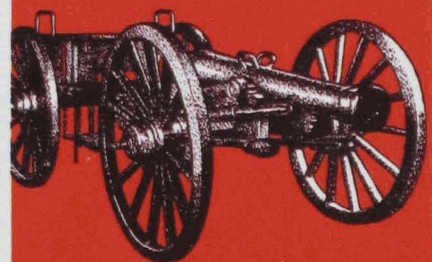
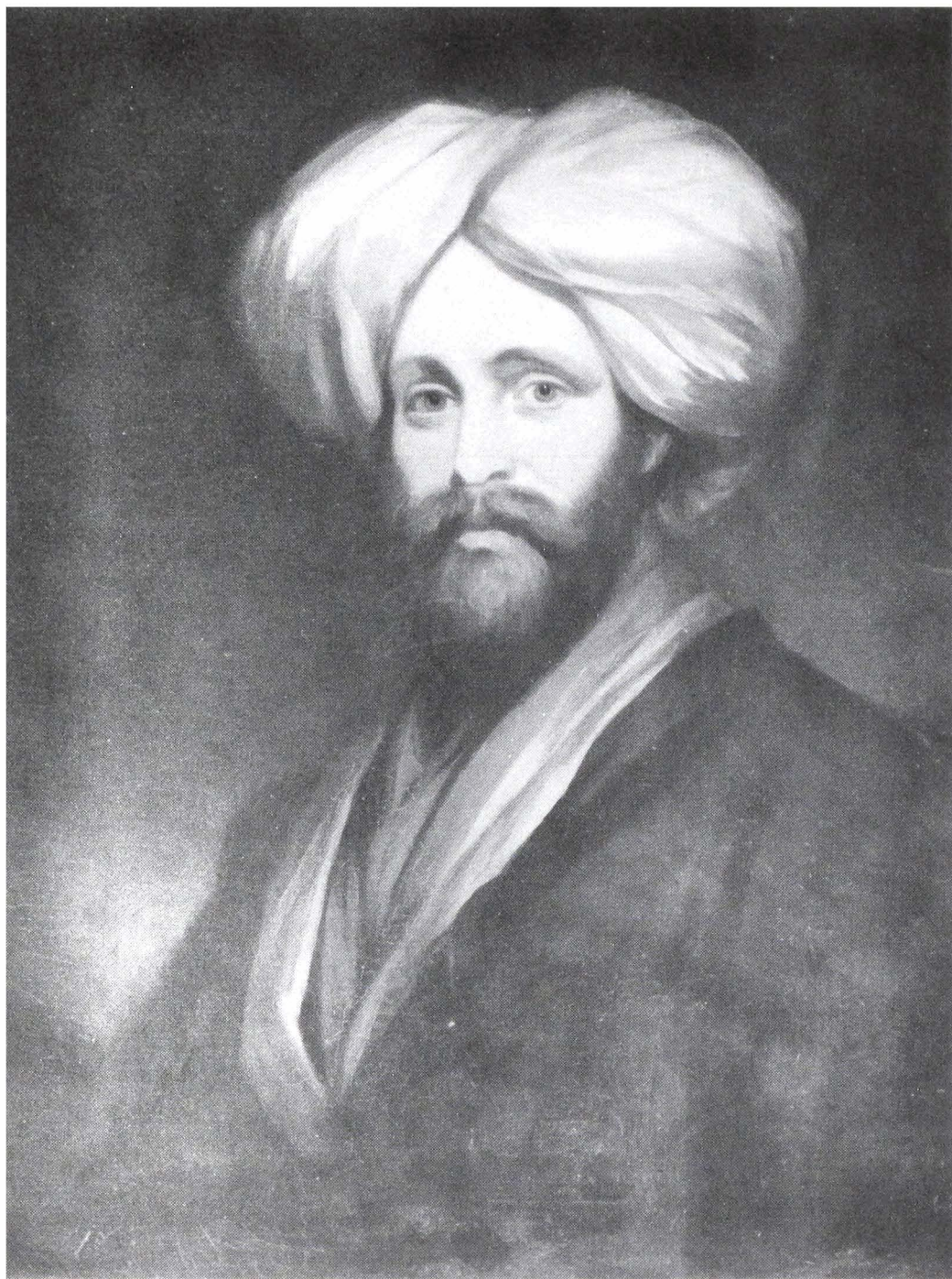


THE AFGHAN CONNECTION

GEORGE
POTTINGER



THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES OF MAJOR ELDRED POTTINGER



Major Eldred Pottinger

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OF MAJOR ELDRED POTTINGER

GEORGE POTTINGER

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To those who have served
in Her Majesty's Royal Regiment of Artillery
this account of an unusual gunner
is respectfully dedicated

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Author's Foreword

This is the story of Eldred Pottinger, seen mainly through the events that led up to, and formed, that 'insane enterprise which is known as the First Afghan War'. Many of his contemporaries wrote letters, journals, and memoirs which were later published. For the most part they confirm Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templer's view that it was a mad hatter's tea-party, but they also provide a vivid insight into the characters of those involved. The principal titles are set out in the bibliography, and I have also made use of the private papers of Sir Jasper Nicolls, the Commander-in-Chief, India, for most of the period, which are now lodged in the India Office Library.

In addition to those personal accounts, manuscript sources, official papers, Blue Books and Hansard reports, there are three histories to which anyone who writes about this series of blunders and disasters must pay tribute. Sir John William Kaye's 'History of the War in Afghanistan' was for long the unchallenged authority. No one has questioned the accuracy of his research or his integrity. Writing shortly after the war, and knowing many of the participants, he has not been displaced as the primary author. But Kaye was essentially a man of his time, ready to add his own Victorian rhetoric and moral strictures. Two recent works have imparted a modern perspective. Sir Patrick Macrory's justly acclaimed 'Signal Catastrophe' (1966) affords a wise, witty account of the retreat from Kabul and its antecedents, with a wealth of contemporary comment. J. A. Norris in 'The First Afghan War' (1967) was concerned to test many of Kaye's judgments. His scholarly volume is especially illuminating on the relations between the Governments at Westminster and Calcutta and on the wider Central Asian aspects. I am happy to acknowledge my debt to all three.

Eldred Pottinger is given due measure in these works. I have had access to his letters which are in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, but some of his papers have been irretrievably

lost. Of these all that remain are extracts quoted in other writings, particularly Kaye's 'History' and his 'Lives of Indian Officers'. It appears that Eldred's Herat journal, along with many other historic manuscripts, was destroyed in a fire in Kaye's room.

The transcribing of the Afghan vocabulary is generally recognised to be a problem. There was no definitive version in 1840, and except in quotation I have used the forms which are, or appear to be, in common use. A brief glossary is appended.

Many have helped me. Sir Patrick Macrory, the great-great nephew of Eldred Pottinger, has been most generous with his store of Afghan knowledge and gave me much useful advice on the approach to be adopted. For technical assistance I was able to rely on that distinguished Gunner, Major General Douglas Brown. Dr Edward Ford of Selwyn College, Cambridge, read my manuscript and made many pungent comments. For information on some of the early Pottingers I am indebted to Mr George Thompson of the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. Mrs David Ross Stewart was invaluable in unearthing material. To all of them, and the staff of the institutions, especially the National Portrait Gallery, the National Army Museum, the University Library, Cambridge, the India Office Library, and the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, it is a pleasure to offer my thanks.

I am indebted to Messrs Hodder and Stoughton for kindly allowing me to reproduce the two maps drawn by Mr Sidney Blackhurst.

Balsham, August 1982

Introduction

In December, 1842, Lord Ellenborough, the Governor-General of India, ordained a great junketing at Ferozepore on the banks of the River Sutlej. It was a massive manifestation of British power, both civil and military. The Governor-General and his entourage had arrived in state and a great clutch of regiments, hastily mustered from the Indian cantonments, had pitched their tents on the plain. The purpose of this elaborate *tumasha* was to greet the Army of Retribution on its return from Afghanistan after avenging the massacre of another British force—the grandiloquently named Army of the Indus—which had set out for Kabul, to the sound of similar feux de joie, four years previously. No effort or expense was spared to give the dusty columns a hero's welcome when they crossed the Sutlej bridge.

Ellenborough enjoyed his moment of triumph, but for some of those present the celebrations had a sour taste. They remembered that of the 16,000 troops and auxiliaries who started their retreat from the Afghan capital in January only a single European reached the precarious safety of Jalalabad. A few were made prisoners or hostages; the rest were annihilated. Now the Afghans had been punished and the Grand Bazaar at Kabul was a charred ruin, but throughout the British lines there were mutterings that the Governor-General's table was furnished with funeral baked meats. Others thought that his flood of proclamations and his caperings at Ferozepore were both insensitive and undignified. Among the senior officers disenchanted with the whole business was the most senior of all, Sir Jasper Nicolls, the Commander-in-Chief. He had watched the troops march in before he retired to sit alone in his tent with his papers before him. He was a bitter man. Appointed to the chief military post in August, 1839, a week after the Army of the Indus reached Kabul, he had to fret for months till his predecessor gave up his office. Thereafter he exercised little personal influence as the Afghan expedition foundered and was eventually destroyed. More recently he had been snubbed by Ellenborough, who kept him in

ignorance of the orders he had issued for the avenging march. Nicolls wrote in his private diary that the Governor-General's lack of decent attention to his position was inexcusable. There was no harmony in high places. But today it was not the journal in which he regularly entered the trivia of his Command, honours, appointments, and dates of seniority, that engaged his attention. He had the disagreeable task of drawing up a report to explain how British arms had met with such an unparalleled disaster that retribution was required.

Nicolls was very clear on one point. No one was going to blame him for planning or executing the campaign. Later, on the point of retirement, he was still at it. 'I would not have counselled that invasion *for any honour* which could have been conferred on me'.¹ As he addressed his mind to preparing a formal minute he needed no great perception to identify what had gone wrong. Strategically, he said, the worst fault had been making war with a peace-time establishment (a worthy professional argument) and without a secure base. The latter was certainly true. The lines of communication between Kabul and Hindustan were at best tenuous and never adequately protected. The supply arrangements had been derisory and the country to be invaded was too poor to provide food or forage. Then there was the folly of sending native troops into Afghanistan, where both they and Europeans were hated as infidels. There were tactical errors no less compelling. Arms, ammunition, even money to pay the troops, had been left in indefensible positions and had to be abandoned. Nicolls, shrinking from overt criticism of individual officers, summed it up as 'great military neglect and mismanagement'. Lastly, in an attempt to preserve some relics of the army's reputation, he had some hard words about the powers delegated to political agents, and the blind optimism of the British Envoy at the Kabul court.

This appalling catalogue would be received with incredulity by the students of any Staff College, and it might be thought that it came from the pen of a disappointed General too keen to exculpate himself. But as we traverse the sinister mountain passes—the Bolan, the Khyber, Huft-Kotul and Jugdulluk—and read the journals and letters of those who fought there, or who survived months of captivity, it will be apparent that Nicolls did not exaggerate.

The First Afghan War was not simply a military *débauche*. It was a political reverse which, in the long term, undermined British authority throughout Central Asia. The Whig Government at home and Lord Auckland, the Governor-General at the time, had, for reasons that seemed justifiable and were supported by reports from our Embassies, been alarmed that the security of British India was threatened by Persian aggression and Russian intrigue. To frustrate these twin evils they sent the ill-fated Army of the Indus to impose the authority of the Raj on the warring Afghan rulers and erect an independent state that would be friendly to British interests. Four years later, when the Army had been destroyed, Auckland's policy was repudiated, and after a vast expenditure of men and money we left the unforgiving tribesmen to remember the iniquity of our régime and the desolation we had caused. If a hostile Afghanistan was a threat to British India, that was what we had ensured.

The whole exercise was often denounced by those who had to take part in it. In England too there was no shortage of critics. D'Israeli at his most trenchant exclaimed that Afghanistan, if only it was left alone, was the best possible bulwark against aggression. The soil was barren, the country unproductive and intersected by stupendous mountains where an army must be exposed to destruction. How, he asked, could there be a stronger barrier, a more efficient frontier, than that which nature herself had marked out?² That was in the heat of party politics. The Duke of Wellington's response to the disaster was more measured. From his Olympian height, he opined in a despatch to Ellenborough that British influence had received a blow from which it would take a long time to recover. 'There is not a Moslem heart from Peking to Constantinople which will not vibrate when reflecting upon the fact that the European ladies and other females attached to the troops at Cabul were made over to the tender mercies of the Moslem Chief who had with his own hand murdered Sir William Macnaghten, the representative of the British Government at the Court of the Sovereign of Afghanistan. . . . It is impossible to impress on you too strongly the Notion of the importance of the Restoration of Reputation in the East'.³

Earlier writers on the Afghan War have found that the size of the panorama, from arid deserts and stark gorges to the snow-

capped peaks of the Hindu Kush, dwarfs the human activity involved, and reduces the participants to the size of ants crawling up a gigantic landscape. It is also the case that, compared with later global struggles, the Afghan campaign was on a small scale. Though thousands were on occasion deployed, the battles and casualties were often numbered in hundreds, or less. But the story of wars is the story of those who fight in them. This was still an era when personal effort could affect the outcome, and it is with individuals, and with one in particular, that we are concerned.

Mountstuart Elphinstone, in his 'Account of the Kingdom of Caubul', published in 1815, was prepared to concede that the Afghans had virtues, but listed their vices as 'revenge, envy, avarice, rapacity, and obstinacy'.⁴ All these failings are readily exemplified in the Afghan rulers who have a place in the cast—Shah Soojah, Dost Mahomed and Akbar Khan—but those who framed British policy towards Afghanistan, especially Auckland and his senior dragoman Sir William Macnaghten, did not heed Mountstuart Elphinstone's warning. At times they appeared perversely innocent or ignorant of what lay behind the oriental demeanour of the men they derided as 'naughty boys'. Among the army leaders, Keane, who led the advance to Kabul and then hastened back to India, was too content with a superficial success; and the other Elphinstone, the pathetic invalid General in charge at the crucial stage, has no defenders.

Though the British army suffered, as it has often done when it is roused to fight after a prolonged period of inactivity, from an obsolete organisation and aged, inactive generals, there was a balancing factor in the verve and dash of many of its young officers, both on regimental duty and on detachment as political agents. Some of those who served in Afghanistan profited from the ordeal to earn their due guerdon in the Mutiny, but others were less fortunate, and one aspect which demands notice is the way in which sons of the same family sought service in Hindustan and beyond. The Lawrences, George, Henry and John, all had famous careers, but the Conolly family lost three sons—Edward killed in action in Kohistan, Arthur executed at Bokhara, and John who died as a prisoner in Kabul. It was the same with the Broadfoots. One fell at Purwundurrah in 1840; a second was murdered exactly a year later by the *ghazis* who sacked the Kabul

Residency; and George, a most admirable officer who had engineered the defences at Jalalabad, was killed in the battle of Ferozeshah in 1845. Then there were the Pottingers. Tom, serving with the 54th Native Infantry, was one of those who perished during the retreat from Kabul; one brother died as a member of the East India Company's civil establishment; and Eldred, who endured extraordinary hardships, did not long outlast the Afghan War. This book is primarily about Eldred.

There are three reasons for selecting him. First, though heroism was expected of the young lions, particularly when they were left in isolated outposts, Eldred's had a gleaming, untarnished nature, with a stamp of its own. Second, it is at least arguable that his efforts in stopping the Persian army at Herat affected the whole history of Central Asia. Finally, while he is not put forward as a paradigm of boring perfection, he was remarkably resilient. Whether faced by hostile Afghans or the intransigence of the hierarchy, he displays what Smollett called modest merit struggling with every hazard to which he was exposed 'from his own want of experience, as well as from the selfishness, envy, malice and base indifference of mankind'.⁵ It is a picaresque tale.

If Eldred needed an example, he had a ready-made model in his uncle, the largely-forgotten public servant Sir Henry Pottinger. Henry, who appears fitfully in these pages, had some relevance for us. He went out to Bombay as an Ensign and first came to notice when he undertook an extensive exploration of Baluchistan and Sind. His 'Travels', published in 1816, gives an accurate account of the flora, fauna and inhabitants of these regions, and though he had no scientific training it cannot be dismissed as the work of a dilettante. After serving in the Mahratta War he was appointed Resident at Cutch, and was Political Agent for Sind from 1836 to 1840. Eldred joined him at Cutch, and it was with his uncle's approval that he set off on the historic mission that took him to Herat. In 1838 Macnaghten recommended that Henry should be given the job of Envoy to the Court of Shah Soojah-ool-Moolk, and accompany the Army of the Indus to Kabul. But Auckland felt that he was too valuable in Sind, where he was busy coercing the local Amirs, to be spared. The Governor-General also wanted someone who would be more immediately compliant in carrying out his plans, and

Macnaghten himself was appointed. Henry, as it turned out, was singularly fortunate in not being preferred.

