happened to one individual.

On the right hand on entering Ahar stands a conspicuous ruin, the tomb of a certain Sheik, Shahaub-u-deen (Star of Religion). I made many inquiries, but no one seemed to know at what period the reverend old gentleman flourished. It may, however, probably have been during the fourteenth century, as Tamerlane is reported to have added to the building, erected by the Sheik himself, the two minarets of blue lacquered tiles on each side of the middle and principal arch. I should, however, doubt the truth of the assertion, as Tamerlane was more likely to have destroyed, than to have added to the structure; besides, I should hardly think it so ancient. The façade has a lofty arched recess in the centre; and on either side are wings, having an upper story, attaining to about two-thirds of the present height of the minarets. On the left hand as you face the building is another wing on the ground-floor, con-

taining an apartment now used as a mosque. The whole face of the building was formerly covered with characters and scrolls in lacquered tiles of blue and yellow, of which very few now remain. The minarets are in tolerable preservation, except their summits, which were apparently once crowned with some kind of ornamental roof or spire, but they are now level with the top of the wall of the main building; and at the base of both the pillars, at about four feet from the ground, is a vacant space in the tile-work which possibly may have contained a slab for an inscription. In front of the building is an old tank, built principally of marble; but it is now dry, and half filled up with pieces of masonry which have fallen in from the sides. From the central arched recess one passes through a low door into a lofty square chamber, built of brick and surmounted by a dome of the same material; it is perfectly empty, and is now the abode of sparrow-hawks and wild pigeons, which enter through the holes and crevices in the top. Another door in one corner of this chamber leads into an open area surrounded by a number of small cells, probably once appropriated to visitors, or the apartments of the priests and attendants who formerly kept the place in order. The court is so filled with graves, that the marble slabs covering them have formed a complete pavement. In the centre is a handsome screen or railing of stone of a dark slate colour, beautifully chiselled in open work, surrounding the tomb of the saint. This screen would appear to have been erected in a hurry, or left unfinished, as on one half of the small wicket

which gives access to the tomb the sculpture is incomplete. There are no figures engraved, the carving representing only scrolls of flowers and other fanciful devices. Most of the grave-stones are inscribed with Arabic characters. The lower part of the outside walls of the building is composed of single slabs of stone, some of a reddish purple, and some of a grey tint, reaching four feet from the ground; the remainder is of very excellent brick, and of good workmanship.

We ascended the minarets by a worn and dilapidated spiral staircase, and should have obtained an extensive view of the town and neighbouring mountains, but the weather still continued overcast, and the magnificent Savalaun Dagh was enveloped in clouds to its very base. I should think the shafts of the minarets still standing were not less than a hundred and thirty or a hundred and forty feet high.

The ruin is situated in what was formerly a burying ground, but was converted into an orchard by the present Shah before he came to the throne. At one corner is a large gateway, through which passes a rill of water flowing from the town along the top of an embankment, and planted on either side with a row of luxuriant willows. Over the gateway are some open rooms; the whole in a state of great dilapidation.

In an arched window of the mausoleum we observed a quantity of reeds. We inquired what they were, and were informed, that, if a person suffered from pain or disease, he twined a reed with string or rag, prayed over it, and consigned it to this holy

place, and the people gravely assured us that the malady duly passed away. What peculiar efficacy belonged to the reed or the string nobody pretended to explain, but every one asserted the fact. This superstition resembles the hanging up of rags or offerings on the branches of trees near sacred spots ; a custom common both in Turkey and Persia, and many other countries, Ireland and Scotland not excepted.