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James Abbott

Excerpt

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### Preliminary Remarks.

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WHEN Major Todd, in June 1839, arrived as Envoy at Heraut, he selected Moolla Hussun, a Mahomedan Priest of great respectability, as bearer of a letter of friendship to the Khaun Huzurut, (Supreme Lord) of Khiva, called also Khaurism Shauh, or King of Khaurism. Moolla Hussun arriving at Khiva when the state was threatened with a Russian invasion, was well received, and on his return was accompanied by an Oozbeg lord, Shookkuroolla Bae by name, as ambassador from the Khaun Huzurut to the Indian Government. The letter borne by this ambassador, accepted of the tender of British friendship, and made several demands which could not be complied with, upon the responsibility of Major Todd. It was in answer to this mission, that the Envoy deputed me to visit the Court of Khiva.

The news brought by the Khiva ambassador rated the Russian force at 100,000 fighting men, who were said to be still in the Kuzzauk country, N. West of the sea of Aral. In return for the Envoy's present of a very handsome rifle, he sent a very sorry specimen of the boast of Khaurism, in shape of a broken down nag. This, however, had probably been substituted by the minister for the horse originally sent. The presents entrusted to my care were a Persian sabre and a Heraut rifle for the Khaun himself; a rifle for his brother, the Inauk of Huzarusp; and a matchlock rifle for

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[More information](#)

the Governor of Yoollataun. The royal presents were very unworthy of the occasion; but the British Toshekhaneh\* had been exhausted, and as I was to ride *chuppah*, (post,) my haste to present myself before his Majesty was to serve as an excuse for their poverty. Such trifling particulars throw light upon the manners and customs of a country: it is also but justice to myself to state, (so far as political considerations will allow,) the very trifling means I had of conciliating favour.

The kingdom of Khaurism is separated from the Russian district of Orenburgh by a considerable belt of steppe, held by Kuzzauks, whose chief, or Sooltaun, is nominally tributary to Russia. The Russians call this people Kirgheez, to distinguish them from their own Kuzzauks, or Cossacks, who are Christians, but the name is unknown to the people themselves. Khaurism is bounded on the west by the Caspian; on the S. West by Persia and Heraut; on the S. East by Bokhara; on the N. East by Kokaun.

The present capital of Khaurism is Khiva, lying in N. lat.  $41^{\circ} 20'$  and E. long. about  $60^{\circ}$ , and about 40 miles West of the Oxus. It therefore bears from Heraut about N. N. West, and is distant from it, by the road, something less than 600 miles, of which, after passing the mountain barrier of Heraut, nearly the whole is a barren steppe, where even a tent is rarely discovered.

The former capital was Oorgunj, and two towns of this name have successively enjoyed the dignity. A country so cut off from the rest of the world by wide steppes, whose rare inhabitants are plunderers and slave-dealers by profession, was too little known to be correctly designated; accordingly, Khaurism is a title with which few are familiar, whilst the

\* With each British Mission in Central Asia is a magazine of rare articles and dresses of honour, intended as presents to sovereigns and nobles, or rewards for the services of others.

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[More information](#)

capitals Oorgunj and Khiva have in turn given their names to a kingdom, which whatever its wealth and political importance, is at least sufficiently extensive. Khaurism is about 800 miles in length, north and south, by nearly 600 east and west, comprising an area of nearly 480,000 square miles. It is of much importance to bear in mind, that Bokhara is entirely severed from Russia by Khaurism. The latter kingdom joining Kokaun, in the desert, about 360 miles east of Khiva.

