

THE AFGHAN POLICY

OF THE

BEACONSFIELD GOVERNMENT

AND ITS RESULTS.

BY

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It was, in principle and in act, an unrighteous usurpation, and the curse of God was on it from the first. This is the great lesson to be learnt from the contemplation of all the circumstances of the Afghan War. "The Lord God of recompenses shall surely requite."—*Kaye's History of the War in Afghanistan.*

THE AFGHAN POLICY.

NOTHING fades so rapidly from our recollection as the history of our own time, and there are doubtless many thousand well-informed persons, who have already forgotten the train of circumstances that led to the two unhappy wars which the Beaconsfield Administration has waged in Afghanistan.

It has been thought right, accordingly, that some one should put together a brief narrative of what has occurred, and should, without entering much into detail, bring once more prominently forward the points which ought to be fixed in the memory of the public.

The first thing which it is desirable to make perfectly clear is that it was the Liberals and not the Conservatives who took the initiative in calling the attention of the country, through the House of Commons, to the advance of Russia in Central Asia. The circumstances were these:—

More than forty years ago, misled by delusions the remembrance of which will ever remain as a blot upon their fair fame, a group of English statesmen promoted or sanctioned the invasion of Afghanistan. That invasion was at first successful. Success led to over-confidence and over-confidence brought about hideous and intolerable disasters. Those disasters were irreparable, but some sort of satisfaction was given to our military honour by the avenging march of Pollock to Cabul, the capital of Afghanistan. From first to last, however, except in so far as we were able to say that we, one of the most civilised and advanced of nations, had got without final military disgrace out of a country defended by half-armed barbarians whom we had, in the first instance, most unjustly attacked, the whole business, from the Simla manifesto of Lord Auckland to the proclamation of Lord Ellenborough about the gates of Somnauth, was one long folly, only saved from being ridiculous by numerous grisly and sickening episodes.

From the end of the first Afghan War up to quite recent times we had hardly any intercourse with Afghanistan. It was ruled by Dost Mahomed, with whom we had fought, but who lived to make, under circumstances into which we need not enter, two treaties with us, to both of which he held in honour and good faith.

During all his lifetime, Russia which was a considerable Asiatic power long before we were, and the European dominions

of which, unlike our own, are separated from Asia only by an imaginary line, was moving south and east just as we were moving north and west. How quickly we were moving north and west may be gathered from the fact that an officer who had commanded as an ensign at Thannah, a place about twenty miles north of Bombay, lived to command as a colonel at Peshawur, a thousand miles north-west of Bombay. During all this time Russia had no more right to complain of our advance, or to address to us any observations on the subject, than we had to complain of her advance, or address to her any observations on the subject. If our respective conquests had been made in different planets they would have had just as much bearing upon each other as they actually had.

It stands to reason, however, that if two great Powers are advancing towards each other, a time must come when their movements do become of consequence to each other, and that time arrived for us, in the course of the sixties. Long ere that we had reached the natural boundary of India—the mighty mountain line which runs west of and parallel to the River Indus. All sensible Britons were agreed that this was the extreme limit, prescribed by nature, to British power in Asia; that any annexation beyond the Suleiman range meant, not national advantage but national calamity. Russia, however, had by no means arrived at any natural boundary; she had no Suleiman range; she was being led on amongst the arid plains of Tartary by precisely the same causes which had led us on towards that barrier across the fertile fields of India;* and two questions began frequently to be asked amongst persons who occupied themselves specially with Indian and foreign affairs, “Where will she stop,” “Is it desirable or not that she should come up to our boundary?” Most of the few people who interested themselves in these matters answered the last question, as I think rightly, in the negative. They thought that it *was* desirable that at least for a considerable time to come there should be a pretty wide space between the two Empires, between the comparatively high civilisation of the Briton and the lower civilisation of the Muscovite.

Our Conservative friends would much like to be able to say, as they constantly insinuate, that the Liberals were caught napping, so to speak, by the advance of Russia; that it was a Conservative Administration which came forward and warned the country not to treat the Russian advance as a bugbear, but to look it calmly in the face, and see that, in old Roman phrase, the commonwealth took no damage.

Unhappily, for them, however, they can with truth say nothing of the kind. It was a member of the Liberal party, a bitter enemy

* It should be remembered, too, that the country which we annexed was immensely more populous than that which fell to the lot of Russia.

of the policy which has been adopted by the Beaconsfield Administration in dealing with Afghanistan, who, in July, 1868, spoke as follows :—

“SIR,—I should have been sorry if this conversation had come to an end without my having had an opportunity of expressing my very great regret that one of those untoward accidents to which the House is subject, should have prevented the Hon. and Gallant General, the member for Frome (Sir Henry Rawlinson), bringing before us a subject which will, I fear, however favourably matters may turn out, exert a sinister influence on many future Indian budgets. I allude, of course, to the recent advance of Russia in Central Asia. I am as far as possible from being an alarmist on this question. Some who have given much attention to it say that I am too little of an alarmist ; but I do think that even in this crowded Session this matter should not have been passed by. There is a difference between panic and wise foresight. A discussion inaugurated as it would have been by the Hon. and Gallant General, with whose views some of us do, and some of us do not agree, but whose acquaintance with a certain portion of the subject we all admit to be great and almost unique, would have enlightened opinion in Europe, strengthened the hands of the Viceroy * in what I consider his wise policy, and, above all, calmed opinion in India. Far be it from us to wish to see a revival of the Anti-Russian feeling of thirty years ago ; but let us not deceive ourselves. This is a grave matter. It is for the interest of all of us, and above all for the interest of the Government for the time being, that all the best information and all the best thought about Russia, which exists in Western Europe, should be called out for our guidance, and it is known to everyone that the most sovereign means of calling out the best knowledge, and all the best thought, existing in Western Europe on any political subject, is a discussion in the British House of Commons.”

Sir Stafford Northcote, who was then Secretary of State for India, replied, in a very sensible and moderate speech, the material part of which is thus reported in Hansard :—†

“He regretted as much as his hon. friend opposite did, that the hon. member for Frome (Sir Henry Rawlinson) had not had an opportunity for bringing forward the whole subject of the foreign policy ; but he was quite certain that the true policy was that which had been indicated—that we should abstain from any action which would provoke collision or would produce complications on our frontier, and that we should take all the means in our power to develop our system of communication.”

Would that the wisdom of 1868 had guided the councils of 1878 !

* Lord Lawrence. † July 27th, 1868.

Having made this preliminary matter clear—having shewn that it was *from the Liberal, not the Conservative benches that came the first note of warning about the Russian advance in Central Asia*, and having mentioned the fact that amongst the earliest official acts of the Duke of Argyll, as Secretary of State for India, was the appointment of a gentleman well-skilled in Russian to a position in the India Office, for the express purpose of keeping us acquainted with the most important publications which appeared in Russia about Central Asian affairs, I will pass to consider the events which occurred in Afghanistan after the death of Dost Mahomed.

Hardly had the old man closed his eyes, than things took the course which they had taken through all past time in Afghanistan, that is to say, a dispute arose amongst his sons with regard to the succession. Dost Mahomed, like a sensible man, had advised Sir John Lawrence, when he ruled the Punjâb, not to interfere in the inevitable contest between his children, but to let them fight it out among themselves. At the same time he shewed where his own preference lay, by designating Shere Ali to be his successor.

This was the policy which was followed during the Afghan civil war, alike by Lord Elgin, by Sir William Denison, who became Acting-Viceroy for a few weeks after Lord Elgin died, and by Sir John Lawrence when he returned to India as Viceroy. The British Government took no part in the struggle, except to recognise pure matters of fact, when it was absolutely necessary so to do. Thus it recognised the fact that Shere Ali was designated as his father's successor, and was therefore, until another of his competitors proved to be stronger, and drove him away from his capital, to all intents and purposes Ameer of Afghanistan. When, however, that event occurred, it again recognised the obvious fact that not Shere Ali but another of his brothers was the actual, or, as it is called, the *de facto* ruler of Cabul and Candahar.

At length, however, after many chances and changes it became clear that Shere Ali was the man whom the Afghan people wanted to be their king. He became once more what he had been just after his father's death, *de facto* as well as *de jure* ruler of Afghanistan, but although it was clear that he was the choice of the great majority of the Afghan people, it was equally clear that he would be a very weak ruler on account of his extreme poverty. If he was a very weak ruler rebellions would inevitably break out, and the whole country would be reduced before very long to hopeless anarchy.

Sir John Lawrence said to himself, "If we had intervened while the result of the struggle in Dost Mahomed's family was going on, we should not only have done exactly what Dost Mahomed, in spite of his preference for Shere Ali, asked me not to do, but we should inevitably have, in the long run, injured the cause

of that prince, because the most powerful arm which his enemies could have used against him would have been the fact that he was the candidate of the hated infidels; the candidate of the Government which, not much more than half a generation before, had ravaged the Afghan country with fire and sword."

Of course, from *our* point of view, there was everything to be said for the avenging expedition of Pollock, but the invader and the invaded never agree, and the Afghans naturally looked at the matter in an altogether different way. However just we may have thought it to kill Afghan men, to burn Afghan villages, to cut down the fruit trees, and to destroy everything we could lay our hands on in their country, they had the strange taste not to like it, and the fact that any prince was the candidate of the people whom they most abhorred would have been quite fatal to his success.

When, however, the fight had been fought out, when Shere Ali had been virtually elected by the Afghan people, Sir John Lawrence thought it right to give him just that amount of assistance, which if wisely used, would turn his weak into a strong and assured hold of the country, by enabling him to reward faithful service, to repress partial disturbances of the peace, and, in short, to do the works of a wise Asiatic ruler, a wise ruler of barbarians. He took the assistance gladly, but grumbled because it had not been given him long before. That, of course, was merely human nature; every one of us, I fancy, in Shere Ali's position would have done the same, and every cool-headed man in Sir John Lawrence's position, and with his perfect knowledge of the circumstances, would have done exactly what he did, not only in the interest of the British power and good name, but in the interest of Shere Ali himself.

