

**ARMENIA: A YEAR AT
ERZEROOM, AND ON THE
FRONTIERS OF RUSSIA,
TURKEY AND PERSIA**

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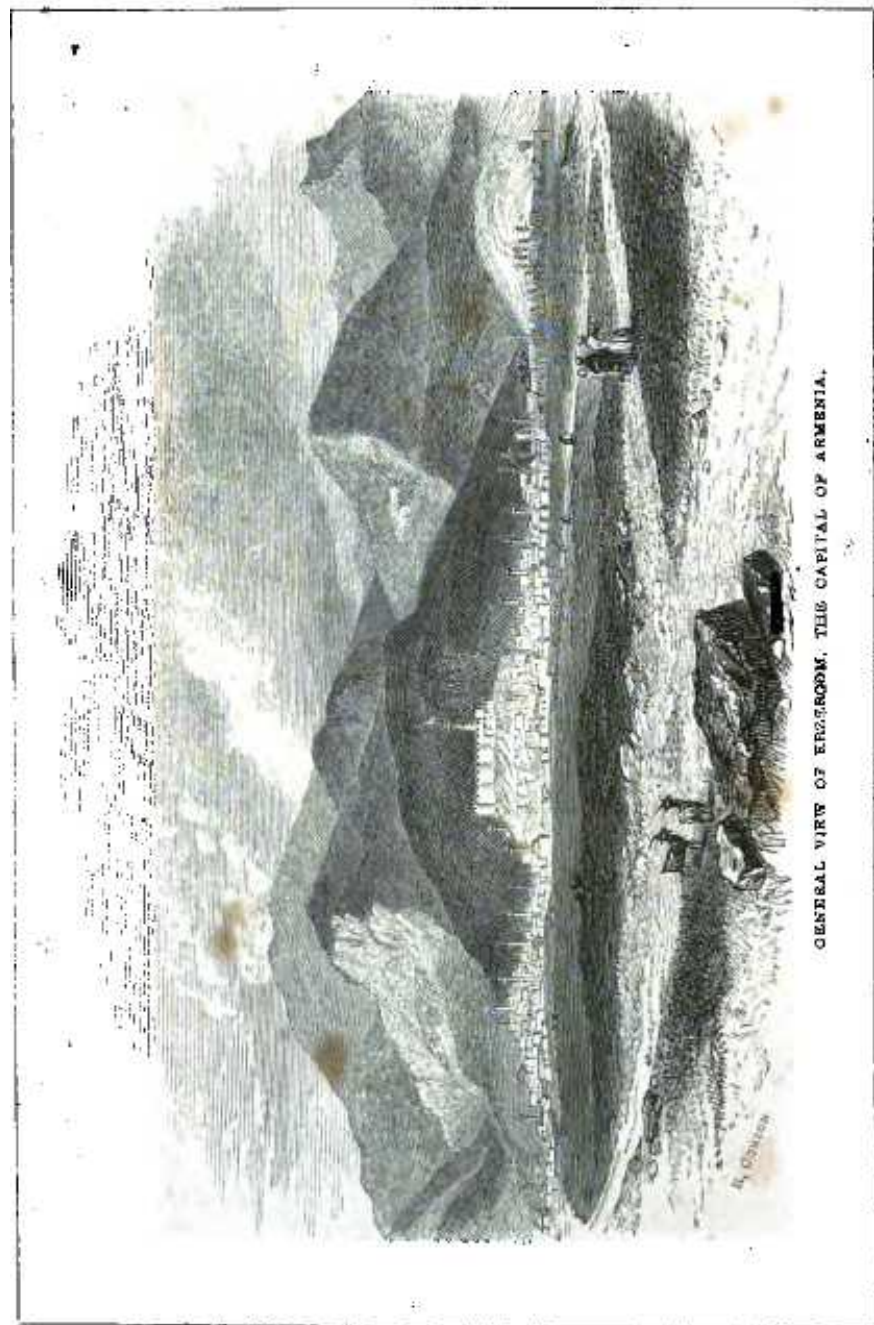
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ROBERT CURZON

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GENERAL VIEW OF ERZEROUM, THE CAPITAL OF ARMENIA.

P R E F A C E.

ALMOST from time immemorial a border warfare has been carried on between the Koordish tribes on the confines of Turkey and Persia, in the mountainous country beginning at Mount Ararat towards the north, and continuing southwards to the low lands, where the Shat al Arab, the name of the mighty river formed by the junction of the Tigris and the Euphrates, pours those great volumes of water into the Persian Gulf. The consequence of the unsettled state of affairs in those wild districts was, that the roads were unsafe for travellers; merchants were afraid to trust their merchandise to the conveyance even of well-armed caravans, for they were constantly pillaged by the Koords, headed in our days by the great chieftains Beder Khan Bey, Noor Ullah Bey, Khan Abdall, and Khan Mahmoud. The chains of mountains which occupy great part of the country in question are for months every year covered with snow, which even in the elevated plains lies at the depth of many yards: the bands of robbers con-

stantly on the watch for plunder of any kind prevented the mountain paths from being kept open, so that those who escaped from the long lances of the Koords perished in the avalanches and the snow-drifts by hundreds every year.

