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James Abbott

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Narrative of a Journey from Herat to Khiva, Moscow, and St Petersburg during the Late Russian Invasion of Khiva

This two-volume travelogue recounts the diplomatic mission through Central Asia and Russia undertaken by James Abbott (1807–96) in 1839. An officer in the Bengal Artillery, Abbott first travelled to Central Asia in 1838 and was soon drawn into the ‘Great Game’ between Russia and Britain as they struggled for influence in the region. When Russia launched an expedition against Khiva in 1839, ostensibly to free Russian slaves, Abbott was sent there to advise the Khan and then travelled to Russia to initiate mediation. While the Russian slaves were freed by Abbott’s successor, Abbott believed he had succeeded and published this account in 1843. The work includes anecdotes of his experiences and observations on the cultures and landscapes he encountered. In Volume 1, he describes his journey from Herat to Khiva and the beginning of his journey to Russia.

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VOLUME 1

JAMES ABBOTT



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T. Picken lith.

Day & Haghe Lith^{rs} to the Queen.

SUMMUD KHAUN

AFGHAN.

Steward of Capt.^m Abbott's Mission to Khiva.

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AND
ST. PETERSBURGH,
DURING THE
LATE RUSSIAN INVASION OF KHIVA;
WITH
SOME ACCOUNT OF THE COURT OF KHIVA AND THE
KINGDOM OF KHAURISM.

BY CAPT. JAMES ABBOTT,
BENGAL ARTILLERY,
Author of the "T'hakoorine," and lately on a political Mission.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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Written on the shore of the Caspian, Khaurism,—April, 1840.

VICTORIA!—From thy thousand isles,
 Thy realms beyond the sea,
 Old ocean wreathes his brow in smiles
 To bless, to welcome thee.—
 Throughout each palace crystalline
 Each far resounding dome,
 With ocean pearls the Naiads twine
 Their sea-green locks—they come ;
 They come, light dancing o'er the Deep,
 As motes in sunny beam ;
 In music o'er the waves they sweep,
 Victoria still their theme,
 Queen of the Isles,
 Queen of the Deep,
 Of Freedom, Valor, Beauty, Queen.

No sceptre needs that lily hand,
 Bend but thy beauteous brow,
 Old Ocean's thunders shake the Strand,
 They quell each haughty Foe.

NOTE.—Only two of the stanzas were written as dated. The attack recorded in the Journal having immediately followed.

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Forth the white-pinion'd squadrons fly,
 Those eagles of the wave ;
 The red-cross Banner streams on high
 Its beacon to the Brave.
 And at thy glance, to light they leap,
 The war-blades bright and keen :
 Red roll the Floods, wild, curl, and sweep,
 Hoarse voices chyme between—
 “ Queen of the Isles !
 “ Queen of the Deep !
 “ Of Freedom, Valor, Beauty, Queen” !

Blessings on Her, whose very name
 Breath'd in the Scythian Wild,
 The Scythian's stony heart could tame,
 And free* sad Slavery's child !
 Britannia's name, till then unheard,
 With thine sweet union found :
 Old Oxus own'd the blest accord,
 And trembled at a sound.
 Then clank'd the riven chain : the Deep
 Gave up its dead :—and keen
 Leapt forth the prison'd fires.—They weep,
 They bless a power unseen,
 Queen of the Isles,
 Queen of the Deep,
 Of Freedom, Valor, Beauty, Queen.

Victoria ; bid thy standard wave,
 Fling far each giant fold,
 Dropp'd with the pearls of ocean's cave,
 With India's gems and gold !

* See page 166, vol. 1st Journal.

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On that red-cross the circling sun
 Ne'er sets :—and winds that blow,
 Shake from each fold a blessing down,
 On some sad child of woe.
 O'er earth and wave, where'er its deep
 Dread shade of peace is seen,
 A Heav'n on earth the Ransom'd keep,
 Starr'd in thy ray serene,
 Queen of the Isles,
 Queen of the Deep,
 Of Freedom, Valor, Beauty, Queen.