But some one may say, "You speak of the interest of the British power and good name; what bearing could anything that happened in Afghanistan have upon either the British good name or the British power?" That is a very fair question, and the answer to it is this. States ought to act as much as possible exactly as individuals act in society, and while all sensible individuals avoid mixing themselves up in the quarrels of their neighbours, the reputation of a peacemaker has always, and will always, be one which good men will desire to obtain, and which, when obtained, will add to their good name. But further, we all know that it is not an agreeable thing to have a burning house next door to you, and while the civil war was raging in Afghanistan, Afghanistan was a burning house. If there is anything specially desirable in India, it is that the minds of the population, and more especially of the warlike portion of the population, should not be excited, and as long as every day brought rumours down the passes, of bloody strife raging close to the gates of India, their minds were sure to be excited. Further,

as long as the civil war continued, there could be very little trade with Afghanistan, and as one of the objects of all wise rulers of India must be to keep as many trade gates open around India as possible, it was obviously desirable that the trade gates should not be closed by war along hundreds of miles of our Western frontier.

Was there not also, some one may say, a desire that Afghanistan should have that kind of connection with us which might make Russia, if she ever advanced as far as the River Oxus, careful not to attempt any hostile move against that country? I reply, "Of course there was." Sir John Lawrence was far too enlightened a statesman not to have watched the Russian advance in Central Asia, and to have considered its bearing upon our position in India; and on September 3rd, 1867, he, a Liberal Viceroy, suggested officially to a Conservative Government that some understanding should be come to between the Foreign Offices of London and St. Petersburg.*

Still the Afghan policy of the year 1868 must be considered by itself, and Sir John Lawrence would have had good reason for acting precisely as he did, if Russia had been still as far from India as she was a hundred years ago. His views received full support from Sir Stafford Northcote, and were carried into effect. Soon afterwards he left India and was succeeded by Lord Mayo, whose appointment to the Vice-royalty was one of the last acts of the Conservative Government, which fell in the end of 1868.

The Duke of Argyll, who became Secretary of State for India under Mr. Gladstone, accepted to the fullest extent the Afghan policy which found favour with his predecessor, and during the whole of his long period of office never swerved from it in the smallest particular.

It had been the intention of Sir John Lawrence to have accepted the proposal of Shere Ali to come down to the plains of India, and pay him a visit. He left India, however, before this could be managed; but Lord Mayo took up the idea, and early in 1869 Shere Ali came down from his hills, and was splendidly received at Umballa. While he was there he took the opportunity, very naturally, of trying to get from the British Government as much as he possibly could. We were rich—he was poor; we were powerful—he was weak; and a great deal of consultation took place as to which of his demands could be properly complied with. He played, we may be sure, all his cards, including, no doubt, the card of the advance of Russia. He knew that there were many persons in India who lived, and others who affected to live, in a perpetual panic about Russia, and he thought, not unnaturally, that he might turn this panic—or *quasi*-panic—to his

* Afghan Papers, p. 21.

own advantage. In this, however, he was mistaken. The higher personages with whom he was brought in contact were not the victims of silly fears, nor did their interests incline them to wish for trouble on the frontiers ; and he, or his subordinates, had to content themselves with such unofficial encouragement as they could get from observing that some of the secondary or tertiary personages with whom they came in contact fancied, or affected to fancy, that his poor little kingdom might be made into a "bulwark" against Russia! What he must have thought of the bulwark theory may be gathered from a story which was told me by a gentleman who was present when the circumstance about to be related occurred.

One day, after Shere Ali had seen a good deal of civilisation as it exists amongst the Anglo-Indian community in North-Western India, his attendants were jesting and laughing about our ways, when he lost patience and said, "I am inclined rather to cry than to laugh. God has given me much. I am a king, I have an army and a revenue, but He has denied me wisdom." Then turning to my informant, he added with a smile, "You will never see me like this again. Of everything you shew me I will say, 'It is nothing, it is nothing.'"

One of the things most dear to the hearts of the people about the Vice-regal Court who shared the views of the Russophobes, or Russo-cowards as we may call them in the vernacular, was to have European Agents at various points of Afghanistan, and there would have been much to be said for this, if those Agents could have been used merely for the purpose of getting good information about Central Asia with a view to the advancement of civilisation and friendly intercourse, and if the idea had been agreeable to the Afghans. Unhappily, however, it would have been very difficult to have restricted Europeans in Afghanistan to the functions of simple reporters, and even if that difficulty could have been surmounted, the repugnance of the Afghans to the idea was so intense that it was perfectly out of the question. The Vice-regal subordinates, when they pressed it, were met with civil speeches of which they tried in after years to make as much as they could, when it was the object of those who had the bestowal of patronage to support the theory that Shere Ali had consented at Umballa to receive European Agents in Afghanistan, but the controversy was set at rest, first by the positive evidence of Mr. Seton Karr, a strong Conservative, who was Foreign Secretary to the Government of India at the time of the Umballa interview, and who asserts most positively that Shere Ali and his people would not *tolerate* the idea of having European Agents in Afghanistan. That ought to have been enough, for through Mr. Seton Karr went all the official communications of any real importance which passed at the Umballa interview ; but a letter from Lord Mayo to the Duke of Argyll, dated June 3rd, 1869, was absolutely conclusive

and final, for Lord Mayo wrote, "The only pledges given were that we would not interfere in his affairs, that we would support his independence, *that we would not force European officers upon him.*"

Of course, as was observed in the Afghan debate of December, 1878, any one who re-opens this question simply asserts that Lord Mayo deliberately deceived his official chief, a gross and wicked libel upon a high-minded gentleman who is no longer able to defend himself.

The policy of Mr. Gladstone's Government with regard to Afghanistan was a wise and generous one. No silly attempts to aim a blow at Russia over the shield of the Ameer found favour with it. When it had anything to say to Russia it said it, as all English Governments should, boldly and openly, not at Cabul but at St. Petersburg.

Had it then anything to say at St. Petersburg in 1869? Most certainly it had, for the Duke of Argyll lost no time in acting upon the suggestion which the *Liberal* Viceroy, Sir John Lawrence, had made in 1867, apparently without much effect, to the *Conservative* Secretary of State, Sir Stafford Northcote, that some definite arrangement should be come to between England and Russia about Central Asian affairs. All through the spring negotiations went on, and as early as the 7th of March, Russia disclaimed any intention of intervention or interference whatever *opposed to the independence of Afghanistan.**

In the course of the autumn, the general and inchoate good understanding which had been arrived at, led to a further discussion of details, which developed, as will be seen somewhat later, into a perfect agreement, and even before the Session closed, Mr. Gladstone's Government *was able to do what their predecessors had not done, that is, to state fully their views as to their political attitude alike towards Afghanistan and towards Russia in Central Asia.†*

And now let us look back from the Thames and the Neva, and see what was passing in the East,

Returned to his own dominions the Afghan monarch set to work to consolidate his power, with the help of the money and arms which he had received from the British. He had been disappointed to a certain extent, for he dreamed dreams that we should give him a dynastic guarantee and much else, that, in fact, we should become responsible for keeping him on the throne of Afghanistan, without having the slightest power to oblige him to rule wisely and well. On the whole, however, he was in pretty good humour, and he continued to be so until the impression made by his splendid reception, and by the kindness which had been shewn him began to wear off.

* Afghan Papers, p. 104.

† Hansard for July 9th, 1869.

After the murder of Lord Mayo he wrote the following letter to the Acting-Viceroy, Lord Napier and Ettrick :—

“After expressions of sorrow and affliction, be it known to your friendly heart that I have just been shocked to hear the terrible and mournful tidings of the death of the Viceroy and Governor-General of India.

“By this terrible and unforeseen stroke my heart has been overwhelmed with grief and anguish, for it can scarce own again, in days so out of joint as these, that the world will see another so universally beloved and esteemed for his many high and excellent qualities as him who is now in the spirit-land.

“All great and wise men have ever regarded this transitory world as a resting place for a single night, or as an overflowing and changing stream, and have never ceased to remind their fellows that they must pass beyond it and leave all behind them. It is, therefore, incumbent on men not to fix their affections on perishable things during the course of their short lives, which are, as it were, a loan to them from above.

“Naught remains to the friends and survivors of him who is gone from among us but patience and resignation.

“The unvarying friendship and kindness displayed towards me by him, who is now no more, had induced me to determine, if the affairs of Afghanistan at the time permitted the step, to accompany His Excellency on his return to England, so that I might obtain the gratification of a personal interview with Her Majesty the Queen, and derive pleasure from travelling in the countries of Europe. Before the eternally predestined decrees, however, men must bow in silence.

“A crooked and perverse fate always interferes to prevent the successful attainment, by any human being, of his most cherished desires. What more can be said or written to express my grief and sorrow ?”

Shortly after this letter was received, Lord Northbrook succeeded Lord Mayo in his high office, and carried on precisely the same policy. Gradually, however, the impression that had been made on the mind of Shere Ali began to fade. Internal difficulties worried him, difficulties from which the dynastic guarantee, which he had desired, would, he thought, have delivered him. We gave a decision in accordance with what appeared to us right and justice in a dispute between him and another of our allies, the Persian Government, which had been referred to us as arbitrators, whereas he, intelligibly enough, would have liked us to make things pleasant for him, with or without the assent of our consciences.

Meanwhile the Russians had, as all competent observers knew they must, been moving still further south, over those regions of Central Asia which lay nearest to Shere Ali's outlying dependencies; and he became, perhaps, really a little afraid that they might give

him trouble. *Perhaps they would have done so if Mr. Gladstone's Cabinet had not interfered. It did so, however, and the fact that it was determined to uphold the Ameer's independence was made patent to all the civilised world by its insisting that Afghanistan must be understood to mean all the vast territories actually in his possession, and not merely Afghanistan proper.* It was important to the Russians to make Afghanistan mean as little as possible, because they had bound themselves, as we have seen, to respect the independence of Afghanistan, while it was important to us to extend its meaning as widely as possible; because, although rejecting with scorn the idea that the mighty Empire of India required any bulwark, except what our own strength could supply, we thought it extremely desirable in the interest alike of England, and of Russia that there should be as broad a belt of territory as possible between Muscovite and British Asia.

