

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm
Garnett Engels Schiller Byron Molière
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka
Cotton Dostoyevsky Kipling Doyle
Baum Henry Flaubert Nietzsche Willis
Leslie Dumas Stockton Vatsyayana Crane
Burroughs Verne
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch
Homer Tolstoy Whitman Twain
Darwin Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato
Potter Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen Harte
Kant London Descartes Cervantes Burton Hesse
Poe Aristotle Wells Voltaire Cooke
Hale James Hastings Shakespeare Irving
Bunner Richter Chekhov Chambers Alcott
Doré Dante Shaw Wodehouse
Swift Pushkin Newton



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**Notes of an Overland Journey
Through France and Egypt to
Bombay**

Miss Emma Roberts

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**NOTES OF AN OVERLAND JOURNEY
THROUGH FRANCE AND EGYPT TO BOMBAY.**

BY THE LATE MISS EMMA ROBERTS.

WITH A MEMOIR.

1841

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MEMOIR.

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Experience has, especially of late years, amply refuted the barbarous error, which attributes to Nature a niggardliness towards the minds of that sex to which she has been most prodigal of personal gifts; the highest walks of science and literature in this country have been graced by female authors, and, perhaps, the purity and refinement which pervade our works of imagination, compared with those of former days, may not unjustly be traced to the larger share which feminine pens now have in the production of these works. It would appear to countenance the heretical notion just condemned, to assume that a robust organization is essential to the proper development and exercise of the powers of the understanding; but it is certain that, in several instances, individuals, who have exhibited the most striking examples of female pre-eminence, have not reached the full maturity of their intellectual growth, but have been lost to the world in a premature grave: to the names of Felicia Hemans and Laetitia E. Landon, besides others, is now added that of Emma Roberts, who, although in respect of poetical genius she cannot be placed upon a level with the two writers just named, yet in the vigour of her faculties, and in the variety of her talents, is worthy of being associated with them as another evidence against the asserted mental inequality of the sexes.

Miss Roberts belonged to a Welsh family of great respectability. Her grandfather, who was a gentleman of good property, and served the office of High Sheriff for Denbighshire, North Wales, possessed the fine estate of Kenmell Park in that county, which was disposed of after his death to Colonel Hughes, the present Lord Dinorben, whose seat it continues to be. He had three sons, all of whom entered a military life, which seems to have had peculiar attractions to this gallant family. The eldest, the late General Thomas Roberts, raised a regiment, which became the 111th, and it is said he frequently officiated as Gold Stick in Waiting to George the Third. A son of General Roberts was aide-de-camp to Sir Arthur

Wellesley in Portugal, was taken prisoner by the French, and detained during the war: he afterwards rose to the rank of lieutenant-colonel. The second son, Colonel David Roberts, of the 51st regiment, distinguished himself in the Peninsular war, having, on the 7th January, 1809, during Sir John Moore's retreat, near the heights of Lugo, headed a party which repulsed the French Light Brigade, on which occasion his cloak was riddled with bullets, two of which passed through his right-hand, which was amputated. He was then a major, but afterwards commanded the regiment, in Lord Dalhousie's brigade, and subsequently in Flanders, and was so seriously and repeatedly wounded, that his pensions for wounds amounted to £500 a year. Colonel Roberts was an author, and wrote, amongst other things, the comic military sketch called *Johnny Newcome*. The youngest son, William (the father of Miss Roberts), in the course of his travels on the continent, in early life, formed some intimacies at the Court of St. Petersburg (to which he was introduced by the British Ambassador), and eventually entered the Russian service; he was made aide-de-camp to General Lloyd, his countryman, and served with great distinction in several campaigns against the Turks. He afterwards entered the British army, but had not attained a higher rank than that of captain (with the paymastership of his regiment), when he died, leaving a widow, a son (who died a lieutenant in the army), and two daughters.

Emma, the youngest daughter of Captain Roberts, was born about the year 1794. After the death of her father, she resided with her mother, a lady of some literary pretensions, at Bath. Though possessed of a very attractive person, though of a lively disposition, and peculiarly fitted to shine in the gayest circles of social life, her thirst for letters was unquenchable, and the extent of her reading proves that her early years must have been years of application.