His subsequent career was, for the most part, illustrious. He returned to England, on grounds of ill-health, in 1840, but Palmerston did not let him stay idle for long. The Opium War with China had broken out in January of that year, and Henry was soon on his way to the Far East. After the British, under Sir Hugh Gough and Admiral Parker with Henry as the civilian representative, had enjoyed a series of successes, peace was signed on board H.M.S. 'Cornwallis' before Nanking on 29th August, 1842. The treaty which Henry negotiated gave Britain a great deal. It opened the Chinese ports to our commerce, and—here Henry went beyond his instructions—it began our tenure of Hong Kong, of which he became the first Governor.⁶ Back in England in 1844, he had honours heaped on him. A Baronet and a G.C.B., he was made a Privy Councillor and Parliament voted him £1,500 a year for life. The good merchants of Liverpool, who saw their trade booming, gave him a great banquet, and visitors, including Wellington who pronounced himself 'highly satisfied', thronged to see his portrait by Francis Grant when it hung in Messrs Graves' Galley in Pall Mall.⁷ (Plate 1) He still had some appetite for service overseas, a short time as Governor of Cape of Good Hope and then seven years as Governor of Madras, before he finally retired and went to live in Malta, where he died in 1856.

For us, two traits in Henry's character are of interest. A letter from a Mandarin, intercepted during the Nanking negotiations, complained that 'to all his representations the barbarian, Pottinger, only knit his brows and said "no"'. The same uncanny determination to stick to his guns was shown by Eldred when his Afghan captors pressed him to sign bills on the Government of India in their favour. He gave them a frosty answer. The second characteristic is the reverse of the coin. Henry's later years were not uniformly successful, and obituaries remarked that he was better when mastering a crisis than in day-to-day administration. The same was true of Eldred. He had little taste for diplomacy or the humbug of routine. Both were better when looking into the bright eyes of danger.

Lest it be feared that the family was imbued only with stern Victorian rectitude, Henry's son Frederick offers a very different

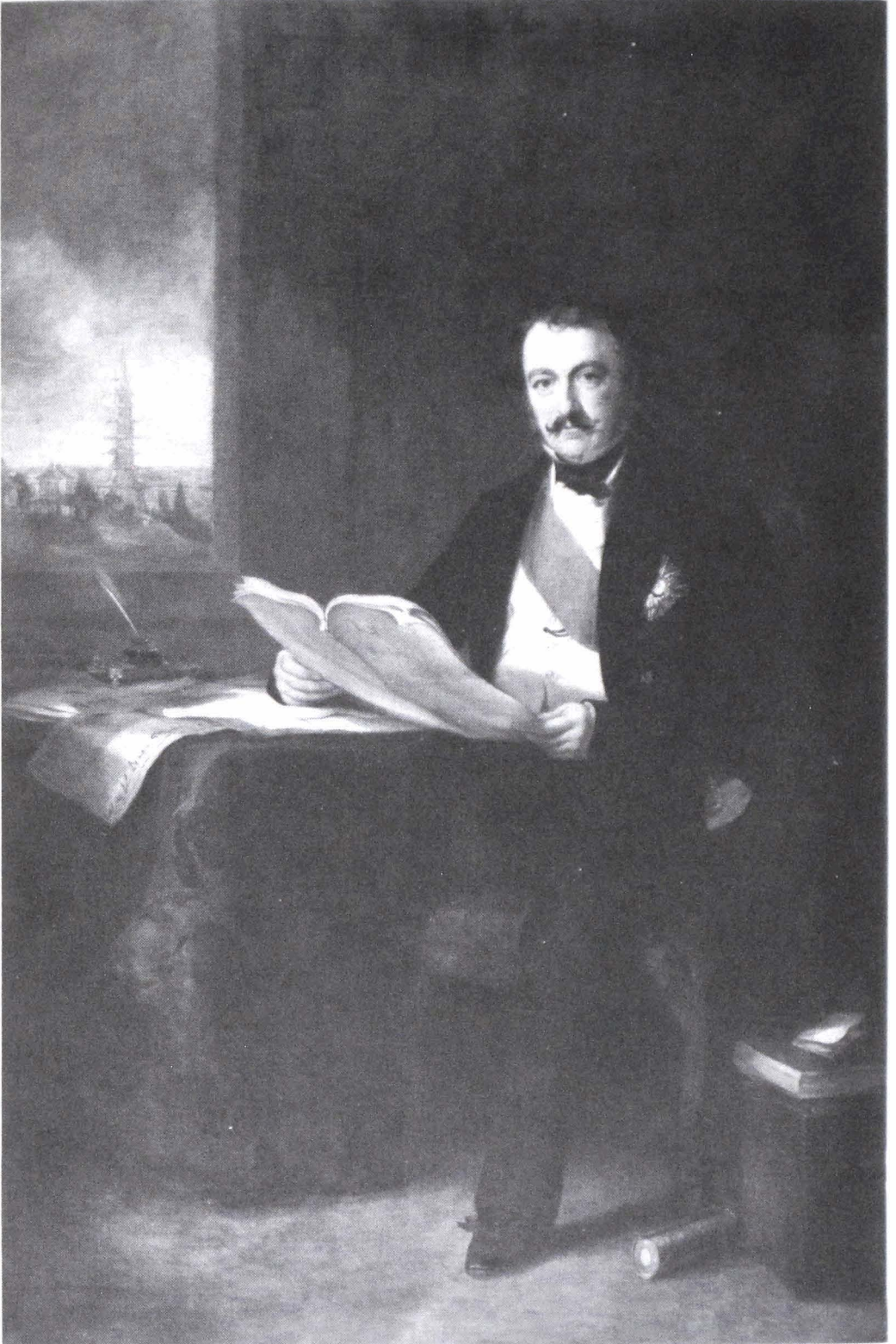


Plate 1. Sir Henry Pottinger

picture. Perhaps Henry was too authoritative a father; perhaps his mother was too doting in recompense; perhaps Frederick inherited some of the prodigal ways of his cousin Eldred's father Thomas; or maybe it was the statistical chance that any family is liable to have a black sheep. Fred, absurdly good-looking and abominably charming, was commissioned in the Grenadier Guards and embarked on a relentless downhill career. Gambling was his most expensive affectation—an investment on Lord of the Isles in the Derby Stakes cost him £10,000—and he soon exhausted the proceeds of his mother's jewellery and the substantial patrimony left by his father. This was too much for the Brigade, and Fred had to take himself abroad. In Australia he joined the New South Wales Mounted Police and, weary of high life, applied himself with some energy to patrolling the bush.

Two episodes, part of Australian mythology, were recounted in barely fictional form by Rolf Boldrewood in 'Robbery under Arms', where Fred appears as Sir Ferdinand Morringer. Fred was engaged in a lengthy pursuit of the notorious bushranger who masqueraded under the name of Starlight. Eventually, in Boldrewood's account which misses nothing of the tension, the mysterious Starlight, who could control his gang of convicts as easily as he could fascinate women, was cornered and fell to the carbine of one of Fred's troopers. Then came the moment of incredible drama. As Fred held the dying man in his arms Starlight murmured:

'Well, it's over now. I don't know that I'm sorry except for the others. I say, Morringer, do you remember the last pigeon match you and I shot in, at Hurlingham?' 'Why, good God', says Sir Ferdinand, bending down and looking into his face, 'It can't be—yes, by Jove, it is—'

Starlight muttered a scarcely audible name, then put a finger on his lips and whispered 'You won't tell, will you? Say you won't'. Fred nodded.⁸

Starlight had been a close friend of his in the Grenadiers. (Sadly, an anonymous contributor to 'The Field' in 1937, who claimed to know Starlight's identity, cannot be traced.) Fred became Commissioner of Police, but his death was as inconsequential as most of his life had been. Starting by stage coach on the first part of his journey home, he jumped down to pick a wayside flower for a

young passenger. He stumbled; his loaded pistol went off; and the wound mortified.

There are no such quiddities in Eldred's history, but there are incidents which would appeal to any theatrical impresario. The Victorians, who marked the first success of the Afghan War by dancing to a popular gallop called 'The Storming of Ghuznee', (plate 9) applauded the rescue of the Kabul captives when it was enacted as a highlight of Astley's Circus in 1844. For us it is a tragic charade, but before the curtain rises we will look at Eldred's early years, examine briefly what the British were doing in Afghanistan, and then let events speak for themselves.

CHAPTER I

Man-at-arms

'India, fertile in heroes, has shown, since the days of Clive, no man of greater and earlier promise than Eldred Pottinger. Yet, hero as he was, you might have sat for weeks beside him and not have discovered that he had seen a shot fired. . . .'¹ Sir Henry Lawrence's assessment might have been written to whet the reader's curiosity. In a couple of pregnant sentences he identifies the promise of the young soldier, but it is his reticence and reserve that he singles out for special praise. Reticence, however, is not a common virtue in the officers who served in India during the last century. Even discounting florid Victorian rhetoric, few of their despatches err on the side of underestimating the strength of the enemy they overcame, or fail, in passing, to itemise their own valuable contribution. In this context Eldred is something of a sport. His career had its blemishes, but vainglory was not one of them. From orthodox beginnings his activities were as remarkable as his character.

Eldred was born on 12th August, 1811, of Irish stock. The origins of his family are best described as crepuscular. An article in the *'Philadelphia Inquirer'* of 1897, tracing the history of the Pottingers who made their way across the Atlantic, asserts with some confidence that they show 'a direct descent from Egbert, the first Saxon King of England, and the grandfather of Alfred the Great', but this agreeable flight of fancy is not documented.² What is more certain is that Eldred's Ulster forebears have on their coat of arms 'three pelicans in their piety', the same emblem as that of the Orkney Pottingers which is found on a tombstone dated 1632 in St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall. Both sides may have shared a common Norse ancestry, a view supported by the derivation from the Norse 'pottingjar', or apothecary.

One branch of the family had apparently moved to Ulster by the beginning of the XVIIth century, as there is a Pottinger grave in Belfast which is credibly dated 1602. The Belfast Pottingers

were merchants, and a narrow alley still called 'Pottinger's Entry' was their place of business. They prospered, and by 1660 one Thomas Pottinger was Sovereign (i.e. Mayor) of Belfast. His son, also called Thomas, held the same office under the suspect charter granted by James II when he returned to Ireland in 1689. (Another son, the elder, Edward, was a captain in the Navy. He was lost with all his crew when the man-of-war 'Dartmouth', which a year before had played a leading part in breaking the boom at Londonderry, sank off the West Coast of Scotland in October, 1690.)

It is not clear when the family moved up in society to acquire their country mansion — known as Mountpottinger, on the County Down shore of Belfast Lough. The *Belfast Newsletter* of 22nd October, 1909 says that it was bought by the first (Sovereign) Thomas Pottinger, but the first of the family who felt able to add the territorial designation 'of Mountpottinger' after his name was yet another Thomas who was High Sheriff of County Down in 1759. In 1752 he had married Frances Curwen, daughter of Eldred Curwen of Sella Park and Workington Hall, Cumberland, who was M.P. for Cockermouth from 1738 to 1741. Thomas and Frances called their eldest child Eldred Curwen. Both names were to recur in later generations, and disappointingly Eldred appears to derive from simple Cumbrian habit rather than to hark back to the ancient Anglo-Saxon kings.

The whole of the Mountpottinger estate, except for the house and a few acres of land, was sold in 1779 to Barry Yelverton, Chief Baron of the Irish Exchequer, who later became Viscount Avonmore. (Mountpottinger is now one of the less attractive urban districts of Belfast. It was a Parliamentary constituency in the lifetime of the old Stormont Parliament.) The house was sold in 1811, the year when the Eldred who is our main concern was born. He was the son of the latest Thomas and his wife Charlotte Moore, the only daughter of James Hamilton Moore (d. 1808) and his wife Jane (d. 1814). James Moore, though Irish, had spent much of his life in Copenhagen. Charlotte, greatly esteemed for her social grace and her interest in literature, died on 10th April, 1813, when her only son Eldred was scarcely two years old. The Pottingers had such affection for her that, according to Dr Richard Clarke ('Gravestone Inscriptions, Vol. I, Co. Down'), when the family burying place which had been in Belfast

since 1602 was closed by the building of St George's Church, they moved part of the old tomb to the graveyard at Kilmore where the Moores, including Charlotte, were interred. Their remains are now recorded on adjoining plaques. The estate at Kilmore, an Ulster parish near Crossgar in County Down appears to have been part of her dowry, and it features in Eldred's correspondence.

Within a year of Charlotte's death Thomas married Eliza Fulton, who soon began to look on Eldred as her own son. Eliza's ancestry is mysterious, and she had an Indian connection, if a stronger term is not more appropriate. The Hodson index in the National Army Museum refers to Eliza as the 'natural' daughter of John W. Fulton. In Foster's 'Noble Families of Royal Descent' Fulton is listed as a banker. He certainly went to India, though he had returned to Ireland before Eliza met Thomas Pottinger, and he left a will in Calcutta. This made bequests to Eliza from the proceeds of the sale of his Chowringhee Road house and left stipends to the legatees of one 'Beebee Poll' (deceased). It appears likely that, in the fashion of the time Fulton had a beebee, or mistress, probably half-caste. Whether she was Eliza's mother cannot now be ascertained, but a surviving photograph of her has something oriental about her eyes.

Eldred must have heard admiring tales about his own mother, but from the start his relationship with his stepmother was a happy one. The strong bond which developed between them—particularly during his father's absences from home on his yacht, when he could afford this luxury, and elsewhere—lasted throughout his life. The letters he wrote to her from India, and from Afghanistan during his captivity, show a deep love for 'my dear mother' as he always called her, and an abiding practical concern for her welfare. He had the same feelings for the children she bore, and looked on them as his own brothers and sisters. Closest to him were John and Tom, both of whom were his contemporaries in India, and Harriet. They were a happy, if improvident family, and though in his official career his reserve sometimes extended to secretiveness, in his dealings with his family he was frank, open, and rejoiced in their affection.

Improvidence, an inconsequential way of looking after his affairs, was unhappily the hallmark of Thomas Pottinger's way of life. His second wife's dowry was dissipated and he was eventual-

ly in straightened circumstances. At one stage he thought of following his son to India to refill his empty purse, but Eldred, who reacted strongly against his father's cavalier way of handling his finances, sent him a strong reproof. From Calcutta he wrote on 3rd December, 1840.

'I cannot see any advantages in your coming out to this country, even in a high situation, but to do so in a mercantile situation will, I must honestly confess, grieve me much. . . . If you had capital of your own to trade on, or any means of ensuring your independence, it might make a different case, but in the present instance you are dependant on the whims of others, and your independent spirit by no means adapts you for the appointment you mention, and you must be well aware (if you will but consider for a moment) that your whole life has been the very opposite of what is required for a steward (director of other persons' property is but that) and, as you have so often already done, I have not the least doubt you will throw up your appointment'.

Priggish Eldred sometimes appeared, but on this occasion his filial asperity was justified. He continued with the remainder that

'my pay is but £250 per annum if by sickness or any other accidents I lose my present appointment, and that I have not a sou to fall back on. Your present state of affairs is one of the things that chiefly detains me in this country. Otherwise I would have gone home, for my health is much broken. . . .'

There follows a dismissal of his father's claim that his plight was entirely due to others, and his annoyance that Thomas had approached Henry (Eldred's uncle) for help. The letter ends much in the same vein, with his 'petition that you will leave the pushing on in the world to your children and will yourself sit down quietly'.³

With his mother he was even franker. He wrote to her at the same time.

'I trust you will second me. It is too late for him to come out to this country; let him recollect he will find the country governed by men who are much younger than himself; that many who he may recollect as insignificant persons and who he may have snubbed in former days will now be his superiors; and finally let him reflect that if his embarking in such a line is not highly detrimental to all our prospects I would not wish to offend by offering advice. . . .'⁴

Thomas did not proceed with his plan, which was probably no more than a passing aberration, but Eldred was still worried about his behaviour. Three years later, in one of his last letters to his brother John, he wrote.

'My present idea is that my father must be induced to give over Kilmore, on which I will clear off, if I can, the present mortgage and place it in the hands of an Agent for the use of our mother and the younger children. If something be not done now I fear we shall lose all our property. I am afraid my father has been humbugged and swindled by his associates, and that the only way we can aid him is by putting it out of his power to do further mischief to his property.'⁵

But these domestic crises were years ahead. Up to the age of fourteen Eldred stayed in the family home, latterly being educated by a tutor. He was high-spirited and enjoyed all the youthful pursuits common to boys brought up on a rural Irish estate, even if the bailiffs were hovering. At times he chafed at his tutor's discipline, but this was because he resented chastisement when he did not believe he had earned it. Eldred had a keen sense of what he thought were his rights. With his brothers he played at soldiers and showed an alarming early taste for experiments with gunpowder. He was not bookish—family folklore recalls that his favourite volume was Drinkwater's account of the siege of Gibraltar—and it was soon clear that his talents and inclinations did not suit him for one of the learned professions. A young Irishman at the beginning of the last century who had no great patrimony, who still had to make his way in the world, and who was not fitted for the Church or the Law, had only one avenue open to him—the army. For an Irishman who lacked influence at the Horse Guards this meant service in India, and service with one of the East India Company's regiments. So Eldred was enrolled as a Gentleman Cadet at the Company's Seminary at Addiscombe.

It is doubtful whether many now remember the 'great nursery of Indian captains' where, according to Kaye, Eldred absorbed the 'moral odour of Indian heroism'.⁶ Haileybury, where the Company's civilian officers received their earliest training, survives as a distinguished public school, but Addiscombe is but a dim memory. From 1798 the Company had been allowed to nominate a number (usually ten a year) of Gentleman Cadets to

the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich. With the growth in its activities this was no longer adequate, and in 1809 the Company set up its own establishment. Originally it was intended to produce Engineers and Gunners, but seven years later the Seminary was also opened to Infantry Cadets.