The greater part of Khaurism (as its Persian name implies) viz., all that is East of the Oxus, belonged to ancient Persia. The descendants of the Persians are still existing under the name of Sart. They are known by their beards, a distinction, for the sake of which, the Oozbegs, the present lords of the empire, frequently condescend to intermarry with them. The Toorcumuns who inhabit the steppe between Khiva and the Caspian are more particular: and accordingly beards are rarely seen amongst them. The Kuzzauks, whose country extends from the northernmost limit of Khaurism, to an irregular line from the south of the Sea of Aral drawn W. S. West to the Caspian, would in turn be despised by the more polished Sart. The presence therefore of a beard in a Toorcumun or Kuzzauk khail (camp) may generally be traced to some Persian slave of the family. And if we consider the extreme value and importance to the nations of Asia of an appendage by which they swear, and upon which they pray; we may appreciate the strength of the temptation under which it has been introduced into any household.

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[More information](#)

## Chapter F.

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Departure from Heraut—Anecdote of the Poet Jaumie—Arrival and reception at Purwana—Peer Muhumud Khaun, commander of my Escort—Parting benediction—Kytoo Ridge—Cross country path to Khooshk—Valley of the Khooshk—Arrival and reception at Khooshk, the Jumsheedee capital—Departure—Peril from Petticoats—Reception at a Jumsheedee Khail—Translation of 40 Virgins—Kara Tuppah—Singular sagacity of the Scorpion of Pèshawur—Freemason's Hall—Anecdotes—Chummunie Bhyad—Slave dealing at Heraut—Cause of the Vuzeer suffering it—Sabres of Khorussaun—District of Baudkhiss—Kullah i Mowr, Toorkish frontier—Reception by the Yahmoots of Punjdeeh—Inconveniences of guestship—Dismissal of Peer Muhumud Khaun.

On 24th December 1839, I quitted Heraut in progress to Khiva, and several trifling arrangements being found incomplete, halted at a village near the Eed-gauh, where I was hospitably entertained by a descendant of the poet Jaumie, whose tomb is at the Eed-gauh. This poet, by birth a Herautie, has a name only less esteemed than those of Haufiz and Saadi. It was related to me by a native of Heraut, that a poet who in his day had some celebrity, came to visit Jaumie, and challenged him to a trial of poetic skill. They sat on the banks of the Jooe Unjeer (fig canal,) a running and pure stream from the Hurrie rood, and for several days they continued the combat, answering one another in the most beautiful verse; all who loved poetry collected to hear them, but said the narrator, Jaumie was a *Bul-bul*, and the third evening, when the visitor was in mid discourse with Jaumie, and the verse of

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the latter continued to improve in power and sweetness beyond the measure of human song, the stranger was observed to betray unwonted languor; his head gradually sank upon his breast: when his answer was expected, he continued silent, and when a friend strove to arouse him, he was found to be —dead. Traditions of this nature are implicitly believed by Asiatics, who would deem the doubt of them akin to infidelity. The belief upon which this tale is founded is universal, viz. that the Bul-bul, when out-done in melody, droops its head upon the breast and expires.

I quitted this village the next morning, and after much delay, occasioned by the falling of the baggage from the ponies' back, reached Purwana, in a high valley about 11 miles distant from Heraut. The road lies between close hills, of no considerable height, and ascends the entire distance to Purwana. As it is not my purpose to publish any particulars relative to the practicability or otherwise of this mountain chain, I shall content myself with describing the general aspect of the country. This village is depopulated by forays of the Jumsheedees, a people of Toorkish origin, but tributary to Heraut. These men encouraged by the connivance of the Vuzeer Yar Muhummud Khaun are ever on the watch to seize for sale to the Toorcumuns, the miserable subjects of Heraut. Here are profuse Kaureeze, and a little cultivation. The people, who are Taujiks, received and entertained me very hospitably. Around this village are hills and high plains producing wormwood, which is browsed by the wild antelope. The tombs of the five saints who founded the village, are seen in the neighbourhood.

Unless I could deem myself the most interesting personage of the group now proceeding to Khiva, it were unpardonable to omit mention of those who formed my retinue. This I shall from time to time take occasion to do, as any incident happens to bring them prominently forward.

