REMARKS

ON

THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN.

BY

THE HON. WILLIAM LESLIE MELVILLE,

OF THE BENGAL CIVIL SERVICE.

"We ought with reverence to approach that tremendous divinity that loves courage, but commands counsel. War never leaves where it found a nation. It is never to be entered into without mature deliberation; not a deliberation lengthened out into a perplexing indecision, but a deliberation leading to a sure and fixed judgment."—BURKE.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS,

45, GEORGE STREET, EDINBURGH, AND 22, PALL MALL LONDON.

MDCCCXLII.

LONDON:

BRADBURY AND EVANS, PRINTERS, WHITEFRIARS.

REMARKS

ON

THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN.

The late President of the Board of Control, and the late Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, have recently taken opportunities in Parliament to urge on the present Government to persevere in occupying Afghanistan. So strongly does Sir John Hobhouse feel upon the subject, that he has revised for publication the speech which he delivered on Mr. Baillie's moving for papers on the 23rd of June:— "For myself," says he, "I hope I may be permitted to say, that "I am not at all discouraged by recent calamities which, to "my mind, prove nothing against Lord Auckland's policy. I "am confident, that if that policy be persevered in, they will "be fully repaired; the Afghans will be our friends, and "Persia will be, as she was heretofore, a parallel, not of attack, "but of defence. I will presume to add, that if Ministers "pursue this course they will receive the most cordial sup- "port, not only from the Parliament, but the people*." He does not in express terms urge the permanent occupation of the country by the British authorities; but the whole tenor of his argument, if I understand it rightly, inculcates this "extension" of our territory.

* Substance of the Speech of the Right Hon. Sir John Hobhouse, in the House of Commons, 23rd June, 1842, page 57.

Lord Palmerston is more explicit. "I can conceive," says he, "the Government saying that the position from which we "have been driven is a position that we ought to be in, and "that regain it we must. If we do regain it, I trust it will "not be, as recommended by some, merely with the view of "abandoning it again*." And again, on the 7th of July, he stated that, "the great measures which the late Government "took in Afghanistan, had opened in that country a vast "field for our commerce in that extensive region which was "watered by the Indus, and which embraced the greatest "portion of central Asia. And if the present Ministers have "not the weakness and pusillanimity to abandon the position "which their predecessors had obtained for them, they would "secure to this country a great degree of commerce in that "important country."

Lord John Russell seems to have entertained similar opinions, although they are less distinctly expressed; and upon the whole, this may be considered the course to which her Majesty's late advisers have pledged themselves.

Sir Robert Peel, on the part of her Majesty's Government, declines expressing any opinion as to the policy to be adopted.

Having throughout entertained a strong opinion as to the injustice and the impolicy of the expedition into Afghanistan, I am equally convinced of the inexpediency of attempting to remain there one moment beyond the period when we can retire without serious discredit. A calm and temperate examination of this view of this great question may properly be undertaken at the present moment; and as my Indian friends, who are much more competent to the task, have shrunk from the performance of it, I trust I may be excused for giving expression to the grounds on which I have formed my opinion.

Lord Palmerston, it is true, accuses of "weakness and

* Debate 24th June.

pusillanimity" all who entertain these views; and Sir John Hobhouse is against listening to "these prophets of evil, who have from time to time repeated the same cuckoo note, and foretold the downfall of our dominion." However convenient this mode of disposing of this great political question may be, I shall not be deterred by such observations from examining it on the broad grounds of justice and expediency.

Neither is it worth while to dilate on a topic much enlarged upon—the period which is chosen for the discussion *. The public mind, always indifferent to Indian subjects, was not perhaps heretofore prepared to examine it, and as the moment of calamity seems to be passing away our future line is to be chosen. Surely, however, this is a point scarcely worthy of a passing notice.

In examining the series of papers presented to Parliament, we find that on the 20th of September, 1837, the Court of Directors of the East India Company (of course with the concurrence of Sir John Hobhouse, then President of the Board of Control) informs the Governor-General of India in Council, that with respect to "the states west of the Indus you have uniformly observed the proper course, which is, to have no political connexion with any state or party in those regions;

* Sir John Hobhouse complains, that if the course pursued was pernicious, it was surprising "no condemnation of it should have been pronounced in either House of Parliament," p. 7. Sir Robert Peel answered for himself in the Commons. In the Lords, surely Sir John has overlooked the debate of the 19th of March, 1839, when Lord Aberdeen said, "That unless the course taken were subsequently explained, no man could say it was not as rash and impolitic as it was ill considered, oppressive, and unjust." Lord Brougham said, "There was no expediency in the policy which the Governor-General had pursued, there was no justice in the policy which he had pursued, it was in complete dereliction of every ordinary rule of reason." Lord Ellenborough said, "They might assume from the evidence already produced, that the conduct was a folly; it remained for the evidence to be produced to determine whether it were a crime."—*Hansard.*

to take no part in their quarrels, but to maintain, so far as possible, a friendly connexion with all of them, and to obtain and transmit to us the most correct information which can be procured concerning all transactions of importance in that part of Asia."