Addiscombe was a pleasant country house, about a mile East of Croydon. The site is mentioned in John Evelyn's *Memoirs*. The mansion, built by William Draper in 1702–3 was probably designed by Vanburgh. Before being acquired by the Company it had been successively owned by Lord Charles Talbot (d. 1786) and the First Earl of Liverpool who died in 1808. As is the way with gentlemen's residences taken over for institutional purposes, it was neither entirely suitable nor big enough. Extra buildings were constructed in the grounds but the accommodation was still Spartan. So were the rations. Future officers were expected to survive on a diet of 'tea and bread and butter: or bread and milk, if preferred' for breakfast. After a strenuous morning's drilling, lunch of 'bread and cheese with good table beer' would be taken.⁷

Cadets were expected to be between 14 and 16 on admission and to stay for two years. Initially the fees were £30 per annum, and instruction was provided in mathematics, fortification, Hindustani and Military Plan Drawing. As a belated concession to the more civilised arts, Classics and French masters were eventually appointed. (In the Afghan War, Eldred and other officers were able to write to each other in French, for security reasons.) In order to remind the young gentlemen of what lay ahead of them, Mr H. Angelo gave lessons in Broadsword Exercise. Before Addiscombe was closed in 1861 as part of the reorganisation of the army in India after the Mutiny, 3,600 cadets had completed their training there. Over 500 were posted to the Engineers; nearly 1,100 joined the Artillery; and the remaining 2,000 became Infantry officers, some of them eventually transferring to the Cavalry. At the Woolwich Military Academy cadets often aspired to pass out sufficiently high in the list to be offered commissions in the Engineers and then opt for the Artillery instead. The records and memoirs do not disclose whether the same affectation prevailed at Addiscombe. Some support for Kaye's encomium on Addiscombe can be found in even a cursory examination of the list of graduates. To look only at those who

served in Afghanistan, the memorable names of Augustus Abbott, George and Henry Lawrence, Arthur Conolly, Henry Durand, Richmond Shakespear and Vincent Eyre are among the alumni.

It would require hindsight to say that Eldred's career could be foretold from his time at Addiscombe, but there were a few portents. He was a cheerful, ebullient cadet, and not surprisingly his name often appeared on the extra-drill list for minor breaches of discipline. Relations between the prospective officers, already conscious of their privileged status, and the local inhabitants were not always cordial. According to H. M. Vibart's history of Addiscombe, 'Pottinger, it appears, was a great boxer, and was frequently distinguished in pugilistic encounters with the toughs of Croydon'.⁸ There was an occasion when Eldred's reserve, his unusual ability to keep his thoughts to himself, nearly cost him his commission. It started with an explosion in the college grounds which shattered the windows near the parade ground. In one version Eldred had invented and exploded a new type of shell. More credibly, safety precautions being somewhat primitive, he had got hold of an old shell casing, stuffed it with powder, and fired it from one of the demonstration mortars. At the subsequent enquiry—the incident was thought to go beyond acceptable *joie de vivre*—Eldred was pressed to name his accomplices, but he resolutely refused. His future hung in the balance, but he was allowed to take his final examination and sailed for Bombay.

The Bombay Artillery which Eldred joined already had a most respectable history. Before 1748 it existed only as part of the Bombay Regiment (2nd Battalion, Royal Dublin Fusiliers), each company in the battalion having assigned to it a 'Gun-room Crew'. The first muster-roll, dated York Fort, 1st December, 1708 shows the complement as including a gunner, a gunner's mate, three assistants, a carpenter, a chief guardian of staves, and a sub-guardian.

In 1748 the Court of Directors of the East India Company sent out instructions for the formation of a regular company of artillery 'for the better defence of our Settlements in time of danger'.⁹ The Gun-room Crews were abolished and, under the First Captain and the Chief Engineer, the new company was to consist of one Second Captain, one Captain Lieutenant and

Director of the Laboratory, one First Lieutenant Fireworker, one Second Lieutenant Fireworker, one Engineer Fireworker, four Sergeant Bombardiers, four Corporal Bombardiers, two drummers and a hundred gunners. 'In order to complete the Company of Artillery as soon as possible, a sufficient number of young, healthy, able-bodied, and most sober men from among the Soldiers' were to be taught the exercise of the artillery.¹⁰ No deserter was to be engaged, even 'although he may have been pardoned for his desertion, nor any Roman Catholic'.¹¹ There seems to have been a strong doctrinal objection to Catholics, as anyone serving who subsequently married one was to be dismissed at once. The uniform was to be of blue, with red cuffs and facings and brass buttons. Pay ranged from £200 a year for the First Captain to £50 for the Ensign Fireworker. Sergeants received two shillings a day and gunners and drummers one shilling.

Up to 1759 Artillery officers shared a common seniority list with the Infantry, but thereafter they formed a distinct corps. By 1768 the artillery strength had increased to four companies and a battalion was formed. In 1775 the Engineer duties previously carried out by Artillery officers were transferred to the new corps of Bombay Engineers. Seven gunner companies were raised by 1802, and in the half century since its formation the Bombay Artillery had taken part in an impressive list of major battles, from Plassey to Seringapatam and Assaye. The first cadets from Addiscombe were reported qualified on 29th December, 1809. Later changes in organisation in 1817 and 1818 saw the abolition of the antique ranks of Lieutenant-Fireworker (a pleasant descriptive term) and Captain-Lieutenant, in favour of the more orthodox Second Lieutenant and Captain. It was not until 1862 that the Bombay Artillery, which had meanwhile greatly increased in strength, was merged with the Royal Artillery of the Queen's Army.

Eldred, number 308 in the list of Bombay Artillery officers, was gazetted Second Lieutenant on 13th December, 1827, being promoted to Lieutenant on 20th August, 1835, and gaining brevet promotions first to Captain and then to Major on 23rd July, 1839. Making normal progress, but no more, he was Quartermaster and Interpreter to the 2nd Battalion from 1834 to 1835. Then, though he did not fully appreciate it at the time, his regimental service in the artillery was to come to an end.

Before leaving the Bombay Artillery the service of some of Eldred's relations may be briefly noted. His stepbrother John (B.A. No. 330) had been at Addiscombe from 1829 to 1831, and by 1841 he was Adjutant of the 1st Battalion. From his portrait (plate 2) a saucer, more elegant figure than Eldred, he was also more of an establishment man—although he incautiously wrote to the Times in 1842 denouncing his stepbrother's detractors. He later saw service in Persia and with the Ahmednuggur Field Force in the Mutiny, retiring as a Major-General in 1863. Appointed High Sheriff, he died in 1877 at Carrick-on-Suir in County Tipperary. Throughout his career he was more fortunate than Eldred, or his brother Tom who was killed on the retreat from Kabul. John had twin sons who both passed through Addiscombe. Eldred Thomas (B.A. No. 475) went to the Seminary in 1857 but resigned from the Artillery in 1870, after a moderately uneventful career. He seems to have got a second wind, serving in the South African War to be mentioned in despatches and awarded the C.M.G. Brabazon Henry (B.A. No. 476) was at Addiscombe with his brother, but his later career was more illustrious. He was eventually Secretary to the Government of Bombay, Military Department and retired as a Lieutenant-General in 1892. His sons Eldred Charles and Robert Southey were both gunners, but by now the Bombay Artillery had been absorbed in the Royal Regiment.

To return to the Eldred who is our subject, though he never forgot his artillery training he was soon to be assigned to very different duties. From the skill he later exemplified in directing the Heratees' efforts when their city was under siege, and the gallantry he showed while temporarily in charge of the guns at Charekar, it is at least arguable that he remained a gunner at heart. In 1842, when he accompanied the Army of Retribution on its return from Afghanistan, he found time, though still weakened by his captivity, to make a professional point in writing to John.

'The superiority of having light drivers is evident to all. . . . I think myself that the little postillions are a great point. . . . Another thing I observe in our Horse Artillery is the size of the men. It is evidently too large. I feel satisfied no man higher than 68 inches or weighting more than ten stones and a half should be in the Horse Artillery. That size has abundant strength for the work. . . . This remark applies also to the



Plate 2. Major-General John Pottinger

Light Cavalry. Indeed I would not have a man in it above 66 inches and ten stone weight. The horses of both services require a thorough change'.¹²

In his early years with the regiment he chafed, as subalterns do, at what often seemed pointless inactivity. Though disease, the over-consumption of claret, and the odd casualty on punitive expeditions, made for gradual moves up the seniority list, promotion was slow, and expectations not encouraging. Eldred had taken the opportunity to broaden his experience by serving attachments with two native cavalry regiments, the Poona Auxiliary Horse in 1835 and the Cutch Irregular Horse a year later. Then, as many of his more enterprising colleagues did, he decided to apply for a transfer to the Political Department. In the absence of a major campaign, and there was none in immediate prospect, this was where the chance of exciting service and advancement lay.

It was no accident that his decision to embark on a political (according to Macaulay 'political' meant simply 'diplomatic') career took place at Cutch because his uncle Henry was the Resident there. Eldred admired Henry more than most. 'A person better capable of giving sound advice does not exist', he wrote to his mother. One might have hoped that Henry would have given his nephew some pointers on the art of negotiation, but this seems doubtful. Authority came easily to Henry but he was not much more tractable than Eldred. For his part, Eldred never shone at the more devious aspects of diplomacy, and in his attitude to his superiors his tendency to be right, sometimes too explicitly right, did not tell to his advantage. Kaye records, with some diffidence, an anecdote about Eldred's time at Cutch.

'One day, Eldred appeared before his uncle in a great state of excitement, declaring he had been grossly insulted by a native—a horsekeeper, or some other inferior person—on which Henry Pottinger, amused by his young relative's earnestness, said, smilingly to him, 'So, I suppose you killed him, Eldred?' 'No', replied the young subaltern 'but I *will*, uncle'. Thinking that this was an instruction from higher authority, he was quite earnest in his declaration. It need not be added that the joke exploded, and that the retributive hand was restrained'.¹³

This incident does not argue for any great maturity on the part of

young Eldred, and it makes all the more remarkable his conduct on the solitary, romantic mission he was now to undertake.

Henry Pottinger, a famous explorer in his own right, knew from his correspondence with Calcutta that there was a pressing need to obtain more accurate intelligence about the rumours of moves across the Afghan border. Eldred volunteered to go and see what he could find out. His uncle agreed, Calcutta approved, and in the summer of 1837 he took the road for Afghanistan. He was to have full scope for his fluency in Persian and Pushtoo—he had already learned more than was needed to qualify as an Interpreter—and his facility for merging unobtrusively into the background. It is time to consider why John Company was so interested in affairs beyond the Indus.

CHAPTER II

The Magnetic Frontier

The early history of the British in India is a distant preamble to their involvement in Afghanistan. In 1601 the 'Company of merchants of London', given its charter by Queen Elisabeth to trade 'into the East Indies', despatched four ships from England, carrying goods for trading and gifts for local rulers. Their immediate objective was no more than to bring back a cargo of pepper, then a scarce commodity in the home market. They went first to Sumatra, but finding conditions unfavourable tried their luck at Surat on the Indian coast. There was some friction with the Portuguese who were already established in the port, but by 1612 the English had taken root, dealing principally in fabrics and indigo.

From this modest start the Company prospered, and by 1700 its stock was selling at a high premium in London. But expanding trade needs security and security in time requires the provision of troops, the levying of taxes, and the imposition of a system of law and order. The Company's agents, by now extending to Madras, Bombay and Calcutta, were zealous in all these fields, and the time was propitious. The great Mogul dynasty was in decline and the native rulers in disarray. The Persian Nadir Shah, then for the first time raiders from Afghanistan, swept down to raid Delhi. In 1761 the Afghans thrashed the Mahrattas, the strongest force in Central India, before returning, heavy with loot, to Kabul.

Apart from the fragmenting and feuding of the Indian princes, the Company had another reason to adopt a more military posture. This was the presence of the French, anxious to expand their own trading facilities. A new phase started with the arrival in India of the indomitable Stringer Lawrence, an experienced professional soldier. Lawrence emulated the French in recruiting native infantry and more than held his own against his rivals in the Madras area until 1754. The subsequent triumphs at Arcot and Plassey are outwith the scope of this book, but once the

Company had gained control of Bengal it was drawn inexorably towards further acquisitions, however much this policy might be deplored in London at the Leadenhall headquarters. In India the Company would assert that it was fighting defensive battles (which ironically extended its boundaries), but this period was marked by widespread exploitation. The Government in London now intervened more directly with the Regulating Act of 1773 and with the India Act of 1784 which in effect brought the Company under the control of the Crown. The Board of Control, including two Ministers, was appointed with the right to issue instructions to the Company's agents in India. In time the Secret Committee of the Court of Directors of the East India Company, despite its sinister title, became little more than a channel for transmitting the fiat of the President of the Board of Control. For all practical purposes the President was now Secretary of State for India, and from 1812 onwards he was a member of the Cabinet.

Both Government and Company interests made it necessary to cast a vigilant eye on what was happening beyond the Indian frontier, and though Kabul seemed a long way from Calcutta, affairs in Afghanistan were of more than passing interest. In 1783 George Forster, originally a Company employee, reported after his journey through Afghanistan, Persia, and Russia. (Forster was not the first Englishman to penetrate to Kabul. John Hicks, an artillery officer who served the Mogul Emperor Aurangzebe, died there in 1666, and his tomb was identified by many who served in the First Afghan War, 1838–42.) Forster found Kabul a poor place, and the Afghans a rude, unlettered people. He discounted Timur Shah the Kabul ruler, embarrassed by an empty treasury and a meagre army, as a possible threat to the Company's wellbeing. His comments aroused little interest, but later rapporteurs who took a different line were, as we will see, regarded more seriously. Zemaun Shah, who succeeded Timur, had his own internecine feuds with his brothers, but with him the possibility of a conflict between the British and the Afghans first takes shape.

In February, 1798 Richard Wellesley, newly arrived as Governor-General, was soon disturbed by Zemaun Shah's intrigues. It was known that Tippoo Sultan of Mysore was seeking French support to expel the British from India. Wellesley learned that

Tippoo had also made an approach to the Afghan ruler, and concluded that Zemaun had not abandoned his project of invading Hindustan. In fact the Afghan chief, who had occupied Lahore two years earlier, indulged in the luxury of sending peremptory letters to Wellesley demanding his assistance against the Mahrattas. Not for the first, or by any means the last, time the British found a devious expedient. Duncan, the Governor of Bombay, was instructed to send a native agent Mehdi Ali Khan to encourage the Persians to launch a diversionary attack on Zemaun Shah from the west, and to involve Zemaun's brother who was then in exile in Persia. The ruse worked and Wellesley wrote to Duncan with the satisfactory news that Zemaun had withdrawn from Lahore on 4th February, 1799.

Meanwhile in London, Henry Dundas, the Secretary of State for War, relying on reports from Harford Jones the British Resident in Baghdad, was urging that a very watchful eye should be kept on Zemaun. Wellesley decided to despatch his own envoy to Teheran, and Captain John Malcolm was sent to secure, in effect to buy, a treaty with the Persians. The threat of French designs provided an additional spur. In November, 1800 Malcolm and his bribes were warmly received by the King of Kings. The treaty finally negotiated provided that Britain and Persia would cooperate against any Afghan or Persian aggression, and as a sting in the tail, no Frenchman would be allowed residence in Persia. The comic aspect of this cynical treaty was that, with Persian collusion, Zemaun had already been overthrown and blinded by his brother Mahmoud. The French clauses were ineffective. The Persians soon realised that it was the Russians who were the menace and, failing to get British support, they applied to Napoleon. Not the highest point in British diplomacy.

The Russians, it was true, had shown some interest in an invasion of India through Afghanistan. In January, 1801 Czar Paul despatched a Cossack force under Vasili Orloff with the vaguest of instructions and less information about the terrain he had to cover. Two months later the expedition was called off and Paul, who had made ambitious overtures to Napoleon for a joint expedition, was assassinated. Now it was the French who seemed to offer the most immediate threat to the north-west frontier. From 1802 they had been seeking an alliance with Persia, and in 1807 they obtained it. More sinister was the appearance in

Teheran of a substantial mission under the French General Gardenne, to supervise the training of the Persian army. Gardenne was also authorised to promise the assistance of French troops. Then, in July, 1807 Napoleon met Czar Alexander on the famous raft in the River Nieman and signed the Treaty of Tilsit. Under the, temporarily, secret clauses Alexander was committed to declare war against England, and although the treaty did not mention India, British circles in Calcutta were convinced that an invasion was imminent.

Lord Minto, who succeeded Wellesley, had been appointed for his declared views against expansion, but he now took alarm. As an immediate step, agents were sent to the frontier states to convince them that they faced a common enemy. Malcolm retraced his steps to Teheran; Charles Metcalfe went to seek the good offices of Runjeet Singh, the ruler of the Sikhs; and Mountstuart Elphinstone (plate 3) became the first Briton to undertake an official embassy to the kingdom of Kabul.

None of them met with any lasting success. Malcolm's approaches were rejected, and Minto was furious to find that London had also sent Harcourt 'Baghdad' Jones, now a Baronet, to the Persian court. The Persians, however, were now disenchanted with the French. They dismissed Gardenne, and the violent, thrasonic Jones eventually obtained his treaty. In the Punjab, Metcalfe's objectives were more limited and he persuaded Runjeet Singh that he would at least refrain from attacking the states south of the Sutlej.