The Russians struggled for their own view as hard as they could ; but at length when they saw that we were right, and meant to have our own way, they gave up the contest, and admitted everything for which we contended.*

Soon after this took place the Russian expedition to Khiva. Neither the Ameer nor we had the slightest right to object to that expedition. It had nothing to do with either of us. The Russians had very serious grievances against the Khan. Everyone who knew the A. B. C. of Central Asian politics knew that he must be punished sooner or later, and the only thing that created surprise was that the resistance made was not more serious.

A military fact, however, always seems more important to barbarians, whether in turbans or round hats, than does a diplomatic one, and so it is quite possible that the advance against Khiva, which did not affect him at all, though it occurred in his neighbourhood, frightened the Ameer more than our arrangement with Russia reassured him, though this last was the very Magna Charta of his independence.

After some correspondence, it was arranged that a confidential envoy should come down from Cabul and see the Viceroy at Simla ; this was done and the general result of what passed is so well summed up in two paragraphs, one from a letter which Lord Northbrook subsequently wrote to the Ameer, and another from a document sent with it, that I will quote them.

Here is the first :—

“The result of the communications between the British and the Russian Governments has been, in my opinion, materially to strengthen the position of Afghanistan, and to remove the apprehension of dangers from without. *The boundaries of your Highness' dominions, to which the letters refer, have now been definitely*

* Afghan Papers, p. 105.

settled in a manner which precludes any re-opening of the matters by Bokhara or any other Power, or any further question or discussion on the subject between your Highness and your neighbours in those quarters. To this settlement the British Government are a party, and they are consequently even more interested than before in the maintenance of the integrity of your Highness' frontier. I have had some conversation with your Envoy on the subject of the policy which the British Government would pursue in the event of an attack upon your Highness' territories. A copy of the record of these conversations is attached to this letter." *

And here is the second :—

Should the Ameer be threatened, "and the endeavours of the British Government to bring about an amicable settlement prove fruitless, the British Government are prepared to assure the Ameer that they will afford him assistance in the *shape of arms and money, and will also, in case of necessity, aid him with troops.* The British Government holds itself perfectly free to decide as to the occasion when such assistance should be rendered, and also as to its nature and extent; moreover, the assistance will be *conditional upon the Ameer himself abstaining from aggression, and on his unreserved acceptance of the advice of the British Government in regard to his external relations.*" †

The Ameer, in short, received every assurance of protection against external foes, that he could receive short of an unconditional guarantee, the giving of which would have been the signal for him to become an aggressor certainly against his neighbours of Persia, and very likely against his neighbours beyond the Oxus into the bargain. The promises he received would have been enough, and more than enough, for any reasonable man; but Shere Ali was not a reasonable man. He was a moody barbarian, subject to occasional fits of insanity, and with a good deal of the cunning which often accompanies unsoundness of mind. When he was trying, through his Envoy, to make Lord Northbrook go not only beyond the promises made by Lord Mayo at Umballa, but beyond the obligations which resulted from our arrangement with Russia, he was thinking, I do not doubt, much more about internal than about external affairs—about an absolute dynastic than about an absolute external guarantee. As to danger from Russia at least, we know that he was thoroughly reassured by the Simla Conference.

Lord Northbrook held to the views contained in the paragraphs which I have just quoted, and Shere Ali shewed his disappointment at not having obtained all he wished, exactly as might have been expected. He behaved well enough in essential matters, knowing that the British Government would not be trifled with,

* Afghan Papers, p. 116.

† Afghan Papers, p. 114.

but he allowed it to perceive that he was cross by little failures in courtesy.

All this, however, was not very important. Diplomacy exists for the purpose of smoothing away difficulties of this kind, and if the Duke of Argyll had remained at the India Office, and Lord Northbrook at Calcutta, Shere Ali would gradually have been won back into perfect good humour.

If the Liberals had remained in power we should, in all probability, never have had any difficulties with Russia about the Eastern Question. All would have been arranged in the autumn of 1876, by wise and firm diplomatic action. Supposing, however, that by some miracle this had not been so, and that Russia had tried by giving us trouble in Asia to put a pressure upon us in Europe; had tried, for example, to force us into some unfair concessions about Constantinople or the Dardanelles, what would Lord Northbrook, or any other Liberal Viceroy, have done? Why, of course, he would have taken up the negotiations with the Ameer precisely where they were left at Simla. He would have said, "Now the contingency has arisen which we talked about at Simla. The Russians may possibly give you some trouble; we will make again with you a treaty exactly on the lines of that which we made with your father in January, 1857, when we quarrelled with Persia. We shall pay you a large sum every month until peace is made between the British and Russian Governments; British officers will, as in 1857, see to the application of the money; and we will, if you like, also aid you with troops to any extent you please. But when the subsidy ceases, and the war is at an end, every single British officer and all our troops shall be withdrawn from your country. We shall still keep a native gentleman as our representative at your Court, but no European officer shall, on any account whatever, be forced upon you, for we know perfectly well that there is nothing you would dislike so much." That is the way in which the Liberals would have met any attempt at making mischief in Asia on the part of Russia, if Russia had ever been on the point of going to war with us.

The Envoy of the Ameer who came to Simla had, however, no power to enter into any definite arrangement about the *particular measures* to be adopted in case the Ameer was, without any blame on his part, threatened by any of his neighbours, and that being so, further conversation about them was postponed until they could be discussed between the Viceroy and the Ameer in person.*

The projected interview unfortunately never took place. That it would have had the best effect, and have revived all the feelings which the Ameer had at the time of the Umballa meeting, cannot be doubted; but immediately afterwards the Government of India was plunged into all the anxieties of the terrible Bengal

* Afghan Papers. p. 109.

Famine, Shere Ali had serious internal troubles to attend to, and long ere the Viceroy and he were again free to think of a meeting, an event had occurred in Europe which entirely altered the state of affairs on the North-West frontier of India.

That event was the fall of the Gladstone Administration. It was brought about, as we all know, chiefly by two causes, first, by a combination of angry interests, secondly, by want of proper organisation and by inaction on the part of the Liberals. Of reaction in the proper sense there was very little; that is to say, very few people really dreamt of going back upon anything that had been done, of re-establishing the Irish Church, or re-introducing purchase in the army, or abolishing national education, or repealing any considerable portion of the police regulations which had been applied by the previous Parliament to public-houses in the interests of order and decency. There was, however, just enough of feeling in certain classes that * the previous Government had attended too little to foreign affairs to make the astute party leader who was at the head of the new Administration see that something was to be done by fussing a little about a "spirited foreign policy," and encouraging his subordinates to do the same, provided it could be done without getting the Government into a scrape. At first, however, it is only fair to say that the chief idea of the new Government was to do as little as possible. They thought, and thought rightly, that the country was in an apathetic frame of mind, and that "he lives well, who has well lain hidden" was the best motto for them to adopt. This kind of thing went on for about a year, but at last, in the beginning of 1875, it seems to have occurred to Lord Salisbury, the Secretary of State for India, that there was a chance of doing a little bit of spirited foreign policy without getting the Government into any scrape at all, and in an evil hour, on the 22nd of January, 1875,† he sent a despatch to Lord Northbrook directing him to re-open the question of sending European officers to reside in Afghanistan. Lord Salisbury, it is as likely as not, did not know when he signed this despatch what a very grave step he was taking, for his knowledge of Indian affairs or of foreign affairs, at that time was extremely moderate. He had not been, I think, two years at the India Office altogether, even including his first brief sojourn there under a previous Administration, and, when he was there before, questions relating to the North-West frontier were not very prominent. When the despatch reached India, it found the Viceroy and his Council far better prepared than their official superior for the discussion

* As a matter of fact it had attended to them with excellent results; but, unhappily for itself, it had forgotten the maxim, "Do well and see that your deeds are seen."

† Afghan Papers, p. 128.

of the question which it raised. Lord Northbrook had been sent out *under Mr. Gladstone's Administration, the first, as I have mentioned, which had minutely studied the Russo-Indian Question, or expressed its views about it very fully in Parliament.* Lord Northbrook's opinions on the subject were entirely those of his late chief, the Duke of Argyll, and as soon as the despatch reached him he saw that Lord Salisbury, perhaps without quite realising what he was about, had taken a step which might have the very gravest consequences.

This may be the place to mention that one or two circumstances occurred subsequent to the Simla Conference which did not improve the temper of the Ameer. One of these was a friendly remonstrance which had been made by Lord Northbrook in favour of mercy to the Ameer's son, Yakoob Khan, whom his father had got into his power, and whom it was supposed he meant to put to death. Lord Northbrook could not have avoided making this remonstrance, because just and merciful rule * in his own dominions was one of the points on which we insisted at Umballa, as a condition precedent to Shere Ali's receiving any aid from the British. But the Ameer bitterly hated his son, and did not like the interference. There was, too, a little slip for which the Government of India apologised, the sending directly instead of through the Ameer certain presents to one of his feudatory chiefs. Then there were frequent articles and other publications proceeding from the Russophobe school of Anglo-Indian politicians, which found their way to Cabul and disquieted the mind of its ruler, and there was the book of Sir Henry Rawlinson, "England and Russia in the East," which emanating as it did from an important member of the Indian Council in constant communication with Lord Salisbury, the Secretary of State, might well have shaken more steady nerves than those of the Afghan monarch.

But to return to Lord Salisbury's despatch of January, 1875.

The Viceroy of India is so great a personage and so much attention is paid to the maxim, "India should be governed in India," that few people keep sufficiently in their minds the fact that he is, after all, only a very high-placed and magnificent subordinate of the Secretary of State, liable to be proceeded against criminally if he wilfully disobeys his orders. He must obey, but at the same time it is his duty, if he thinks that any instructions given to him are likely to be dangerous, to state his views and those of his Council fully and frankly to the authorities at home.

