

**SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE
POLITICAL STATE OF THE INTERMEDIATE
COUNTRIES BETWEEN PERSIA AND
INDIA, WITH REFERENCE OF RUSSIA
MARCHING AN ARMY THROUGH THEM**

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Some Considerations on the Political State of the Intermediate Countries Between Persia and India, with Reference of Russia Marching an Army Throught Them by E. Stirling

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ON THE
POLITICAL STATE
OF
THE INTERMEDIATE COUNTRIES BETWEEN
PERSIA AND INDIA,
WITH REFERENCE TO
THE PROJECT OF RUSSIA MARCHING AN ARMY
THROUGH THEM.

BY
E. STIRLING, Esq.
BENGAL CIVIL SERVICE.



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INTRODUCTION.

AT a time when our knowledge of the states between the Caspian and the Indus is daily increasing, and our intercourse with these long-secluded countries every year becoming greater, I am induced to offer these pages on a subject to which the attention of many intelligent men has been directed. They were written under the instructions of my much-regretted friend Sir John Keneir M'Donald, the late envoy in Persia. The following is the correspondence which took place on that occasion. A perusal of his letter will make evident the great importance he attached to the acquisition of the information he desired.

To Edward Stirling, Esq. Bengal Civil Service, Tehran.

SIR,

Yours having imparted to me your intention of returning to India viâ Khorassan and Afghanistan, by the most practicable route, it appears to me that in the course of your journey you might be able to acquire such information concerning the nature and resources of those countries, the state of the roads, the disposition of the people, &c. &c. as might be at once useful and acceptable to Government: under this impression I venture to trouble you with a few observations on a subject which the actual posture of affairs in this country renders at this moment peculiarly interesting.

An investigation into the condition, capabilities, and military features of those countries by which a European army from the north or west could penetrate to India, has always appeared to me most desirable; and it was with this view that Government were induced about two years ago to sanction a proposal made by Mr. M'Neill, who then held an expedition of this description in contemplation.

The only two routes by which a Russian army could attempt the invasion of India are—1st, that which lies through the heart of Khorassan by Meshid, Turbat-i-Hydree, Heerat, Candabar, and Cabool, to the Attock; 2dly, that which proceeds from Buchara by Balk and the Hindoo Coash to Cabool.

The state of our knowledge with regard to the facilities and the impediments which may tend to aid or retard the progress of a hostile force in those directions, is at the present period extremely defective. On this account it has occurred to me that, in the execution of your present determination, you might render an essential service to Government, by improving the geography of those countries as regards the existence of deserts, mountains, rivers, and other military objects of inquiry; the number, position, strength, and population of the towns that may lie on the high road; the number, power, and influence of the different independent tribes; how far they stand affected to the Government of Persia, Buchara, and Cabool; their feelings and dispositions towards each other, as well as the part they are likely to take in the event of a foreign enemy invading their countries; their power of opposing, or means of affording friendly aid to the invaders, whether arising from the adoption of hostile measures, the difficulty of obtaining supplies, the want of water, beasts of burden, or the badness of the roads.

The above are, I think, the principal points to which I should wish to invite your attention; but your own good

sense and understanding will of course dictate to you the nature and extent of the information you should, if practicable, acquire.

The ministers of this court have, I am happy to perceive, manifested every disposition to facilitate your journey; and you will, consequently, be provided with the necessary rukms to insure your safe conduct and civil treatment from hence to Heerat, beyond which the authority of his Majesty does not extend.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

J. M'DONALD.

Tehran, June 30, 1828.

To Colonel J. M'Donald, &c. &c. &c. Tehran.

SIR,

I HAVE the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of this date, suggesting inquiries respecting the resources and geography of the countries through which I may pass in my return to India; and beg in reply to assure you of every disposition on my part to acquire, as far as my health, rapidity of my journey, and my means of inquiry permit, information on the different matters to which you have deemed it worthy to request my attention.

It would have been a source of satisfaction to me, and of some consequence to the Government, had I been furnished with the necessary instruments for fixing the situations of the principal places, for measuring distances and heights; but in the absence of these, I cannot hope that the result of my journey will be so useful as otherwise it might be; and therefore, *in limine*, I would claim your indulgence, and solicit you to moderate the expectations which you may be inclined to

form from the great interest attached to those countries. A person with considerable abilities and personal endowments of an intellectual nature, might, indeed, without the aid of such instruments, be able to collect and embody volumes of useful information; and although I cannot but feel highly flattered and pleased that you should have honoured me, I must not conceal that my slender talents are scarcely equal to the performance of the task even in a moderate way, much less in a way that would insure universal approbation.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

EDWARD STIRLING.

How far I have been able to execute the task which I undertook, must be decided by the result. I can only say, that I am sensible how very inadequately I have fulfilled his precepts; though, at the same time, I would claim some indulgence in consideration of the difficulties I had to surmount in obtaining even this scanty information, in a country where travelling was not easy, where jealousy encircled me, and where I could not always apply to the best sources of knowledge, my informants often being illiterate men, and, though intelligent, not raised above the labouring classes.

A copy of the foregoing instructions was sent to the Supreme Government at Calcutta; but on my return to that Presidency, I was not called upon to forward the information I might have collected in consequence of Sir J. M'Donald's letter. The greatest apathy prevailed, and the members of the Government

could not be roused to take an interest in the subject. The knowledge that I had been in these intermediate countries, produced no desire for intelligence regarding them; and my reception gave no encouragement to the production of it.

Neglect had been preceded by the deprivation of my appointment—I was no longer Collector of Agra—that situation had been disposed of nearly two months prior to my reaching the Presidency: my return was deemed hopeless, and my death anticipated. Three-and-twenty days in excess of my leave of absence was sufficient to put me out of employment, though two months exceeded by the Hon. W. Melville and others, under circumstances that called for less indulgence, had not the same effect—they still retained their appointments. No explanations or representations weighed to alter the resolutions of Government in my case; and I was not restored to a full collectorship till the expiration of eighteen months, and even the pay of this last office was afterwards reduced. These my grievances, although calling for and perhaps meriting redress, need not be further detailed: it is sufficient to say, that I was in no humour to give, and the Government appeared little disposed to avail themselves of the result of my travels. The labours of Burns, Gerard, and Connolly, have since appeared, and other works, some by foreigners, are in progress. Sir John M'Donald's views, communicated to me, have been developed by the mission of Capt. Burns. I shewed the facility and practicability of the path which has since been followed with greater success. My reward