Elphinstone's embassy was more elaborate. In his own words, 'As the court of Caubul was known to be haughty, and supposed to entertain a mean opinion of the European nations, it was determined that the mission should be in a style of great magnificence'.¹ Apart from civilians and officers, his retinue comprised 200 cavalry, 200 infantry, and 600 camels. Shah Soojah was the current ruler, but his kingdom was too disturbed for either him or Elphinstone to reach Kabul. So the British mission paid their respects at Peshawar which Soojah occupied as his winter capital. There was no lack of oriental ceremony to greet the British envoy. Elphinstone was impressed by Soojah's elaborate jewel-encrusted dress, including a bracelet in which was embedded the Koh-i-noor, 'known to be one of the largest diamonds in the world.' As conflicting views on Soojah feature



Plate 3. Mountstuart Elphinstone

largely in later events, it is noteworthy that Elphinstone was surprised 'how much he had the manners of a gentleman, or how well he preserved his dignity, while he seemed only anxious to please'.²

Unfortunately the British were slow to learn that Soojah was a consistently broken reed. He had no great apprehension about the French, but at Elphinstone's instigation he signed a vague *concorde*. The Afghans would, at British expense, resist any French invasion, and the treaty was much embellished with the usual protestations of undying fidelity. Its worthlessness was apparent when the hapless Soojah was driven out by his brothers to take refuge with Runjeet Singh (who tricked him into handing over the Koh-i-noor) at Ludhiana. There he remained as a pensioner for thirty years, apart from one small excursion, until the British decided he was their man and should be restored to his throne.

Events in Europe next led to the extinction of the French menace, real or imagined. Wellington got the better of Napoleon's armies in the Peninsula. The little corporal, who scoffed at Wellington as 'the Sepoy general' found his star in decline, and after Waterloo there was no need to fear the spread of French influence. But the Russian chimera remained.

The next decade was something of a close season in the Great Game. No military expeditions were mounted and such intelligence as reached Calcutta came from haphazard sources. There were, for example, reports sent back by a Company officer, William Moorcroft. In his view, based on his wanderings as far as Bokhara, there was evidence of the activities of Russian agents. Of more significance was the exploration carried out by Arthur Conolly, a cornet in the Bengal cavalry, who made an extensive overland journey in 1831, returning from England by way of St Petersburg, Moscow, Teheran and Afghanistan. The sum of his report was that if the Russians took Khiva, as appeared at the time a distinct possibility, there was a real threat of an invasion through Persia and Herat. To counter this he advised that the best bulwark would be a united, independent Afghanistan. It is not improbable that when his cousin William Macnaghten, the Governor-General's Political Secretary, read this report, and studied the maps, one of the seeds of the ill-fated expedition to Kabul that was to end in tragedy twelve years later was sown.

The last of the tentative probings of this period was the journey to Kabul undertaken by Alexander Burnes, a young Scotsman who had first been commissioned in the 3rd Native Infantry. Burnes is one of the most controversial figures in later events, but meanwhile it will suffice to say that he was inordinately ambitious and had a great facility in native languages. Burnes had earlier been involved in surveying the Indus River, and now he obtained the Governor-General's permission to explore further afield. With a small detachment including his *munshree* Mohun Lal, and travelling in native dress, Burnes visited Kabul, where for the first time he met the significant figure of Dost Mahomed the Amir, Bokhara, and Teheran. His published account contained little political or military intelligence, but his private report to Bentinck induced the Governor-General to send him back to England and lay his conclusions before the Company's Secret Committee. 'Bokhara' Burnes was received by the King and made something of a hero in the London season. But the ways of heroes are full of pitfalls and, on his return to India, Burnes was disappointed to find himself once again in no higher appointment than his previous one as Assistant Resident in the inhospitable area of Cutch.

The reader may be excused an account of the interminable feuding between the two Afghan tribes of the Barukzye, led by Dost Mahomed, and the Suddozye, of whom Shah Soojah was the principal figure, but the unsettled, to put it mildly, conditions north of the Indus now began to cause much anxiety in British Government circles. The Government were looking for someone with whom they could forge a stable alliance against the Russian/Persian threat, possibly through Herat. Their anxiety may have been prudent, although both Calcutta and London always underestimated the physical and geographical difficulties in mounting a successful incursion. But the next, faltering step which Bentinck authorised was ill-advised. Shah Soojah, languishing in idleness still nourished hopes that the tribesmen would rally to his support if he reappeared in his former domain. Captain Claude Wade, the British representative at Ludhiana, saw some merit in Soojah's ambitions. Money was needed. Soojah's first approach was to Runjeet Singh, but the sapient Sikh knew his man and demanded too high a price for his assistance. Soojah, who had been in receipt of a British pension since 1818, next tried Ben-

tinck and the Governor-General's reply was equivocal. British policy was not to intervene in the domestic troubles of neighbouring states, but Soojah was master of his own actions.³ Wade, still enthusiastic in Soojah's cause, did, however, manage to obtain an advance of allowance for him, and with this encouragement the vain pensioner mustered a force.⁴ In February, 1833 he left Ludhiana and occupied Shikarpur. Next he marched on to attack Kandahar, then in the possession of Dost Mahomed's brothers.

The Dost's enquiry whether Soojah had British endorsement meet with the inept reply that although the British were not directly involved—as he already knew—they were favourably disposed to Soojah. In the confused battle that followed Soojah was routed. He then made his sad way back to Ludhiana. Dost Mahomed had two good reasons for indignation. Among the captured baggage he found compromising letters from Wade seeking support for Soojah, and as a final insult Runjeet Singh took advantage of his preoccupations at Kandahar to seize Peshawar. The loss of Peshawar was a grievance which Dost Mahomed never forgot. It was soon learned that he was seeking help from the Persians and the Russians against the infamous Sikhs. This episode added to British apprehension. It also showed the folly of attempting to meddle in Afghan affairs. But the lesson was not taken to heart.

The imperious figure of the British Foreign Secretary, Henry John Temple, Lord Palmerston, now began to exercise a decisive influence on relations with Afghanistan. It is not clear what first induced Palmerston to devise the policy that resulted in active intervention across the Indus. Certainly there were disturbing reports from Ellis, the Envoy at Teheran, that the Shah of Persia was looking for conquests in the direction of Herat and Kandahar. Early in 1836 the Persians had sent the Herat ruler an insolent ultimatum demanding hostages and tribute, and eventually insisting that the coinage should in future bear the Persian imprint. At Herat, Shah Kamran and his unscrupulous Wuzeer (of whom we will hear more) found this too much to bear, sent a defiant reply, and awaited the arrival of the enemy. Palmerston told Ellis to warn the Persians against invading Afghanistan.⁵ The Shah took this with some equanimity, and confirmed that an expedition, in which Herat would be only the first objective, would start in the next campaign season.

If the Persian attitude gave Palmerston food for thought, it was only part of a more formidable menace. Bearing in mind the Russian acquisitions at the expense of Turkey at the end of the 1820's, and looking at the map of Central Asia, it needed little imagination to envisage the Muscovites spreading over the Middle East and posing a real threat to India. Palmerston was not short of imagination, and he fully shared the more local fears that had long been felt in Calcutta. An equation soon formed in his mind. The Persian Shah, susceptible to Russian ambitions, must be countered by a ruler in Kabul who would be amenable to British influence. A simple move in the game of chess, to use the metaphor beloved of diplomats, but it ignored the reaction of the natives who were to provide the pieces.

Palmerston required a pliable Governor-General who would put his plans into effect. Bentinck came home in 1835, at the end of his tour of duty, and Metcalfe, who was left temporarily in charge was not thought likely to be sympathetic to Palmerston's designs. Mountstuart Elphinstone, who was better seized than most of his contemporaries of the realities of the power struggle in Afghanistan, was offered the job. Regrettably his health would not let him accept, the more unfortunate since it is hard to believe he would ever have countenanced the march across the Indus. There followed the short Tory interlude and the appointment of Lord Heytesbury was announced. But before he was measured for his kit the Whigs were back in office; Palmerston again had the decisive voice: and the choice landed on a Party hack, George Eden, Lord Auckland.

A bachelor aged 51, Auckland came from a political family. His father, the friend of Pitt, held office three times. Auckland had already had an undistinguished tenure at the Board of Trade and the Admiralty, but his only connection with India was a family one. He was the nephew of Lord Minto who had been Governor-General from 1807 to 1812. Otherwise he was ignorant of Indian affairs. He was said to be austere, reserved, almost forbidding in manner, but without pretension. To complete the indictment of faint praise, he meant well. But he was not a decisive person. He was diffident in his own judgment, a diffidence that was to lead 'him, his party, and his country into disaster.' The Sapper Henry Durand later described him as being 'afloat on a sea of conjecture' as he struggled with conflicting

reports from his agents.⁶ Meanwhile he sailed for Calcutta—a journey whose hazards were often underrated. Durand, for instance, who set out from England in October, 1828 on board the ‘Lady Holland’ was threatened by pirates before the ship sank. General Nott had fared no better on the ‘Kent’, suffering the indignities of shipwreck and arrest by a French privateer. Auckland’s voyage on the ‘Jupiter’ was less eventful, but ominously the vessel with his party ran aground in the Hooghly River, to be rammed by the boat following astern.

Auckland’s closest advisers were William Macnaghten, whom he inherited from Bentinck, Henry Torrens, and John Colvin. Macnaghten, a brilliant oriental scholar, well versed in the minutiae of Indian administration, was the archetypal bureaucrat. The drawing now in the National Portrait Gallery (plate 4) shows cold, calculating eyes peering through glasses perched on a long nose, a melancholy drooping moustache, and a trace of weakness in the chin. He was ambitious, but so far he had shown no liking for aggressive policies. So much so that Bentinck, back in England, was astounded that the Army of the Indus had marched. ‘What! Lord Auckland and Macnaghten gone to war! The very last men in the world I would have suspected of such folly!’⁷

Torrens was a good linguist and a ready writer, but he had too volatile a temperament. He was a great favourite with Auckland’s sister, Emily Eden, who accompanied her brother to India. John Colvin, the Private Secretary, strong-willed and hasty in judgment, was believed to have the greatest direct influence on the Governor-General. Macnaghten, Torrens and Colvin were each to earn their share of obloquy for the events that followed.

Auckland’s introduction to Afghan matters was peaceful, but his first exchange with Dost Mahomed was marked by what, in retrospect, seems an excess of irony. The Amir of Kabul, hoping for better things from Bentinck’s successor, wrote congratulating Auckland on his appointment, seeking his advice on how to deal with ‘the reckless and misguided Sikhs’, and ending with the hope that ‘your Lordship will consider me and my country as your own’.⁸ On the last point the Dost could not have imagined that Auckland would eventually try to displace him in favour of Shah Soojah. Auckland’s reply referred to the British policy of non-interference in independent states.⁹ Dost Mahomed was to have good cause to remember this when he was chased out of his country.



Plate 4. Sir William Hay Macnaghten

For the time being, however, Auckland contented himself with saying that he would probably 'depute some gentleman' to visit Kabul and discuss commercial affairs of mutual interest. This was Auckland's reaction to a directive from the Secret Committee of the Directors of the East India Company. In it the Governor-General was enjoined to watch more closely than hitherto the progress of events in Afghanistan, and to counteract the spread of Russian influence. He was given discretion to despatch a confidential agent to Dost Mahomed, either with a watching brief, 'or to enter into relations with this chief, either of a political, or merely, in the first instance, of a commercial character.' When Auckland came to the view that the time was ripe to 'interfere decidedly' in Afghanistan, such an interference 'would undoubtedly be requisite', either to prevent Persian expansion or 'to raise a barrier against the impending encroachment of Russian influence'.¹⁰

Through Auckland's character and actions do not always evoke sympathy, the directive was sufficiently vague to make even the most experienced proconsul ponder. But the die was cast. Intervention of some kind there was certainly going to be.

The man chosen to make the journey to Kabul was, once more, Alexander Burnes, now recalled from his uncongenial assignment at Cutch. The pretence that this was a 'commercial' commission was a cynical one. Or, as Henry Richard M.P. later described it 'In pursuance of that odious system of mystery and dissimulation which marks the art of diplomacy, and which works so much mischief in the relations of States, he went ostensibly as a commercial, but really as a political agent, though the foolish mask, which deceived nobody was soon cast aside'.¹¹ However that may be, Burnes was received by Dost Mahomed in September. Shortly afterwards the Persian army laid siege to Herat. As Kaye summed it up, 'Burnes appeared at Kabul; Mahomed Shah at Herat; and the seeds of the Afghan war were sown'. Eldred Pottinger's movements had also taken on a new significance.¹²

CHAPTER III

Herat Ho!

Among the more improbable aspects of Eldred's anabasis to Afghanistan were the disguises he assumed. The portrait in the National Army Museum shows a high forehead and wide-set eyes. He grew a swarthy beard, but though he might stain his skin it is difficult to imagine him as a Cutch horse-dealer. Yet that was what he claimed to be as, without a single European companion, he made his way by Shikarpur and Peshawar to Kabul. He had, or picked up, sufficient equine expertise to answer queries from curious tribesmen; but by the time he reached Dost Mahomed's capital he began to have second thoughts. He doubted whether he could maintain the horse-coping fiction indefinitely, and decided that he would be better off pretending to be a Syud, or holy man, thereby appropriating to himself something of the aura of mystery that surrounds those who claim divine inspiration.

The John Buchan-like story continues. Eldred's next objective was Herat, very much the key point in his exploration. But there were signs that the Dost's suspicions had been aroused and that he might retain Eldred at Kabul. So, as he records impassively in his journal, 'I gave out that I was going out with Syud Ahmed to see the defile of the Logur River. After dark I left the house on foot, having some days previously sent the horses to a caravanserai, and thence ordered those I intended taking to join me at the bridge, where my guide also met and escorted us to his house at Vizierabad, a few miles from the city'.¹ He had been sufficiently circumspect to avoid any contact with another British agent, the dubious Charles Masson, who had been in Kabul for some time. Masson did not have a good reputation. His real name was James Lewis; he had deserted from the East India Company's service; he was subsequently pardoned and employed to collect intelligence while nominally engaged on archaeological research. In his Narrative, published in 1842, he records his annoyance when he heard that Eldred had left without seeing him. This no doubt

accounts for his ill-tempered remark that it would have been better if Eldred had not gone to Herat, where his presence later irritated the Persians. He even claimed that Henry Pottinger had written to him urging his nephew's recall, but this is not substantiated, and Masson is not a reliable witness.²

On the march, few days passed without the threat of Eldred's identity being discovered. He came across a traveller who had met Burnes at Balkh, and whose frequent references to '*feringhees*' and 'Sekundur Burnes' suggested that he did not altogether believe that things were what they seemed to be. A Kuzzilbash tribesman was uncomfortably inquisitive. Even more alarming was Eldred's detention in the fort of Yakoob Beg, a Hazara chief who made some sport of blackmailing or enslaving anyone who strayed into his territory. The chief and his cousin gave Eldred a searching examination. But he kept his nerve, and by way of covering his silence applied himself devoutly to telling his beads, 'much to the increase of my reputation as a holy person'. Eventually, his knowledge of religious duties being found faulty, he had to admit that he was a latter-day convert, and that he 'had been a soldier and had not studied, but would do so now'. He was good enough at colloquial expressions to survive. Then his complexion was thought to be odd—perhaps the stain was wearing off—and Yakoob Beg's men began to mutter to themselves that he might indeed be a *feringhee*. Feeling that he had to chance his arm, Eldred said indignantly that 'such inhospitality had never been heard of; that here I had come as a pilgrim trusting to his aid; that I had chosen an unfrequented and barren road because the Hazaras being Mussulmans, even as we were, we looked for good treatment at their hands'.³

He went on to argue that while men from the plains of Hindustan were dark-skinned, it was a land of many mountains where the people were fair. This forthright statement evidently disarmed the chief who left Eldred and his companions, glancing at each other with relief, to their prayers. He was not too happy as he started his ritual ablutions. He had 'no taste for this mockery, and not considering it proper, never before having attempted it', but he escaped without being detected in failing to make the correct obeisances.

Worse was to follow. Their baggage was searched, and Eldred had been somewhat reckless in the belongings he had retained.

They were not the normal possessions of either a horse-dealer or a holy man. There was a copy of Elphinstone's volume on his journey to Kabul. The chief's men gazed at one of the prints and exclaimed that it must be an idol. Eldred's companion Hoosain swore that it was not and that the houses of the Kuzzilbashes in Kabul were full of such pictures. Then there were some pencils and a compass which Eldred said were for the study of astronomy, only to learn that the Hazaras regarded this as a forbidden science. But the sweat really broke out on his brow when a notebook containing a Persian and Pushtoo vocabulary was discovered. By an unhappy mischance a neighbouring chief and a Syud, who could both read, appeared. A lengthy philological debate followed, and though no explanation would satisfy the Hazaras they became tired of guessing and retired. But Eldred must have remembered the old Afghan story of the tribesmen who caught a holy man, killed him, and set up a shrine to worship him.

