

# SIX MONTHS IN PERSIA.

BY

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BENGAL CIVIL SERVICE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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## CHAPTER X.

## KARMAN.

12TH TO 17TH APRIL.

ZAKI BEG went to the Governor's and returned with the kadkhudabashi, or Mayor of Karman, to whom was assigned the duty of ministering to our necessities. We were offered a change of quarters, but I preferred the caravansarai. For two days I rested and wrote letters; then I went out and called on the kadkhudabashi, who received me with much deference, gave me sherbet and a qalyan, and some information about Karman. After a while he offered me wine, which I accepted with thanks. It was light *vin ordinaire*, but he had better stuff in his cellars, for Sayyid Ali next day brought me a great *baqqâra* or glass vessel, containing about three quarts of dark strong wine, which he had purchased from the kadkhudabashi for five krans. This wine was so strong that I had to mix it with water. Moreover, Sayyid Ali

bought six bottles of brandy, three for himself and three for me, at three and a half krans per bottle—a magnificent bargain, for the brandy proved to be very fair. It had come from Bombay to a trader of Karman, who finding no market for it in the city, was glad of this opportunity of getting it off his hands.

Next day I called on the Vazir, who gets the credit of governing the whole province. I found him a comparatively young man, with a reddish nose of ultra-Persian dimensions ; for the rest, he spoke in a quiet tone of voice, and was extremely civil. The room in which we sat was adorned with the usual tawdry pictures taken from bundles of piece-goods, and set in the fair white plaster of the wall, alternating with small mirrors similarly set, which make a better show. We talked of the assassination of the Emperor of Russia—an astounding piece of news which I heard here for the first time. “There are Nihilists in all countries,” said the Vazir ; “we have our Nihilists in Persia, whom we call Bâbis.” At a subsequent interview, I tried to get news of our doings in Afghanistan, and of the Russians in the Turkoman country ; but the Vazir had nothing to tell me, save that the Biluchistan mail would be in next day, and that he would send me anything of interest

which it might contain. I never saw it; but I succeeded in procuring some copies of the *Akhtar*, a Persian newspaper published in Constantinople, which, though old, were better than nothing.

The Prince Governor (Farman Farma) of Karman, having appointed an evening for my visit, I went to the palace, and was ushered into a large plainly-furnished room, opening on a courtyard with plane-trees and apple-trees, and with three small fountains prettily playing. A broad divan, covered with red cloth, occupied part of one side of the room, and beside it, on a high bedstead, sat the prince. He is very like his brother the then Governor of Shiraz, but older and feebler. He was enveloped in a great fur cloak. His manners were courteous and calculated to set one at one's ease. Having visited Europe with the Shah in 1873, he has much in common with Europeans, and there need be none of those appalling gaps and flaws in the conversation which render an Indian *mulaqat* so peculiarly fearful. He asked about the fate of Candahar, and could scarcely believe that it was to be given up, after the expenditure of so much blood and treasure. He politely acquiesced, however, in my suggestion

after irrigating the terraced wheat and poppy, came pouring out in crystal showers through the stone walls which fenced the upper margin of the road. Behind the leafy screen great rock-walls rose, dark and impracticable; while before us the gorge narrowed and closed against the huge snow-crowned rampart of Shirkuh ridge itself, suspended highest of all, like a white cloud in the blue air. We found quarters in the house of a Haji, close by the river. The first thing I did on arriving was to go and bathe in a pool. The water was delightfully cold. A pile of granite boulders above the terrace-fields gave me a fine view of the long straggling village and the cliffs that shut it in and hold up the snow-covered summits of the mountain. I wished to cross Shirkuh by the head of this ravine, but everybody agreed that the road was blocked with snow, and I did not like to risk the mules.

