



CORMICK, JOHN

CORMICK, JOHN (sometimes erroneously identified as Charles; d. Mayāmey, near Nīšāpūr, October 1833), one of the first English surgeons to work in Persia and personal physician to the crown prince ‘Abbās Mīrzā. Cormick, who came from County Tipperary in Ireland, qualified as a member of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1800. He was appointed assistant surgeon in the Madras Medical Service in January 1800 and surgeon in February 1807. He went to Persia in 1225/1810 as the second surgeon attached to Major General John Malcolm’s third mission, ostensibly dispatched under provisions of a preliminary agreement negotiated by Sir Harford Jones in 1224/1809; he remained as an employee of the East India Company after Malcolm’s departure later that year (Lorimer, *Gazetteer* I/2, p. 1900-05). Cormick was attached to the army of ‘Abbās Mīrzā in Azarbaijan (Elgood, pp. 445-46) and was present as a surgeon at the battle of Āšlāndūz in 1227/1812; it was he who found the body of Captain Charles Christie on the battlefield (for his account, see Kaye, pp. 623-30; Monteith, pp. 94-95). The presence of the military mission raised diplomatic problems with Russia, and most of the British personnel were withdrawn in 1230/1815. Cormick, however, remained in Tabrīz, having married an Armenian woman in 1227/1812. He gained the confidence of ‘Abbās Mīrzā, who was eager to overcome traditional prejudice against Western medicine and appointed Cormick chief physician (*ḥakīm-bāšī*) to his own household. He continued to serve his difficult patient (jointly with John McNeill after 1821) for the rest of his life, accumulating considerable wealth in the process.



At the same time Cormick remained an employee of the East India Company and, making use of his sensitive position at the crown prince's court near the Russian border, reported to and received instructions from the British representative at the Qajar court (Elgood, pp. 452, 456). During the second Russo-Persian war (1241-43/1826-28) the British envoy, Sir John Kinneir MacDonald, on several occasions prevented Cormick from attending 'Abbās Mīrzā, who was frequently in urgent need of medical treatment. The British used these tactics to persuade the ailing crown prince to agree to a suspension of the payment to Persia of the annual subsidy of 200,000 tomans, specified in the Definitive Treaty of 1229/1814 (see letters from 'Abbās Mīrzā to MacDonald in Ekbal, pp. 146-49, 200-03; cf. pp. 93-94). Cormick was not simply a British informer, however; according to all reports, he was a loyal companion to his august patient and assisted him in his reform projects as far as they concerned medicine and public health (Elgood, p. 467; Najmī, pp. 310-11). He thus carried out smallpox vaccinations on a large scale, receiving a special allowance for this service from the Indian government (Elgood, p. 463). A treatise of his on vaccination was translated into Persian by Mīrzā Moḥammad b. 'Abd-al-Ṣabūr as *Resāla-ye ta'līm dar 'amal-e ābela zadan* and was one of the first books to be printed in Persia (1245/1830; Ṭabāṭabā'ī et al., p. 209; *Fehrest-e ketābhā-ye čāpī*, Tehran, 1352 Š./1973, I, cols. 4, 391, II, cols. 1686, 1698). He received the order of the Lion and Sun (Second Class) from the Persian government in 1240/1825.

After the treaty of Torkamāñčāy (1243/1828) 'Abbās Mīrzā ordered the Armenian population of Azarbaijan placed under the protection of MacDonald; when MacDonald died in 1830 this responsibility devolved on Major Isaac Hart and then on Cormick (Wright, pp. 45-46, citing FO 60/140). In 1249/1833 Cormick was summoned to accompany 'Abbās Mīrzā on his campaign to Khorasan; he contracted typhus and died in the village of Mayāmey near Nišāpūr in October (FO 60/134; Curzon, *Persian Question* I, pp. 281, 398); he was later buried at Tabrīz. His son [William](#) was also a physician in Tabrīz.

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The correct version of Cormick's name, as it appears on his tombstone in Tabrīz, was provided by Sir Denis Wright.

(Kamran Ekbal and Lutz Richter-Bernburg)