But, when its thund'rous folds are freed,
 When the fork'd fire-bolts glance,
 'Mid warrior shouts and tramp of steeds
 And gleam of serried lance :
 When earth and sky its gloom deplore,
 And Ocean's terrors rise,
 And, hurl'd upon a hostile shore,
 Th' Armada shatter'd lies :
 Whilst surges roar and tempests sweep,
 — Each fearful crash between,
 Justice, dread voice accord shall keep
 And Mercy hymn serene,
 Queen of the Isles !
 Queen of the Deep,
 Of Freedom, Valor, Beauty, Queen.

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Preface.

IN offering the following pages to the public, I feel sensible that some apology is necessary for the incompleteness of the materials, and defectiveness of the execution ; but still more, for instances of egotism, of which I was not aware, until I saw the work in print.

I was called, suddenly, from active and engrossing duties as a Revenue Surveyor, to join the army of the Indus, assembling at Feroozpore. No space was allowed me for procuring books, treating of the countries we were about to enter ; and my duties on the march were of a harassing character, exhausting both mind and body. My company being detained to garri-

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son Cundahar, I was selected to accompany Major Todd, the Envoy proceeding to Herat, as his political assistant; and at Herat, found no leisure for research; my new duties fully engrossing me. I thus departed for Khiva, ignorant of every particular, whether of fact or curiosity, connected with Toorkestaun: had to learn the Persian tongue, (itself a foreign language in Khaurism,) on my hurried march thither, and was closely guarded, whilst there, from intercourse with the natives.

From the hour of leaving Khiva to that of my arrival in England, I knew neither leisure nor rest. During the greater portion of that period, I was incapacitated, as the reader will see, for taking notes: and in England, I was more harassed than I had been on my journey through Russia. Even on my return, as I passed through Europe, my life was too hurried to admit of much reference to the note book of memory. It was not until my arrival in Calcutta, that any repose was afforded me. There, with the prospect (as I supposed) of being immediately remanded to the active line of service, to which I still belonged, I sat down to collect my scattered materials, ere they should be utterly obliterated; and, as I conceived that the personal narrative of a traveller through the steppes

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of Tartary could only be interesting, by drawing largely upon his sensations and emotions ; I noted roughly every thought and fancy that could yet be recovered, intending to select carefully from the mass, such as were suitable for publication. The selection has, I feel, been injudicious. The habit of addressing the public, by the lips of imaginary personages ; a mode which admits of the most unreserved confessions, has beguiled me too often into particulars, that should have been reserved exclusively for the eyes of friends. Nor is it by any means an easy matter, to form a judicious selection, from matter once committed to paper : for the narrative becomes mixed with the sentiments, and the extrication calls for both nerve and judgment.

At the same time, the Journal must be published now, or consigned for ever to oblivion : for I can see no opportunity, in the future, of committing it to the Press ; and am warned, by the late loss of many MSS. and drawings in Afghaunistaun, which had cost me the labour of years.

The above observations are not put forth to screen these pages from criticism : but only, to exculpate the author from the charge of having rashly thrown them upon the world, or

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having neglected the research and labour, due from every one, who presumes to amuse or instruct his fellows.

Should leisure ever be mine, the Appendix may, in some future Edition, be rendered less incomplete. But the difficulty to a Wanderer, of procuring books relating to Central Asia, is greater than would be believed. Even in London, I have visited at least twenty booksellers, ere I could find Elphinstone's Cabul, a standard work; it may be added, the *only* standard work, on Afghaunistaun. Some of the booksellers stared at me with blank visages: others thought I was speaking Hebrew; and when I added, or Tod's Rajhasthan, they either hunched the shoulders in dismay, or thought I was hoaxing them. Latterly, whenever I lost my way in London (a pretty common occurrence) I used to step into the first bookseller's shop, and ask for Elphinstone's Cabul and Tod's Rajhasthan, and as soon as the shaking of heads had subsided, and the bookseller was sufficiently recovered from his bewilderment, beg him to direct me on my way.