Her first literary work was in the grave department of history, — *Memoirs of the Rival Houses of York and Lancaster, or the White and Red Roses*, which was published in two volumes, 1827. In the preparation of this work, Miss Roberts prosecuted her researches into the historical records at the Museum with so much diligence and perseverance, as to attract the notice of the officers of that institution, who rendered her much assistance. This work did not take hold of public attention; the narrative is perspicuously and pleasingly writ-

ten, but it throws no additional light upon the events of the time. It is not unusual for young writers, in their first essay, to mistake the bent of their powers.

On the death of her mother and the marriage of her sister to an officer of the Bengal army (Captain R.A. M'Naghten), Miss Roberts accompanied Mrs. M'Naghten and her husband to India, in February 1828, taking her passage in the *Sir David Scott*, to Bengal. From Calcutta she proceeded with them to the Upper Provinces, where she spent the years 1829 and 1830, between the stations of Agra, Cawnpore, and Etawah. Her active and inquisitive mind was constantly employed in noting the new and extraordinary scenes around her, the physical aspect of the country, the peculiar traits of its population, and the manners of both natives and Anglo-Indians: the strong and faithful impressions they made never faded from a memory remarkably retentive. It is to these favourable opportunities of diversified observation, in her journeys by land and water, along the majestic Ganges, or by the dawk conveyance in a palanquin, and in her residence for so long a period away from the metropolis of British India, which exhibits but a mongrel kind of Eastern society, that the English public owe those admirable pictures of Indian scenery and manners, which have conquered, or contributed to conquer, its habitual distaste for such topics.

Whilst at Cawnpore, Miss Roberts committed to the press a little volume of poetry, entitled *Oriental Scenes*, which she dedicated to her friend Miss Landon, then rising into eminence under the well-known designation of L.E.L. This volume, which she republished in England, in 1832, contains some very pleasing specimens of glowing description, graceful imagery, and well-turned expression, which show that her powers required only cultivation to have secured to her a respectable rank among modern poets.

Mrs. M'Naghten died in 1831, and about this time (either soon after or shortly before the death of her sister), she exchanged provincial scenes and society for the more cheerful atmosphere of Calcutta, where a new world of observation and of employment opened to her. The sketches she has given of the City of Palaces, and of its inhabitants, prove how accurately she had seized their characteristic features. Here her pen was called into incessant activity; besides

various contributions to Annuals and other ephemeral works, Miss Roberts undertook the formidable task (doubly formidable in such a climate) of editing a newspaper, and the *Oriental Observer*, whilst under her direction, was enriched by some valuable articles written by herself, indicating the versatility of her talents, the extent of her resources, and the large area of knowledge over which her active mind had ranged.

This severe over-employment, however, entailed the inevitable penalty, loss of health, and in 1832, being now bound by no powerful tie to India, and looking forward, perhaps, with innocent ambition, to a less confined theatre for the display of her talents and acquisitions, she quitted the country, and returned to England, the voyage completely repairing the injury which the climate of India had wrought upon her constitution. The reputation she had acquired preceded her to this country, where she had many literary acquaintances, some of whom had reached a high station in public esteem; and her entrance into the best literary circles of the metropolis was thereby facilitated; but the position which she was entitled to claim was spontaneously conceded to talents such as hers, set off by engaging and unaffected manners, warmth and benevolence of heart, equanimity and serenity of temper.

The fruits of her observations in the East were given to the world in several series of admirable papers, published in the *Asiatic Journal*, [A] a periodical work to which she contributed with indefatigable zeal and success, from shortly after her return to England until her death. A selection of those papers was published, in three volumes, in 1835, under the title of *Scenes and Characteristics of Hindostan*, which has had a large circulation, and (a very unusual circumstance attending works on Indian subjects) soon reached a second edition. This work established Miss Roberts's reputation as a writer of unrivalled excellence in this province, which demands a union of quick and acute discernment with the faculty of vivid and graphic delineation. Of the many attempts which have been made in this country to furnish popular draughts of Indian "Scenes and Characteristics," that of Miss Roberts is the only one which has perfectly succeeded.