On the 15th of May, 1837, Lord Auckland wrote a letter to the Ameer Dost Mahomed Khan, chief or sovereign of Afghanistan, saying he had sent Captain Burnes to negotiate a commercial treaty with that chief.

On the 24th of September, 1837, Captain Burnes reported his arrival at Dost Mahomed's Court at Cabul on the 20th.

On the 26th of June, 1838, the Governor-General signed a treaty, the object of which was to send an army to depose this Dost Mahomed, and to place on the throne Shah Shooja ool Moolk, the former sovereign; but who had been out of possession for nearly thirty years, notwithstanding his having made many efforts during the interval to recover his authority.

Surely the justice of the course thus pursued requires the most rigid inquiry. Here is the recognized head of a powerful nation, to whom we send a friendly mission to negotiate for an object we desired to attain, and a few months after it is resolved not merely to go to war with him, but to depose him altogether. To justify all this, requires of course the exhibition of very powerful reasons. We will proceed accordingly to examine those adduced by Lord Auckland in the Declaration he published on the 1st of October, 1838, and which is still quoted as an authority by Sir John Hobhouse, although I believed it had been given up by every other person who had ever examined the subject *.

That State Paper seems indeed to be a very singular document. Professing to furnish an exposition of the reasons which led to the advance of the army into Afghanistan, it

* Indian Papers ordered by the House of Commons to be printed, 27th March, 1839.

contains no allusion to the great object in view, *viz.*, repelling the supposed advance of Russia. The motive of this reserve was, I suppose, dread of embroiling the two Governments in Europe; but I would venture to submit, that if the real motives and purposes of a State publishing such a Declaration cannot find a place in it, it would be a better course to remain altogether silent.

To proceed, however, to examine the singular task which the Governor-General has imposed upon himself. The deposition of Dost Mahomed, and the substitution of Shah Shooja, are the means of effecting the objects he contemplates, and they are laboured with considerable care.

The Governor-General observes, "that having deputed Captain Burnes to Cabul for objects of a commercial nature, while he was on his journey the troops of Dost Mahomed Khan made a sudden and unprovoked attack on those of our ancient ally, Maharaja Runjeet Sing."

Now, in the first place, it is clear that this was no offence to the British Government. We had no alliance with Runjeet Sing: he was our neighbour, and nothing more, and the treaties we had made with him merely defined the boundaries of the two states, and arranged some commercial facilities. But, besides, the attack on Runjeet Sing, so far from being sudden and unprovoked, was merely in prosecution of hostilities which had been carried on for several years, and which had enabled the wily chief of the Punjab to conquer Peshawur, the residence of the Cabul court, when Mr. Elphinstone was in the country, together with the rich adjoining tracts. The native newspapers had long abounded with details of these hostilities, and they formed the subject* of observation between Dost Mahomed and Lord Auckland, in the first complimentary letters which passed on his lord-

* Ameer Dost Mahomed Khan to the Governor-General, 31st May, 1836. Lord Auckland to Dost Mahomed, 22nd August, 1836.

ship's assuming charge of the government. But so little weight did Lord Auckland attach to the matter, that on deputing Captain Burnes to Cabul* he never even alluded to it; and in all the minutes and discussions which followed, I cannot find a trace of any complaint regarding this attack.

The next ground for deposing Dost Mahomed is, that when the Governor-General tendered his mediation to adjust this quarrel, Dost Mahomed "persisted" in urging the most "unreasonable pretensions, such as the Governor-General could not, consistently with justice and his regard for the friendship of Maharaja Runjeet Sing, be the channel of submitting to the consideration of his Highness." Surely it is too obvious to require argument or illustration, that this is no ground for the British Government making war on and deposing the suffering party particularly, because it is not alleged that Dost Mahomed ever sought for, or accepted, the mediation of the Governor-General.

But it is further alleged, that Dost Mahomed had "avowed schemes of aggrandisement and ambition injurious to the security and peace of the frontiers of India, and had openly threatened, in furtherance of these schemes, to call in every foreign aid he could command."

The schemes here referred to are those regarding the recovery of Peshawur from Runjeet Sing. The frontiers of India are those of Runjeet Sing, not those of the British Government; and it is not surprising that Dost Mahomed, on being pressed as he was by Captain Burnes to relinquish claims with which he considered Afghan honour and interest to be bound up, should make the querulous observation†, that "as my hopes on your Government are gone, I will be forced to have recourse to other Governments." Almost immediately afterwards, however, he says in a letter to the

* Lord Auckland to Ameer Dost Mahomed Khan, 15th May, 1837.

† To Captain Burnes, 23rd April, 1838.

Governor-General, received by Captain Burnes on the 28th of April, after the Captain had left Cabul—"If the restoration of Peshawur required a longer time, it was no harm in saying so; but it was necessary that Captain Burnes should give pecuniary assistance that we might be able to protect Herat, and if unsuccessful, certainly to save Candahar from the Persians. Captain Burnes gave us no assurance on the above-mentioned subjects; perhaps he has no power to do so." Here seems to be a direct invitation to treat for relinquishing one object and prosecuting another, both of which were precisely those sought for by the British Government*. Here, however, the communications terminate.

