

*A Brief Notice Respecting
the Trade of the Northern
Provinces of Persia,
Addressed to T. H. Villiers*

SIR,

As I am the first British subject who has exported goods direct from England to Persia perhaps a short sketch of my proceedings may not be uninteresting.

In the year 1827 I went out to Persia at the instance of Syeed Khan, who, in conjunction with Major I. Hart, then commanding the Persian disciplined forces, had made arrangements for my entering the military service of the Prince Royal. After remaining more than two years in Persia Major Hart proposed that, in connexion with himself, I should proceed to England to purchase an investment of British manufactures for the purpose of an experiment to prove the capabilities of the trade to Persia direct from England, via Trebizonde. I left Persia with this object, and after my arrival in England the death of this gentleman, who had always been my sincere and zealous friend, was a severe blow to my enterprize. However I sailed from England in September 1830 with an investment of English manufactures of various kinds to the amount of £6,000, and reached Tabreez a second time in January 1831, the time occupied in travelling from London being something more than four months including the voyage. I found throughout the journey no difficulty or impediment arising from the political state of the countries traversed: at Constantinople a duty of three per cent. was exacted from me, although it was stated that the goods were shipped for Persia, and merely landed at that city "in transitu." This duty clears the whole of Turkey with the exception of a trifling toll or tax levied on each load at Deodeen, one stage from the Persian frontier. The Black Sea I consider much less dangerous than is

generally supposed. I traversed it in the month of December and on board a bad Ragusan schooner, without any accident; and from all I could learn from persons the best acquainted with the navigation, disasters are of rare occurrence. The usual time occupied in the passage from Constantinople to Trebizonde is from four to ten days. The journey from Trebizonde to Erzeroum, ten or eleven caravan marches, is a difficult one in winter, as the route is almost all through defiles and rocky mountain passes. On the top of a mountain called "Gaushupongar," thirty five miles from Erzeroum, we were obliged to leave five horses, with their loads, in the snow and run down to save our lives, the drift of snow was so considerable, and the whole caravan was detained three days at the resting place, during which time we made several attempts to reascend the mountain, but were always driven back after great toil and labour until the weather finally cleared up on the fourth day, when we succeeded in getting down the loads, the horses of course having perished. These accidents are common during three months of the winter, but, nevertheless, caravans pass continually throughout that season: in summer and during nine months of the year the road is perfectly open. The risk of robbery on this road I should not conceive worth consideration, as I never heard of an instance, and single loads of value pass without the slightest apprehension.

The city of Erzeroum is much diminished in importance and prosperity since the invasion and occupation of it by the Russians, and the forcible expatriation of more than 9,000 Armenian families, by the same power, who formed the chief part of the mercantile and manufacturing population. Many of these unfortunate exiles were escaping from the locations assigned to them by the Russian government, and almost all were stated to be anxious to return, but, except those who happened to be placed near the frontier, were prevented by the "surveillance" of the Russian police. At Erzeroum no duties are levied on goods which have paid duty at Constantinople. It will perhaps be deemed worthy of the consideration of His Majesty's Government whether, in the event of the trade being regularly prosecuted, an arrangement with the Turkish government could not be entered into, that goods, passing their dominions for Persia,

should not pay the duties, which are now the same as those charged on merchandize imported for the Turkish consumption.

The distance from Erzeroum to Tabreez is sixteen caravan marches, about 300 miles: the part of the road where travellers are most exposed to plunder is from the pass of "Dahar," in the chain of mountains called "Kusseh Dagh," to the Persian frontier. This tract of country was, formerly, chiefly inhabited by Armenians, but the Russian army carried them all off except a few of the very poorest, and their villages are occupied by tribes of wandering "Kurds" from "Van and Moush" and the frontiers of Erivan. These people are, of course, plunderers from habit and education, but there is as yet no instance of their attacking a caravan. It is necessary for travellers to be well armed and to keep united in bodies; this being done, I do not think there is much risk, even for so small a number as six; but the travelling in this country is particularly unpleasant, from the wretched nature of the accommodations, and the bad character of the people. After crossing the Persian frontier the whole country passed over is secure, as is the case, generally, in the territories of His Royal Highness Abbas Mirza and in the north of Persia generally. The route usually traversed by caravans runs within eight miles of Byazeed, the frontier town of the Pachalick of Erzeroum, and within about twenty of the present frontier of the Russian Empire.

