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***The Indian Borderland, 1880–1900.* By Colonel Sir T. Hungerford Holdich, R.E., K.C.I.E., C.B., F.S.A., late Superintendent Survey Department of the Government of India; a Vice-President and Gold Medallist of the Royal Geographical Society. (Methuen & Go.)**

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Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society / Volume 33 / Issue 03 / July 1901,
pp 612 – 618

DOI: 10.1017/S0035869X00028884, Published online: 15 March 2011

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0035869X00028884

How to cite this article:

T. H. Thornton (1901). Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 33,
pp 612-618 doi:10.1017/S0035869X00028884

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CAMBRIDGE JOURNALS

THE INDIAN BORDERLAND, 1880-1900. By Colonel Sir T. HUNGERFORD HOLDICH, R.E., K.C.I.E., C.B., F.S.A., late Superintendent Survey Department of the Government of India; a Vice-President and Gold Medallist of the Royal Geographical Society. (Methuen & Co.)

The author of "THE INDIAN BORDERLAND" is so well known as a geographer that it goes without saying that his book is one of exceptional interest and value. It is primarily a record of twenty years' important survey-work in the countries adjacent to the north-west frontier of India—in Balūchistān, on the shores of the Persian Gulf, in Wazīristān (the Switzerland of the frontier), in south and north Afghānistān, on the Perso-Balūch border, in the wild tracts of tribal territory west of the Sulimāni mountains, in the region between Kāfiristān and Chitrāl, and far away to the north on the banks of the river Oxus and in the remote Pamīrs, between Lake Victoria and the western frontiers of China. But it is also a mine of information respecting the geography, history, and antiquities of those countries, with graphic descriptions of scenery, architectural remains, and personalities, and of stirring events in which the author was himself concerned.

In the first phase of the Afghān war of 1879 he was in command of a survey party attached to the Kandahār field force, and was the first to carry triangulation from India through the Bolān to the summit of the Khojak pass, and, when the force was broken up at Kandahār, accompanied General Biddulph in his adventurous return-journey between Peshīn and the Punjab.

In the second phase of the war he was one of the first officers to traverse the Khaibar from Peshāwar to Kābul, and succeeded in making a complete survey of the pass, and, after pushing his survey operations to the slopes of the Hindū-Kush and down the historic valley of the Kābul river, took part, as Assistant Engineer, in defence of the Sherpur cantonment against the risen tribes.

In the expedition against the Mahsūd Wazīrs in 1881, which he accompanied as Surveyor, he succeeded in attaining the summit of Shuidar, one of the dominant peaks of Wazīristān, and valuable survey-work was the result. In that against the Sherānis in 1883 he was one of a party of British officers who ascended, for the first time, the Takht-i-Sulimān—the mighty pine-crowned ridge, rising 11,000 feet above sea-level, which looms like an impenetrable barrier between the plains of the Punjāb and the highlands of Afghānistān—and, after a brief fight (in which the enemy lost thirty killed), occupied the highest peak—known as the *Kaisar-garh*.

In 1883 he was appointed Superintendent of topographical surveys in Balūchistān, and, in that capacity, was able to carry out important surveys of the coastline of Makrān and the islands of the Persian Gulf—the coastline full of memories of Alexander's fleet, and still the land of myrrh and spikenard and fisheaters (*mahikhurān*)—the *ichthyophagi* of Arrian,—the Bahrein islands, rich in remains of old Phoenician settlements, and Hormuz, the 'Aden' of the Persian Gulf in the days of Portuguese supremacy.

In 1884 he was attached to the Indian section of the commission for delimiting the Russo-Afghān frontier between the Hari Rūd and the Oxus, and took part in Colonel Ridgeway's march from Quetta across the Helmund desert to Sistān and the Herāt valley, and thence to Panjdeh. After our retirement from Panjdeh he assisted in strengthening the fortifications of Herāt, and, after the collapse of Russian opposition, carried out the demarcation from Zulfikār to the Oxus, returning across the great Balkh plains to Mazār-i-Sharīf and Tāshkurghān, and thence, over the Hindū-Kūsh, and down the lovely Ghorband valley to the capital; here closing a long line of triangulation which, with many vicissitudes, preserved the connection of all its successive links from Quetta to Mashad and Herāt, and from Herāt to the Hindū-Kūsh and Kābul.

In 1890 he acted as Survey Officer in the Zhob Valley expedition.

In 1894 his services were required in demarcating the Eastern boundary of Afghānistān between Lundi Kotal and the Hindū-Kūsh, and, in 1895, he was again employed in demarcating the Russo-Afghān boundary between Lake Victoria (in the Pamīr) and the Chinese frontier.

In 1896 he was chief of a commission which successfully delimited the Eastern frontier of Persia.

And lastly, in 1897, he crowned his services in India (of upwards of a quarter of a century in duration) by acting as Chief Survey Officer in the Tirah Expeditionary Force, when he was able to fill in all the blank spaces in the frontier map—Tochi, Tirah, Mohmand, Swat, and Buner—that yet remained between the Gomul and the Indus.

Much of the survey-work, it will be perceived, was carried out amid the difficulties and dangers of campaigning, difficulties well described at p. 354 of the volume; other portions were done while attached to civil commissions for delimiting boundaries, a work involving less danger, but requiring tact and patience in dealing with Persian or Russian or Afghān colleagues; and all of it carried out under conditions involving much trial and exposure.

For these services he received scant recognition in military despatches, for although a military officer, doing military work, he drew his pay from a civil department, and was thus, technically, a civilian. But his work was none the less appreciated. He was made C.B. in 1894, and K.C.I.E. in 1897, and never were these decorations better earned.