Lord Northbrook, accordingly, on the receipt of Lord Salisbury's most dangerous despatch, immediately telegraphed to ask whether the order was peremptory, or whether some delay would be allowed. Lord Salisbury replied that some delay would be

* Afghan Papers, p. 95.

allowed. Lord Northbrook then summoned his Council and laid the matter before them. The result was a despatch giving it as their unanimous opinion that the course suggested by Lord Salisbury was one which might involve the Empire in the most perilous complications. Lord Salisbury received this most solemn and authoritative warning in the summer of 1875, and what course did he adopt? Did he, like Lord Northbrook, summon his Council, the body of Indian experts who are appointed by law to assist the Secretary of State in governing the great Empire in which most of them have spent their lives? Not a bit of it. *It cannot be too distinctly impressed on the mind of the public that the Indian Council in this country is in no sort of way responsible for the crimes and follies of the last two years.* Lord Salisbury exercised a power which he possessed under the Government of India Act, and gave the go-by to his Council. He replied to Lord Northbrook on his own responsibility, and ordered him to carry into effect the instructions contained in his despatch of January. In his reply there occurred the following most significant passage: "The first step, therefore, in establishing our relations with the Ameer upon a more satisfactory footing, will be to induce him to receive a temporary embassy in his capital. It need not be *publicly* connected with the establishment of a permanent mission within his dominions. There would be many advantages in *ostensibly* directing it to some object of smaller political interest, which it will not be difficult for your Excellency to find, or, if need be, *to create.*"*

On receipt of this despatch Lord Northbrook lost no time in taking steps to carry the orders he had received into effect. In the course of doing so it became clear not only that all the principal officers who, as being specially charged with our relations with Afghanistan, had to be consulted as to details, agreed entirely with Lord Northbrook and his Council in believing that the proposed step, dangerous under any circumstances, could hardly be made at a more unlucky moment, but also that Lord Salisbury had so imperfectly thought out his silly policy that he had neglected to give any orders as to some points with regard to which positive instructions must in the nature of things be given to the envoy who was to be sent to Cabul. The Secretary of State for India had even carried his carelessness so far that he had not observed that he had not given the authorisation required by law to the Indian Government to enter into an unconditional guarantee of the Ameer's territory, which guarantee would as a matter of course be given if we went one step beyond the arrangements which, as I have already explained, were made at Simla in 1873.†

Lord Northbrook and his Council wrote accordingly to ask for

* Afghan Papers, p. 149.

† Afghan Papers, p. 152.

precise instructions as to the matters which Lord Salisbury had slurred over or forgotten, and took the opportunity of respectfully pointing out to the Secretary of State that if a mission was really to be sent to Cabul the honest course would also be the wise one, and that the Ameer was quite sharp enough to understand that only matters of grave political importance could induce the British Government to send a special mission to Cabul, and that if it were *ostensibly* directed to objects of *minor* political importance the Ameer would be simply incredulous.

The last words of the despatch are these—words to which the events of the last four years have given terrible significance :—
 “ We are convinced that a patient adherence to the policy adopted towards Afghanistan by Lord Canning, Lord Lawrence, and Lord Mayo, which it has been our earnest endeavour to maintain, presents the greatest promise of the eventual establishment of our relations with the Ameer on a satisfactory footing; *and we deprecate, as involving serious danger to the peace of Afghanistan and to the interests of the British Empire in India, the execution, under present circumstances, of the instructions conveyed in your lordship's despatch.*” *

The signature of this prophetic State paper was one of the last of Lord Northbrook's official acts in India, for a new Viceroy had been appointed to succeed him some time before it was signed.

The choice of the Conservative Government had fallen upon Lord Lytton, whose disastrous connection with one of the blackest and most dishonourable pages of our Indian history must not blind us to his many gifts and merits. When, however, Lord Lytton was appointed Viceroy of India, he would have been the first to have disclaimed any acquaintance with the circumstances, or with the needs of that country. If we remember that his father was a friend of the Prime Minister's, and that he himself was a near neighbour, as well as the most prominent Conservative ally of Lord Salisbury's in Hertfordshire, that he was a man in whom imagination was strong, and that a little spirited foreign policy at a cheap rate was what Lords Beaconsfield and Salisbury desired, the choice is sufficiently intelligible. It was a choice which many people not in the secret of these noble-men's views did not disapprove, for they had good reason to believe that Lord Lytton would work hard, and also that he did not entertain any illusions about our North-West frontier. It is only just to all parties to affirm and re-affirm that the policy which he has carried into effect was not initiated by him but by others.

Many and difficult were the questions with regard to internal administration which awaited Lord Lytton, as they await all

* Afghan Papers, p. 155.

Viceroy when they land in India ; but to frontier questions he need have devoted very little time. There were some troubles in Khelat of no great account, and the Ameer of Cabul, as we have seen, was a little out of humour ; but, to use the words of that monarch's own Prime Minister, *Lord Northbrook had thoroughly reassured him about any interference from Russia,* and Lord Northbrook left the friendship with Afghanistan without change.†*

But no cheap glory was to be obtained out of merely governing 240 millions of men in a quiet, humdrum way. Something was wanted that could be used among the rowdier elements in the constituencies—something in the spread eagle line.

“Before all things, pluck,” said a great authority, “pluck is the order of the day !”

Armed accordingly with instructions, which were a masterpiece in their kind, carefully pointing out as they did how the new Viceroy should appear to give more and stronger assurances to the Ameer than Lord Northbrook had done, without really doing so, while directing him at the same time to press the fatal demand for the stationing of British officers in Afghanistan, Lord Lytton went to India and immediately set to work to carry his orders into effect. At what period he became a willing instrument of the evil policy of his chief I do not know. Perhaps it was before, perhaps after the instructions were drawn up. Ere long he became, I fear, not only a willing but an eager instrument. Nothing, however, turns upon that, except the personal judgment which is to be formed of Lord Lytton. In the course of carrying his instructions into effect he met with the strongest opposition from the three ablest members of his Council, Sir Henry Norman, Sir William Muir, and Sir Arthur Hobhouse. There is an awkward allegation that measures were taken for the express purpose of preventing these high officials exercising their legal right of recording formal minutes of dissent ; but this again is rather a matter for persons who are interested in discussing the character of the Viceroy. All such side issues had better be passed by and attention concentrated upon the main action. It would be tedious to go into the details of the negotiation between the Viceroy and the Ameer. They can be read amongst the Afghan papers, or in the book called the “Causes of the Afghan War,” published about a year ago.‡ Suffice it to say that as early as the month of October, 1876, the Viceroy had become, or appeared to have become, very much irritated against the Ameer, and delivered an address to our Native Agent at Cabul, Atta Mahomed Khan, which contained the most insulting and altogether undiplomatic expressions ; which expressions, however, the Agent was directed to convey faithfully to the Ameer ! §

* Afghan Papers, p. 211.

† Afghan Papers, p. 206.

‡ Chatto and Windus, London.

§ Afghan Papers, p. 183-185.

This he proceeded to do. The Ameer, much alarmed both by the Viceroy's language and by several military movements which were made about this time, and which had to him all the appearance of being directed against him, appears to have thought that admitting British officers might be a less evil than a war, and our Native Agent wrote in December, 1876, from Cabul, to say that the Ameer would agree to admit them, if our Government held to its views after hearing, at a conference to be held between his Prime Minister and a person representing the Viceroy, the objections which he had to urge. That conference took place at the frontier city of Peshawur, early in 1877, and the representative of the Viceroy, Sir Lewis Pelly, pressed very strongly the admission of British officers into Afghanistan as a preliminary to all discussion. His instructions, said Sir Lewis, were categorical, and he had no discretionary powers as to that matter. What the Prime Minister of the Ameer thought about it can best be gathered, perhaps, from some remarks which he made in conversation with a friend, on February 7th :—

“It is a very serious business, and this is the last time that the Ameer will treat with the British Government. God grant that the issue be favourable. But you must not impose upon us a burden which we cannot bear, and if you overload us, the responsibility rests with you.’* ”

“I interposed here, and asked the Cabul Envoy what the burden was to which he alluded. He at once replied, ‘The residence of British officers on the frontiers of Afghanistan.’ He then went on with some warmth and excitement to enlarge upon the objections of the Afghan people to the presence of foreigners in their territories, and upon the difficulty the Ameer would experience in protecting them from insult and injury, in the event of his acceding to the condition of their residence in his country.”

Again he observed to Sir Lewis Pelly (Afghan Papers, p. 208), in the conversation of February 12th, 1877 :—

“I beg the favour of your consideration of the true facts of the state of affairs in Afghanistan with justice and impartiality. The condition of the Afghan people is perfectly well known to the authorities of the English Government. There is no need, therefore, for a detailed mention of them. I will only allude to some of them briefly.

“In the first place, the people of Afghanistan have a dread of this proposal, and it is firmly fixed in their minds, and deeply rooted in their hearts, that, if Englishmen or other Europeans once set foot in their country, it will sooner or later pass out of their hands. In no way can they be re-assured on this point, and it is impossible to remove these opinions from their minds, for they adduce many proofs in support of them, the mention of which now

* Afghan Papers, p. 202.

would greatly prolong this discussion. Therefore, since the opinions of the people of Afghanistan are such, the protection of the Englishmen in the midst of those hills is difficult, nay, impossible, because the whole army and the subjects of the Government are of these mountain people." And further (Afghan Papers, p. 212):—"As to what was said in reference to the external danger, I beg to observe that danger is of two kinds, internal and external; the internal danger, owing to the residence of English officers on the frontier, is apparent, and admits of no doubt. Matters would fall out in accordance with my description of the state of affairs in Afghanistan in the conference of the 12th of February. Therefore, consider what will be the beginning and what the end of such a measure. As to external danger, as I have already shewn to-day, I do not entertain its probability."

All through the discussions with Sir Lewis Pelly, the Prime Minister held to this point. At length, on the 19th of February, Sir Lewis Pelly said, that as the preliminary condition was declined, the conference could not proceed, and it was agreed that the matter should be referred to the Viceroy for his orders. This was done. The Viceroy's answer came and was transmitted to the Prime Minister of the Ameer on the 15th* of March. It announced that the British Government repudiated all liabilities on behalf of the Ameer, and denied the obligations under which previous Viceroys had come to him. By this time, however, the poor man had become dangerously ill, and on the 29th of March he died. The Ameer then proposed to send another high officer to continue the conference, but on March 30th the Viceroy telegraphed to Sir Lewis Pelly as follows:—

"Close conference immediately, on ground that basis on which we agreed to negotiate has not been acknowledged by Ameer; that, Mir Akhor not being authorised to negotiate on that basis, nor you on any other, conference is terminated *ipso facto*; and that you will leave Peshawur on a stated day. The date of it you will fix yourself, but it should be as early as conveniently possible, in order to shew we are in earnest, and avoid further entanglement." †

On the 20th of April, thirty-six days, as will be observed, after Sir Lewis Pelly's letter to the Prime Minister of the Ameer, a member of the Opposition asked the representative of the Indian Government in the House of Commons whether any change had recently taken place in the relations of the Government of India with Afghanistan. Lord George Hamilton replied, "*I have to say that no change whatever has occurred in the relations between the British Government and the Ameer of Afghanistan!*" ‡

The same member further, on the same occasion, asked Lord

* Afghan Papers, p. 220. † Afghan Papers, p. 222.