On arriving at Tabreez I found the Prince Royal, his court and army, all absent on the expedition to Kirman against Hassan Allee Mirza. This was a great bar to the ready sale of my goods, as they were chiefly such as were calculated for the higher classes; it also made the settlement of the duties to be levied on my investment a difficult question. The customs of Tabreez, and indeed of the whole of Adzerbijian, are farmed from the Government, therefore, of course, the customer made his demands as high as possible, particularly as there was no previous criterion by which to estimate them. Sir J. Malcolm's treaty has an article which proposes, that the duties should be levied from the purchasers of British goods: this, it will immediately be seen, is impossible to be put in force, and

the claim set against me was five per cent. "ad valorem," but the "ad valorem" meant an exorbitant price set upon the articles by the parties most interested, viz. the collector of the customs, and, accordingly, the demand made was more than ten per cent. on the actual cost value. The reasons given in justification of this demand were, that the Russians paid five per cent., and that all other European importers must pay the same: this is the fact, but their goods are taken at a fair market value, for as every thing in Persia is decided by the influence of the parties interested, and as the Russian influence is all powerful in the north, and their commercial interests particularly well watched over, it may be supposed that no unfair advantage can be taken of the subjects of that nation. However, as I intended proceeding within a short time to join His Royal Highness Abbas Mirza, I succeeded in getting the affair left over, for his personal decision, making a deposit in the hands of the customer, and Captain Campbell kindly giving his personal security that I should pay whatever His Royal Highness might hereafter award, if the amount exceeded that of the deposit already made: this settlement I was enabled to come to from the personal exertions and influence of Captain Campbell.

Within six weeks I sold the principal part of my goods, chiefly to the higher class of people. I found the merchants of Tabreez rather disinclined to purchase, as they consider this trade, being carried on by a European, as being inimical to the interests of their Constantinople traffic, in which all of the Tabreez merchants are more or less engaged; but this observation applies only to Tabreez, and to the merchants of that place. All other classes, and the merchants of Persia generally, being *more ready* to purchase goods of English than of their countrymen, because they, very justly, place more confidence in the fair dealing of the European. I found the disposition of all classes to use British manufactures very favourable, and there is a striking difference, in this respect, between the Persians and Turks: the former are fond of novelty and all kinds of European improvements, whereas the latter are, with difficulty, forced to use European manufactures of new and fancy kinds. The best English double-barrelled

guns, fine pistols, telescopes, gold and silver hunting watches, knives, china of the finest kinds, superior cloths, and many other articles of the finest description, which have no sale at Constantinople, are sought after and duly appreciated by the Persians, when, by the Turks, they are little understood or cared for in comparison.

The Russians carry on a very considerable trade from Georgia, both to Tabreez and the other cities of Adzerbiji-an, and to Rusht and the provinces of Ghilan and Mazanderan, through the Caspian Sea. German goods bought at the Leipsic and other fairs find their way into Persia through Russia and Georgia, they are generally brought to the great fair of Makaray or Nijuni Novogorod, and from thence across the Caucasus to Tiflis: the bulk of this trade is in low cloths, printed cottons, cut glass of all kinds, bad porcelain, common cutlery &c., all of inferior qualities, but as the prices of these goods are low, and the Georgian Merchants take indigo, shawls, silk and other products in exchange; the amount of yearly traffic is very considerable; it is difficult to form a calculation as to the actual sum; but I have good grounds for stating, that the exports and imports amount to more than a million and a half sterling, annually: the balance of this trade is in favour of Persia, and remittances are continually making in Dutch ducats of Russian coinage which is the most current gold coin in the southern provinces of Persia. I feel little doubt that a great proportion of this trade might be done by England, considering the present low prices of English goods, and the facilities afforded by shipping them direct to Trebizonde, from whence they have only twenty-five day's land carriage, and the feeling strong throughout the country in favour of every thing English. To effect this to any extent would, of course, require much labour and time, but, if establishments, at Tabreez, were placed under the official protection of His Majesty's Government, and the trade was regularly carried on by persons of competent capital, I feel confident of the result being as I state. During my stay in Tabreez Georgian merchants purchased of me English chintzes to mix with their own Russian ones to make them more saleable, and I sold to members of the Russian mission fine black cloths and other articles, pro-

hibited in Russia, to be introduced into that country through Georgia: if the supply were once regular, the habits of the people would lead them to be much larger consumers of British manufactures than they now are. The great difficulty would be to establish an exchange commodity: silk is the principle article and, in ordinary times, might be profitably imported into England from Persia. The present depression of that article here, and the high price in Persia, owing to the plague having almost depopulated the province of Ghilan, is a bar to its being purchased for the British market at this particular period.

