

**THE MIRZA. IN  
THREE  
VOLUMES. VOL. I**

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The Mirza. In Three Volumes. Vol. I by James Morier

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**JAMES MORIER**

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# THE MIRZA.

BY

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# THE MIRZA.

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## INTRODUCTION.

ALTHOUGH the Persians cannot be complimented upon their morality, as a nation, yet no one can deny that they abound in a lively wit, a social disposition, and in qualities which fit them to be agreeable companions. The Englishman, bred up in reverence of truth, in love of justice, and in admiration of every thing that constitutes good government, with a strict sense of honour, and a quick impulse to uphold his rights as an independant man, remains perfectly astonished and incredulous at all he sees and hears, when first he finds himself an inhabitant of an Asiatic state. In Persia particularly, where truth and falsehood are upon equal terms, where a man to

live, must practice deceit, where the meaning of the word honour is not to be defined, and where there is no government but such as emanates from caprice or despotism, there his astonishment and disgust are complete, although, at the same time, should he have any turn for humour, he cannot help being amused at the ingenuity of the wiles exercised, at the light-hearted levity, and apparent clown and pantaloon philosophy with which evils, such as the Englishman would call great, are supported.

During my stay in that country, which took place during the reign of the late King, Fattah Ali Shah, I became acquainted with many Persians of various ranks and denominations, from the King on the throne, to the lowest tent-pitcher and muleteer. At first, I felt as any other of my countrymen would feel; I was startled by their unceasing adulation, and petrified by their unblushing falsehoods, however pleased I might be with their winning manners; but as I became more acquainted with the genius and character of the nation, I learnt to place a more proper value upon

their professions, and to give a truer interpretation to their assertions, for I found much of the disgust which I had at first felt, proceeded from their forms of speech, which I can compare to nothing better than to a redundant paper currency, which begins by being of doubtful value, and ends by being worth nothing at all. How would it surprise Mr. A if riding with Mr. B. in the park, Mr. A. praising the beauty of his companion's horse, Mr. B. were immediately to say—"You do me honour—it is a present to you—it belongs to you forthwith—I will send it to you." And if, in utter confusion, Mr. A. felt himself bound to accept it, how much more surprized would he be to hear Mr. B. turn round and make the same present and the same speech to the next person who should happen equally to praise his horse! So it is in Persia. This sort of intercourse takes place on every common occurrence, and it would be deemed ill breeding, and a want of knowledge of life, if the language of falsehood, flattery and hyperbole, were not used the more abundantly, the more in consonance with the character of the people.



The Persians have aptly been called the Frenchmen of the East; vanity is, in truth, their besetting sin, and that circumstance alone may, perhaps, account for the lust for compliment and adulation which exists in both nations.

Among those who formed part of the Shah's court, I became intimately acquainted with a Mirza, one eminently ingenious, who, had he possessed the advantage of an enlightened education, in addition to his natural acquirements, would not have failed to distinguish himself in the world. He was in person, tall and ungainly, with no regularity of features, and possessing, what in a Persian's estimation is absolute deformity—a scanty beard. But he had a thoughtful cast of countenance, a large and full eye, with much sweetness of expression. His good sense becoming an antidote to the poison of an Asiatic education, made him see and deplore the great defects of his countrymen, and he frequently entered into very confidential confessions, respecting the acts and proceedings of some of the higher powers of the state. I make no doubt, had he lived

in England, he would have become an excellent reformer, so quick was he in discovering an abuse. I strongly believe he was but a sceptical Mahomedan; but whatever might be the case in that respect, he freely owned that there could be no hope for his nation, but in a total and subverting change. Notwithstanding this, he was in the enjoyment, if not of a very lucrative, at least, of a very exclusive situation at the court of the Shah, for he was the Poet Royal, with the title of Melek al Shohera, or Prince of Poets, a distinction acquired principally by his exquisite talent of lauding the King. His facility in the act of versification was great, and the fertility of his invention unbounded. One of his most successful feats in applying the powers of his flattery, was the composition of an historical poem, descriptive of the reign of his Royal patron, which he called the History of the King of Kings, we must suppose as a tacit triumph over the celebrated Shah Nameh, or the History of Kings, by Ferdâsi.

In proportion as our intimacy increased, I discovered how great were his powers of in-

vention, which in addition to the composition of poetry, I found to consist in the faculty of relating extemporaneous stories.

He informed me, that during the journeys which the Shah made on horseback, either on military or hunting expeditions, he was frequently called upon, in order to beguile the tedium of the road, to entertain him with stories, which he invented and related on the spot, adapting their nature and tendency to the exigency of the moment. I was much struck with this circumstance, as being highly characteristic of oriental life, and of the power of an Eastern King, who orders a story to be related as he would order a palace to be built; it also threw a light upon what might possibly be the originating cause of that succession of stories so much prized even in Europe, namely, the Arabian Night's Entertainments, and, consequently, I became extremely desirous to hear stories so fabricated. I did not hesitate to make my wishes known to my friend, who with that amiability of character for which he was conspicuous, assured me that he would be happy to indulge my curiosity at the very