

IRANIAN
SERIES

A JOURNAL OF
THREE MONTHS' WALK IN PERSIA IN 1884
BY CAPTAIN JOHN COMPTON PYNE

Edited by Russell Harris and Marjan Afsharian
with contributions by Jeremy Archer



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A Journal of Three Months' Walk in Persia in 1884
by Captain John Compton Pyne

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BY CAPTAIN JOHN COMPTON PYNE

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Give to me the life I love
Let the lave go by me.
Give the jolly heaven above
And the byway nigh me.
Bed in the bush with stars to see,
Bread I dip in the river –
There's the life for a man like me.
There's the life for ever.
(Robert Louis Stevenson, 'The Vagabond')

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John Compton Pyne (1857-1893), 2nd Battalion, The Dorsetshire Regiment, by Jeremy Archer

John Compton Pyne, second son of the Reverend Edward Manners Dillman Pyne, Vicar of Westacre, in the district of King's Lynn and West Norfolk, and his wife, Charlotte Sophia, daughter of the Reverend Dr. John Chevallier J.P. of Aspoll Hall, Suffolk, was born on 26 May 1857 and baptised at All Saints', Westacre on 2 August 1857. In the light of his sad fate, it is relevant that one of his mother's younger sisters, Frances ("Fanny"), married Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Horatio Kitchener (1850–1916) and that their second son was Horatio Herbert Kitchener, later 1st Earl Kitchener of Khartoum, who was seven years older than his first cousin.

John Compton Pyne was educated at Uppingham School, from where he passed first into the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, by some two hundred marks. On 30 January 1878 he was commissioned into his local regiment: the 54th (West Norfolk) Regiment of Foot. He must have been as surprised as everyone else when, little more than three years later, the Childers Reforms re-designated his regiment as the 2nd Battalion, The Dorsetshire Regiment.

During the next few years, the old stands of Regimental Colours were moved from Norwich Cathedral to Sherborne Abbey. Pyne first saw active service during the Second Afghan War, during which he served as Transport Officer on the Khyber Line of Communication, before taking part in the decisive Battle of Kandahar on 1 September 1880, following the famous march of the Field Force, led by Lieutenant-General Sir Frederick Roberts, from Kabul to Kandahar. For his service in this campaign, Pyne's Service Record shows that he received the Afghanistan medal.¹



Figure 1: Captain John
Compton Pyne.

¹ Afghanistan Medal, 1878-1880 – Pyne started his service in Afghanistan in 1879. The medal was awarded to all troops who served in the Second Afghanistan War, 22 November 1878 to 26 May 1879, and 3 September 1879 to 20 September 1880.

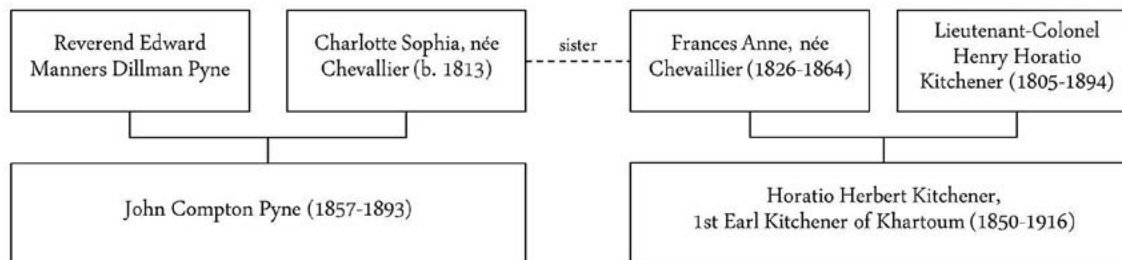


Figure 2: Relationship of John Compton Pyne to Earl Kitchener.

Promoted to lieutenant on 2 February 1881, Pyne soon showed that he had absorbed then-important military skills, such as drawing, painting and using his powers of observation. The Military Museum of Devon and Dorset is fortunate to have inherited a significant – but under-used – collection of his watercolours, depicting military life in the late nineteenth century, coupled with fascinating

views of the Middle East and the Sub-continent, where he was serving. In 1884 he was given three months' leave in order to undertake a walk through Persia, during which he wrote his copiously illustrated *Journal of Three Months' Walk in Persia* which took place from 14 April to 19 July.



Figure 3: Afghanistan Medal 1878–1880. Designed by the British illustrator Randolph Caldecott (1846–1886), the obverse, seen here, shows Anglo-Indian troops marching through the Khyber Pass with an officer riding in the foreground — a idealised view of a scene in which Pyne, as a transport officer, would have participated.

Figure 4: Major-General Sir Horatio Herbert Kitchener (1850–1916). Kitchener is seen here in a hand-coloured photograph by the established Cairo studio of Lekegian. At the time of the image, he was Commander-in-Chief of the Khedive's forces and carrying out 'the pulverization of the Mahdist tyranny' (Napier, 1900, p. 26), in one battle of which our hero, J.C. Pyne, was killed. Kitchener wears the uniform of a *sirdar* in the Egyptian army. His face with its piercing eyes was to become familiar on British World War One recruitment posters with the famous slogan: "Your Country Needs You!"





Figure 5: The Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, painted by John Compton Pyne, circa 1880.

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