Next follows the treaty for placing Shah Shooja on the throne of Cabul†, which seems to me to have been the fatal origin of all our calamities and embarrassments; I say so, because before the British army crossed the Indus, the other objects immediately contemplated had already been attained. A slight attention to dates will prove this.

Those objects were, first, either to save Herat, or, should it have already fallen, to prevent the farther advance of the Persians into Afghanistan; and, second, to put a stop to the designs, real or imaginary, of Russia in that quarter.

Now, as to the first point, on the 8th of November, 1838, the Governor-General publishes a letter from Colonel Stoddart at Herat, of the 10th of September, 1838, intimating that the Shah of Persia had, on the preceding day, raised the siege of that place.

As to the designs of Russia, Lord Palmerston, in his letter

* Lord Auckland seems to have apprehended that the assistance he furnished against the Persians would be employed against Runjeet Sing To me it seems that it would have been easy to devise precautions to guard against this.

† Sir John Hobhouse talks of "the lawful Sovereign of Herat, (brother of Shah Shooja) the real representative of the ancient dynasty." That dynasty had subsisted from the time of their grandfather (Ahmed Shah) only.—*Malcolm's Persia*, i. 403.

of the 20th of December to the Count Pozzo di Borgo, acknowledges having received from him, on the 11th of November, Count Nesselrode's letter of the 1st of that month, the assurances contained in which were accepted by the Queen's Government as entirely satisfactory*.

On the 15th of February, 1839, Sir Willoughby Cotton publishes his orders to the Bengal or leading column of the expedition, on the occasion of their crossing the Indus.

Thus an interval of three months and four days elapsed between the receipt of Count Nesselrode's satisfactory letter and the passage of the Indus; and had not Lord Auckland, in an unfortunate moment, committed himself with Shah Shoojah, he might still have retired with credit from a movement the objects of which had been already attained.

The value of Shah Shoojah to us seems to me to have been extremely small. If he had powerful support in the country, so as to be able to maintain himself without our aid, he would of course have thrown overboard all connexion with us the moment he found it convenient to do so. If he was weak, we were only hampering ourselves unnecessarily with an inefficient ally, and all the dangers of so distant, and hazardous, and prolonged an expedition, were increased to a degree which rendered ultimate success in the highest degree improbable. Unfortunately, he

* There is something in the date of Lord Palmerston's remonstrance on this subject which seems to require explanation. On the 27th of April, 1838, Lord Auckland urges on the Home authorities the clear right and interest we have to remonstrate with Russia, and on the 22nd of May he again draws particular attention to Russian interference. These letters must have been received in London in July and August at latest, probably in June and July; yet, notwithstanding the great interests immediately depending, and the near approach of the season for commencing operations in India, Lord Palmerston does not address Count Nesselrode on the subject until the 26th of October. He had two interviews previously with Count Pozzo di Borgo regarding it. The dates of these interviews are not given; but, as Count Nesselrode says, "we do not hesitate a single instant" to meet the English Cabinet with explanations, it is obvious they were very recent. Fortunately, the Russian minister did not imitate this delay.

seems to have proved both powerless and unfaithful*, and we are reaping the bitter fruits of our false calculations in attempting "to raise up a barrier to all encroachments from the westward†," founded on so precarious a basis.

Such an object could not thus be attained, and there were other reasons why involving ourselves with Shah Shoojah was to be deprecated.

Lord Auckland, in his original proclamation, (1st October, 1838,) remarks upon "the disunion and unpopularity" of the Barukzye chiefs (viz. the party of Dost Mahomed), as proved from the information of the various officers who have visited Afghanistan, and again that "the popularity of Shah Shooja ool Moolk throughout Afghanistan had been proved to his Lordship by the strong and unanimous testimony of the best authorities." In like manner, Sir John Hobhouse quotes Sir Alexander Burnes‡, and Sir Claude Wade and Mr. Masson,

* The career of this unhappy man has at length terminated. He seems, like other weak men, to have fallen a victim to the attempt to intrigue with two parties quite irreconcileable. It is said he intrigued with the chiefs with a desire to get rid of the English; but, when he saw the extent to which the insurrection had spread, and the murders with which it was attended, he got alarmed, and sought to prevent the advance from Cabul to attack Sir R. Sale at Jellalabad. This occasioned his assassination.

† Lord Auckland to the Secret Committee, 13th August, 1838.

‡ I cannot view Sir A. Burnes's testimony as very strong. He says, on the 24th of March (Parl. Pap. No. 5, page 37), "If we succeed in uniting the whole of the Barukzye family, which I believe quite practicable, we shall raise up in this country, instead of weak and divided states accessible to every intrigue, alike injurious to themselves and us, a barrier which will prevent future causes of vexation, and advance commercial and political ends." Yet on the 3d of June he says, as quoted by Sir John Hobhouse, that two of our regiments and an agent would ensure Shah Shoojah's being fixed for ever on his throne. I do not profess to understand or to be able to reconcile the various conflicting views expressed by this active and intelligent traveller and partisan, and I am rather surprised to be told that Lord Auckland had the greatest reliance on his opinion in the movemen he was meditating.—*Substance of Speech*, pages 33 to 39.

and refers to Dr. Laird, Lieut. Wood, and Major Todd, in proof of the same position.