There seemed to be no prospect of escape. His companions fell ill. Eldred was depressed. 'Now that I looked back, well knowing the imposition I had been practising, I could not conceal from myself the true state of the case, and that a discovery had really been made; but that hitherto good fortune had saved us. For the barbarians were not certain in their own minds, though a grain more evidence or the speech of a bold man would probably have decided the affair'.⁴ It was unusual for Eldred to admit even the possibility of failure, but on 7th August, when his spirits were at their lowest, the inscrutable chief stopped his cat-and-mouse game and told him he could leave.

Their departure was marked by a bizarre incident. It appears that Eldred had sought Yakoob Beg's favour by presenting him with a small detonator gun. His journal does not disclose how a Syud came to have such a warlike piece of equipment. Presumably he explained it by reference to his earlier service as a soldier. The party had got no further than the summit of the glen that led down to Yakoob Beg's fort when they were called back. Eldred thought the chief might want a 'turnscrew or bullet-mould' (sic), but when they reached the courtyard they heard a shot followed by a shout of exultation. They were told they were not wanted; they had been sent for only to make the gun go off. Overcome with relief, Hoosain burst into an eloquent speech that delighted

Eldred. Did he expect them to return, he berated the chief, if he chose to send for them every time the gun misfired? They left unmolested.

Either Eldred had made a good impression on his host, or he was more fortunate than he knew. The American, self-styled, General Josiah Harlan who was employed for a time in the service of Runjeet Singh, and who knew Yakoob Beg, wrote that the jovial Hazara had been known to dismiss a guest 'with a dress of honour and promises of protection, with many protestations of especial friendship', and then despatch a party of brigands in disguise to plunder him.⁵ On 18th August, his cover as a Syud still unpenetrated, Eldred arrived at Herat. It had taken him twenty six days (eight of them in uncomfortable detention) to complete the journey from Kabul.

The Herat plain offered a pleasing prospect to a traveller from the barren mountains of the North. Lying in the most temperate part of Afghanistan, it was punctuated by groves of willows and poplars. Orchards, vineyards and cornfields lay in seeming plenty. Running streams irrigated the neighbouring countryside, which was studded with small villages. The city of Herat, containing some 45,000 inhabitants, was no mere tribal outpost. It was surrounded by a moat and four sides of an earthen wall, each face being about a mile in length. Outside the walls, two *fausse-braies*, or covered ways, provided additional fortification. A towered citadel overlooked the city, but it, like the walls, was in poor shape and greatly needed to be buttressed. Mohun Lal, the Kashmiri who appears and reappears throughout the Afghan war, noted that 'No repairs are performed in Herat till the last extremity'.⁶

Entering Herat by one of its five gates, any sense of euphoria induced by the rural landscape was at once dispersed by the appalling squalor, the obnoxious stench. In Arthur Connolly's words,

'The town itself is, I should imagine, one of the dirtiest in the world. . . . No drains having been contrived to carry off the rain which falls within the walls, it collects and stagnates in ponds which are dug in different parts of the city. The residents cast out the refuse of their houses into the streets, and dead cats and dogs are commonly seen lying upon heaps of the vilest filth'.⁷

The city was quartered by two main streets which met at right angles in a domed quadrangle. The streets, however, were narrow, and often roofed across to be nothing more than gloomy vennels. There was the usual complement of mosques and public baths. The populace, who were Sheeahs, were surly, ill-clad, impoverished and relentlessly harassed by their rulers and the soldiery, who belonged to the Soonee sect. It was notorious that the wretched people were regularly subjected to every known form of insult and exaction, often leading to imprisonment or being sold as slaves. This oppression proceeded under Shah Kamran and his Wuzeer Yar Mahomed Khan.

Shah Kamran, after a notable career of criminal self-indulgence, was enfeebled by age and debauchery. Pock-marked, no longer able to satisfy his sexual appetites, he was now addicted to the bottle. In the past, however, he had, according to Eldred, been much devoted to field sports. He was an unerring shot with a matchlock; he could divide a sheep in two by a single cut of his sabre, and with a Lahore bow send an arrow through a cow. He could still conceal his arrogance and procacity beneath a specious politeness; traces of a prince were occasionally apparent in his bearing; but his once resonant voice had given way to a reedy petulance.

Petulant he might well be, for the real power in Herat was exercised by the Wuzeer. Burly, square-built—his unusual negroid lips always attracted attention—Yar Mahomed was an exceptionally sinister creature. He was more accomplished, more learned than Shah Kamran, but his conversation was riddled with deceit. Eldred found him one of the most persuasive talkers he had met, but, he added, 'a person who disregards truth, and thinks nothing of denying what he has asserted a few minutes before, is a most puzzling person to argue with'.⁸ He was ostensibly a devout Mahomedan; he could affect courtesy or cordiality when it suited his purpose. Kaye in his history regarded him with particular hatred. 'Of all the miscreants in Central Asia, Yar Mahomed was the most unscrupulous. . . If there was an abler or a worse man. . . . I have not heard his name'.⁹ The truth is that the British never got the measure of Yar Mahomed. Long after the siege, which is the subject of these chapters, was over, he negotiated at will with any power that he thought might help him. In return for promises that could scarcely be believed

at the time, he coolly pocketed huge subventions from British funds, although he was still carrying out secret intrigues with the Persians and subversive Afghan tribes. But that comes later.

Shah Kamran and Yar Mahomed were absent from the city when 'Syud' Pottinger rode in. They were engaged in frittering away their cavalry in an unnecessary expedition against the fortress of Jowayn in Seistan. Eldred and his companions at first went about unarmed. They were eager to find out as much as they could, without attracting attention, but they narrowly escaped being apprehended by slavers. He made

'a firm resolution never again to venture out without arms; and it is a rule everyone should follow in these countries, unless attended by an armed escort. However, in any case, a sword should always be carried, if not by yourself, by an attendant. So universal and necessary is the custom, that the *Moolahs* (priests) always travel armed even with an army'.¹⁰

On 17th September, 1837 he watched the army's return to Herat. The procession had all the variations of an oriental tapestry—baggage mules, then the criers and executioners wearing their tall red caps and carrying their grim weapons, the splendid royal steeds led by grooms, Shah Kamran borne in a covered litter followed by the royal princes, and, bringing up the rear, the infantry. Yar Mahomed had his own retinue. He led the chiefs and the cavalry—in their sheepskin caps the most warlike part of the column. The people made their obedient huzzas, but there was no wild enthusiasm. There were many who wondered if deliverance from their brutal oppressors was not at hand. For each day brought more definite reports that the Persian invaders were on the march, and were not the Persians fellow-Sheeahs?

Eldred was alive to this bazaar gossip and decided to make himself known to the Wuzeer. He was fully aware of British interest in what happened to Herat. It stood at the beginning of the only route by which a large army could move against Hindustan. It was also, as he developed in a later memorandum to the Government, admirably suited to be a supply depot. Lead, iron, and sulphur could be extracted from its mines; there was plenty of saltpetre; and the local inhabitants could readily be recruited to augment an invading force. These were the practical, professional comments of someone who had seen the area at first hand.

Successive Governor-Generals, as we will see in later chapters, had no doubt that, strategically, an independent Herat was essential to the security of their frontier. Most of those who studied the map of Afghanistan were of the same opinion, only Durand taking a different, eccentric, view. He later dismissed Herat as having only 'a fictitious importance. To say its integrity was vital to British India was a hyperbole insulting to common sense!'¹¹ Meanwhile Eldred had three choices. If he crept away undetected he could carry only an imperfect account of the Persian disposition. If he remained in disguise and was discovered his motives would be suspect. If he declared himself the outcome was unpredictable, but he would at least learn more of the Heratis' attitude and, though an element of bluff would be needed, he might be able to influence events. He opted for the third course. Yar Mahomed received him, wrote Eldred, 'most graciously; rose on my entrance, and bade me be seated beside himself. He was seated in an alcove in the dressing-room of his bath. As it is not customary to go empty-handed before such people, I presented my detonating pistols, which were the only things I had worth giving. After this interview I went about everywhere boldly, and was seldom recognised as a European. A few days afterwards, I paid a visit, by desire, to the King'.¹²

Neither Yar Mahomed nor Eldred were deceiving themselves. The Wuzeer was quick to see that there might be an occasion when the presence of a British officer could be turned to advantage. On 4th November Eldred wrote to Burnes at Kabul that, although he had been at pains to explain that he had no official authority, the Heratis were anxious to detain him. (On a different note, he had lost his compass, and asked Burnes to send him a replacement, 'or a spare card and magnet, or at least write how to magnetise iron. I have been hammering away at bits of iron without success for the last week'.¹³ Compasses, indispensable to wandering officers, were also much prized by non-Europeans. Burnes, in his earlier travels, won the favour of the Chief Minister of Bokhara by giving him one.)

So the scene was now set for the memorable siege; corrupt rulers bolstered by an arrogant soldiery; a disaffected populace; an invading force the more to be feared because its strength was not known; and Eldred as the joker in the pack.

As reports of the Persians' approach became more insistent

Shah Kamran ordered that all the grain and forage that could be lifted from the outlying villages should be brought into the city. The remaining crops were destroyed, and fruit trees which might afford cover were cut down. No one was to move outside the walls. Having few illusions about the dubious loyalty of the Sheeahs, Yar Mahomed ordained that suspects were to be tortured, enslaved, or murdered. For good measure, the Sheeah Moolahs were arrested to make sure that they did not incite the faithful to disobedience. On 15th November it was learned that the Persian army was moving in three compact bodies, with an advance guard of 10,000 men. On the 22nd their leading cavalry had an inconclusive skirmish with the Afghan outposts, and on the next day the siege began in earnest.

The Persians had a great superiority in artillery, and if it had been properly used the city would soon have been captured. But the Persian gunners were far from skilful at working out their elevations and, to Eldred's surprise, much of the round shot was misdirected. More menacing was the arrival in the Persian camp of an enormous 68 pounder which must soon have flattened the defences, but after firing a few rounds its carriage collapsed and was not repaired. Missiles from rocket batteries shrieked overhead, but caused more alarm than casualties, and the most effective of the enemy weapons proved to be their mortars. As soldiers in other wars have found, mortar bombs descend with accuracy and without warning. But Eldred noticed that much of the Persian ammunition was made of slate-rock, or 'marble, carved from the tombstones', and with little more than a bursting charge did little damage.¹⁴

The Haratis were desperately short of guns, and despite such instruction as Eldred could provide managed little in the way of effective counter-battery fire. For the most part they had to be content to peer over the battlements and cheer occasional flurries by their cavalry. Not all were successful. Eldred recorded ruefully that the garrison 'sallied a few nights back, and the rear attacked the head of their own column'. Patrols would bring in Persian heads which were displayed on the ramparts. Rewards were given for these grisly trophies, and the avaricious Afghans would go as far as claiming separate recompense for the head and for the ears, even for the heads of deceased comrades. Eldred was revolted by this practice. He was also professionally annoyed that

collecting heads invariably broke up the vigour of the pursuit, and prevented the destruction of the enemy trenches. There was no doubt, he recorded, that

'great terror was inspired by the mutilation of the bodies, amongst their comrades; but there must have been, at least, equal indignation, and a corresponding exultation was felt by the victors at the sight of these barbarous trophies and the spoils brought in. From the latter, great benefit was derived, as it induced many to go out who otherwise never would have gone out willingly; great benefit was derived from the arms and tools brought in on these occasions; but though the Afghan chiefs fully acknowledged and felt the value of proper combination for this purpose, they were too irregular to carry through any arrangement'.¹⁵

Eldred's advice was that each sortie should consist of three distinct bodies—the first of unencumbered light troops to carry out the initial attack, the second to act as reserve and give covering fire for the third party which would destroy the enemy works and carry off as many tools and arms as possible. But he did not succeed in enforcing this highly desirable discipline. He noted that all the sorties were made with swords alone, and few men were killed outright. The Afghans, when their first impetus was spent, would not engage the Persian reserves, and were prone to retreat at the first shot.

By Christmas the effects of the siege were becoming apparent, and morale in the garrison was low. 'It was our idea at this time that the city must eventually fall'.¹⁶ Rations were scarce, and as the Persians kept up intermittent attacks at various points it was a disheartening business repairing the mud walls. The enemy's mines were, at Eldred's urging, matched by counter-mines. But it was a precarious balance. 'For my part, I could not understand what kept the Persians back. They had an open breach, and no obstacle which would have checked British troops for a single moment.'¹⁷

The 26th December was marked by an outbreak of reciprocal barbarity. Shah Kamran sent all the prisoners to be sold as slaves. In the Persian camp Mahomed Shah retaliated by ripping up the bellies of his captives. Four days later came the great Mahomedan day of festival which signalled the end of the ritual fast, and both sides suspended hostilities. Shah Kamran led the

procession to the Juma Musjid, the Great Mosque, but the celebrations were notably muted. They made but a beggarly appearance, according to Eldred, and the traditional distribution of sweetmeats was sparse. With the New Year Shah Kamran issued a proclamation calling for further effort, and the *Moolahs* exhorted the people to form working parties. From the Persian encampment Shere Mahomed Khan, the brother of the Wuzeer, appeared outside the gates to demand surrender, only to receive a defiant reply. But Eldred noted that Yar Mahomed was keeping his options open. He did nothing to exacerbate his relations with the Persian ruler. 'He invariably threw the blame of the defence on someone else, and regretted being obliged to fight. He constantly talked of his being bound in honour to serve his master, but in inclination to serve Mahomed Shah'.¹⁸ Such duplicity was not uncommon among Persian or Afghan chiefs who had a keen sense of looking after number one. But the possibility, though at present remote, of Yar Mahomed's defection worried Eldred. If the Wuzeer deserted there would be no one capable of enforcing adherence to the Herati cause, and the Persians—with their Russian advisers—would occupy the gateway to India. With these thoughts in mind Eldred agreed to extend his role from that of military adviser to act as intermediary with the Persian ruler.

It may have been his own idea. In earlier discussion with Mirza Ibrahim, the Wuzeer's assistant, he had suggested that someone should be sent to the Persian lines to sound out the chiefs, and that he would go with him. Mirza took note, but thought that no Afghan would be prepared to try. Then on 18th January Yar Mahomed approached Eldred to act as Envoy. Next day he had a long interview with Shah Kamran and received his instructions, a confused mixture of beseeching and threats. Kamran, however, thought it would be prudent to negotiate from a position of seeming advantage. A night attack was accordingly mustered on 21st January, but no assault was actually made. On the 26th the Afghan cavalry fanned out over the plain with some success, but the Persian infantry stood firm, and the outcome was inconclusive. Finally, on 8th February Eldred set off on his mission.

He took leave of Yar Mahomed and his Ministers in the public bath. The Wuzeer was

'sitting at breakfast on the floor of the bath. Not one of the party had a rag of clothing on him except a cloth round their

waists, while their servants, officers, and messengers from the ramparts stood round armed to the teeth. At the same time the temperature of the *Humman* was so hot that I burst into a profuse sweat on entering, and it was so over-powering that I could not sit down or join in their meal, but hurried off as quickly as I could'.¹⁹

It was significant that Yar Mahomed, in character, enjoined him to assure the Persian Wuzeer of his 'filial affection', that he was bound by his salt to stand by Shah Kamran, and that if the Persians would return to their own country he would follow and show his obedience.

As Eldred made his way through the narrow twisting lanes he fully expected that his journey would be brought to an end by a bullet from a Persian sentry. But sighting the first of the enemy he made his companion—once again Syud Ahmed—wave his turban, for want of a better flag of truce. The Persians, recovering from their surprise to find he was an Englishman, thought he had come to bring news of surrender and crowded round shouting 'Afreen! Afreen! Khoosh Amudyd; English humisheh Dostani Shah-in-Shah!—Bravo! Bravo! Welcome. The English were always friends of the King of Kings!' He was taken by the officer in charge of the picquet to the Russian General Samson who commanded the sector. Samson received him very civilly and sent for tea and *kallyans* (pipes). Eldred never mastered the oriental pipe, but took tea with his host before being escorted to the main camp to meet Hadjee Aghazy, the Persian Wuzeer, who asked him to state his business.

'I told him I was an English traveller, that H.M. Shah Kamran had sent me with a message to Mahomed Shah, that Wuzeer Yar Mahomed Khan had charged me with a message to His Excellency, and that I had brought letters from the Government of India for Colonel Stoddart, which had been brought into the town, and the Afghan Government had permitted me to take to Colonel Stoddart. I further said I wished to see Colonel Stoddart immediately as I believed the letters were of importance'.²⁰

Eldred was making the most of it, affecting a confidence he did not feel. But the presence of Stoddart requires some explanation.

CHAPTER IV

'And when the sun set, where were they?'

Byron, 'Don Juan'

Colonel Charles Stoddart, a staunch and forthright officer who was to meet a savage death at the hands of the Khan of Bokhara, had been sent to the Persian headquarters by James McNeill, the British Envoy at Teheran. In order to register British disapproval of the Shah's incursion into Afghanistan McNeill had declined to accompany the Persian court on its way to Herat. But there had to be a liaison officer, and the fact that he was there would serve as a reminder of British concern about the invasion, and, even more, about the Shah's reliance on Russian support.

As Eldred bluffed his way into Stoddart's tent he may have thought there was something comic in two British officers being in opposing camps, but he did not record it. Instead he related Stoddart's astonishment at meeting him. Stoddart was pulling on his coat to do honour to his visitor, who had been announced as a high Herati dignitary, when Eldred appeared. No one, he wrote, who had not experienced it could understand the pleasure which fellow-countrymen enjoyed when they thus met, particularly when they belonged to the same profession and were pursuing the same objective. They had exchanged only a few sentences when a messenger arrived to summon them to Hadjee Aghasy, the Chief Minister. Eldred replied with admirable insolence that they would attend as soon as he had drunk his coffee.