‡ Hansard, April 20th, 1877.

George Hamilton if the negotiations with the Ameer had entirely ceased, and Lord George replied, "I believe that the Ameer has expressed a wish to carry on negotiations, *and that the matter is under the consideration of the Government of India.*" The Secretary of State for India must surely have known that the negotiations had been broken off on the 30th of March!

Again, on the 11th of June, Lord George Hamilton, in reply to Sir Charles Dilke, said, "*No change in our obligations to the Ameer has been the result of the conference,* but it would not be consistent with the interests of the public service to publish the conversation."

It must surely have been within the knowledge of the Secretary of State for India that when Lord George Hamilton, in his representation, made use of these words, the British Government had repudiated all liabilities on the part of the Ameer and his dynasty, and had cried off from all the promises hitherto made to him, promises which those who had made them, the Duke of Argyll, Lord Northbrook, and others, considered to be obligations of the most binding character.

The next step, after closing the negotiations at Peshawur, was to withdraw our Native Agent from Cabul, or rather not to allow him to return thither, or in other words to break off diplomatic relations with the Ameer. Breaking off diplomatic relations when combined with such language as Lord Lytton, with apparently the full approval of Lord Salisbury, held to the Ameer, is usually the preliminary to war, and Lord Salisbury, writing in October, 1877, speaks of the Ameer as maintaining an attitude of isolation and scarcely veiled hostility.* The relations between England and Afghanistan, in the summer of 1877, may accordingly be considered to have been as "stretched" as they well could be without actually breaking. In other words, we were drifting into war.

It did not, however, suit the purpose of the Government to take Parliament into its confidence about this important matter. It was anxious to develop, unimpeded by criticism, the marvellous policy which it had for two years been carrying on. How far such conduct is in accordance with the spirit of the British Constitution as hitherto understood, I will not stop to inquire but I should have thought that no one, however little he may admire Parliamentary institutions, can think it right for a Minister to come down to Parliament and make statements apparently for the express purpose of deceiving his questioners, and of giving altogether incorrect impressions to the country as to what is going on with regard to matters of immense and vital importance. Yet that is what was done by the present Government.

On June 15th, 1877, the Duke of Argyll called attention to the very disquieting rumours which had been coming for many

* Afghan Papers, p. 224.

weeks from the North-West frontier of India. He remarked, amongst other things, that it was said that, "Alarmed by diplomatic demands and military arrangements, the mind of the Ameer was thoroughly unsettled ; that he was in a state of agitation and anger, and was collecting troops to resist aggression, or perhaps to make an aggressive movement upon India. The Ameer of Afghanistan was not, perhaps, a great power ; but another Afghan war would be, he need hardly say, a very serious matter. It would cost several millions of money, and it would, in any event, be a great misfortune if our good understanding with the Ameer were seriously disturbed. It was important that the noble Marquis should have an opportunity of giving their Lordships' House and the country an assurance *that he did not contemplate any serious change in the policy heretofore pursued towards Afghanistan ; and, above all, that he desired to continue at all events that friendly but watchful course of conduct which he believed was the only safe course to adopt in our relations with such a sovereign as the Ameer.*"

To these remarks Lord Salisbury, the Secretary of State for India, replied, and this is the conclusion of his speech :—

"I only wish emphatically to repeat that none of those suspicions of aggression on the part of the English Government have any true foundation ; that our desire in the future, as it has been in the past, is to respect the Afghan ruler, and to maintain as far as we can the integrity of his dominions. *There is no ground for any of the apprehensions to which the noble Duke has referred, or for suspicions which are too absurd to be seriously entertained.* The affairs of the frontier are maintaining a peaceful aspect, with the exception of a little trouble with a local tribe—the Afreedees. We have also maintained our relations with Khelat, and the papers we have laid on the table will explain what has occurred. But there is no reason *for any apprehension of any change of policy or of disturbance in our Indian Empire.*" *

It would be difficult to use clearer language, and Lord Northbrook would have been wanting in courtesy if he had not frankly accepted the Secretary of State's assurances, which he did in the following words :—

"The policy we have pursued with regard to the Ameer has been to shew him that we desired to assist him with our advice whenever he requires it, and not to press upon him the presence of British officers in his territory unless he really desires that they should go there, and will give them a welcome. I feel satisfied that if that policy is deliberately adhered to now, as it has been for many years, whatever difficulties may have arisen for the time being, and whatever suspicions may be entertained by the Ameer—from what cause I, not being acquainted with the facts, will not inquire—will disappear, and that the Ameer will soon see that his

* Hansard, June 15th, 1877.

suspensions have no foundation, and will look upon us as every sensible man in his position must—as his best friends, and as those to whom, in certain circumstances, he will have to apply for assistance. It is with great satisfaction, therefore, that I have heard the assurance of the noble Marquis that the policy I have referred to Her Majesty's Government will continue to pursue. *I am satisfied that he has given us that assurance in perfect good faith, and that we may trust him to resist any attempt to put it aside.*"

After a few words from Lord Halifax, which are not reported, Lord Salisbury again rose, but confined his remarks entirely to an incidental matter, *thereby of course accepting the interpretation put by Lord Northbrook on his words about the main subject of the conversation.*

I pass now to the Quetta episode. From the very commencement of the Session of 1877,* great efforts had been made in the House of Commons to obtain information as to what the Government was doing in the State of Khelat, a district which lies to the south of Afghanistan, and more especially as to whether it was intended to occupy Quetta. The reason why the Opposition was anxious to have this question answered, was that the occupation of Quetta had for long been the step which was most loudly urged by those Anglo-Indian politicians who desired to go *forward* and to annex the whole or part of the territories lying between us and the Russian possessions in Central Asia.

These persons had obtained in consequence the name of the "forward school," and the rumours which came from India led to the belief that Lord Lytton had taken measures to carry their wishes into effect. Notice of an intention to ask a question on this subject was given by a member of the late Government the very day the House met. But all the means which our Parliamentary forms put at the disposal of officials, were skilfully used to stave off debate, and the Government made no full or elaborate statement upon the subject until the month of August.† When it did so, it assured the Opposition that although Quetta had been temporarily occupied for purely local reasons connected with the affairs of the State of Khelat, that occupation had nothing in the world to do with the forward policy, with regard to which the Government held precisely the same views as their predecessors. Thus spoke Sir Stafford Northcote :—

"As to the occupation of Quetta, if we are to regard that advance from a military point of view—a step in the nature of taking up a certain position to defend ourselves against an apprehended attack—then I should maintain the opinion that it would be a false move ; but if our relations with the Government of Khelat are of such a character as to demand that we should take certain steps to

* Hansard, Feb. 9th, 1877.

† Hansard, Aug. 9th, 1877.

improve and regulate those relations ; if it is thought right and desirable that we should send an envoy there, and that the envoy should be accompanied by a sufficient escort to secure him an honourable reception, I do not see that such a course can be open to objection, or can be liable to the construction that in taking such a step, Her Majesty's Government are doing anything that is inconsistent with the policy that has hitherto been pursued—the policy originated by Lord Northbrook, approved by my noble friend, Lord Salisbury, and continued by the present Viceroy, Lord Lytton. I gather from the language of the hon. member for Kirkcaldy (Sir George Campbell) and the noble Lord (the Marquis of Hartington) that they are not dissatisfied with the explanation of my noble friend, *if they could only feel sure that there was not something behind*. They refer to some expressions used by my noble friend, Lord Lytton, in which he speaks of the desirability of considering our frontier policy as a whole, and treating it from an Imperial point of view, *and they seem to assume that that policy is going to change its character, and pass from a policy of inactivity into one of activity*. I do not admit that that is a fair construction of my noble friend's despatch."

And again :—

"I hope that hon. gentlemen *will not run away with the idea that there is any great revolutionary change of Indian policy in our minds ; nothing could be more unfortunate than that that should be*. We have two dangers to guard against. We have, on the one hand, to guard against exciting the people of India into believing that there is some great policy of aggression in contemplation; and, on the other hand, against the idea that we are cowed and inactive through fear of some great foe that is coming upon us. Neither of these views is true. The policy of England is—as it ought to be—a firm and courageous policy, because a temperate policy. The lines of it are to strengthen our position in that country, to do everything we can to improve the condition of the people ; not to provoke attack and yet to be ready. It is necessary to have regard to our relations with the bordering tribes—and I do not deny that it becomes all the more necessary when events take place in Central Asia, or elsewhere, which cause agitation and excitement among those tribes. *The main lines of our policy are unchanged, and I believe the country will be satisfied, and will wish them to continue.*"

Thus spoke Lord George Hamilton:—"As Quetta, however, was the most convenient station for conducting further negotiations Major Sandeman had remained there. The escort of 986 men who had accompanied Major Sandeman, who were all natives, were also sent to Quetta ; but the mere fact that the force was under 1000 men—a force with which it would be evidently impossible to take the field with any effect—of itself shewed that they were not sent

for aggressive purposes. *He therefore hoped the House would dismiss from their minds the idea that either aggression or annexation was intended.*"

What are we to think of these statements when we bring them into connection, first with the fact that before two years were over the so-called "scientific frontier" had been extended to a place considerably further *forward* than Quetta, and also that one of the points most insisted upon by the Opposition in the speeches to which Sir Stafford Northcote and Lord George Hamilton replied, was a passage from a despatch written by Lord Lytton to Lord Salisbury, and which, in that it treated frontier affairs as part of a single Imperial question, seemed to imply that the occupation of Quetta was not connected merely with the affairs of Khelat, but seemed to the Opposition to imply that the occupation of Quetta was part of a new scheme of policy inspired by the views of the *forward* school?

Here is the passage in question—a most ominous one.