Now, to me it appears that nothing is less to be relied upon than the opinions of individuals respecting the popularity or unpopularity of an existing foreign Government, unless those individuals are remarkably endowed with powers of correct and impartial observation, and have means of obtaining information, not usually possessed by temporary residents. This is surely true even in England and France, and other countries, where the people are perpetually pouring out, through the medium of the press and of other channels open to them, their grievances, or "more rarely" their satisfaction; but in Eastern countries, where there is no press and no Parliament, and where the disposition is so strong to say what is agreeable to the inquirer rather than what is true, it is still more difficult to arrive at sound, practical conclusions. The more confident the assertions, the more I should distrust the judgment of the reporter*.

To all this testimony, therefore, I would oppose the facts that Shah Shoojah had been king, and had been deposed for thirty years; that he had made various efforts to recover his authority, which had failed; and that Dost Mahomed remained ruler of the country. He was recognised by the

* Even at home we find men widely differing on such points. Sir John Hobhouse says, if Ministers persevere in occupying Afghanistan, "they will receive the most cordial support, not only from the Parliament, but the people." From all the observations and inquiries I have made, I am satisfied that Ministers would receive no support at all in any such course, and that there is scarcely a man of any political party, who has ever attended to the subject, excepting only individuals immediately belonging to the late Government, who does not consider the expedition so capital a blunder, that we must withdraw from the country the moment we can do so without serious discredit. Let Sir John Hobhouse or Lord Palmerston ask the opinion of any intrepid friend they may possess, with the exception stated, and they will discover who is nearest to the truth.

turbulent chiefs, and by the people; and that we should interpose, and tell them we know better than themselves, who they wish for a ruler, is only a proof how far great emergencies sometimes perplex the fairest intentions and an intelligent mind, and assimilate Lord Auckland's measures in Cabul to those adopted by Bonaparte in Spain*. The penalty has been scarcely less signal. Few of the passing events of our times convey a more striking lesson than the contrast of the brilliant prospects held out in the concluding period of Lord Auckland's Declaration, so often referred to, with the fatal results. Notwithstanding the employment of a British army, the Governor-General there expresses his hopes that the Shah will be replaced on the throne by his own subjects and adherents; and, when "the independence and integrity of Afghanistan" were thus established, the British army was to be withdrawn. These measures were required by the duty of providing for the security of the possessions of the British Crown; but the Governor-General rejoices that he will be able to assist in restoring the union and prosperity of the Afghan people, and in putting an "end to the distractions, by which for so many years the welfare and happiness of the Afghans have been impaired." Pure as these objects were, they were tainted at the source. The stern voice of justice forbidding the pursuit of them was echoed through the length and breadth of the land. The "independence" of

* I have spoken of Lord Auckland's measures with the freedom which seems to me to be called for by the mode of defence set up (unhappily, as I think) by his two supporters in the House of Commons. In India he regarded that freedom with fairness and indulgence. Indeed, after the experience of six trying years, I may say that his excellent intentions, his talents for business, his indefatigable industry, and his fairness in the distribution of his enormous patronage, are the themes of universal applause. Unfortunately, however, he was in a situation where he could not make a *small* mistake, and he seems to me to have made two great ones; one which we have been examining, and another in his internal administration.

Afghanistan was not thus to be achieved. Three short, but troublous, years elapsed, and the murder of all the leaders, who had engaged so eagerly on this fatal scene, and the bones of unburied thousands, tell the rest of the tale.

But to proceed: Lord Auckland, in one of his minutes *, says, "Of the justice of the course about to be pursued there cannot exist a reasonable doubt. We owe it to our own safety to assist the lawful sovereign of Afghanistan in the recovery of his throne †."

Now this, after all, seems the only justification which can be offered for the measures adopted by his Lordship

* Minute, 13th August, 1838, Indian Pap., No. 4, p. 7.

† Sir John Hobhouse says, page 21, "The real question Lord Auckland and the Cabinet at home had to consider was, whether the intermediate country between the confines of Persia and the Indus, or rather our own frontier on the Sutledge, was to be in possession of a friendly power or one manifestly hostile." To the question thus put, there would, I should think, be only one answer. But it seems to embrace a very incomplete view of the subject, for it excludes from consideration the justice of our interposition, the sacrifice of our resources, the hazard of remote and prolonged hostilities, which were to be weighed against the advantages. Again, page 32: "The real question (before Lord Auckland) was, whether the state of affairs, in the region between Persia and India, was such as to require direct British intervention." But surely this is not "the real question" either, for it equally excludes from consideration whether British intervention could be justly and successfully exercised. Again he says, p. 16—The disaster at Cabul "is a military defeat, nothing more." Surely Waterloo was a military defeat—nothing more. But at Cabul it was a successful insurrection, which may, especially in India, be more than a lost battle.