As soon as His Royal Highness Abbas Mirza heard of my arrival in Tabreez he wrote to me to join him as quickly as possible, with all the goods I had, unsold, which he wished to take himself. I therefore set out for His Royal Highness's camp, then at Kirman, by the route of Hamadan, Ispahan, and Yezd. Throughout the whole of this country I found the people anxious to procure English manufactures, and at Ispahan, where I became acquainted with the principal merchants, they expressed their anxious wish to see a regular British establishment in the North of Persia, and agreed that their interests would be much better served by such an establishment, than by their present means for procuring European goods through agents at Tabreez, Erzeroum and Constantinople; and they all expressed their conviction, that the bulk of their business, in manufactures, must hereafter be done through that channel, as the prices of what they drew from India were too high to enable them to compete with the merchants who drew their supplies from Georgia or from Constantinople. This, I may add, is now the feeling of the merchants throughout Persia, and even as far to the south as Shiraz, within ten marches of the Persian gulf. A considerable trade is carried on from Constantinople, formerly by the Bagdad route, and thence across the desert through Kuzistan and Shuster, but the late troubles in that part of the Turkish empire have rendered this route impracticable, and the caravans pass by Erzeroum and Tabreez. I saw at Constantinople three Shiraz merchants who had come direct from that place with a cargo of pipe sticks and tobacco &c., and were exchanging them for European goods of all descriptions with which they

were returning to their native city, a journey of from seventy to eighty days each way.

I may here remark that Ispahan, from its central position, is the natural capital of Persia. It is the grand entrepot for all traffic with India, the Persian gulf, the South of Persia, Herat, Candahar, Caubul, Bokhara and Khorasan generally, and the grand centre of communication between these places and the North of Persia, Bagdad, Constantinople Georgia, &c. Here are found the richest and most respectable merchants, and here the native manufactures are brought to a degree of perfection unknown in other parts of Persia. It is, commercially speaking, the capital of the Empire, and it was only on the accession of the present dynasty to the throne, which being of the powerful Turkish tribe of "Kudjars," and that tribe inhabiting the country about Teheran and Mazanderan generally, that Aga Mahomed Khan changed his capital to Teheran, being induced so to do from a natural desire to have his capital as near as possible to the focus of his power, and to be surrounded by his own tribe, upon whom alone he could place implicit reliance.

Yezd I found greatly injured by the late war. It is a place of much production, and its manufactures of silks of all kinds are justly esteemed the finest and best in Persia; it is also famous for carpets, sweetmeats, sugar and fire-arms. It was the seat of a very considerable commerce in shawls, brocades and precious stones, drawn chiefly from Cashmeer and India; its exports and imports were large and many highly respectable merchants resided there. These had nearly all fled, and much of their property been plundered, and for the last three years no confidence had been felt, but, since His Royal Highness Abbas Mirza has occupied the country, tranquillity and confidence are fast returning, the bazaars are opened, and the merchants are gradually coming back, but to raise it again to its former station will be the work of time. The people are, generally, intelligent and habituated to commerce: they showed a great desire to become possessed of the newest products of mechanical skill; watches, double-barrelled guns, pistols &c. were in great request, and an air cane which I had drew crowds round my quarters anxiously desiring to see it fired.

From Yezd to Kirman the country is desert and thinly peopled, poor in water and forage Kirman was totally ruined by Aga Mahomed Khan, whose barbarity at this place is well known. It is however now again a city of importance. The best shawls manufactured here are of coarser quality, but approaching nearly in colour, and general appearance, to the inferior Cashmeers. An immense exportation of the commoner kinds takes place to all parts of Turkey and to India; some are as low in price as 2s. 6d., containing nearly two square yards, and are worn by all the lower classes throughout Asia. "Chenna" of the best kind is grown in great quantities in this province, and forms a principal article of exports. The grain produced is not sufficient for home consumption. There is no doubt of there being gold and silver ore in the mountains of Kirman. I have seen specimens of these and other metals, collected from the beds of streams and the mountains. The carpets of this place are also famous throughout Persia.

I found His Royal Highness Abbas Mirza in full possession of the whole of the provinces of Yezd and Kirman; his army was dispersed throughout the different most important places; tranquillity and confidence were fast returning, and the poor inhabitants who, during the turbulent sway of Hassan Allee Mirza, had fled, wherever flight was practicable, were now returned to their homes; nevertheless considerable distress was felt from the scarcity of corn, the addition of an army of 15,000 men being more than the resources of the place could meet.