*"The present Viceroy having had the advantage before leaving England of personal communication with your lordship on the general subject of our frontier relations, was strongly impressed by the importance of endeavouring to deal with them simultaneously, as indivisible parts of a single Imperial question, mainly dependent for its solution on the foreign policy of Her Majesty's Government, which is the ultimate guardian of the whole British Empire, rather than as isolated local matters."**

Nothing calling for notice occurred on the North-West frontier of India during the winter of 1877-78. In the spring, however, of the latter year the present Government had the fantastic idea of bringing an Indian force to Malta. † The Russians, of course, laughed at this imbecile little manœuvre, and said, "What is the good of bringing Indian troops to Europe when we know that in order to send that handful of dusky soldiers you are obliged to keep nearly ten times as many of your best white-faces in Asia?" They, however, thought that it would be worth their while to shew that two could play at that game, and so they also organised an equally idiotic little expedition in Central Asia which was to march towards Afghanistan, for what purpose they knew best, for it could have done about as much harm to the Indian Empire as a popgun could do to Gibraltar. Either to cover the failure of this expedition, or for some other purpose, the Russians sent a very insignificant Mission to Cabul in the summer of 1878. Whether the Ameer invited the Russian Mission, being anxious to have some

* Hansard and Khelat Papers.

† Was this force intended to seize a point on the coast of Syria, and only diverted to Malta? Was the Russian expedition mainly defensive and designed to encounter our troops collected in the Punjâb for the invasion of Central Asia? Should the British Parliament be kept in the dark about such matters?

European friend after we had ceased to hold diplomatic relations with him ; or whether he admitted it against his will, fearing that he should no longer have the assistance of the British if a rival attacked him under Russian protection, I know not, nor is it at all material. Anyhow, from some cause or other, he received the Mission.

It has been said in some of the newspapers that correspondence between Russian officials and Shere Ali has been discovered at Cabul. I do not know whether the statement is true, but nothing is more probable. After Lord Lytton had informed him that he was an earthen pipkin between two iron pots,* that Russia desired to come to an understanding with England at his expense, and that England repudiated all liabilities towards him ; when, further, all this hostile language was emphasised by the withdrawal of our Envoy from Cabul and by the occupation of Quetta, Shere Ali would indeed have been different from other Orientals if he had not turned to look for some help or comfort from Russia ; and considering that Russia must have known that war with England might have broken out almost at any time after the summer of 1876, and must have shrewdly suspected that the concentration of troops in North-Western India, about which the Duke of Argyll inquired in 1877, was intended to attack her, it would have been passing strange if she had not attempted to set on foot a little intrigue with the Afghan ruler. It is quite possible that even at an earlier period he may have sometimes asked himself whether something or other might not be got out of his other great neighbour as well as out of the Viceroy. We all know the story of the governess, who was asked by another lady of her profession whether she taught her pupils to bow at the name of the Devil ? "No, indeed, I don't," was the reply. "I do," said the other, "I think it is safer !" Shere Ali may well have taken this view, though I know of no evidence that he did. But he was quite shrewd enough to be aware that we would be incomparably the most powerful stay, and if he had been treated by Lord Salisbury and Lord Lytton with the same calm and kindly firmness with which he was treated by Lord Northbrook and the Duke of Argyll, his alliance with us would have remained unbroken.

But some reader may ask, "What would the Liberals have done if the Russian Mission had gone to Cabul ?" The reply must be, "If the Liberals had remained in power, this particular mission, which cannot have been friendly to us, would never have gone to Cabul, for we should never have blundered into the relations to Russia in which the Tories brought us in 1878 ; but if our relations to Russia had been 'stretched,' and this particular mission had been sent, we should have said at St. Petersburg,

* Afghan Papers, p. 183.

‘Although this is not a direct breach of your agreement with Lord Clarendon in 1869, yet under all the circumstances you must see that it is not in accordance with the spirit of that agreement that you should be at Cabul just at this moment, and we must request you to withdraw.’” Such requests mean a good deal, and are always complied with by States which do not mean to go to war.

It cannot be too distinctly remembered that as long as we and Russia were on good terms we had no right, either from the ordinary obligations of national courtesy or through agreement, to say to the Russians, “You must not send a Mission to Cabul” We had no more right to do so, than they would, in the absence of any agreement to the contrary, have to forbid our sending a Mission to Khiva or Bokhara, if we pleased so to do to-morrow.

The next step would have been to say to the Ameer, of course in the most courteous diplomatic language, “We have had but to say one word and the Russian Mission disappears from your capital. Don’t you think you had better reconsider yourself and get back into good temper?” Very soon he would have been as amenable as he was at Umballa. But the Viceroy’s passions were roused, and at home a little “spirited foreign policy” was wanted. The Jingoës had been baulked of their war with Russia, and it was desirable, as Mr. Leatham so well said in the House, to “*run into something cheap.*”

A letter was accordingly sent, on August 14th, from the Viceroy to the Ameer, insisting on the reception of a British Envoy.

Three days after this, Shere Ali’s son, Abdoollah Jan, to whom he was deeply, and indeed madly devoted, died, and all business was suspended during the period of mourning. On September 17th Sir Neville Chamberlain reported to the Viceroy as follows:—“Ameer was very much displeased, objected to the harsh words, and said: ‘It is as if they were to come by force. I do not agree to the Mission coming in this manner; and until my officers have received orders from me, how can the Mission come? It is as if they wish to disgrace me; it is not proper to use pressure in this way; it will tend to a complete (rupture?) and breach of friendship. I am a friend as before, and entertain no ill-will. The Russian Envoy has come, and has come with my permission. I am still afflicted with grief at the loss of my son, and have no time to think over the matter. If I get time, whatever I consider advisable will be acted upon. Under these circumstances they can do as they like!’ Nawab adds that the advance of the Mission should be held in abeyance, otherwise some harm will occur. Should the Ameer decide to receive the Mission, he will of his own accord, and will make all necessary arrangements. If Mission advanced now, Nawab anticipates resistance.”*

* Afghan Papers, p. 241.

On the 18th he reports again :—“ Another letter received from Nawab Gholam Hussein Khan after an interview with Wazir Shah Mahomed, who assured Nawab, on his oath, that the Ameer intimated that he would send for the Mission in order to clear up mutual misunderstandings, provided there was no attempt to force this Mission upon him without his consent being first granted, according to usual custom; otherwise he would resist it, as coming in such a manner it would be a slight to him. He attributed the English grievances against him to mischievous reports of news-writers. He reiterated his Quetta grievances, &c. He says he did not invite the Russian Mission, but that, as his country was quite exposed and he was estranged from the English, he was obliged to let them come on after they crossed the Oxus.” *

On September 19th, Sir Neville Chamberlain reports again :—“ The Nawab says that the Ameer is in a bad humour, and the Ministers tell me that on account of grief and indisposition he cannot bear to hear alternately harsh and conciliatory language. The Ministers express hope that when replies were received to the Nawab's letters of the 12th and 13th, the reception of the Mission will be satisfactorily arranged for. Further, that if Mission starts on 18th, without waiting for the Ameer's permission, there would be no hope left for the renewal of friendship or reconciliation. In such a case we cannot hold ourselves responsible for anything. What will happen will happen.” †

Nevertheless, on the 21st, the Viceroy ordered Sir Neville Chamberlain to advance, and a portion of the escort did advance to the little Afghan fortress of Ali Musjid. The commandant of that fortress courteously declined ‡ to allow the Embassy to proceed. A few days afterwards Shere Ali replied to the Viceroy's letters, in a tone which exactly reflected the perplexity into which he had been thrown, and the mortification he suffered from the harsh and violent way in which the Embassy of Sir Neville Chamberlain had been forced upon him.

Hereupon it was resolved to send an ultimatum. No answer to the ultimatum was received before the date fixed, and on the 21st of November war was declared. The manifesto of the Viceroy concluded as follows :—

“ With the Sirdars and people of Afghanistan this Government has still no quarrel, and desires none. *They are absolved from all responsibility from the recent acts of the Ameer, and as they have given no offence, so the British Government, wishing to respect*

* Afghan Papers, p. 242. † Afghan Papers, p. 243.

‡ If Lord John Manners were a person who was in the habit of weighing his words, it would be impossible to believe that he had read Sir Louis Cavagnari's report, p. 249 of the Afghan Papers. He could not, if he were, have reiterated his assertion that the Embassy was met by insult and violence.

*their independence, will not willingly injure or interfere with them, nor will the British Government tolerate interference on the part of any other Power in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. Upon the Ameer Shere Ali Khan alone rests the responsibility of having exchanged the friendship for the hostility of the Empress of India.”**

In the Declaration of War, dated November 21st, 1878, there is not the slightest hint that we were going to war with a view to plunder Shere Ali or anyone else of any portion of territory. A great many causes of war are enumerated, but of a desire to rectify our frontier not one syllable.

On November 9th, however, the Prime Minister had taken the opportunity of the Lord Mayor's dinner to make the following astounding observations:—

“Our North-Western frontier is a *haphazard* and not a *scientific frontier*. It is in the power of any foe so to embarrass and disturb our dominion, that we should be obliged to maintain the presence of a great military force in that quarter, entailing on the country a proportionate expenditure. These are unquestionably great evils, and former Viceroy's have had their attention called with anxiety to the state of our frontier. Recently, however, some peculiar circumstances have occurred in that part of the world which have convinced Her Majesty's Government that the time has arrived when we must terminate all this inconvenience and prevent all this possible injury. With this view, we made arrangements by which, when completed, in all probability at no distant day, all anxiety respecting the North-Western frontier of India will be removed.”

A more cynical announcement of an intention to steal can hardly have been often made. But it is not, however, to the wickedness, but to the absurdity of the proposal that I wish to call special attention. For this was the first occasion on which the public heard of the since much talked-of scientific frontier. I am quite aware that if there were no such thing as the eighth commandment, our frontier as it existed before the second Afghan War, our haphazard frontier, or, as I should prefer to call it, our natural frontier, might have been improved in various ways. But when a speaker says that he wants a scientific frontier, he is using a perfectly well-known military expression, and ought to use it with some regard to its meaning. A scientific frontier is a French phrase used to describe the frontier of France towards the Low Countries, for which Nature has done nothing, and for which man has consequently been obliged to do everything. When the Prime Minister said he wished for a scientific frontier, he said that he wanted a line of great fortresses to the west of India, whatever he may have meant.