The Hadjee would have nothing to do with the Afghan approach. Nor, later, would the Shah. Both began their discussions amiably enough, but then worked themselves into a passion, swearing that they would take Herat. Eldred asked them to repeat their own terms. As he reported in a letter he managed to despatch to Burnes, these did not hold out much promise of reaching a settlement. The Persians insisted that Kamran and Yar Mahomed should come to the Persian court and kiss the Shah's feet. They must give up 'foraying the frontier'; they must restore

all prisoners—especially two daughters of Mohammed Khan Jume; they must supply a contingent for the Persian army; and lastly they must be prepared to 'emigrate to Ajurbizun', if the Shah should so direct. Eldred said there was no prospect of the Herat rulers accepting such humiliation.¹ This did not go down well, and after some fruitless sparring the mission came to an end.

Eldred was delayed for a day by a storm before he returned to Herat. The populace thronged round in great excitement. Even Shah Kamran had been watching progress through a telescope. But when he heard the terms which Mahomed Shah had proposed he burst into 'a gasconading speech, in which he abused everyone'.

The next move came from the Persian side. Mahomed Shah was suspicious at Eldred's reported influence and determined to make the Heratis get rid of him. On 20th February a Persian officer arrived at the gate with a new proposition. It was to the effect that they should compose their differences without any meddling by the *feringhees*. For his part, the Shah had no designs on Herat; his expedition was aimed at Hindustan; and he merely sought the support of the Heratis as true Mahomedans. The Wuzeer, not deceived by the seeming affability of the Persian offer, blandly replied that if the Shah would empower Stoddart to act as envoy Herat would accept any agreement reached between him and Eldred. This, agreed Eldred, was 'a most politic measure'. (He very likely suggested it.) It put the odium of continuing the war on the Persians. But nothing useful emerged from this, or other negotiations, throughout the rest of the month.

The siege was now intensified, though the Persians too were short of food. (Eldred on his visit to their camp had noticed gardens and vineyards which had been completely uprooted, with not a tree or shrub left standing.) The Afghans deserted their post near the north-east angle of the fort and for a time the enemy gained a foothold. From then on, Eldred observed, the investment began to be really felt. He also remarked that 'Everything depends on the life of the Wuzeer, and I do not believe he has a single well-wisher, let alone friend; the garrison is held to its duty by the cry of religion'.² While he superintended work on the ramparts, often at great personal risk, Eldred had other worries. He began to doubt whether his presence, which did nothing to mollify the

Persians, would ultimately be helpful to the Heratis. Some of them might also think that he was the forerunner of a British attempt to occupy their country. 'It might be alleged from my having a commission in the Indian Army, that I was a secret agent for Government, whereas I was a free agent, Government having most liberally given me *carte blanche* as to leave and action, in return for which I offered to lay before it my acquisitions in geography and statistics; and I was very apprehensive that my actions might be disapproved of'.³ He remained only at the pressing invitation of the wily Yar Mahomed, who made great use of the traditional argument that a guest should not leave his host at the approach of danger. On 23rd March he wrote to Burnes that provisions in the city were now at treble prices, and there was a shortage of powder, 'but nitre can be made as soon as the hot weather begins'. The most urgent need, however, was for money to pay the near-mutinous soldiery. Without it, he doubted if they could hold out for more than a month. On a more personal problem, he was now in debt, and had to borrow from the Herati usurers.⁴

The siege was to undergo two further phases, an unexpected attempt at British mediation, followed by renewed activity by the Persians under growing Russian influence, before the threads were finally drawn together.

On 18th April the Persian batteries brought fierce fire to bear on the ramparts. A large breach was made in the west wall, and the defenders had to explode a mine to prevent the enemy from scrambling over the *fausse-braie*. Yar Mahomed and Eldred were present directing operations when a bullet killed Aga Ruhya, Yar Mahmud's favourite eunuch, who was standing beside him. In the evening, when a pall of smoke still hung over the city, the sentries came in to report that an Englishman, said to be the representative of the British Ambassador, was outside the moat and craved admittance. Next morning Major D'Arcy Todd rode through the gate. His uniform—the full outfit of tight-fitting coat, glittering epaulettes and cocked hat—aroused much astonishment among the Heratis. It was not only his garb that caused a cackle of wonder. He was also evidence of a more direct intervention by the British.

At Teheran, James McNeill had done his best to keep both Palmerston in London and the Governor-General abreast of events, but he was hampered by the time-lag in the transmission

of mail. His correspondence with Auckland, however, had given him discretion to act on 'his own excellent judgment', and he felt that the time had come to take a stronger line with the Shah. He also decided that he must deliver his representations in person and set off for Herat. D'Arcy Todd, who accompanied him, records that, with sixty laden mules and a train of 600 camels, they covered the 700 miles from the Persian capital in 26 days. Todd, then 30 years old, and originally commissioned in the Bengal Artillery, had spent the last five years in Persia, nominally training the Persian gunners. (Judging by their efforts at Herat, his instruction was not notably effective.) But he became irked by perpetual drilling without any real authority. He was anxious to transfer to a political career, and was eventually appointed Secretary to the Legation. His first impression of the siege was in marked contrast to Eldred's. No doubt it all looked very different from outside the walls. 'Well, here we are', he wrote, 'encamped within two thousand two hundred yards of Herat. Nothing I had previously heard gave me the slightest idea of the strength of the place, which, if defended by artillery, I should pronounce impregnable to a Persian army. It has now held out for five months, and the Shah does not appear to have advanced one step towards gaining possession of the place. His batteries have knocked off some of the upper defences, but no attempt has been made to effect a breach, which, indeed, it would be difficult to do with brass twelves and sixes. . . .'⁵

The Shah was far from pleased at McNeill's arrival. He was well aware that the Envoy's only object would be to induce him to raise the siege. McNeill, however, solemnly demanded an audience, allegedly to present a letter from Queen Victoria. He was persuasive, he was fluent in Persian, and he knew Persian ways. He secured permission for Todd to open negotiations with Herat. In the city Shah Kamran was encouraged by Todd's news that the Persians would accept mediation, and said he would comply. Indeed he hoped McNeill would come and talk affairs over with him. As a mark of special favour he took off his cloak and sent it to Todd as a gift. Todd was also offered a horse, but prudently declined, although the Heratis had already started to make a ramp up the counterscarp to get the nag out. So Yar Mahomed offered the animal to Eldred; he also refused, but at his suggestion it was roasted and eaten by the hungry Sheeahs.

There followed a series of attempts, all frustrated, to reach

agreement. The same evening that Todd left Herat McNeill himself appeared at the gate. Most of the night was spent in discussion with Yar Mahomed. Shah Kamran, roused early in the morning, said he was content to leave negotiations to McNeill. But on 23rd April a discomfited Todd returned to say that Mahomed Shah would not entertain the proposed agreement and was intent on making Herat submit. In Todd's account, 'the Persians had been playing their usual dirty game, shuffling and shirking, and eating their own words. . . .'⁶ Eldred had an audience with Shah Kamran, and explained that McNeill had been deceived by the Persians and had acted in good faith. Kamran said he had not expected anything else. Incidentally it is odd that, at least according to their correspondence and private papers, neither Eldred nor D'Arcy Todd saw anything remarkable in the negotiations between these two oriental monarchs being largely carried out by two British Artillerymen.

The Russian Count Simonich had now reached the Persian camp. His disposition was much more acceptable to Mahomed Shah than McNeill's. At his instance the siege operations were henceforth carried out with more vigour. Eldred learned that he had undertaken an extensive reconnaissance, inspected the defences in detail through his eyeglass, and advised that the east side was the most vulnerable. Officers from the Russian retinue were giving professional advice, and even more significantly Russian funds were available to pay the Persian army. This was sad news for the Heratis—the intelligence soon reached the city—and the chiefs began to contemplate making their own peace with the Russian Envoy. Eldred was present at their discussions and was hard put to restrain them, urging that McNeill had their interests at heart. For a time the Heratis were comforted by a report that Todd had been sent to the Governor-General to arrange for British assistance. Todd, carrying despatches but nothing else, had in fact left for Simla on 22nd May, little thinking that the next year he would be back in Herat to end his political career in disgrace. (Unlike Eldred, Todd said he would travel openly as a British officer. All the difficulties Europeans had met, he added, had arisen from trying to personate natives—with the same success as a Chinaman would meet pretending to be an Englishman on the strength of a tight pair of breeches.)⁷ Eldred, still encouraging Yar Mahomed not to yield

to Persian blandishments, and not to accept any form of Russian mediation, was distressed to receive a warning from McNeill not to commit the British Government to aid for Herat. He felt he was in danger of overplaying his hand.

As events developed, such influence as McNeill had with Mahomed Shah declined from the moment of Simonich's arrival. The British Envoy listed the insults to which his mission had been subjected, both in the Persian camp and earlier, and requested satisfaction. It was not immediately forthcoming, but in time the Shah half-heartedly agreed to McNeill's demands, except regarding Herat—where he was insistent that Pottinger must be ordered to leave. McNeill replied tartly that Eldred was not under his orders. This was technically correct, but McNeill, before he left, deputed Eldred to act as British Agent at Herat. On 7th June the British Envoy broke off relations with the Persian Court and left the encampment.

By mid-summer the Heratis were in great distress. Food and fuel were almost unobtainable, and after months of confinement the physical conditions were most obnoxious. There were outbreaks of scurvy and fever, and the death toll mounted. Eldred noted with distaste that 'in a calm, or when the wind came from the southward in which direction the greatest number had been buried, the human kind could scarcely withstand the horrible effluvia of putrid flesh'.⁸ Meanwhile, the Persians, prodded by their Russian advisers, had crept much closer to the walls, and on 13th June a furious attack on the *fausse-braie* came near to succeeding.

The expected climax occurred eleven days later. It was a crucial battle and Eldred played a crucial part. A heavy barrage from the Persian artillery was followed by an ominous lull, but the crackle of musketry rising to a crescendo soon made it clear that a major attack had been launched on all five gates. At four of these the weary garrison held their own, and at the Arak gate the Russian contingent was repulsed with heavy casualties, including their commander General Samson who was wounded. At the fifth gate, however, the enemy carried both the lower and upper *fausse-braie* and made an incursion. The fate of the city was poised in a nice balance.

The Heratis always fought better when Yar Mahomed or Eldred was present. Both hurried towards the *melée* on the

counterscarp, but twice the Wuzeer, whose detractors never accused him of lacking courage, faltered. Only Eldred's fierce expostulation roused him and kept him moving forward. The soldiers sensed the Wuzeer's irresolution, and the defence was within a hair's breadth of being routed. The men were dribbling away. Finally, according to Eldred's journal, 'the defenders—the people about—abused, and several times had to lay hold of the Wuzeer and point to him the men, who turned as soon as he did'.⁹ Yar Mahomed, at last spurred to action, struck at them with his staff, and in the narrow confine literally squeezed them towards the enemy. The Persians, astounded at this sudden thrust, panicked and fled down the slope. The tide turned and the attack fizzled out.

There is no doubt that if the Wuzeer had not been stimulated to call on his last reserves of strength and urge the defenders to a final effort the city must have been overcome. It is equally certain that the result was entirely due to Eldred's vehement insistence. But such was the modesty of the man that his journal, which gives a vivid detailed account of the fighting, does not mention his own part. Kaye, however, on studying the actual manuscript, ascertained to his satisfaction that Eldred had deliberately erased all references to himself. 'The people about' mentioned above were one man—Eldred Pottinger.

His troubles were by no means at an end. The Heratis had survived the enemy's most concerted attack, but the aftermath was one of disillusion. As they relived the horrors of the fighting, collected wounded, piled corpses, and resumed the never-ending business of shoring up the walls, their attitude was nearer to despair than triumph. They had nothing to look forward to but another assault; all supplies were becoming scarcer; and the extortions of Yar Mahomed and the chiefs, desperately seeking more funds to pay the troops, were daily more severe. Eldred tried to temper the more punitive exactions, but he had only fitful success. Far from being grateful for his efforts, the Heratis began to regard his presence as the reason for the siege being prolonged. The Persians, whose losses had been heavy, were in no haste to mount another attack, but Mahomed Shah made it clear that Pottinger must be expelled before he would treat. Eldred, though flattered that the Shah regarded him as 'equal to an army', offered to go, but Yar Mahomed was not anxious to

dismiss him. To do so would be a grave breach of hospitality—and, despite the stakes involved, this had some importance in the Herati counsels. The Wuzer also had at the back of his mind that there might still, in one way or another, be a manifestation of British support. So July passed.

But, when Eldred was becoming thoroughly depressed, help, in the best melodramatic fashion, was at hand. It was Auckland who appeared in the unlikely guise of *deus ex machina*. In his despatch of 1st May to the Secret Committee he said he had ordered the Bombay Government to send a small force up the Persian Gulf.¹⁰ Two steamers, the 'Semiramis' and the 'Hugh Lindsay', carrying detachments from the 15th, 23rd, and 24th Regiments and the Marine Battalion, duly sailed with a naval escort. Auckland saw this move only as a precaution, and the force was intended to be at McNeill's disposal in case his mission failed and he thought it better to leave the country by way of Bushire. The combined operation met with no resistance, and on 19th June the troops occupied the island of Karrack. (This was technically in breach of the 1814 Treaty which had scarcely lived up to its opening phraseology, 'These leaves are a nosegay plucked from the thornless Garden of Concord', but in any event Palmerston had decided that the concordat should be denounced, and—retrospectively as it happened—had so authorised McNeill.)¹¹ By the time reports of the landing reached the Persian camp they had been greatly exaggerated. It was said, for example, that Bushire had been taken and that a great expeditionary force was advancing. Auckland cannot have expected that his unexpected, modest exercise in gunboat diplomacy would have this effect. McNeill received the Karrack news, together with further orders from London, while en route for the frontier. He at once sent Stoddart back to wait on Mahomed Shah. His message was in much more peremptory terms than his previous overtures. The Shah was to be told that if he took Herat or any part of Afghanistan, this would be regarded as an act of hostility against England. He was to be reminded of the Karrack expedition, and plainly informed that if he did not retire the consequences for Persia would be severe.

Stoddart was received by the Shah on 12th August. According to his report, the King of Kings took the ultimatum very equably. 'The fact is that if I don't leave Herat, there will be war, is not

that it?' 'It is war'. replied Stoddart, 'All depends upon your Majesty's answer—God preserve Your Majesty!'¹² Two days later, when Mahomed Shah had studied a translation of the document which Stoddart had handed to him, he calmly accepted its terms. He would not, he said, go to war with the British. 'Were it not for the sake of their friendship, we should not return from before Herat. Had we known that our coming here might risk the loss of their friendship, we would not have come at all'.¹³

It was some time before intelligence of the Shah's climb-down reached Herat. Surprisingly, Stoddart did not succeed in communicating the news to Eldred, and the Russians still had a squib to fire. On 17th August, the Russian Goutte came to Yar Mahomed with the proposition that if Shah Kamran would leave the city to make a gesture of homage to the Persian monarch, this could lead to the siege being lifted. Eldred needed all his powers of persuasion to prevent the Wuzeer from agreeing. His influence at this stage was even more decisive than his military expertise had been.

The end, when it came, was something of an anticlimax. Early in September movements could be seen in the Persian camp. The most forward batteries were withdrawn; the guns were being limbered up; tents were struck. The advanced guard had started its retreat some days before Mahomed Shah looked for the last time on the city he had failed to capture despite a ten months' siege, and turned back towards his own country. A hasty despatch from Stoddart, punctiliously timed '26 minutes past 10 o'clock a.m. on 9th September, 1838', reported that 'The Shah has mounted his horse "Ameerij", and is gone'.¹⁴ He had lost troops, money, and face. A pathetic proclamation when he reached Teharan attempted to turn his defeat into a near-victory, blaming the perfidious British for interfering, referring to the shortage of provisions for his 'Victorious army', and claiming that many Heratis had deserted Yar Mahomed to march off with the Persians.¹⁵ But no one was misled. The Russians, however, could view the Shah's débacle with some equanimity. They played down Simonich's activities, and they had, in reality, hedged their bets. If the Persians, with their assistance, had prevailed, the way to Hindustan was open. If the British intervened, their relations with the Shah would be impaired for the future. By an odd quirk the designs of two great powers were frustrated by the determina-

tion of the British officer who remained obstinately behind the walls of Herat.

There were many contributory reasons for the survival of the Herat garrison, a survival that often looked against the odds. The Persian chiefs were keen on individual, piecemeal attacks; they did not drive home their advantage when they had gained an initial success; and, above all, they were unable or unwilling to combine in a coordinated assault plan. The Heratis surprised themselves. They showed occasional fortitude, and their spirits would rise as each sortie was driven off. In Yar Mahomed they had a tenacious, skilful and unscrupulous leader, whose nerve failed him in only one crisis. But it is impossible not to conclude that for much of the seige Eldred was effectively in charge. The single contemporary who disagreed was, once again, Durand, who alleged that 'Pottinger's advice was seldom asked, and still more seldom taken by the defenders'.¹⁶ The Persians, however, had no illusions who was their real adversary.