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[More information](#)

The most important person was the Afghaun Peer Muhumud Khaun, a relation of the Vuzeer of Herat. He was given me by the Vuzeer as commander of an escort of five horsemen, to be increased to fifteen on approaching Punj Deeh. The instant I saw him I perceived that he was far too respectable for the petty office assigned, and I held him in suspicion accordingly. Peer Muhumud Khaun is a very handsome man, and his beauty is of a striking character. His features are nobly formed, his eye is large, dark, and expressive. His teeth are of dazzling whiteness. When first he waited upon me at Herat I was very busy, the twilight was settling into darkness, and I did not observe his approach. When I looked up I saw before me a figure which almost startled me by its resemblance to our best portraits of Edward the Third. The effect was increased by the shadow of a large dark blue turban and a cloak still darker. Presenting himself to me as sent by one whose cunning is only to be surpassed by his villainy, whom I believed by a similar messenger to have contrived the imprisonment of the gallant, but unfortunate Colonel Stoddart, he was regarded by me with singular interest, and that of no pleasing character. He has naturally become the chief object of my attention, and as I can understand his Persian, and he by dint of excessive intelligence contrives to make out a good deal of mine, I am in deep conversation with him whenever the road permits it. He has orders to escort me to Merv, to Khiva if I think fit; and as for very important reasons he is extremely anxious to attend me to the latter place, I have an advantage which I shall not for a moment suffer him to forget. Here I received a letter from Major Todd. We separate under circumstances sufficiently gloomy. I leave him in the very stronghold of robbers. I go myself, as agent of the British Government to a Court, of the language and manners of which I am utterly ignorant, and to accomplish that of which the most

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sanguine have no hope. It is simply a matter of duty, and as such, entered upon cheerfully, and with full determination to carry my efforts to the uttermost.

The man who brought me this note had formerly been in my service whilst marching to Heraut. He was one day so extremely insolent that I lifted my riding whip to him; remembering however my political office, I did not strike him, but I perceived that he was highly offended. On reaching our camp in the evening, and retiring to bed, I observed that he had not brought me my gun, which he always carried, and which he had orders to place in my bed at night. I also observed that his right hand was bandaged, and that he was very reluctant to let me look at it. I called for the gun; he made a hundred excuses for not bringing it. I went to his bedding, where I found it. I drew it out of the oilskin case, and found the right cock down on the nipple and the left on full cock. I conceived immediately, what his countenance expressed, that he had cocked it with the intention of shooting me, but relenting perhaps, or deferring his intention, had endeavoured to let down the cocks, and had caught his thumb under one of them. I now insisted upon examining the wound, and found it just as I suspected. I took no notice of this little demonstration, nor ever condescended to use precaution against a creature so contemptible. Under the influence of a present, he now took leave of me, on the high plain above Purwana, and holding his turban in his hand before his eyes, uttered a thousand benedictions upon me. For my part I should have rather preferred his curse. However this is judging harshly. The lawless spirit of revenge which inspires the savage, is, when properly regulated, the parent of some of the noblest virtues, being in fact the guardian and defender of man's dearest rights.

Avoiding now the more direct and difficult passes of the mountain ridge of Kytoo, we crossed that chain without acci-

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dent, meeting neither dwelling nor tent, excepting two ruined Rabaht (hospitia) in the valley, and descending some grassy heights, pitched at evening in a hollow, where we found a little water. We were now on the road to Khooshk, the capital of the Jumsheedees, as recommended by Yar Muhummud Khaun, on the plea of my being provided by their chieftain with a further escort of ten horsemen. Khooshk is two marches out of the direct road, and being suspicious of the Vuzeer's intentions, I was reluctant to visit it. When therefore I reached the junction of the two roads, I put P. M. Khaun under a cross examination as to the advantage to be expected from the deviation. He was extremely guarded to prevent suspicion that he was bent upon the Khooshk road, and I gave him no hint of my own suspicion of treachery. Finally I was induced to visit Khooshk, by the reflection, that having to pass through the territories of its chief, who was doubtless aware of my approach, it was of importance to conciliate him by any compliment in my power.

