

THE FRONTIERS OF BALUCHISTAN.



TRĀKUN ON THE RUD-I-BIYABĀN.
(From a Sketch by the Author.)

[*Frontispiece.*

THE FRONTIERS
OF
BALUCHISTAN

TRAVELS ON THE BORDERS
OF PERSIA AND AFGHANISTAN

BY

G. P. TATE

F.R.G.S., M.R.A.S., OF THE INDIAN SURVEYS

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

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K.C.I.E., C.S.I.

WITH A COLOURED FRONTISPIECE, THIRTY-SIX PLATES AND TWO MAPS

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TO MY WIFE

WITHOUT WHOSE CONSTANT ENCOURAGEMENT

AND ASSISTANCE

THIS BOOK WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN WRITTEN.

INTRODUCTION.

To lovers of Nature a desert ever presents peculiar fascination, and those who have once come under its spell can seldom free themselves from the longing to leave the crowded highways of civilization and return again to the untrodden regions of the silent wilderness.

In his "Frontiers of Baluchistan" the author furnishes us with many choice sketches of the desert and desert life painted in life-like colours, and with a fidelity such as none but a true child of the desert can attain to.

While one portion of the work deals with the vast desert which lies between Quetta and Persia, a wilderness which Nature appears from time immemorial to have determined should never be anything else, the other and larger portion describes that strangely interesting country of Seistan, which Nature has bounteously endowed with every gift of water and soil, and which has become a desert by man's own handiwork and folly.

The vast ruins, which everywhere in the latter region testify to a past prosperity and civilized population, both long since gone, give to the silence of the barren

wilderness in which they stand a sadness which can be but inadequately described in words.

Through both these regions, and also the present small inhabited portion of modern Seistan, Mr. Tate leads us with picturesque descriptions and interesting historical allusions.

Upon the many interesting incidents which marked the history of the Baluch-Afghan Boundary Commission, 1895-96, and the Seistan Arbitration Mission, 1903-5, with which Mr. Tate, as Survey Officer, traversed the various portions of the country dealt with in this book, he has felt himself debarred from touching.

He has, however, fully made up for lack of personal narrative by the strength and picturesque colouring of his portraiture of the country and people he describes.

A. HENRY McMAHON.

QUETTA,

6th February, 1909.

P R E F A C E .

IF the lives of human beings are shaped by a controlling and mysterious influence, then I must have been predestined to be a wanderer all my days, for my travels began at an age when most people are still in the nursery.

By the time I was ten years old I had traversed two sides of the triangle which has Calcutta and Karachi as the ends of its base and Abbottabad for its apex. Of the journey between Calcutta and Abbottabad I have no recollection, but of the journey from Abbottabad to Kushālgarh on the Indus, I retain a very clear impression, for I rode each day's stage along the frontier road on my pony, while my mother and a very small sister travelled in a doolie carried by bearers. At Kushālgarh we chartered two wide-beamed vessels manned by oarsmen, on which temporary dwellings had been erected, one for ourselves and the other for our servants and my pony. The tedium of our long journey down the river was broken by stoppages at several points where friends—and strangers also—extended a generous hospitality to the small party of voyagers.

Those were the days when the frontier was garrisoned

by regiments of the Frontier Force, and trans-border politics bulked largely as topics of conversation in the small stations along our marches. In this way there was laid in my mind the foundations of an interest in those countries and their affairs which has never been effaced. As we floated down the Indus, day after day was visible to the west, the lofty mountain barrier. Beyond the mountains lay a mysterious land of which very little was known. An occasional Indian explorer had at times, with considerable risk, brought back scanty though valuable geographical information, and the yearly caravans of Afghan traders alone gave an insight into affairs "at the back of beyond."

Life in the small frontier cantonments in those days was full of incident as the homes of the warlike and independent border clans in some cases lay within easy reach of our military settlements, and at times when a spirit of unrest was abroad it was unsafe to go unarmed. The conditions of our daily existence exercised an influence on my small mind, which was kept alive by the great camps of Povindah Afghans which we met on our voyage down the river to the point where it is joined by the five rivers of the Punjab. These camps were composed of women and lads whose husbands and fathers had gone further into India on business intent. As a rule, however, the vicinity of these camps was avoided by us, as we were too weak a party to accept any risks from such unruly folk.

“Once on the frontier always on the frontier,” was a saying that used to be current in Anglo-Indian society. It has been fulfilled in my case. Many years passed since this memorable journey, and many of my holidays were spent within sight of the mountains to the west of the Indus. Then, again, later on I crossed the barrier, and the old fascination came over me with redoubled strength, and it has held me in a grip which no hardships have been able to loosen. For a series of years the Frontier of Baluchistan—and, as my friends of Khārān used to tell me, the desert—was my “home” for the greater part of each year. Though at intervals this connection has been temporarily interrupted, yet the fascination of the desert has again and again drawn me irresistibly back to it—inexplicable though that fascination has been to many of my friends.

It is not possible to analyse this feeling nor define it in exact terms. Something is due to the freer and more simple, if strenuous, existence, and a good deal also to the fact that when I made the acquaintance of these tracts they were to a very large extent either imperfectly or not at all known. Contact with the rude inhabitants revealed an utterly unexplored field for research in the folk-lore and tribal legends, with which I became conversant over the camp fires, or in lonely bivouacs among the hills. The presence of an insignificant explorer's retinue excited no fears in the minds of the people, nor was there any object to be gained by the assumption of

false appearances on their part. I saw them off their guard, and found much to interest me. An explorer's library, again, must needs be limited, and mine consisted of books of a solid and lasting description. Thrown on one's own resources for occupation, the powers of observation are rapidly developed, and not a day passed that did not provide work for the responsive fingers.

Finally, for me there was the burden of the daily task, but for which I should never have had the greatly appreciated opportunities that presented themselves at various times. A great deal of this work was completed under very considerable stress of circumstances that had to be overcome, and on which it is unnecessary to enlarge. At other times purely professional and scientific requirements had to be cheerfully subordinated to others of a wider and more important nature.

To those whose photographs I have used in this book to supplement the pictures which are my own handiwork I offer my best thanks.

G. P. TATE.

MUSSOORIE,

15th December, 1908.

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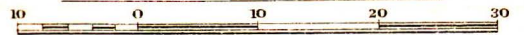
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MAP OF PART OF SEISTAN

TO ILLUSTRATE
"The Frontiers of Baluchistan."

Based on a map in the "Geographical Journal" (1906),
by permission of Sir Henry McMahon and the Royal
Geographical Society.

Scale 1:1,000,000 or 1 Inch = 15.78 Stat. Miles.



- Ancient ruins thus
 - W (Chah)
 - Spr.
 - Vill.
 - △
- ZĀHIDĀN
 - Well
 - Spring
 - Village
 - Trigonometrical Points
 - Heights in feet.