To put a stop, or at least a check, to so lamentable a state of things, the governments of Turkey and Persia requested the assistance of England and Russia to draw up a treaty of peace, and to come to a distinct understanding as to where the line of border ran between the two empires; for hitherto the Koordish tribes of Turkey made it a virtue to plunder a Persian village, and the Persians, on their side, considered no action more meritorious, as well as profitable, than an inroad on the Turkish frontier, the forays on both sides being conducted on the same plan. The invading party, always on horseback, and with a number of trained led horses, which could travel one hundred miles without flagging, managed to arrive in the neighbourhood of the devoted village one hour before sunrise. The barking of the village curs was the first notice to the sleeping inhabitants that the enemy was literally at the door. The houses were fired in every direction; the people awoke from sleep, and, trying in confusion to escape, were speared on their thresholds by their

invaders; the place was plundered of everything worth taking; and one hour after sunrise the invading bands were in full retreat, driving before them the flocks and herds of their victims, and the children and girls of the village bound on the led horses, to be sold or brought up as slaves; the rest having, young and old, men and women, been killed without mercy, to prevent their giving the alarm: their victors frequently coming down upon them from a distance of one hundred to three hundred miles.

In hopes of remedying these misfortunes a conference was appointed at Erzeroom, where a Turkish plenipotentiary, Noori Effendi; a Persian plenipotentiary, Merza Jaffer Khan; a Russian commissioner, Colonel Dainese; and an English commissioner, Colonel Williams, of the Royal Artillery, were to meet, each with a numerous suite, to discuss the position of the boundary, and to check the border incursions of the Koordish tribes, both by argument and by force of arms, the troops of both nations being ordered to assist the deliberations of the congress at Erzeroom by every endeavour on their part to keep the country in a temporary state of tranquillity. The plenipotentiaries on the part of Turkey and Persia and the English and Russian commissioners entered upon their arduous

task at the beginning of the year 1842. Colonel Williams, to whom the duties of the English commission had been intrusted, was too unwell to proceed to Erzeroom, and I was appointed in his stead, being at that time private secretary to Sir Stratford Canning, her Majesty's ambassador at Constantinople. Colonel Williams afterwards recovered so much that he was able to set out, and we started together as joint commissioners, in company with Colonel (afterwards General) Dainese, on the part of Russia, a gentleman of very considerable talents and attainments. The discussions between the two governments were protracted by every conceivable difficulty, which was thrown in the way of the commissioners principally by the Turks. At length, in June, 1847, a treaty was signed, in which the confines of the two empires were defined: these, however, being situated in places never surveyed, and only known by traditional maps, which had copied the names of places one from another since the invention of engraving, it was considered advisable that the true situations of these places should be verified in a scientific manner; consequently, a new commission was named in the year 1848, whose officers were instructed to define the actual position of the spots enumerated in the treaty above mentioned

These commissioners consisted of Dervish Pasha for Turkey, Merza Jaffer for Persia, Colonel Williams for England, and Colonel Ktchirikoff for Russia.

This party left Bagdad in 1848, surveyed the whole of that hitherto unexplored region, among the Koordish and original Christian tribes, which extends to the east of Mesopotamia, till they finished their difficult and dangerous task at Mount Ararat, on the 16th of September, 1852. The results of this expedition are, I hope, to be presented to the public by the pen of Colonel Williams, and will, I trust, throw a new and interesting light upon the manners and customs of the wild mountaineers of those districts, and give much information relating to the Chaldeans, Maronites, Nestorians, and other Christian Churches converted in the earliest ages by the successors of the Apostles, of whom we know very little, no travellers hitherto having had the opportunities of investigating their actual condition and their religious tenets which have been afforded to Colonel Williams and the little army under his command.

Armenia, the cradle of the human family, inoffensive and worthless of itself, has for centuries, indeed from the beginning of time, been a bone of contention between conflicting powers : scarcely

has it been made acquainted with the blessings of tranquillity and peace, through the mediation of Great Britain, than again it is to become the theatre of war, again to be overrun with bands of armed men seeking each other's destruction, in a climate which may afford them burial when dead, but which is too barren and inhospitable to provide them with the necessaries of life; and this to satisfy the ambition of a distant potentate, by whose success they gain no advantage in this world or in the next.

It is much to be deplored that the Emperor of Russia, by his want of principle, has brought the Christian religion into disrepute; for throughout the Levant the Christians have for years been waiting an opportunity to rise against the oppressors of their fortunes and their faith. The manner in which the Czar has put himself so flagrantly in the wrong will be a check to the progress of Christianity. That the step he has now been taking has been the great object of his reign, as well as that of all his predecessors since the time of Peter the Great, will be illustrated in the following pages.

The accession of a Christian emperor to the throne of Constantinople will be an event of greater consequence than is generally imagined; for the Sultan of Roum is considered by all