These petty obstacles are sufficiently absurd in detail; but under restricted leisure they become formidable. With regard to my route, it was taken by means of the watch, and recon-

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noitring compass. As far as Khiva it may, I think, be depended upon, and agrees well in result with Capt. Sir Richmond Shakespear's bearings, by another route, to and from the same points. From Khiva to the Caspian, the loss of my watch greatly crippled me : moreover, the bearings could be taken only when the Toorcumuns of my escort were at a distance : a character for necromancy being dangerous in those countries. The bearings, however, and distances were noted daily to within sixty miles of Nuov Alexandrof, on the Caspian.

The difficulties in the way of the author's research in Toor-kestaun, were again encountered in Russia. Ignorance of the language, restricted leisure, and a mind utterly unprepared, by previous reading, for the subject before it. The only reasonable pretension, therefore, of the following pages, is to have endeavoured to make the most of very limited opportunities, and not to have wearied the eye, that shall have honoured them with perusal.

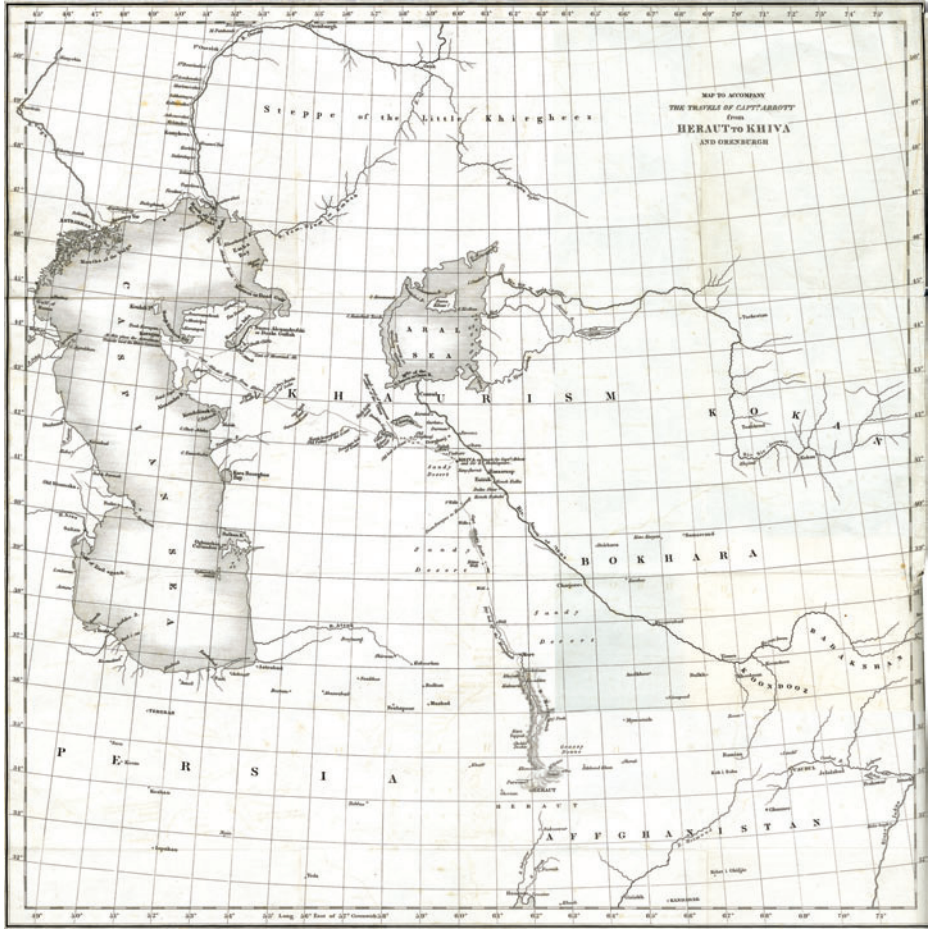
Calcutta, Dec. 1st, 1841.

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