But his survey-work is not all our author has done for fame. He is a scholar as well as a surveyor, and when following the footsteps of Alexander had his Strabo and Arrian and Ptolemy by his side; he is well versed in Buddhist lore, and not unacquainted with Ibn Haukal and the Arabian geographers. Moreover, with the trained eye of a surveyor, he combines an intense love of nature, art, and architecture, great powers of description, and, last, not least, a keen sense of humour.

As a specimen of word-painting let me quote his description of a Balūch juniper forest at p. 18 :—

"A juniper forest is picturesque with a weird form of attractiveness. No ordinary forest tree could imitate the attitudes, or follow the fantasies, of the juniper. White skeleton arms, twisted and gnarled, riven and bent, with but a ragged covering of black foliage, lift themselves to the glowing sky, and cast inky shadows over the stunted yellow grass-growth below them. Each tree separates itself from the crowd, so that it is a dispersed and scattered forest, owning no friendly connection with trees of other sorts, but preserving a grim sort of isolation. Nevertheless, with a backing of snow peaks, and the light of spring sunshine upon it, the strange beauty of that juniper forest became crystallised in the memory, ranking, as a Balūch speciality, with the olive groves of the more eastern uplands, and the solitary group of magnificent myrtles which stand near Sinjao."

Again, his description of summer in Herāt (p. 138):—

"The time for scarlet tulips to decorate the hill-sides had come. They were there in patches of vermillion, and hung about the blue hill landscape in vivid contrast. Purple thistles and wild poppies and roses were of slightly later bloom; but there were, even then, beds of the graceful white opium poppy, varied with a slate-coloured beauty, massed in patchwork about the feet of old gateways and minārs, and wasting a sleepy perfume over the acres of the dead. The villages of the valley were buried in orchards, now scattering their wealth of pink and white blossom idly to the passing winds. Lucerne beds were already knee-deep in luscious greenery, and the odour of scented willow pervaded the moist, hot air."

Again, the advent of winter at Zulfikār (p. 150):—

"The winter was coming on again apace. The poplars and pistachios had turned red and yellow about the edges of the Hari Rud and the slopes of the Koh-i-Bubuk. The reedy banks of grass had again dried into excellent cover for pheasants and chikor; the thousands of little water-channels

had been turned off, and bare acres of brown stubble land spread out where cornfields had been. All the host of green things, the asafoetida and the thistles and the strange plants of umbelliferous (I think that is the word) nature, which burst up through the moist earth of spring, like mushrooms, or like the tortoises of the Peshin valley, were standing stark and stiff and dry, not yet scraped off the face of nature by the periodical blasts of Badghis. With the first touch of frost, all these spread out the delicate white tracery of a thin lace veil over stretches and sweeps of the low hills bordering our daily route."

Again, his description of the coloured tiling of the Herāt *madrasah*, or college (p. 142) :—

"Of the effect of the encaustic-tiled decoration which graced the face of the gigantic gateway, and which was introduced in plaques and panels wherever space admitted on the walls of the madrasah and mosque, it is difficult to write in measured terms. The old Persian colouring of copper-green, golden brown, and rich turquoise blue with a straw-yellow ground, was employed, in most exquisite harmony, in graceful flower-patterns; and these were introduced with precisely such value in detail as befitted so vast a subject. It was a triumph of the art of Babylon and applied to comparatively modern Persian architecture."

Again, concerning the Makrān coast (p. 206) :—

"The coastline is not greatly changed from the coastline of the fourth century B.C., when the galleys of Nearkos slowly worked their way from point to point till they reached the Persian Gulf. Most of the primitive ports and landing-places of Arrian's story can be identified, although some have been filled up by sea-washed sand, or washed away altogether, as the case may be. Some of the coast islands still exist in their primitive form of sterile arenaceous simplicity, and some have obviously disappeared. The island of Astola (or Astalu), nearly midway between the Urmāra and Pasni headlands, and possibly in geologic

ages once forming a connected range with them, is as much an object of superstitious dread to the Med fishermen of the coast now as it was to the Greek sailors then; although the enchantress who once dwelt there, and turned her lovers into fish, is no longer recognised. It is probable that her unlovely story ceased to be told when the Karak pirates infested the coast and disposed of the crews of captured ships wholesale over the edge of its cliffs, till they finally drew down the vengeance of the Arabs upon their heads and were wiped off the sea."

As a picturesquely-described incident the ascent of the Takht-i-Sulimān (ch. iv) may be quoted, and as a sample of portraiture the description of Ghulām Haidar, the Amīr's Commander-in-Chief (pp. 249-250).

Though not a political officer (in the technical sense), Colonel Holdich has naturally formed decided opinions regarding the policy pursued towards the countries in which he has been employed. These opinions are scattered through the volume, and there is a concluding chapter dealing with the thorny question of the Afghān frontier. He scouts the idea of Russia advancing to India by way of the Pamīr; he defends the action of the Government in reference to Chitrāl and the Wazīrs, but doubts the propriety of demarcating boundaries between the Amīr and Balūchistān, and the independent tribes on the south and east of the Amīr's territories. He has an enthusiastic admiration for the late Sir Robert Sandeman (who, by the bye, was strongly in favour of demarcation), and bears ample testimony to the soundness of his work. His opinions may be right or wrong, but they are carefully thought out, clearly expressed without a trace of dogmatism, and deserve the fullest consideration.

It may be added that the work is enriched with more than twenty illustrations, the majority of them from sketches made by the author himself.

The writer of the present review lays down the volume with the consciousness that in the small space available he

has been quite unable to do justice to its contents. To the 'general reader' the style may appear a little too compressed, and the narrative too full of detail and names difficult to pronounce, but all who desire a more than superficial account of a series of highly interesting but little known regions will find "THE INDIAN BORDERLAND" as fascinating as it is instructive.

T. H. THORNTON.

June, 1901.