* Afghan Papers, II., p. 20.

When after the war, of which I shall presently have to speak, a treaty was signed, the so-called scientific frontier turned out to be neither scientific nor a frontier, for it consisted of three or four points separated from each other by great distances, and by some of the most difficult country in Asia. Someone compared it not inappropriately to the points of a dilapidated toasting-fork run into the mountains of Afghanistan.

Parliament met in December, and the Afghan Question was immediately raised by an admirable speech from Mr. Whitbread. As he sat down an old and very experienced member said to me, "That is the strongest indictment I ever heard in the House of Commons." I could well believe it, for since Mr. Whitbread's grandfather attacked Mr. Pitt for his insane policy in 1792, and Fox made his great Oczakow oration, there had been few better opportunities of the same kind.

The debate was a very hot one, for the Liberals felt not only that the Government had engaged the country in an unnecessary and wicked war, which might lead to the very gravest consequences; and that the whole policy built up by a long succession of Viceroys and Secretaries of State had been overthrown at a blow, but that even graver issues were raised by what had occurred than the wisdom or folly of an Afghan war. If the tactics which the Government had adopted with a view to prevent the discussion of their policy in the Session of 1877 were to make a precedent, then the whole of our system of Parliamentary government would have to be revised. *That system depends for its smooth working upon its being distinctly understood that the same rules of morality are to govern Ministers in their communications with their political opponents across the chambers in which the Legislature meets, as govern English gentlemen in their ordinary intercourse, and, above all, upon the assumption that anything like wilful deception is utterly out of the question.* Of course, the moment that the papers relating to the affairs of Afghanistan were in the hands of the Opposition it was but too evident that the worst fears which they had formed and expressed in June and August, 1877, were only too well-founded, and that affairs had been taking at those times precisely the line which the members of the Opposition believed that they had been taking, until the positive assurances of Ministers had tranquillised them.

A disagreeable incident added to the annoyance already felt by the Opposition. In a despatch signed by Lord Cranbrook, who had succeeded Lord Salisbury at the India Office, and addressed to the Viceroy, statements were made about Lord Northbrook and the Duke of Argyll which they both instantly and indignantly denied.* Explanations of these statements were tendered by Ministers after Parliament met; but in the

* Afghan Papers, p. 262.

meantime they had been flying round the world with the signature of Lord Cranbrook, the Secretary of State for India, attached to them. It might be unjust to accuse Lord Cranbrook of being more than technically responsible for these statements. The chief moral responsibility must rest elsewhere, but it has never transpired that Lord Cranbrook in any way censured the person or persons who misled him, and one cannot help remembering the jurist's question: "*Cui bono?*" for whose advantage was it done, who profited by the deception?

The discussion took the turn which most party discussions have taken in the Publicans' Parliament. The argument was on one side, the votes on the other, but Her Majesty's Ministers were naturally able to boast that they had received as a Christmas gift the blessing of the Legislature upon their disastrous enterprise.

Meantime the second Afghan War took its course. No one who had ever seriously studied the question doubted that the mere military part of the business would be simple enough. As far back as 1875 a member of the late Government, writing from Peshawur, had said, after describing some military manœuvres at the mouth of the Khyber:—

"It was a striking sight, and none the less striking because one knew that the men before us, and those who were lying behind them, on the road along which we have come, could walk over anything and everything between this and the Syr Daria. I yield, I trust, to no British politician in pacific, and, indeed, in warmly friendly feelings towards Russia, but I am all the freer to indulge those feelings, because I well know that so far from having any cause to fear her aggression we could, if need were, which God forbid! make her position in Central Asia wholly intolerable. When will people learn that, as I have said before, our difficulty is not in *governing* India but in *goevrning it well?* We are strong enough now to try to govern it well, and are doing so. If we were weaker, we might be tempted to conciliate the violent and turbulent classes by a warlike policy. If we thought a warlike policy a right or a wise one, we could occupy all Afghanistan, and hold it with the greatest ease. Let no one dream, misled by the fiasco of Lord Auckland, that there is any doubt about that. But what good would or could come to us from so doing, from annexing new expenses and responsibilities without any new advantage?" *

Given adequate supplies of money and generals fairly up to their work, success in Afghanistan was a certainty. Officers who would make an indifferent figure if opposed to the highly trained ability, the excellent war matériel, and the thoroughly disciplined troops of the great European armies, are very Marlboroughs and Napoleons when opposed to disorganised masses of Asiatics,

* Notes of an Indian Journey. London, 1876.

individually brave but wanting all those advantages with which civilisation has armed the most advanced communities. A good many valuable British and British-Indian lives were sacrificed, a great many fine constitutions were ruined, for the climate was the most formidable foe. Beasts of burden, and more especially camels were sacrificed with a hideous prodigality which North-Western India will long rue, and money was poured out like water. The unhappy Shere Ali was hunted off to a distant corner of his dominions where he died of disease, and a treaty was concluded with his son, Yakooob Khan.

At home the Opposition forbore to harass the Government while the war was going on, and acquiesced in the usual vote of thanks to the army. The Government naturally gave as little information as they could, but at length towards the end of the Session the Liberals had the famous Treaty of Gandamak in their hands.

It was easy to see that the idea which had presided over the conception of that document was not the statesman's idea, "Let me do the best for my country; let me make a settlement which will, at least, last for some considerable time." It was the tricky wirepuller's idea, "Let me make a settlement which, however worthless, will look well for a year or two, and last over the next election. The Prime Minister said last year that we 'had obtained *peace with honour in Europe*,' and got a reasonable number of fools to believe him. This year I will enable him to say with as much truth, and probably with as much success, that we have obtained *peace with honour in Asia*."

When, on the very last night of the Session, the Opposition at length got an opportunity of calling attention to the Treaty, they had no difficulty in shewing that it was not a razor meant to cut, but a razor meant to sell; that the very men who had pushed the Government into the "forward policy" were telling them that their settlement was not complete but required to be *largely supplemented*. One speaker, after criticising most of the articles of the Treaty in detail and shewing that amongst others Dr. Bellew, who was one of the most important people behind the scenes in India through all this Afghan folly, and Sir Henry Rawlinson, who was the high priest of the forward school, looked upon the Treaty as a mere step towards their own far-reaching designs of annexation and conquest, spoke as follows: "The Chancellor of the Exchequer will rise before the debate closes, and with that Nathaniel manner of his, will deny Dr. Bellew, the oracle of the Viceroy; will deny Sir Henry Rawlinson, the oracle of Lord Cranbrook; will deny the *Blackwood* writer, who addresses the forward section of the party. Right hon. gentlemen opposite would deny everything in earth and heaven, except, perhaps, since the Mansion House speech of the Prime Minister, the Divine inspiration of the English land system. It will not do, however,

this plan of winking hard at agents while they write one thing for one section, and another for another section of the public, while yet another and different account is given in Parliament. We may say to right hon. gentlemen what was said elsewhere to some of their colleagues—"You are beginning to be found out. The Afghan War, for which they have taken so much credit, will have to find its place with its brother impostures—the imposture of Cyprus, the imposture of Asia Minor, the imposture of the Balkan fortresses."

Ministers replied with all the jubilant and almost insulting self-confidence of men who felt that they had gained a glorious party triumph, and had made still further progress in the policy which their last Prime Minister set before his party as the high and statesman-like object which should inspire their efforts—the policy of *dishing the Whigs*. Mr. Stanhope, the Under-Secretary of State for India, made the following amongst many other equally sagacious remarks:—*

"He confessed that when he heard the hon. member express a desire to bring on a discussion on the subject he had had some little hope that in the dying days of the Session they were going to hear from him something like a death bed repentance, *and after the prophecies of the hon. member had been so completely falsified*, he had expected to hear some admission of the fact. He feared, however, that the political opinions of the hon. member were such that they could not change, no matter how circumstances might alter."

And again:—

"But, after all, what was the general effect of the Treaty Had it alienated the Ameer from us? Far from it, *for the Ameer was now on the most friendly terms with us, and accepted the Treaty in the most cordial spirit*. Had it alienated the people of Afghanistan? The hon. and learned member for Oxford (Sir William Harcourt) had said: 'You have inspired the people of that country with such a hatred towards you, that all the ground you fail to occupy will be the fortress of your foes.' The result had, however, gone to shew—and the occupation of Candahar, undertaken for temporary purposes, afforded strong proof of it—that the people of Afghanistan, as a whole, had no unfriendly feelings towards us. *The policy lately pursued had gained for this country a friendly, an independent, and a strong Afghanistan*. British influence was paramount in that country; our frontier was secure to a degree which had never before existed—at any rate, for many years past; *and the Government were proud—as the country, in his opinion, would be proud—of the great results which had been accomplished, mainly owing to the patient foresight and perseverance of Lord Lytton—results which it*

* Hansard, Aug. 14th, 1879

would not be possible for any politician, either in or out of the House, to minimise.”

And further :—

“Then the hon. member had called attention to the clause by which they were entitled to place a British Resident at Cabul. He supposed that no one would revert to the dangers and the difficulties of placing an Envoy there that had been mentioned in December, for all those prognostications had been contradicted by subsequent facts. The Ameer had accepted a Resident, and had fixed his place of residence at Cabul, contrary to the expectations expressed at the time. Major Cavagnari, whose ready tact and growing friendship with the Ameer, marked him as specially qualified, had been appointed to the post. He was received with every demonstration of cordiality, and was able to go about the city with perfect freedom, and found that he was well received not only by the Ameer but by the people.”

Sir Stafford Northcote was not less equal to the occasion. He observed :—

“I shall not enter at any great length into the question that has been raised. My hon. friend, the Under-Secretary of State for India, has, I think, in one of the clearest and one of the best speeches it has ever been my pleasure to listen to in this House, explained the real position of affairs and the policy of the Government; and has given a complete answer to the observations of the hon. member for the Elgin Burghs and the hon. member for Kirkcaldy. The noble Lord said he did not hear all the remarks of my hon. friend. I am not surprised at that; for if he had heard the opening observations of my hon. friend he would, I think, have endeavoured to reply to them. My hon. friend asked the hon. member for the Elgin Burghs a question which it might have been well if the noble Lord had answered. He asked what object or advantage they anticipated from the sort of speeches they had made on the present occasion? What is to be the advantage which is to be derived by the country from this kind of criticism and this sort of discussion, which, as we know, will not be limited to the walls of this House? The main points in the mind of the noble Lord appeared to be to express a feeling of disappointment, first, at the success of the Government in spite of the prophecies so freely uttered against the possibility of such success; and, secondly, against the moderation of the Government.”