These grassy heights are in spring infested by small, green snakes, not generally deemed venomous. They have a sufficiently desolate aspect: but their grass in some measure relieves this—one solitary flock of sheep in the distance, and the wild antelopes of the wilderness, were the sole living things we saw. Kytoo, covered at the summit with snow, holds awful pre-eminence over the solitude.

27th December. The clouds collected during the night, and a drizzling shower added nothing to the comfort of my followers, who having no tent, covered themselves with felts as best they could. I heard them, however, making light of it, and whiling the night with laughter and fun. The horses piquetted to short iron pegs driven into the earth, which offered no resistance whatever to any efforts to get free, and unaccustomed to pass the night in the open air, were constantly



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breaking loose, and I was rather surprised to find the number complete at break of day. It was then, that looking in the direction of Kytoo we saw that mountain chain covered from summit to base with snow, and congratulated ourselves with, no little thankfulness, on having already passed this barrier where travellers every year are lost in the snow. A very distressing cross-country path, over steep hills covered with grass, brought us to the rivulet Khooshk, which we ascended to the capital of that name. The valley here is picturesque and interesting. The low hills which form it, are quite naked, or produce only grass. Not a leaf is to be seen. Yet being fringed with the black tents of the Jumsheedees, and peopled with living things, men, women, horses, and sheep, the contrast to the country just passed was strong and welcome. The women in groups were engaged in working upon the banks of the stream. Their dress is either a petticoat or very loose drawers, over which the shift falls. On the head is an ugly white cloth wound round the head, under the chin, and falling upon the shoulders. Their faces therefore are exposed, being in fact not worth the cost of concealment, but the dress was sufficient to smother the charms of a Venus. The black tents which form the capital of the Jumsheedees are of thick felts, supported by a light and moveable framework of wood. Their shape is circular, and their dark hue is received from the smoke of fires lighted within : but sometimes from the colour of the wool. Khooshk however has a few mud huts and a fort, (so called) resembling a dilapidated farm yard. The Jumsheedees reckon their own number at 15,000 families, or 75,000 souls ; but this is probably an exaggeration ; for having now passed through about fifty miles of their country, I have scarcely seen a human being.

I had been throughout this march in conversation with Peer Muhummud Khaun, hoping to gain some hint of the Vu-

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zeer's object in sending me hither. I found by cross examination that he had a letter from the Vuzeer to the Jumsheedee chief, but he believed, he said, that it was merely an order for my escort. I sent him on to announce my approach, and he returned with a single horseman to conduct me to the place prepared for my reception. This was extremely discourteous, for the chief should himself have come to meet me, or at any rate have received me at the threshold, I had, however, no means of enforcing respect, being for the moment in his power, so I alighted at the steps leading to my apartment, which was probably the best he had to offer, and made myself as comfortable as circumstances would allow. Here I found an unusual thing in the shape of a tolerably wide chimney. Upon applying fire, however, I soon found that it was a luxury only in appearance, as none of the smoke would pass up it. After several hours Mahomed Zemaun Khaun, the Jumsheedee chief, made his appearance, attended by Peer Muhummud Khaun. He is a man who affects great frankness, and his manners are lively and rather agreeable, although unpolished. He welcomed me to Khooshk ; said that he heard I had expressed to Peer Muhummud Khaun some distrust of the Vuzeer's motives for sending me thither, and laid his note open before me. This note was certainly all I could desire, but it was probably not the only one. After a very short visit he jumped up, and saying, "farewell," left the room as briskly as he had entered. To judge by this man's countenance, a physiognomist would give him credit for courage, conduct, decision, and generosity ; yet in the late siege of Heraut he betrayed a lamentable want of all those qualities.

During that unfortunate and disastrous investment, the Herauties in vain expected succour from this wild tribe, who by seconding the efforts of the besieged might have done infinite mischief to the Persians. Whilst the Jumsheedees seemed to