*8th May, Manshar, 4 farsakhs; 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.*—Accordingly, next day we marched to Manshar, descending the ravine and turning sharp to our right, passing on our way two little villages, and the large village of Tizarjan, the best of all those which Shirkuh hides in its well-watered recesses. Tizarjan has a river

somewhat smaller than that of Deh Bala, but a much wider area of field and wood, filling a broad hollow at the foot of the highest peak of Shirkuh—a noble mountain capped with a crown of rock many hundred feet high. A broad band of snow lay at the foot of the crown, and its summit was deep in snow. The snow would disappear towards the end of summer, but in clefts and hollows of the rock (so I was assured) the accumulations of countless winters are stored up, safe from the sun. Passing this lovely valley with regret, we turned aside to Manshar, and found that it too lay in a hollow, less broad than that of Tizarjan, and watered by two small streams. It is the largest village of Shirkuh, has a mosque, and a few shops. Here again a Haji's house received us; the old man took so much trouble on my account that I was quite ashamed. I picked up a guide here, who proved rather an amusing fellow. He came with me for a walk in the afternoon, up a hill-side where the gleam of water flowing over a shelving rock had caught my eye. I found the place lined with grass, through which the little streamlet made its way, and half-way up the hill was a small plateau planted with pollard

willows, with a pool in the middle where the streamlet was dammed. They call a dam *istakh* or *salkh*, a strange word, seemingly old Persian. My guide was very anxious that I should bath in the pool, which possessed medicinal virtues, and was resorted to by patients from Yazd; but I had bathed sufficiently in the river below. He then began to discourse freely about local affairs, complained of oppression, and said the *kalantar* would take ten tomans as his *mudakhil* or perquisite in consequence of my visit. This smote upon my conscience, but there was no remedy, and probably the sum was exaggerated. "The people," said my companion, "desire to be under your banner" (*zir i alam i shumá*), i.e., under British rule—had they only a definite notion of England as distinguished from Farangistan generally. Then he proceeded to glorify the mineral products of Shirkuh. "Under the snows," he said, "are crystals (*durr* or *qalam*) as long as one's finger, which grow there like mushrooms." He himself had watched one grow. A boxful of them was collected and sent to Farangistan a few years ago. As for the village people, they are Bâbîs,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Bâb or Gate was a native of Nirez who preached a communistic and mystical religion that had much in it to

and have community of wives and daughters (*zan o dukhtar i hamdigar hilál midánand*); of which custom my companion advised me to take advantage, as a remedy against loneliness during the rest of my stay in Manshar. I hastened to turn the conversation to less questionable subjects. We sat and looked over the valley bathed in the quiet evening light. A cuckoo was calling as we descended the hill towards the groves and broad vine-trellises of Manshar. We crossed a swift brook flowing from the snows that rose against the sky on our right. I thought I had never looked upon a prettier scene. In the Haji's garden of apple, plum, and apricot trees, I enjoyed a qalyan and tea before dinner. I slept in an upper room overlooking the garden, and was wakened twice in the night by the rapturous singing of nightingales, whose wild music burdened every bough.

*9th May, Sakhvid, 5 farsakhs; 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.*—Next day we marched across Shirkuh by the Manshar pass, a low saddle-back, just reaching to the level of the snow at this time of year. The country on the southern side of

attract the free-thinking Persian mind. He was put to death in 1850.

the mountains is utterly unlike the valleys and ravines which nestle in their bosom on the side next Yazd. When we reached the crest of the pass, we saw a long bare slope, of the kind so familiar to the traveller in central Persia, extending downwards till it sank into a desert plain broken here and there by hills, "mere ugly heights and heaps," which rose into jagged ridges in the eastern or left-hand part, and subsided into mere undulations towards the right. The top of the slope, as distinguished from the actual mountain-side above it, lay considerably higher than the valleys on the Yazd side; in fact, for all their southerly aspect, the walnut trees in the gardens of Nid and Sakhvid were only beginning to come into leaf. While the rest of the caravan descended the mountain-side and marched round a spur, I went with my guide by a mountain path which led us up a rocky peak, and thence down a ravine, where a snow-fed brook tumbled among rocks and grass. Coming down upon the road, we walked on, thinking the mules in advance, but in half an hour we heard a shot, and saw them two miles behind. We sat beside a water-channel and awaited their coming. A plane-tree gave us shade, and bushes of sweet