In like manner, Sir John institutes a comparison between the measures adopted on the occasion of similar threatenings, by Lord Wellesley, in 1799, and Lord Minto, in 1809, and those taken by Lord Auckland. Lord Wellesley sent Captain Malcolm to Persia; Lord Minto sent Mr. Elphinstone to Cabul, a mission to Sinde, and a force to Bussorah, as Lord Auckland occupied Karak. "Such," says he, "was their policy, and it succeeded. Such was our policy, and it has succeeded too."

If this had been stated for the purpose of contrast, I should have understood it; for neither Lord Wellesley, nor Lord Minto, ever thought of sending an army into Afghanistan because Shah Zemaun, or General Gardanne,

towards Afghanistan. When the treaty was signed on which the expedition into Afghanistan was founded, a Persian army, assisted by the Russian Ambassador, was besieging Herat, and a Russian Envoy had appeared at Cabul. If our safety was thereby compromised, we were at liberty to protect ourselves. But then the danger must be great and imminent, not remote and contingent. Let us consider, therefore, whence it arose.

There can be no difficulty, I presume, in replying that it arose exclusively from dread of the power and designs of Russia. Lord Auckland says, "From the military strength of the Persians there has been actually nothing to fear*;" and Sir John Hobhouse observes, "The unassisted efforts of Persia perhaps might have been resisted by the unassisted arms of Afghanistan." But for Russia, the Governor-General would have left the Seiks and the Afghans, and the Persians, and all the other contending tribes and nations of Central Asia, to fight it out at leisure, and would trouble himself as little with their squabbles for the next fifty years, as his predecessors have done for the last fifty.

Russia, however, as I have already shown, when applied to, without hesitating a single instant, afforded assurances entirely satisfactory. But even before applying to her, it was obvious that her movements rather required vigilance than hostility. She had only three modes of interfering in Afghanistan—by diplomacy and money, by fighting under the mask of Persia, or by sending a Russian army into Afghanistan.

threatened India. They effected their object by negotiation, without war. Sir John wages a war, and an unsuccessful war too, to attain the object which had been already gained by negotiation.

The indistinctness of such views as these seem to me to lead almost inevitably to the errors we have to lament throughout this whole proceeding.

* 23rd of August, 1838.

As to the first, if India, being so much nearer, and with ample resources, could not be a match for her, it must have arisen from exceedingly bad management. All experience in India and the adjoining countries has shown the inability of Native states to combine effectually against our resources and our reputation. We have only to offer a sufficient inducement to any party, which we can always do, in order to break any confederacy. Even if an extensive alliance, therefore, had existed against us, every other expedient should have been tried before so expensive and hazardous a measure as the employment of force was resorted to, to break it. But there was not even a definite plan. All was vague and uncertain, nothing imminent *. After all, notwithstanding our quarrel with Dost Mahomed, M. Vicovich returned to Herat long before Lord Palmerston's remonstrance at St. Petersburgh †, without, so far as appears, having gained a single object,—except having contributed to induce the English to expend their millions and lose their reputation in pursuit of imaginary objects.

Had the Russians, either directly or indirectly, carried the war into Afghanistan, the note of preparation must have long preceded them, and they could not have made any considerable progress under two or three campaigns. Meanwhile our struggle with them must have begun in Europe; nor, if the danger was real, should we have been idle in India. It is impossible not to be struck with the clearness with which Count Nesselrode states this part of the subject.

* When the adage that "Prevention is better than cure" was quoted, in favour of the expedition, one would have thought the constantly recurring epitaph of the Italian would not have been forgotten: "I was well, wished to be better, and here I am!" There is one also about sleeping dogs, which if apophthegms are to decide political questions, might well have been borne in mind; and another about throwing good money after bad, which should be quite decisive against prosecuting the war.

† Sir John Macneil's letter, 31st July, 1838; Persian papers, page 136.

"The Emperor," he observes, "desires what is just and what is possible. For this reason he cannot entertain any combination whatever directed against the British power in India. It would not be just, because nothing would have given cause for it. It would not be possible, by reason of the immense distance which separates us, the sacrifices which must be made, the difficulties which must be overcome; and all this to realise an adventurous scheme, which would never be in accordance with sound and reasonable policy. A single glance at the map ought to be sufficient to dissipate in this respect all prejudice; and to convince every impartial and enlightened man that no hostile design against England can direct the policy of our Cabinet in Asia *."

The true commentary on these observations is to be found in the latest struggle of Russia with a European power. When fighting at home, with all her resources available on the spot, and opposed only by Turks, it cost her two campaigns and an enormous sacrifice in men and money, to fight her way across the Balkan. The prolonged war in Circassia, and the failure of the expedition to Khiva, are strong illustrations of the same truth, but they are of subsequent occurrence.

So much for the danger which India had to apprehend from a foreign enemy; but farther, the siege of Herat and the approach of a Russian agent are said to have occasioned a "fever of restlessness beyond what had been witnessed for many years within our own territories †." I suppose

* Early in 1839, I had the advantage, on different occasions, of conversing with two gentlemen peculiarly qualified to judge of the designs of the Cabinet of St. Petersburgh. The confident manner in which they repudiated the idea of her entertaining any project against our empire in the East, was strongly contrasted with the alarm then generally prevalent on the subject. Some time after, Count Nesselrode's satisfactory assurances became known.