In Mr. Kaye's history of the first Afghan War there is a page, the third of the third volume, which perfectly describes what happened before the echoes of the speeches of Ministers had died away. Here it is :—

“Afghanistan—serene and prosperous Afghanistan—with its popular government and its grateful people, was in arms against its deliverers. Suddenly the tranquillity of that doomed country, boasted of in Cabul, and credited in Calcutta, was found

to be a great delusion. *Across the whole length and breadth of the land the history of that gigantic lie was written in characters of blood.* It was now too deplorably manifest that, although a British army had crossed the Indus and cantoned itself at Cabul and Candahar, the Afghans were Afghans still; still a nation of fierce Mahomedans, of hardy warriors, of independent mountaineers; still a people not to be dragooned into peace, or awed into submission, by a scattering of foreign bayonets and the pageantry of a puppet king."

Intelligence reached this country early in September that Sir Louis Cavagnari and his escort had been attacked at Cabul by a greatly superior force, and after a gallant struggle had been overpowered and destroyed.

Of course the result of this was a third Afghan War, the end of which we have not yet seen, but we have a large, indeed an overwhelming force, and every conceivable advantage for bringing that war to a successful conclusion. Nothing but the grossest military incapacity can or ever could have made its issue doubtful.

But let us suppose the third Afghan War *triumphantly* concluded, the usual honours showered amongst the commanders, Lord Lytton made an Earl, and so forth. The question is what next, and next? Again we shall be confronted with the same problem which has perplexed the statesman for long years. Are Russia and England to become next neighbours in Asia, or are they to be separated by a belt of territory? If the first of these alternatives is to be accepted, where is the line to be drawn? Is Russia to be allowed to acquire any part of Afghanistan, or are we to acquire the whole of it? To that last question the answer of the Liberals has ever been, "Russia promised to us to respect the independence of Afghanistan; as long as we were in office she did so scrupulously, and if she had not done so, we should have known how to make her keep to her obligation." What the answer of the Conservatives may be I know not; but undoubtedly if they retain the positions in Afghanistan which they took under the Treaty of Gandamak, and still more if they take additional positions, they will have so altered the relations of this country and Russia, as they were in 1869 and 1873, that it will be absolutely necessary to re-open the discussion between the two Governments which the Liberals so satisfactorily closed.

The Beaconsfield Government has by its own act completely altered the aspect of affairs under which Russia bound herself to Mr. Gladstone's Government, and has broken down every *conventional* barrier to her advance. The outbreak of a war could have done no more.

But supposing the question settled by our taking the whole of Afghanistan and Russia coming to the borders of that country, we shall have done two things; first, we shall have advanced to meet

Russia where she is getting always stronger, and where we must always be comparatively weak ; secondly, we shall either have involved the British or the Indian taxpayer, or both, in new and continually increasing responsibilities. I do not think the British taxpayer will like to have his burden increased for the pleasure of being weaker with reference to Russia than he was before, and it is notorious that in India, so far from having any money to throw away upon Afghanistan, if we could raise by taxation millions and millions more than we do every year, we could spend every penny of it and be still very far indeed from giving to that country a really civilised administration. Remember that the average Indian district is as large as Devon and Cornwall put together, that there are some districts as big as Yorkshire, and that the providence of those districts is one over-worked British official. If we are really to do justice to India, really to justify our being there at all, we ought to be able to multiply the European brain power which is now given to its affairs, half-a-dozen times over. We are unable, from sheer inability to raise a larger taxation, to do anything like our duty to India, and yet we must needs go seeking adventures of the most costly description beyond its frontier.

Our position in India when the Duke of Argyll left the India Office, was exactly that of a landowner who possessed a large, rather poor, very improvable, and extremely encumbered estate, but who by dint of taking infinite pains managed to do a little every year for his property, and just, taking one with another year contrived to make the two ends meet. When Lord Salisbury succeeded, it is only right to say that in all particulars except one he carried on, or developed the wise financial policy of his predecessors. Since 1874 the Indian Government has had some great financial misfortunes and some great financial pieces of luck, but to revert to my simile of the landowner, that personage instead of minding his own affairs, and them exclusively, has engaged in a frightfully costly law suit with a neighbour, which may end, after involving him in calamities of every sort, in adding to his estate a large expanse of country, which will cost him vast sums of money every year, and bring the probability of new law suits and new calamities. Strike the Afghan Wars out of the calculation, and the Tory administration of Indian finance would have been one of the redeeming points of their policy. Include them, and their management of Indian finance sinks to a level with most of their other doings, and becomes utterly detestable.

But there are some of our incidental proceedings in Afghanistan which may exercise a reflex action, upon our position in India, and upon the estimation in which we are held throughout the world, about which I must say a word. When at the commencement of the third Afghan War it was announced that newspaper correspondence from

the army was to be put under some restrictions, many people, I suppose, although a good deal startled, suspended their judgment and waited for explanation. There might, they thought, be some reason for it which did not appear. As time went on, however, it became but too probable that there were no important military reasons for these restrictions, that the main object of them was that free course might be given to the rage which was felt by the Government and by the Viceroy at the ludicrous failure of their plans and their prophecies, without its creating too great an amount of horror in the mind of the public at home. We do not know, and until the Liberals return to power we shall never know, the true history of these two wars with all their cruel and bloody details, but some fragments of information have reached the public which give some indication of the spirit in which our operations are being carried on.

The following passage is quoted in the *Fortnightly Review* for January, 1880, from the *Daily News* of December 15th, 1879 :—

“The work of the Military Commission has been unusually heavy during the last few days, though by the terms of the amnesty which has been issued to-day it is probable that their distasteful task of sentencing men to be hanged by the score will now be almost closed. Hitherto the Commission has condemned all who were shewn to have fought against us at Charasiab on the 6th of October, or on the Cabul heights two days later. The regiments then in arms, and the population of Cabul, were warned that by resistance to the British they would have become rebels against their lawful sovereign, and must expect no mercy. The abdication of Yakoob Khan did not condone their offence. On the 6th, seven men brought in by General Gough’s force from the Shuturgardan and the intermediate villages were hanged, one being a havildar of a Herat regiment present in Cabul at the massacre. This was followed by an excursion into the Chardeh Valley, the villagers of which were known to be harbouring disbanded Sepoys. The mullicks, or headmen, were summoned by General Baker, who ordered them to bring out all Sepoys of the Afghan army. Five minutes’ grace was allowed, and within this time thirty men came forward. The General had a roll-call, shewing the names of Sepoys known to live or be hidden in Indikee, and as many of these were missing, the mullicks were asked to explain their absence. They admitted that twenty men were absent, but promised to bring them in when they returned. General Baker then visited smaller villages near and captured eighteen more Sepoys. There could be little doubt that most of them had been trained as soldiers; they fell into their places shoulder to shoulder when the order to start was given, and, keeping time to the quick step of the Sikhs, marched along in good order to our camp. Forty more Sepoys were brought in by

the mullicks, on the 9th and 10th, as well also as a fakir, who had been wounded. This made eighty-nine in all, and they have been dealt with as follows:—

November 10th	...	11 hanged	6 released.
November 11th	...	28 "	19 "
November 12th	...	10 "	13 "
			2 pardoned and retained as informants.
		—	—
Total		49	40
		—	—

The men executed belonged to the Herat regiments. They were either at Cabul when the outbreak occurred, or returned later to fight against us, the muster-rolls now in our hands enabling us to identify them without much trouble. They did not attempt to give false names; and their mullicks were warned that they themselves might incur further punishment if they screened Sepoys belonging to their villages. *Such as could not give a clear account of their movements were condemned to death, and they submitted to their fate with the usual quiet resignation of Mussulmans. Many were of the worst type of Afghans; and their callousness, when waiting their turn at the foot of the scaffold (ten men were hanged at a time), was remarkable.*—*Daily News*, December 15th.

It is obvious that the sympathies of the writer of this account were strongly against the prisoners, for a humane gamekeeper would hardly write more coolly about the death of so many polecats. Suppose for a moment that these were Kentish volunteers, who had been hanged for opposition to a French General marching on London, their crime would have been the same, and the same writer would have described them as heroes and martyrs.

Let us hope that when Parliament meets, some of the many rumours that are circulating may be shewn to be errors or exaggerations. This can, however, it is to be feared, hardly be the case with all of them. Horrible, however, as such things are, they are but the fringe of the subject. The whole policy, from the 22nd of January, 1875, to the present hour, has been one vast web of crime. It is bad to put prisoners to death in cold blood by tens; but it is at least as bad to force a quarrel upon a sovereign, on a mere question of etiquette, to assure his subjects that you do not entertain the slightest hostility to them, as was done by the Viceroy in his Declaration of War; and then to slaughter them by thousands in the field, inflicting thereby, indirectly, intolerable calamities upon women, children,

and other non-combatants. But the wickedness of the whole proceeding is swallowed up in its intolerable folly ; in the destruction of that strong, friendly, and independent Afghanistan which the Government itself professed to desire to maintain ; in the abolition of all our arrangements with Russia in Asia ; in the vast moral advantage given to that Power if ever she desires, by moving in Asia, to gain an advantage over us in the Balkan Peninsula or in Armenia ; in the crazy dreams, which if this Government lasts a few years longer, will make us responsible for the whole of Asia, from the far end of Assam on the borders of China, to the eastern shore of the Bosphorus.

They believed in old days that the curse of Heaven clung to the houses of rulers who did evil deeds. We are acquainted with the story of the banquet of Thyestes, and all that came of it in the imagination of the Greeks. Now, however, we know but too well that that is not the way in which retribution works, and that on the most innocent of us and on our children, as much as on them and theirs, may rest the burden of the sins in which Her Majesty's present advisers have involved their country.