Her pen now came into extensive requisition, and the miscellaneous information with which she had stored her mind enabled her, with the aid of great fluency of composition and unremitting industry, to perform a quantity and a variety of literary labour, astonishing to her friends, when they considered that Miss Roberts did not seclude herself from society, but mixed in parties, where her conversational talents rendered her highly acceptable, and carried on, besides, a very extensive correspondence. History, biography, poetry, tales, local descriptions, foreign correspondence, didactic essays, even the culinary art, by turns employed her versatile powers. Most of these compositions were occasional pieces, furnished to periodical works; to some she attached her name, and a few were separately published. Amongst the latter is a very pleasing biographical sketch of Mrs. Maclean (formerly Miss Landon), one of her oldest and dearest friends.

It was now seven years since she had quitted British India, during which period important events had occurred, which wrought material changes in its political and social aspects. The extinction of the East-India Company's commercial privileges had imparted a new tone to its government, given a freer scope to the principle of innovation, and poured a fresh European infusion into its Anglo-Indian society; steam navigation and an overland communication between England and her Eastern empire were bringing into operation new elements of mutation, and the domestic historian of India (as Miss Roberts may be appropriately termed) felt a natural curiosity to observe the progress of these changes, and to compare the British India of 1830 with that of 1840. With a view of enlarging the sphere of her knowledge of the country, and of deriving every practicable advantage from a twelve-months' visit, she determined to examine India on its Western side, and (contrary to the urgent advice of many of her friends) to encounter the inconveniences of performing the journey overland, through France and Egypt. Previous to her departure, she entered into an arrangement with the *Asiatic Journal* (the depository of most of her papers on Indian subjects) to transmit, on her way, a series of papers for publication in that work, descriptive of the objects and incidents met with in the overland route, and of the "rising presidency," as she termed Bombay. By a singular coincidence, the last paper of this series was published in

the very number of the *Asiatic Journal*[B] which announced her death. These papers, which are now before the reader, carry on the biography of Miss Roberts almost to the end of her life.

She quitted England in September, 1839, and, having suffered few annoyances on the journey, except a fever which attacked her in the Gulf, arrived in Bombay in November, where she experienced the most cordial reception from all classes, including the Governor and the most respectable of the native community. Miss Roberts was known to Sir James Carnac, and in his Excellency's family she became a guest for some time, quitting his hospitable mansion only to meet with a similar cordiality of welcome from other friends, at the presidency and in the interior. Her residence at Parell has enabled her to draw, with her accustomed felicity, in one of the papers published in this volume, a lively sketch of the domestic scenes and public receptions, as well as the local scenery, at this delightful place. It appears from her letters that Miss Roberts meditated a tour into Cutch or Guzerat, which probably was prevented by her subsequent illness. "It is my intention," she wrote from Parell, December 30th, 1839, "to go into the provinces, as I have received numerous invitations; I am at present divided between Guzerat and Cutch: by going to the latter, I might have an opportunity of seeing Scinde, the new Resident, Captain Outram, being anxious that I should visit it." She adds: "I have received much attention from the native gentlemen belonging to this presidency, and have, indeed, every reason to be pleased with my reception." She had projected a statistical work on this part of India, and in her private letters she speaks with grateful enthusiasm of the liberality with which the government records were opened to her, and of the alacrity with which Europeans and natives forwarded her views and inquiries. In a letter dated in February, 1840, she says: "I am very diligently employed in collecting materials for my work; I am pleased with the result of my labours, and think I shall be able to put a very valuable book upon Bombay before the public. I hope to go in a short time to Mahableshwar, and thence to Sattara, Beejapore, &c." Her literary aid was invoked by the conductors of periodical works at Bombay, to which she furnished some amusing pictures of home-scenes, drawn with the same spirit and truth as her Indian sketches. She likewise undertook the editorship of a new weekly paper, the *Bom-*