† Substance of Speech, p. 43.

Sir John Hobhouse regards these alarms of Lord Auckland in a very serious light, and is severe on gentlemen who have attached little weight

this was a repetition of the rumours of impending dangers to our empire which sometimes arise in India as well as in other countries, which very properly afford grounds for watchfulness at home, but which appear to me to offer no plea whatever for attacking our neighbours. Our Government in India is far too strong to require an Algeria in which to employ our perturbed spirits. If there be danger at home, let it be met at home. We shall not remedy it by sending our forces abroad. It is only when all is sound within that we can safely embark in foreign wars.

But there is another view of this question of danger which cannot be overlooked, I mean danger in the great enterprise on which we were embarking. What were the difficulties? Was it planned and conducted on sound military principles? Were the objects practicable, definite, and likely to be soon realised? In entering on a war, the necessity and justice of which were so questionable, the prospects of success, in other words the question of expediency, must be briefly touched upon.

The difficulties were obviously of this character. The people were brave, martial, turbulent, independent, and impatient of all strict and regular government. They inhabit a thinly-peopled country of great extent, and abounding in strong passes, with only occasional patches of cultivated country sufficient merely for the food of the inhabitants. "An Englishman," said Mr. Elphinstone, "on being transported there would be amazed at the wide and unfrequented deserts, and the mountains covered with perennial snow," &c.* The climate prevents military operations during the winter

to them, p. 44. Yet a very little after, p. 48, when touching on the heavy disasters which have really befallen us, he treats them very lightly.—"My decided belief is that they have not produced so serious an impression in India as they have in England."

* These statements are amply borne out by the recent observations. But what statement, or even what opinion, from that venerated source is ever erroneous?

months, and the cold especially disables the inhabitants of India, who necessarily compose so large a proportion of our army, and all our camp followers*. Add to all this, that we had no base for operations which were to be carried on so far from our own territories.

If, therefore, we succeeded in overrunning the country from the superiority of a regular army, and our high reputation for skill and prowess; and if the monarch we had set up proved too weak to support himself (both of which contingencies occurred), it was obvious that we were in a false position, and that we could not, without both great risks and great sacrifices, venture to retain military occupation of the country. I have reason to believe that the danger was pointed out by the late commander-in-chief, Sir H. Fane, to the Government, of occupying "such a vast extent of country by detached bodies of troops insufficient to defend themselves if attacked, too distant to support each other, and without any base to secure their operations." To establish ourselves in the Punjaub as a base, to occupy in force the principal cities of Cabul and Candahar, to take up strong fortified positions in them, and store them well with provisions and supplies, to have strong posts in the passes leading to them; these seem some of the most obvious and indispensable precautions, and without them we ought not to have attempted to winter in the country. They were, however, disregarded.

In regard to the immediate objects of the expedition, I have already had occasion to show that they were substantially accomplished before the army crossed the Indus. A few words, however, must be employed regarding the only remaining object proposed—the barrier which it was supposed British power would erect in Afghanistan.

* I cannot touch upon the sufferings of our Native army without noticing the courage and fidelity, and endurance under privations, which they appear to have displayed throughout—unfitted as they are for service out of India.

But here, I am at a loss to know what was really proposed. We have seen that Lord Auckland promises to withdraw the British army as soon as Shah Shoojah was seated on the throne, while Sir John Hobhouse talks of the extension of our territory, and Lord Palmerston deprecates abandoning the position we had at one time gained. To take either case, however. If we retired leaving Shah Shoojah on the throne, the probability was that he would be obliged immediately to follow us, or if he remained unsupported by us he would continue attached to us exactly as long as any other Native power; that is, just as long as it suited his immediate interest. To expect more would surely be visionary. This therefore is no barrier*.

Again: attempting to conquer an extensive and powerful kingdom for ourselves, merely to employ it as a barrier to our Indian Empire, is, I trust, too much in the Roman and Bonaparte style of restless and unprincipled ambition, to be imitated by us. But really this jargon of barriers is carried too far. Before looking to the future let us look at the result hitherto, and to what has been the success of this barrier building. See too what better barrier could be desired, than that we found existing on the line which seems marked out by nature as the limits of India? It consists of two nations, the Seiks and the Afghans, hating each other with neighbourly animosity, perpetually quarrelling and fighting, opposed in religion and in almost every other point; and the moment either of them is pressed from any quarter,

* Sir John Hobhouse goes still farther, and promises that, if Ministers will but persevere in occupying Afghanistan, Persia itself will be not indeed a barrier, "but as heretofore, a parallel of defence" (page 57); but when this was, he does not mention. Mr. Ellis, in reporting some vapouring of the Persians, makes a similar observation—(*Substance, &c.* page 25;) but I see no recommendation from him to go to war for such an object; or, in the words of Lord Brougham, to dethrone Dost Mahomed because the Persians are besieging Herat.

running to ask our assistance. If the danger is real, we are near enough easily to afford that aid. I do not see what better protection we could desire on that frontier.