As an epilogue to the siege, the detailed report which Eldred submitted two years later shows that he was still surprised that the Persians had not succeeded. 'It is my firm belief that Mahomed Shah might have carried the city by assault the very first day that he reached Herat, and that even when the garrison gained confidence, and were flushed with the success of their sorties, he might have, by a proper use of the means at his disposal, taken the place in twenty-four hours. His troops were infinitely better soldiers than ours, and twice as good troops as the Afghans. The non-success of their efforts was the fault of their generals. . . . They simply wanted engineers and a general to have proved a most formidable force'.¹⁷

Herat was now relieved, but it was a desolate city. Eldred was in a quandary what he should do, but mindful of the authority deputed to him by McNeill he remained with the Heratis. In the meantime, as he was soon to learn, Auckland was intent on his historic folly.

CHAPTER V

The Ferozepore Circus

Auckland had spent the summer deciding what to do about the security of his north-west frontier. Latterly he had been at Simla, sardonically described by Kaye as that pleasant hill Sanitarium which has been the cradle of more political insanity than any place within the limits of Hindostan. The Governor-General was in constant touch with London, but despatches still took between two and three months in transit. He was accordingly much subject to the local influence of Macnaghten, Colvin and Torrens, and it has been argued that if he had been able to call on more responsible advice from old India hands in Calcutta he might have been deterred from the radical moves that led to disaster with all the symmetric certainty of a Sophoclean tragedy. For he was on the brink of abandoning the traditional policy of non-interference in Afghanistan. The decision when it came was severely criticised. Lord Ellenborough spoke for more than the Tory Opposition when he invited the House of Lords to agree that 'they might assume from the evidence already produced that his (Auckland's) conduct was folly; it remained for the evidence so produced to determine whether it was a crime'.¹

Auckland had two related problems. First, he had to decide whether the spread of Russian and Persian influence, as he saw it, should be allowed to reach the very frontiers of British India. Second, if he concluded that counter-measures were needed, he had to make up his mind what they should be.

On the Russian/Persian menace there was a long history of warnings, and they chiefly centred round Herat as the most likely point of attack. In 1835 Bentinck, in his 'retiring' minute considered the possibility that Russia might combine with the Persians to occupy Herat, 'the key of Cabul', and thereafter 'proclaim a crusade against British India, in which she would be joined by all the warlike restless tribes that formed the overwhelming force of Timur. . . .'² (Wellington, and Ellenborough at the Board of

Control had expressed the same view as early as 1829.) In July, 1835 Palmerston sent Henry Ellis on a special mission to Teheran and, in characteristic vein, told him to warn the Persians not to be made the tool of Russian policy by allowing themselves to be pushed into war with the Afghans.⁸ Ellis was quick to report that the Shah was planning to assault Herat, whose ruler Kamran had given him an excuse by slaving forays into his territory, and that his ambitions even extended to Kandahar and Ghuznee. But Ellis reminded Palmerston that Article IX of the 1814 Treaty with Persia (the definitive version of the one 'Baghdad' Jones had negotiated in 1809) precluded the British from interfering in a war between the Afghans and the Persians, 'unless their mediation to effect a peace shall be solicited by both parties'.⁴

On 8th January, 1836 Ellis warned that Count Simonich, the Russian Minister at Teheran, was inciting the Shah to go ahead against Herat. Persia, he said, must be considered 'no longer an outwork for the defences of India, but as the first parallel from whence the attack may be commenced or threatened'.⁵ He also commented again on the restrictive effect of the 1814 Treaty. In April he had worse news. The Kandahar chiefs were seeking an alliance with the Shah and offering to join the attack on Herat. At the beginning of January, 1837 Palmerston instructed Lord Durham, the British Ambassador at St Petersburg, to represent against Simonich's activities. Count Nesselrode, the Russian Foreign Minister blandly disowned Simonich. 'The Count has been explicitly ordered to dissuade the Shah from prosecuting the war (against Herat) at any time and in any circumstances'.⁶ Simonich did quite the opposite. Either the Russian Foreign Minister could not restrain Simonich, which in view of the funds placed at his disposal is unlikely, or he was turning a blind Muscovite eye. The Shah marched for Herat at the end of July, and for the time being Palmerston was foxed. He had two inhibitions. First, there was the awkward Treaty. Second, and more important as Nesselrode was aware, Palmerston was most anxious not to become embroiled with the Russians much nearer home—in Europe.

By the time the Shah encamped outside the city Herat was both a crucial and an extremely delicate issue. It is a remarkable historic fact that in the midst of these diplomatic exchanges Herat should have been successfully defended and that its defence

should have been inspired by Eldred Pottinger, a junior British officer who had arrived there fortuitously and without any Government authority.

As Auckland pondered the growth of the Russian threat, he had one bit of good news. At the end of April, 1838, Henry Pottinger finally obtained his treaty with the Amirs of Sind and persuaded them to accept a British Resident at Hyderabad. That part of the frontier, at least, was secure. Meanwhile McNeill, now the Envoy at Teheran, was arguing that it was time to abrogate the 1814 Treaty, and on 10th March he set off from the Persian capital to beard the Shah in his camp outside Herat. (We have seen in Chapter IV what happened.) On 3rd May, Auckland, writing privately to Hobhouse, admitted that Herat might fall.⁷ To add to the apparent danger, the Kandahar Sirdars, prodded by the Russians, were known to be negotiating with the Persian monarch. Herat was 290 miles from Kandahar, and another 230 miles would bring the Persians to Kabul by way of Ghuznee. Then the whole of Afghanistan would be in hostile hands. Mahomed Shah, by marching to Herat and maintaining a vast army there, had proved that the invasion route was practicable. (This point was later underlined by McNeill.) Moreover, the best undisciplined troops in Central Asia were the Afghans. Were they to be left to the Russians to train and establish outposts on the very banks of the Indus? There were other disturbing factors. Russian agents were active not only among the Afghan chiefs who, volatile and greedy for reward, were always ready to attack any of their number who achieved a temporary dominance. Our new allies, the Amirs of Sind had been approached, and there were reports of unrest as far afield as Nepal and Burma.

In a Parliamentary debate in June, 1842, when Auckland's policy was in ruins and the Kabul expeditionary force had been destroyed, Hobhouse who had been President of the Board of Control at the time, defended the Governor-General on the ground that the real question was whether the country between Persia and our own frontier was to be in friendly or enemy possession. If there had been any likelihood that it would remain neutral no one would have thought of 'occupying territories so far from our own frontier, and the heart of our own empire'. Recent events, however, had shown that neutrality was out of the

question, and, he concluded, 'Sir, we were called upon to act in regard to Russia as we found her at the time'.⁸

On 11th April, 1838, McNeill, shortly after arriving at the Shah's camp, sent Palmerston a despatch, copied to Auckland. It reiterated his view that 'The question of Herat seems therefore to be the question of all Afghanistan. . . .' The moral influence of its fall would have a most prejudicial effect on our national reputation, 'for it is no secret to anyone that the British Government has been desirous to prevent its fall; and that Russia on the contrary has been solicitous to see it in the hands of Persia. All Central Asia will regard it as a question between the greater powers. . . .'⁹ At home Palmerston feared that success at Herat would lead to another joint Persian/Russian expedition across the Oxus, and he ordered McNeill to send an emissary (Stoddart) to Bokhara to urge the Khan to cease his slaving raids and remove the Russians' pretext for invasion. But Herat was still the key.

In his Minute of 12th May Auckland revealed how his mind was working. After remarking that the 1814 Treaty had hamstrung him from giving explicit aid to Herat, and outlining the development of the crisis, he said there were three courses open to him, 'the first to confine our defensive measures to the line of the Indus, and leave Afghanistan to its fate'. This he dismissed because it would be 'absolute defeat, and would leave a free opening to Russian and Persian intrigue upon our borders'. The second was to fortify the existing chiefs in Kabul and Kandahar; but this would merely encourage Dost Mahomed and his relations to attack the Sikhs, whom they hated more than the Persians. There remained the third course, 'to permit and encourage the advance of Runjeet Singh's armies upon Caubul. . . . and as subsidiary to his advance to organise an expedition headed by Shah Soojah'. This plan—'most expedient' if Herat held out, and even more to be recommended if the city fell—was the one Auckland preferred.¹⁰ He had opted for direct intervention, at any rate in principle.

As he came near to the moment of decision, he had not lacked advice from his agents, and very conflicting advice it was. Burnes from his arrival at Kabul in September, 1837 till his mission left the capital in April, 1838, had sent a flood of reports upholding the cause of Dost Mahomed. Burnes was received in Kabul 'with great pomp and splendour', escorted by Afghan cavalry and

seated on an elephant alongside the Dost's favourite son Akbar Khan. It was as well that the British emissary was an old friend of the Afghan ruler, because Dost Mahomed could not conceal his chagrin at the niggardly gifts, a pistol and a telescope with some baubles for the ladies of the *zenana*, which were all that Burnes had been authorised to bring. The contrast with the lavish presents which Mountstuart Elphinstone had earlier given to Shah Soojah was noted. Despite this unpromising start, the Dost listened gravely to Burnes's 'commercial' arguments about trade with Afghanistan. But the pretence was soon dropped. The Dost simply wanted to know what help he could expect to recover Peshawar from Runjeet Singh. Burnes could only temporise, and did so by discussing a possible accommodation that would leave Peshawar in the hands of the Dost's brother Sultan Mahomed. Dost Mahomed would have none of it, and no progress was made.

Burnes had even less success in his attempts to restrain Kohun Dil Khan at Kandahar from siding with the Persian Shah. Both Kabul and Kandahar were, in effect, playing a waiting game to see what happened at Herat, but the Dost, who was not anxious to see his brother supported by a Persian alliance, appeared to agree with Burnes. Lieutenant Leech was detached from Burnes's mission and sent to Kandahar with an offer of British protection and cash. But Macnaghten sent Burnes a stern reproof. 'These promises are entirely unauthorised by any part of your instructions.' He ended with the 'Strict injunction that you in future conform punctually on all points issued for your guidance'.¹¹ This seems to have been Macnaghten's own work, as Auckland, who was then on his way to Simla, later admitted that Burnes's conduct had been prudent.¹²

Unable to satisfy the Dost's claims on Peshawar, reproved for his Kandahar activities, Burnes was further discomfited by the appearance in Kabul of a mysterious Russian officer. Captain Vickovich was a Pole who had been exiled for supporting a Polish independence movement but eventually obtained a Cossack commission. He was the man entrusted by the Russians with their clandestine intrigues in Central Asia. First news of his presence in Afghanistan came in odd circumstances. Major Rawlinson, sent by McNeill from Teheran to the Persian camp at Herat, told the Shah that he had met a strange 'young man of light make, very

fair complexion, with bright eyes and a look of great animation'.¹³ Though the traveller had tried to conceal his identity, it emerged that he was a bona fide Russian officer carrying presents from the Czar to Mahomed Shah. The Shah protested that the Russian, introduced two days later as Captain Vickovich, was on his way to Dost Mahomed and was merely staging at Herat. Rawlinson took alarm and posted back to Teheran with the first intelligence of a Russian approach to the Kabul ruler.

Dost Mahomed received Vickovich very coolly. Not wishing to harm his relations with the British, he kept Burnes fully informed about Vickovich's proposals and even offered to send the Russian packing. Only in April, when Burnes reluctantly left the city, did Dost Mahomed treat Vickovich with respect. How far Vickovich, like Burnes in relation to Kandahar, exceeded his instructions is not clear. A romantic, elegant figure, he brought a letter of introduction from Simonich which began 'The respectable Vickovich will wait upon you', and listed gifts of 'some Russian rarities' that were to be forwarded.¹⁴ McNeill, however, told Palmerston that Simonich had never mentioned Vickovich's name or alluded to intercourse between Russia and Kabul. Later, when Palmerston made his protest to Nesselrode about Russian intervention, the wretched Vickovich was sacrificed. On his return to St Petersburg he was told that Nesselrode knew no one of that name except an adventurer who, it was reported, 'had been engaged in some unauthorised intrigues at Kabul and Kandahar'. According to one version, Vickovich went back to his hotel and blew his brains out.¹⁵

The parallel with Burnes is inescapable. Both were highly intelligent, agile, and resourceful; they were chancers; they were impatient of authority. But equally inescapable is the conclusion that the Russians had the edge in the great chess game. The Kandahar chiefs did, after all, sign a treaty with Mahomed Shah under Russian guarantee. And the Russians knew better than to commit an army of their own to further their ends.

It was in vain that Burnes's reports had been monotonously in favour of Dost Mahomed. A few extracts give something of their flavour. On 27th December, 1837 he wrote regarding Vickovich's arrival, 'Dost Mahomed said that he had come for my counsel on the occasion: that he wanted to have nothing to do with any other power than the British'.¹⁶ Again, a few days later, referring to

approaches the Dost had received from the Russians and the Persians, 'The chief of Cabul declares that he prefers the sympathy and friendly offices of the British to all these offers, however alluring they may seem'. At the end of January Dost Mahomed had declared that his interests were bound up in an alliance with the British 'which he will never desert as long as there is a prospect of securing one'.¹⁷ Finally, in April, 1838 the Dost himself wrote a despairing envoi to Auckland, 'The British Government have given to us aid of no kind, notwithstanding our abstaining from friendship with other powers'. It crossed Auckland's of 27th April to the Dost, expressing regret that he had refused the (very limited) offer of British good offices.¹⁸

Incidentally, Burnes's despatches were first published in an edited form, which cast doubt on the consistency of Burnes's advice and the conduct of Dost Mahomed. This gave rise to two acrimonious debates in Parliament. D'Israeli, reading Burnes's reports much later said in the House, 'There I found great energy, great devotion, great fertility of resource, and a character admirably adapted to the circumstances he was called on to control, and to the positions he filled'.¹⁹

Auckland got very different advice from Captain Claude Wade, the agent on the North West Frontier. Wade was fortuitously well placed to influence the Governor-General as Burnes's correspondence was forwarded by him from Ludhiana. He did not like Burnes, and he added his own, dissentient remarks to the despatches from Kabul. Wade's opinion was that we should not consolidate the Afghan Sirdars under Dost Mahomed since that would in time deprive us of the chance to influence events. He thought it preferable to preserve the existing factions. But Wade had advocated Shah Soojah's claim for support in his ill-starred expedition five years earlier, and he was still convinced that if there had to be intervention Soojah was the man to back. Two other political officers, Dr Lord who had been with Burnes at Kabul and then posted to Peshawar, and D'Arcy Todd, also spoke to Soojah's popularity with the Afghans.

Dost Mahomed, it was apparent, had no friends in Auckland's entourage. Macnaghten was as antipathetic to the Dost as he was critical of Burnes. The same was true of Henry Torrens, of whom it was said that 'the airy grace with which he could throw off a French canzonet was something as perfect of its kind as the

military genius with which he could sketch out the plan of a campaign'.²⁰ Colvin, vain, resolute and imbued with visions of empire, was also keen on the scheme that now emerged. To these men Auckland listened, and before the end of May he sent Macnaghten to approach Runjeet Singh.

The Maharajah, aged with but a few months to live, emaciated and pockmarked with the sight of only one eye, greeted the mission with a facade of oriental pleasantry, enquiring about the British drinking capacity and catechising Macnaghten on his fluency in Arabic. Macnaghten then explained that Dost Mahomed was to be replaced by Shah Soojah and that there were two ways in which this could be done. Either Runjeet, relying on his early treaty with Soojah, could take on the task by himself, or he could act with British support. The first alternative was at once rejected. Under the second, Macnaghten said the British would provide Soojah with cash and officers for his troops. Soojah's force would march on Kabul through the Bolan Pass and by way of Kandahar; the Sikh army would take the Khyber route. There was a suggestion that British troops might also take part. Runjeet was not keen to force the Khyber, but Macnaghten patiently added, in guarded terms, that if it should prove necessary the British would themselves find it expedient to support the cause of Shah Soojah. Runjeet promptly decided that he had better not be left out, and agreed to a tripartite treaty.

On 15th July Macnaghten reached Ludhiana, and two days were enough to secure Soojah's compliance. Understandably delighted at the prospect of returning to his throne after years of exile, he had only two reservations of any substance. First, he should be allowed to raise forces of his own and they should be given some prominence so that he should not appear to go as a mere puppet. This was agreed. He also demurred at being required to make an annual payment to Runjeet Singh, but Macnaghten skilfully defined this as a reimbursement for the cost of Sikh troops. The British mission returned to Simla with their treaty.

