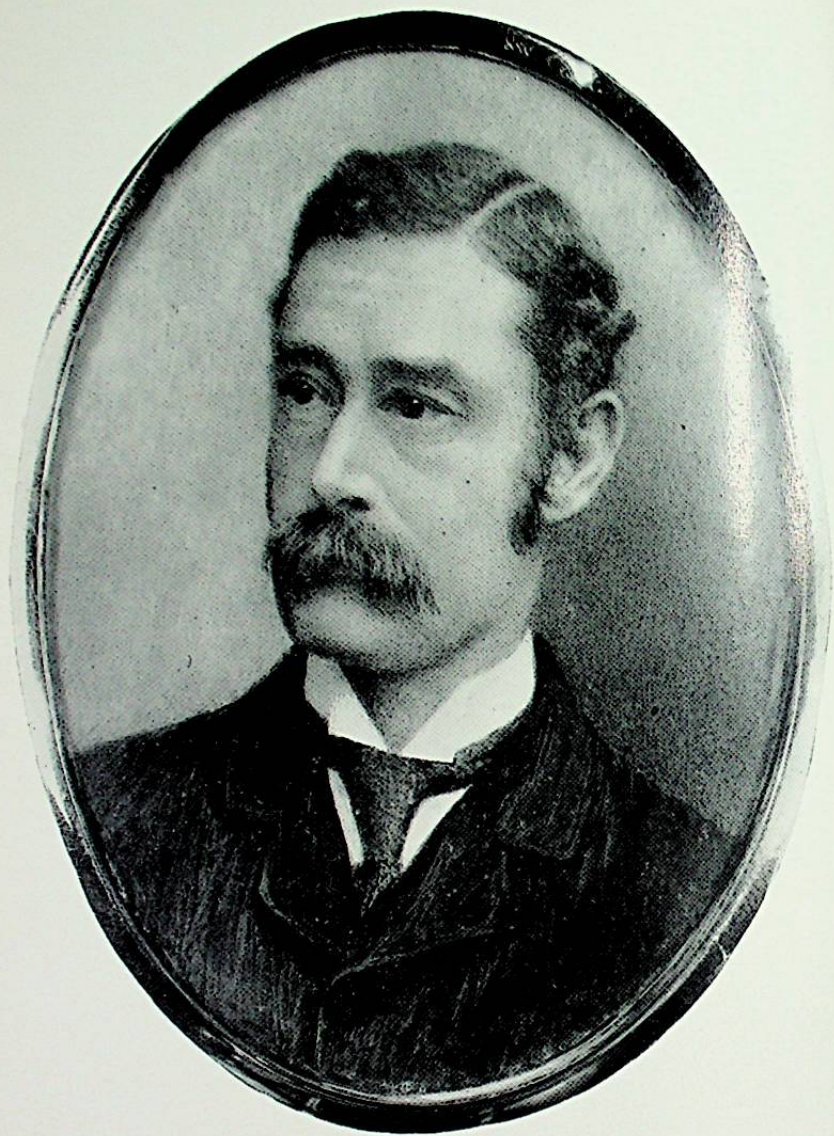


NEY ELIAS

Explorer and Envoy Extraordinary
in High Asia

by Gerald Morgan

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1. Ney Elias, portrait by Annette Elias, about 1895.

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In his day, as an explorer, Ney Elias (1844-1897) ranked with Stanley and Livingstone, but Asia, not Africa, was his chosen field. His activities covered more of Asia, from China to Persia and from Mongolia to Burma, than those of any European of his time. Moreover, behind the scenes he played a crucial part in securing India's northern defences at a time when Russian expansion was thought by many to threaten the Peninsula. He acquired a world reputation and his work was particularly admired and respected in Russia.

His first exploit was a survey of the unknown 'new course' of the Yellow River. But the expedition which caught and held the public's imagination was his dangerous solitary journey of nearly 2,500 miles from Peking through Mongolia and the same distance across Siberia, for which he was honoured by the Royal Geographical Society in the same year as Stanley was for his rescue of Livingstone.

He engaged in two expeditions from Burma, and between them spent six lonely years in Ladakh, listening to and reporting on Central Asian politics. Three times he crossed the Karakorum mountains into Chinese Turkestan and on the last continued across the Pamirs into Afghanistan and almost to Persia. The journey was secret, lasted eighteen months, and only the barest outlines became known. Its political results were of great significance.

His career was an astonishing one but nothing has hitherto been written about him because his extreme modesty and the secrecy which surrounded his exploits have made research very difficult. This book, written by his nephew, lifts the veil not only on Elias' mysterious life, but also on hitherto unpublished events concerning the defence of India.