But besides, unless a case of urgent necessity existed, unless our safety was really compromised, it was surely a capital error ever to have attempted to extend our authority from India towards the West. We are paramount in India. We hold that magnificent empire undisputed and undisturbed, and anything which brings us nearer to Europe, and tends to involve us with European relations, and to introduce among us, European diplomacy, is a movement in the wrong direction. The necessity for perpetual expansion, too, and the dread of a collapse if that tendency was restrained which the late President of the Board of Control urged at the India House on more than one occasion, seems to me a mere error of the imagination. The great boundaries of India are marked out by nature, and have been sanctioned by time; and our true strength and interest consist not in fatal visions of interminable extension, but in the vast field for internal improvement which is open to us. Among other modes of realising this, had but one or two of the ten or twelve millions which this unfortunate war has already cost been expended on works of internal improvement under the skilful and judicious control of Lord Auckland, those best acquainted with India can appreciate what useful and valuable returns would have been afforded to us: what an undisputed benefactor of mankind Lord Auckland would have proved himself!

I have now, I think, examined every considerable fact and argument urged in defence of this war. The events which succeeded our first successes are still too imperfectly known to be made the subject of discussion; but before closing this review and drawing any practical conclusion regarding the prosecution of the war, it may be useful briefly to consider the causes of the late insurrection in so far as they have hitherto been developed.

I must here repeat, that the original interference of the British Government in Afghanistan was likely to excite hostility. We forced upon the Afghans a monarch whose unpopularity had for thirty years excluded him from the throne, whose reputation for ill fortune deprived him of adherents, and who—weak and arrogant as he was—was placed over a bigoted and high-spirited people by the bayonets of a Christian government; the very act which raised him to the throne involving the cession to the bitterest and most detested enemy of the Afghans (Runjeet Sing) a portion of the national territory. So many causes of humiliation must have affected a proud, warlike, and turbulent people. Add to all this, that, for the first time in our history, we have attempted to extend our rule * over a nation of Mahomedans the most bigoted fanatics and courageous fatalists on earth.

Second. It was all along seen by the British authorities that it was their policy to weaken the power of the chiefs and tribes, and to strengthen that of the sovereign. This was supposed to hold out the best prospect of attaining one object of the expedition, viz. the establishment of a strong and friendly government. But reducing the authority of the chiefs was necessarily an extremely offensive measure; and there is too much reason to suppose that Shah Shoojah has been desirous to cast the odium from himself on his allies.

Third. It is to be apprehended that among the numerous subordinate British agents it became necessary to appoint through the country, some have been deficient in the discretion and conciliation urgently required under such difficult circumstances. As one instance, it appears that one officer on some imaginary apprehension determined to attack the fort of Kelat-i-Ghiljye, and although the chieftain to whom it belonged sent in his submission in the most distinct terms,

* Notwithstanding the nominal sovereignty of Shah Shoojah, the employment of British officers in the several provinces shows where the substantial authority rested.

the fort was stormed, and himself and many of his followers were killed. The officer resigned to prevent his being removed; but such an occurrence, however disavowed by the Government, was calculated to spread alarm and disaffection.

Fourth. The heavy expense attending the occupation of Afghanistan, and the present disordered state of the Indian finances, have led to considerable reductions; and, in particular, it was proposed to withhold some part of the payments hitherto made to the Ghiljye chiefs as a consideration for forbearing to plunder. The excitement and danger caused by this attempt was almost immediately perceived by the Envoy, and the former allowance was restored. But the offence was given; the gallant Sale and the retiring British troops were attacked towards the end of October, and on the 2d of November the insurrection broke out at Cabul.

Fifth. To all this must be added the weakness arising from the circumstance that the British occupation of Afghanistan was only temporary, and was liable to terminate at any moment. Had it been proposed at first permanently to retain the country as a British possession, the peculiarities which have been briefly touched upon, and which render its subjugation so much more difficult than that of the countries in India, would have been considered, and the caution, energy, and determination which should characterise a fixed purpose of incorporation into our empire would have been brought to bear upon our administration. But a temporary government prolonged from year to year is always one of expedients, wanting in forecast, and excluding most of the binding relations between sovereign and subject *.

* It does not appear when Lord Palmerston and Sir John Hobhouse formed their resolution of permanent annexation; but erroneous as I consider it, if it was to be, it seems to me that it ought to have been sooner acted upon. Sir John Hobhouse, after lamenting the disaster which he terms a military defeat—nothing more—says, " It has nothing to do with

I need not detain the readers who have honoured me with a perusal with any lengthened comment on the above remarks. My views will be sufficiently apparent, and the justice of them must be determined by others. The death of Shah Shoojah, and the want of fidelity to our cause of himself and his family, of which there seems to be proof, have released us from all claims from that quarter. Supposing it to be so, nobody else has any power to assist us, and we must fight with a direct view to conquest. But all reasoning and experience seems to show that such a course must fail; that the cause, the people, and the country, render the difficulties * so great as to be almost insurmountable; that even if attainable, it is not sound policy to push our frontier so far in that quarter; and that the country is too poor to repay us one tithe of the expense of maintaining ourselves in it. Our policy, therefore, is to withdraw. Of course this must be effected with as little sacrifice of reputation as may be. We must procure the restitution of the prisoners in the hands of the enemy, and make any other stipulations which a more intimate knowledge than a bystander can possess of the state of affairs in the country may

" the policy of the proceeding, unless it can be proved to be the inevitable " consequence of our position in Afghanistan, which I am sure it cannot " be proved."—Page 16. And Lord Palmerston:—" I say this disaster " has no more to do with the original policy of the measure, than the " shipwreck of a line-of-battle ship would have to do with the original " policy which sent a fleet into a given quarter of the globe in one year, " where that line-of-battle ship was lost two or three years after in an un- " expected gale of wind."