I found all classes most anxious to purchase British manufactures. Of course I could not supply any as I had received particular orders from the Prince Royal not to sell any except to himself, and he immediately asked for an account of every thing I had, and took the whole, for which I was subsequently paid. I had an opportunity of observing how much delighted the chiefs of tribes from Khorassan, Baloochistan, Caubul &c., who had come into the camp with offers of service and allegiance, were with the presents of pistols, guns and watches which His Royal Highness made to them. A pair of pistols, purchased for twenty five ducats, were more prized than a shawl coat usually

given, worth seventy. This may be accounted for if the rarity of European articles in this country is considered. The Prince Royal was so fully convinced of this fact, that he has commissioned me to purchase for him in England to the amount of £3,000 of these articles for his treasury, to be given away in presents to those who came from the distant provinces, as is the universal custom of the Persian Royal family. His Royal Highness and the Kaimakaum both repeatedly expressed to me their satisfaction that I had, as they termed it, "opened the road" viâ Trebizonde, and their earnest desire to draw as close as possible the commercial relations direct with England, and, with regard to the duties on the goods I had imported, I received "Rukhams" sealed by the Prince Royal to the governor and chief of the customs of Adzerbijian, directing that, henceforward, I should be allowed to import to the amount of eight thousand tomauns annually, at the same rate of duties as Persian merchants, and that whatever exceeded that sum should be considered on the same footing as Russian produce, and pay five per cent. ad valorem: what I had already imported was ordered to be passed in the Custom House accounts on the same basis. This arrangement I was enabled to come to, partly from being in His Royal Highness's service and confidence, and from a knowledge of the influential men about him, and, partly, by the most powerful instrument in getting through government business in Persia, that of presents.

I was appointed to the command of two battalions of the disciplined infantry viz. the "Hamadani's and Rumsehs," I received the second class of the order of the Lion and Sun, and my pay was increased to eight hundred tomauns annually besides forage: after remaining in the camp two months His Royal Highness Abbas Mirza proposed sending me to England, partly with a view to making the purchases I have mentioned above, and with other objects which I shall have the honour of stating hereafter, and I quitted His Royal Highness's camp at the same time that he proceeded by the "Shahar i Baubek" route to join the king, then at Koomeesha, to the North of Ispahan.

I had intended to have invested the money I wished to remit to England in silk, but I found the silk produced

in the province of Ghilan diminished to, at the least, one half of what it is in ordinary years, from the dreadful ravages of the plague throughout this province; the cocoons had perished from there being no owners or workmen living to attend to them. The raw silk produced in this province, in 1829, was not less than 1,300,000 lbs. weight and, in 1831, I doubt if 600,000 lbs. were produced, and this quantity is not more than is consumed annually in the manufactures of Persia; the effect of this diminution was, of course, to raise the price, and the low prices in England made it impossible to be imported without a loss of from twenty to twenty-five per cent. I was therefore obliged to purchase gold, chiefly Russian Dutch ducats, which from the usual remittance to Constantinople, where, lately, they have borne a higher price than other coin, owing to the Turkish Government wishing to purchase this coin to pay instalments due to Russia for the expenses of the late war.

It may not be uninteresting here to offer a few remarks on the general security of the British trade to Persia. In the northern provinces, and in fact wherever the power of the king and the Prince Royal extends, there is little to be apprehended, particularly for Europeans. During the now twenty-seven years that the British have been located in Persia nothing has occurred to them in these parts which might not have happened in almost any part of Europe. The merchants of Persia form a distant class, who always remain in their caravanserai's, and avoid as much as possible communication with the government; their property is generally respected and the estimation they are held in by all classes is high. The present King and Prince Royal have encouraged them, and made and done all in their power to render the territories under their sway as secure as possible, both for residents and travellers, and they have succeeded to a degree unknown in Persia for the last century. If travellers or caravans pass into parts of the country acknowledging but a doubtful allegiance to the Government they are, no doubt, in danger, but, for the ordinary course and routine of a mercantile business conducted by persons who know the country, the risk is nothing like what might have been supposed. Speaking from a five years' experience of the Prince Royal I have found him, personally,

highly disposed to fair dealing and an honourable line of conduct: no doubt delays and vexations will arise in transactions with the Persian Government, but they proceed rather from the habits of the influential men about the court than from His Royal Highness's views or wishes. The greatest importance must be attached to the nature of the official protection afforded by His Britannic Majesty's Government, as on this the standing and security of British merchants must mainly depend.

