



History of the War in Afghanistan Volume 1

John William Kaye

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John William Kaye's book is a comprehensive look at the European intrigue and fighting that took place in modern-day Afghanistan during the 19th century. From the preface:

"CIRCUMSTANCES having placed at my disposal a number of very interesting and important letters and papers, illustrative of the History of the War in Afghanistan, I undertook to write this Work. There was nothing that peculiarly qualified me for the task, beyond the fact that I enjoyed the confidence of some of the chief actors in the events to be narrated, or—for death had been busy among those actors—their surviving relatives and friends. I had been in India, it is true, during the entire period of the War ; but I never took even the humblest part in its stirring scenes, or visited the country in which they were enacted.

It was not, therefore, until I considered that no more competent person might be disposed to undertake the Work ; that the materials placed in my hands might not in the same number and variety be placed in the hands of any other writer ; and that those best qualified by a full knowledge of the subject to write the History of the War, were restrained by the obligations of official position from that fulness of revelation and freedom of discussion, which a work of this kind demands—that entered upon the perilous undertaking. The necessities of the subject have rendered the task peculiarly painful, and, but for the encouragement I have received in the progress of its execution, alike from strangers and from friends who have freely placed new materials in my hands, and expressed a lively interest in my labours, I might have shrunk from its completion. I now lay before the public the result of much anxious thought and laborious investigation, confident that, although the Work might have been done more ably, it could not have been performed more conscientiously, by another.

I have been walking, as it were, with a torch in my hand over a floor strewn thickly with gunpowder. There is the chance of an explosion at every step. I have been treading all along on dangerous ground. But if I cannot confidently state that I have asserted nothing which I cannot prove, I can declare my belief that, except upon what I had a right to consider as good and sufficient authority, I have advanced absolutely nothing. It will be seen how careful I have been to quote my authorities. Indeed, I have an uneasy misgiving in my mind that I have overburdened my Work with quotations from the letters and documents in my possession. But this has been done with design and deliberation. It was not sufficient to refer to these letters and documents, for they were singly accessible only to a few, and collectively, perhaps, to no one but myself. They have, therefore, been left to speak for themselves. What the Work has lost by this mode of treatment in compactness and continuity, it has gained in trustworthiness and authenticity. If the narrative be less animated, the history is more genuine. I have had to deal with unpublished materials, and to treat of very strange events ; and I have not thought it sufficient to fuse these materials into my text, and to leave the reader to fix or not to fix his faith upon the unsupported assertions of an unknown writer.

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