If the fleet was kept three years in a position surrounded with reefs of rocks, and extremely subject to hurricanes, the simile may be admitted; but if the preceding causes are correctly stated (and I believe, as far as they go, they cannot be disputed, although there may be others), the expedition was followed by the insurrection, as cause and effect.

* Another great practical difficulty has arisen, which we can scarcely sufficiently appreciate in this country, from the annihilation of the only beast of burden suited to the country—the camel. The slow process of breeding can alone provide the means for a future advance.

dictate. We should not retire with our reputation where it was when we entered on this unhappy expedition; but still the failure of foreign aggression need not, I trust, ruin us at home.

Sir John Hobhouse, it is true, says, "That if we persevere in "Lord Auckland's policy, *i. e.*, in occupying their country, the "Afghans will be our friends." (Page 57.) To me it appears that this is entirely a delusion, and that we have already indulged in such visions a great deal too long. Even if the disastrous facts before us did not contradict such an assumption, since the Right Honourable Baronet's speech was published, and since the foregoing remarks were prepared, Sir Alexander Burnes's long report on the state of the country, dated the 7th of August, 1840, has appeared in the *Morning Herald*, of July 25.

It is evidently an honest letter, and the more likely to be accurate, as it was addressed to the Envoy, who knew the circumstances, and who seems to have forwarded it to the Governor-General. He passes in review every province of the Empire, and shows it is a scene of disaffection or insurrection. In one district our agents were rejoicing in the peace and tranquillity around them, when an organised rebellion, which had ended in revolution, was passing before them. In another, two detachments of our troops are destroyed from being too small. At Candahar it was hoped our troops would keep down rebellion till a better system of government shall have been established. At Herat we have reposed confidence which has been from first to last misplaced. It now comes out that the Ghiljies insurgents were supported by the Government of the Punjaub—the Government of our ancient and faithful ally; one party to the tripartite treaty against the second and third parties to the same instrument! In one province, Bamean, we seem to have succeeded; but in the mountainous districts in the neighbourhood of the capital, Shah Shoojah, who had been

received with the strongest feelings of devotion and loyalty, through the most gross misgovernment was so much disliked, that an "insurrection may break out at any moment," among these the most trusty and courageous of his Majesty's subjects. "To me," says he, in concluding this review, "it would be "astonishing if any Afghan King, who had allied himself to "the Seiks and to the English, could be popular; it is not "in the nature of things." And again, "Bad ministers are "in every Government solid grounds for unpopularity, and I doubt if ever a King had a worse set than Shah Shoojah;" and he adduces the most convincing facts in support of this opinion. He proceeds to show the follies and oppressions practised under the King's own eye. But it must be unnecessary to proceed farther. Every fact, every testimony, be it early or be it recent, serves to show that while we persevere in invading the Afghans, they will *not* be our friends.

And if so, what a fearful responsibility are we not incurring in continuing to prosecute a war unjust and unnecessary, alike in its origin and in its continuance, and which, at the close of another three years, may probably terminate in a repetition of the scenes we have just witnessed! Hide it as we will, we are the aggressors, and that blood-spot will never be effaced *.

To it we must be content to sacrifice something of reputation and something of that claim to redress which, with a better cause, we would never relinquish, but it is such a war "as never can kindle among us a vehement and sustained "spirit of fortitude. It has nothing that can keep the mind "erect under the gusts of adversity."

Let us, therefore, with our visions of friendly Afghans,

* On the 13th of November, 1840, Sir A. Burnes writes, "The surrender "of the Dost has made this country as quiet as Vesuvius after an eruption— "how long this will last it is impossible to say." On the 2d of November, 1841, the insurrection broke out at Cabul, which terminated at once his existence and that of our army.

relinquish all ideas of punishing and avenging ourselves on the country, a principle which I am glad to perceive Lord Palmerston so justly opposes. Let our objects be not war and occupation, but to extricate ourselves and withdraw. It is no light question, to be resolved on slight grounds or partial incomplete views. It is to be determined whether we are, at home, to sink more millions, to sacrifice more thousands of lives, and to hazard, still further, our reputation for justice, for prudence, and for power to command success; whether we are abroad to perpetuate on the unhappy land which we are invading all the evils of the most sweeping, and desolating, and exasperating war—to make a solitude and call it peace. I cannot affirm such a proposition as this, on the reasons which have been adduced.

FINIS.

LONDON:
BRADBURY AND EVANS, PRINTERS, WHITEFRIARS.