I left Tabreez in November 1831, and reached Erzeroum, where I found the branch of Mr. Brant's establishment, which had scarcely been entered upon when I passed in going out to Persia, in as favourable a state as could be expected, considering all the circumstances. The state of the city of Erzeroum and of that part of Armenia generally was decidedly unfavourable to considerable sales being effected; a large traffic might have been expected with Bagdad, Diabekr, Wan, &c.; the late troubles at Bagdad had completely closed that route, and the other places mentioned had all been more or less under the influence of revolutions and changes. The city of Erzeroum, so important from its central situation and local capabilities, is but slowly recovering from the effects of the Russian War, and the abduction of the Armenians. The plague which has raged, and, in many places, almost depopulated the northern provinces of Persia, has had the inevitable effect of checking and, in some parts, almost annihilating the foreign commerce: in addition to this, the strongest reason for the hitherto limited amount of Mr. Brant's sales is the dislike and jealousy felt by the Persian merchants trading to Turkey to an English establishment at Trebizonde or Erzeroum. This reason applies particularly to Mr. Brant, because his only reliance for Persian commerce is on a traffic with these merchants, and they all have their establishments at Constantinople, and have long been doing considerable business there, both on commission, and for their own account, and they naturally prefer going to Constantinople, where they have before them a market stocked with goods from all parts of Europe, to coming to Erzeroum or Trebizonde where they have only the limited supply which Mr. B. has as yet had to offer them: they also have large con-

signments of silk shawls, tobacco, drugs, &c. which they barter for European manufactures at Constantinople; but, at Trebizonde or Erzeroum, this description of commercial transaction is nearly out of Mr. Brant's power unless silk bore a better price than it now does in England. It is on this ground that Mr. B. is particularly anxious to be connected with an establishment, in Tabreez, to which he might forward those goods which are most suited to the Persian market, and has expressed his desire to see my brother, Mr. E. Burgess, regularly established there as a commission merchant, and I feel no hesitation in stating, that such an establishment, conducted by persons who know the language and country, is the only means of bringing the trade into a regular and successful state. The goods may be shipped direct from England to Trebizonde, the place of debarkation, Erzeroum an intermediate station for Asia Minor and the Persian merchants, who will come by degrees into the habit of making purchases there, and Tabreez or Teheran the depot for the trade throughout Persia generally; in this opinion I believe Mr. Brant perfectly coincides; but to give the necessary protection to the establishments at Tabreez, the placing a Consul there, and a definitive commercial treaty with Persia on a favourable basis, are absolutely necessary. From conversations with the Prince Royal and his ministers I think there is no reason to doubt the readiness of the Persian government to enter into a fair commercial treaty.

When I was at the Prince Royal's camp it was well known to many of the principal men, that it was in contemplation to remove the seat of His Royal Highness Abbas Mirza's government to Ispahan, if he returned successful from his expedition to Khorassan; in this case there could be no reason for the British mission remaining at Tabreez or in the northern provinces: in fact, now the mission cannot be considered stationary at Tabreez, and, if the trade with England were really entered upon, a resident consul for the protection of our commercial interests, and to keep up the communication with Turkey would, it appears to me, be adviseable. In Trebizonde, when I passed, there was M. Bonham as representative of the house of Fairlie, Bonham, and Co. in charge of an investment of British goods to the

amount of twenty thousand pounds sterling, as well as miners and utensils, and Mr. E. Burgess with an investment amounting to six thousand pounds; all these parties are now in Tabreez, and it is fair to suppose that, as the road is now become known, the communication will increase.

I have endeavoured, with much attention, to ascertain the probable yearly amount of the traffic now carried on between Constantinople and Persia, through Erzeroum, and state, confidently, that it amounts to at least £750,000 annually, of which, perhaps, two thirds are British produce. I know that 5,000 horse loads, of about 300 lbs. weight each, are annually cleared at the Custom House of Erzeroum: a regular communication would have the effect of incalculably increasing this amount. Of the importance of this consideration, to British interests, you will be much more able to judge than I. The unexplored resources of Persia, in mineral and other branches of production, are indeed great, but it would exceed the limits of this communication to go into further details. Almost the whole of Persia is adapted for the cultivation of silk; the provinces of Ghilan and Mazanderan are so, in a remarkable degree, and, no doubt, were this article to become a prominent object of barter for European manufactures, the supply would be most materially increased, and the cost of its production lessened.

If this brief sketch of my proceedings and observations should be found in any manner interesting to the Board of Controul I shall, at all times, be most happy to give any further information in my power.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your faithful and obedient servant,

(Signed)

C. H. Burgess