The pace quickened. Burnes, who had joined Macnaghten at Lahore to listen ruefully to the discussions with Runjeet Singh, reached Simla on 20th July. According to the (unreliable) witness Masson he was immediately set upon by Torrens and Colvin, who 'came running to him and prayed him to say nothing to unsettle

his Lordship'.²¹ Burnes still made a last eloquent plea for Dost Mahomed, but knowing that it had been decided to repudiate the Amir—and only then—he concluded that 'As for Shah Soojahool-Moolk, personally, the British Government have only to send him to Peshawar with an agent, and two of its own regiments as an honorary escort, and an avowal to the Afghans that we have taken up his cause, to ensure his being fixed for ever on the throne'.²² Auckland, ingenuously or deviously, later commented that Burnes was a good witness 'for his inclination is in favour, notwithstanding all that has passed, of Dost Mahomed'.²³

Auckland's despatch of 13th August, 1838 to the Secret Committee made it clear that he had made up his mind. He had no doubt of the 'justice of the course to be pursued' and he intended that the British element in the expedition should be bigger than originally planned.²⁴ Sir Henry Fane, then Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in India, said it was for him, and him alone, to decide what troops were needed, and he was naturally determined that there should be no possibility of failure. After years of inactivity, the messes throughout India hummed with excitement at the prospect of action and in August warning orders were issued. The Bengal Army was to consist of two divisions under Sir Willoughby Cotton (plate 5), and another force of three brigades and one Sepoy corps, commanded by Sir John Keane, was being assembled at Bombay. Fane decided that he would take personal charge of the whole expedition as the 'Army of the Indus'. to complete the charade Shah Soojah's contingent, to be raised, commanded, and paid by the East India Company, was being recruited. 'What a farce', said Colonel Dennie of the 13th Light Infantry, 'it is that it should be called Shah Soojah's, when it is entirely composed of Hindoos, and there is not a single Afghan in it'.²⁵

This remarkable muster required some public justification, and Auckland's bureaucrats were busy with their pens. On 1st October Auckland issued his notorious 'Simla Declaration'. Public statements are not always meant to be taken at face value, but Macnaghten and his colleagues overdid it. As the starting point of the tragic events that followed, the Declaration is reproduced in Appendix I. Briefly, it claimed that Dost Mahomed, having made an unprovoked attack on our ancient ally Runjeet Singh, had declined the offer of mediation, and with foreign encouragement



Plate 5. Major-General Sir Willoughby Cotton

had persisted in schemes of aggrandisement. The siege of Herat was next prayed in aid, along with the Kandahar Sirdars' intrigues. The Governor-General was therefore impelled to arrest foreign aggression, and since no reliance could be placed on Dost Mahomed and his brothers he had turned to Shah Soojah, who when in power had been well-disposed, and of whose popularity there was 'strong and unanimous testimony'. Runjeet Singh, 'from his undeviating friendship', would take part in the operation. Soojah would be restored, and 'when once he should be secured in power, and the independence of Afghanistan established' the British army would be withdrawn.

The reader can judge for himself how far this astonishing document was slanted. In India the reaction was for the most part incredulous; at home it was hostile. At Westminster, Lord Aberdeen said that he had not seen a statement which appeared so much to justify the worst imputations that had ever been cast on our Eastern policy.²⁶ D'Israeli's shrewd comment was 'We are totally unacquainted with whom the East India Company is at war in Asia. The enemy is not to be discovered in the manifesto of the Governor-General. That was rather an order for the assembly of troops than a declaration of war. War indeed had never been declared, and for an obvious reason, we had no apparent foe. . .'²⁷

Auckland's pronouncement was unkindly summed up as saying that because the Shah of Persia attacked Herat we would dethrone the King of Kabul. Was there nothing to be said in his defence? It was abundantly clear to anyone who had read only a selection of the despatches that while Herat was threatened security measures were justified. It also happened that when Auckland issued his proclamation he did not know that the Persian attack on 24th June was the effective end of the siege of Herat. Two other aspects are relevant. Auckland had to bear in mind all the international complications, and it is apparent from the voluminous correspondence that he, Palmerston, and Hobhouse were independently of the opinion that the Simla plan was the right one. Palmerston, in particular, was determined that, with the possibility of war in the Middle East involving Egypt and Turkey, he was not going to precipitate an overt quarrel with the Russians. Auckland wrote privately to Hobhouse on 13th October that he could have made the Simla Manifesto stronger 'if I

had not had the fear of Downing Street before my eyes and thought it right to avoid direct allusion to Russia'.²⁸ The Manifesto does not refer to the Russians.

The second aspect is more frequently overlooked. In an earlier letter to Hobhouse (23rd August) Auckland said 'The siege of Herat has much occupied the minds of the public in India. . . . our shrewdest and calmest observers. . . have concurred in describing the fever of restlessness, as beyond every thing which for many years they had witnessed. From the military strength of the Persians there has actually been nothing to fear, but religion and circumstance, and the character of *ignotum* and *magnificum*, which is attached to the Russian name, have been at work on men's minds, and it may be a fatal mistake if the Russians and Persians were allowed to plant their standard or fix their influence in advance'.²⁹ This is not so much a statement of policy as an indication that Auckland was sensitive to opinion in India.

To return to Herat. On 15th August there had been rumours that Yar Mahomed, relentlessly goaded on by Eldred Pottinger, was still holding out at Herat, but Colvin wrote 'no result of the siege will delay the Shah's (Soojah's) expedition'. On the 21st Auckland wrote in similar terms, 'even though these reports should be true I should not be the less concerned that the Government is acting wisely'. . . . in resisting aggression. 'I am not therefore inclined to relax in preparation. . . .'³¹ But why did Auckland persevere when the news came that Herat had been saved? On 8th November he issued a Notification that acknowledged the end of the siege as a just cause of congratulation, but indicated that he would continue to prosecute with vigour the measures already announced. McNeill, in his despatch of 11th September had certainly argued against putting any faith in the Shah's promises.³² The real reason is that Herat was the symbol, but not the cause of the dispute. Auckland had been manoeuvring, not merely to stop the Persian/Russian thrust at Herat, but to recover British influence in Afghanistan. To do this he had to depend on his alliance with the Sikhs. They were the one stable element and it was through their country that the operation would have to be mounted. Partnership with the Sikhs meant jettisoning Dost Mahomed—Runjeet Singh's implacable enemy. It was also essential to establish on the north west frontier a power both disposed to peace and willing to maintain the status

quo with the Sikhs. Dost Mahomed was opposed to both these conditions, and Burnes had described him as a man devoted to war. Neat, tidy, diplomatic arguments, but they failed to recognise that Soojah was not even a satisfactory puppet, and the Afghans would in time take their own revenge.

As a prelude to the 'signal catastrophe' that followed, the great military circus that now took place at Ferozepore, about a hundred miles from Lahore, has a macabre fascination.

In the solemnisation of treaties, a moment arrives when the attendant pomp and ceremony divert the minds of the contracting parties from the reality of their actions, and the celebrations become the substance. So it was at Ferozepore. Auckland, if he had any doubts about the morality of what he was doing, was convinced of its expediency, and he was now fully committed. (The Secret Committee's despatch, which independently concluded that the expedition was necessary, did not reach him till he had left Ferozepore.) Runjeet Singh's frame of mind was different. His ancient enemy was about to be eliminated; the Peshawar business would be finally cleared up for him; and he had no real intention of sending more than a token contingent of his cherished troops to try the dangerous Khyber defiles. Now the Governor-General and the Maharajah, these two 'suns of glory' met in Durbar to commemorate their triumph in advance, and the vast assembly of onlookers was prepared to take it all at face value.

On the morning of 29th November the British army, both European and native infantry attired in thick red tunics, shakoes, with white cross belts, the Horse Artillery in brass dragoon helmets with white buckskin breeches and high jackboots, formed a street of honour leading to Auckland's Durbar tent. 'About half past nine', wrote the editor of the Calcutta *Englishman* who was an eyewitness, 'the distant clangour of a band of incredible musicians announced the approach of the Maharajah'. As Auckland at the head of his stately column of elephants went forward to greet him, 'the guns of the camel battery spat forth their salutation, and horses reared, and troops presented arms, and bands struck up our national anthem. Sikhs galloped in wild disorder, and dust rose, even to the point of enveloping the proud procession'. The Maharajah, simply clad in red tunic, trousers and turban, was seen approaching with his own line of elephants. (Runjeet's unseemly habits when mounted had earlier

moved the traveller George Vigne to such disgust that he took refuge in Latin. 'Olim, appotus, animi laxandi causa, desuper ab elephante in capita circumstantis turbae mingere solitus est'.³³ As the mammals came alongside, Auckland wearing his full uniform of diplomatic blue received Runjeet into his howdah, and the whole pageant wheeled about to proceed to the Durbar. The Sikh chiefs 'all clinquant, all in gold' or clothed in every diversity of colour, 'scrambled onwards, competing with the British redcoats for a peep at the *tumasha*.' The stench, noise and dust defied the witness's pen, and such was the undignified fracas that but for the help of 'stalwart Fane' the Sikh ruler would not have reached the pavilion.

There the presents, for which the boutiques and gunsmiths of Calcutta had been scoured, were brought forward. But the gift of gifts was a portrait of Queen Victoria, painted by Emily Eden, and 'encompassed in a fitting frame of solid gold and jewelled cornices'. The artist records that she had not managed to get an exact likeness, but doubted if the recipient would notice. The Maharajah's white beard bobbed excitedly as he studied the portrait with the gravity befitting a tribute from one monarch to another. Then, 'amidst compliments, hurrahs, and the discharge of cannon, and the discourse of hautboys, he returned to the place from whence he came'.³⁴ The thirsty troops marched off to breakfast.

When return visits were paid the next day the Sikhs fairly 'shone down the English'. As Auckland's cortège, accompanied by Runjeet Singh's son Shere Singh and a detachment of cavalry came forward 'there was such a pleasant dash of poetry and romance in the congregation of daring horsemen bearing lance, targe and matchlock. . . . that criticism was entirely disarmed'. While the two masses of elephants moved down the avenue of Sikhs whose steel casques and gay appointments glittered in the sun, 'the acme of royal splendour was here bodied forth'. This time Auckland climbed into the Maharajah's howdah to the sound of clarion and cannon fire. In Runjeet's enclosure gifts were again exchanged and there were other, indigenous, forms of entertainment. The British guests, particularly their ladies, were embarrassed by the hard liquor which their host pressed on them, and Emily Eden recounts her difficulty in emptying her glass on the floor, unobserved. More to the liking of the British officers was the display by 'nautch girls, bedizened with jewelry, and

beautified after their fashion with missee, silver dust, etc'.³⁵ Miss Eden deplored 'all these satraps in a row and these screaming girls and crowds of long bearded attendants and the old tyrant drinking in the middle'.³⁶

Of slightly more significance for the expedition that lay ahead, two elaborate military tattoos were held. Fane put his troops through a series of manoeuvres, essaying all the dispositions prescribed in the drill manuals and relentlessly practised in regimental lines. The Sikh cavalry wheeled with their customary brio, and the infantry, smartly turned out in their scarlet tunics, blue trousers and turbans, impressed the bystanders by their bearing. Fane's bloodless victory on the parade ground was his only one as Commander of the Army of the Indus. Now that the Persians had withdrawn from Herat he decided that the force should be reduced, by the peculiar method of selecting regiments by lot, and that he would eventually give up the command.

The Bengal Army now comprised a single division under Cotton, and the whole expedition would in time be commanded by Keane who was meanwhile bringing the Bombay Army up from Karachi. In addition to Shah Soojah's levies of 6,000 men. The Bengal Army consisted of 9,500 troops. The infantry were still equipped with the Brown Bess musket, which had remained unchanged since Waterloo. Effective at no more than 150 yards, it was not, as was soon to be discovered, a match for the long Afghan *jezail* which had four times its range. But the Army's real handicap was its enormous administrative train. The commissariat arrangements were archaic, and except for arms and ammunition all goods were supplied by agents and contractors. Together with a horde of tent-pitchers, hereditary grain-carriers, etc, they made up more than 38,000 personnel. Officers travelled in state. Even a subaltern had half a dozen servants who looked after his glass, crockery, and portable bath tub. He would have his own wine chest, a copious supply of cheroots—one regiment allotted two camels for their carriage—and an exotic collection of cosmetics. Cotton, who travelled in his own buggy, appropriated 260 camels for his and his servants' gear. The whole force required 30,000 camels, who soon proved singularly unsuited for mountain passes and made the nights hideous with their screeching. But on 10th December Cotton's caravan took the road.

CHAPTER VI

Promenade

The end of 1838 saw much movement along the banks of the Indus. While Cotton was leading the Bengal Army on its 400 mile march from Ferozepore to cross the river at Roree, Shah Soojah's force which crossed upstream was on its way down the right bank heading for Shikarpur. Keane had landed with the Bombay column and was advancing from the coast. Fane, who had not yet relinquished his command, travelled downstream by boat. At Herat, however, which had been the original pretext for the expedition, there was little sign of British activity. Here Eldred Pottinger was left for the time being to maintain our interest. It is ironic that Herat was the only Afghan stronghold which was never occupied by British troops.

In a despatch to Palmerston, dated 6th October, 1838, McNeill had specially commended Eldred who had 'thwarted all the military efforts of the Russian officers of superior rank, who for some months conducted the siege, and all the intrigues by which Russian missions sought to sow dissension and excite alarm amongst the defenders of Herat'.¹ Auckland was equally appreciative. In November he wrote to Hobhouse, 'I have appointed Lieut. Pottinger to be political agent at Herat, and given him praise in the Gazette and a salary of 1,000 Rupees a month, with a recommendation to the Court that it date from the commencement of the siege. I hope this will not be thought extravagant. His chivalrous adventure, his admirable conduct, and their extraordinary results ought to be on record and upheld'.² Auckland had originally assigned Eldred as Political Assistant to Macnaghten at the Court of Shah Soojah, but this was changed in the notification of 8th November—after the news that the siege had been lifted—and he was formally confirmed as Political Agent at Herat. The graceful acknowledgement of his services published in the Gazette read 'In conferring the above appointment upon Lieutenant Pottinger the Governor-General is glad of the opportunity

afforded him of bestowing the high applause which is due to the signal merits of that officer who was present in Herat during the whole period of its protracted siege, and who, under circumstances of peculiar danger and difficulty, has, by his fortitude, ability, and judgment, honourably sustained the reputation and interests of his country'.³

This was heady stuff for a young officer, even making allowance for the flowery phrases that dignified official pronouncements, but Eldred was by now heartily sick of Yar Mahomed's deviousness and would have relished different employment. Events proved that he was right.

Meanwhile, all seemed set fair for the Army of the Indus. It was still thought to be a gala, and the regiments who were not there were sad that they were missing the fun. The Bombay column found some recreation on the march. At Tatta, four miles from the river, the Queen's Regiment enjoyed the shooting, particularly the black partridge, which they found an uncommonly handsome bird, much bigger than the English variety.⁴ A more serious diversion was provided by the need to bring the Amirs of Sind to heel. When the Indus was earlier opened up to traffic the Amirs had been assured that the river would not be used for the transport of military stores. They were now to be told that this undertaking would be abrogated. Moreover, although they had only recently, after prolonged and testy negotiation with Henry Pottinger, agreed to allow a British Resident in Hyderabad, they were suddenly presented with a bill for 20 lakhs of rupees in return for Shah Soojah giving up his traditional claim to supremacy and tribute. Not surprisingly, they refused; they were known to be in touch with Mahomed Shah; and there were signs that they were getting ready to fight. To deal with this insubordination Cotton, instead of crossing the Indus as planned, moved off towards Hyderabad. He had three motives. One, the need to secure his rear area, had some justification. The other two—obtaining 20 lakhs for the treasury, and the opportunity of loot if the rich city was occupied—were much more doubtful.

But neither Auckland nor, in this case, Henry Pottinger were to be deterred by any ethical qualms. In the event, the Amirs capitulated before Cotton, who had ignored Macnaghten's angry complaints about the 'wild goose chase', could reach them, and he turned his Division, disappointed at being denied plunder,

back to the Indus. On Cotton's arrival at Roree, Fane took farewell of his troops, and by 18th February the last of the Bengal force had crossed the river. The Sappers had built an impressive bridge, 500 yards long and made of 74 boats ingeniously lashed together, stretching to the midstream island of Bukkur and then to the right bank. An eyewitness account in the *Englishman* rhapsodised on the beautiful sight of 'different corps with their bands playing, followed by a long string of camels and camp followers The glittering of their arms in the sun, the Fort of Bukkur with the picturesque battlements frowning over the bridge, the ancient towns of Roree and Sukkur, overhanging the mighty stream, formed altogether a delightful picture'.⁵ (plate 6) The euphoria of the Ferozepore circus had not yet been dissipated.

Very different conditions lay ahead when Cotton pushed on to Shikarpur, of which it was said 'while there is a Shikarpur there ought to be no Johannum', or hell.⁶ (map 1) The arid, desert conditions and the unsufferable heat—a temperature of 106° in tents was recorded—began to take their toll. There was an appalling wastage in the camel train. Worse was to come on the 150 miles from Shikarpur to Dadhar, which the leading troops reached on 16th March after 16 torrid marches. Colonel Dennie describes the plain 'where no sign of animal or vegetable life is to be found, which the wild beast, from its desolation shuns, and which is neither inhabited by bird or insect: no sound whatsoever disturbs the awful silence'.⁷ Two officers died of heat in their tents, their bodies turning black as charcoal. A similar fate met Lieutenant Corrie of the 17th and ten men who had lost their way, 'halted under a tree and imprudently drank brandy to refresh themselves'.⁸

The climate was not the only hazard. Though Cotton neglected the basic precaution of making a reconnaissance, luckily his advance was not opposed. But the supply system was indescribable. Such forecasts as had been made were so wide of the mark that Cotton's men were already on half rations, and the size of the British soldier's loaf was reduced. The great promenade to Kabul might be claimed as a military success, but the conditions on the march were an indictment of those responsible for the commissariat. It had been blandly assumed that the army could live off the land. But no food or forage was obtainable. The local inhabitants were at best on subsistence level and they could not suddenly find supplies for thousands of troops and campfollow-

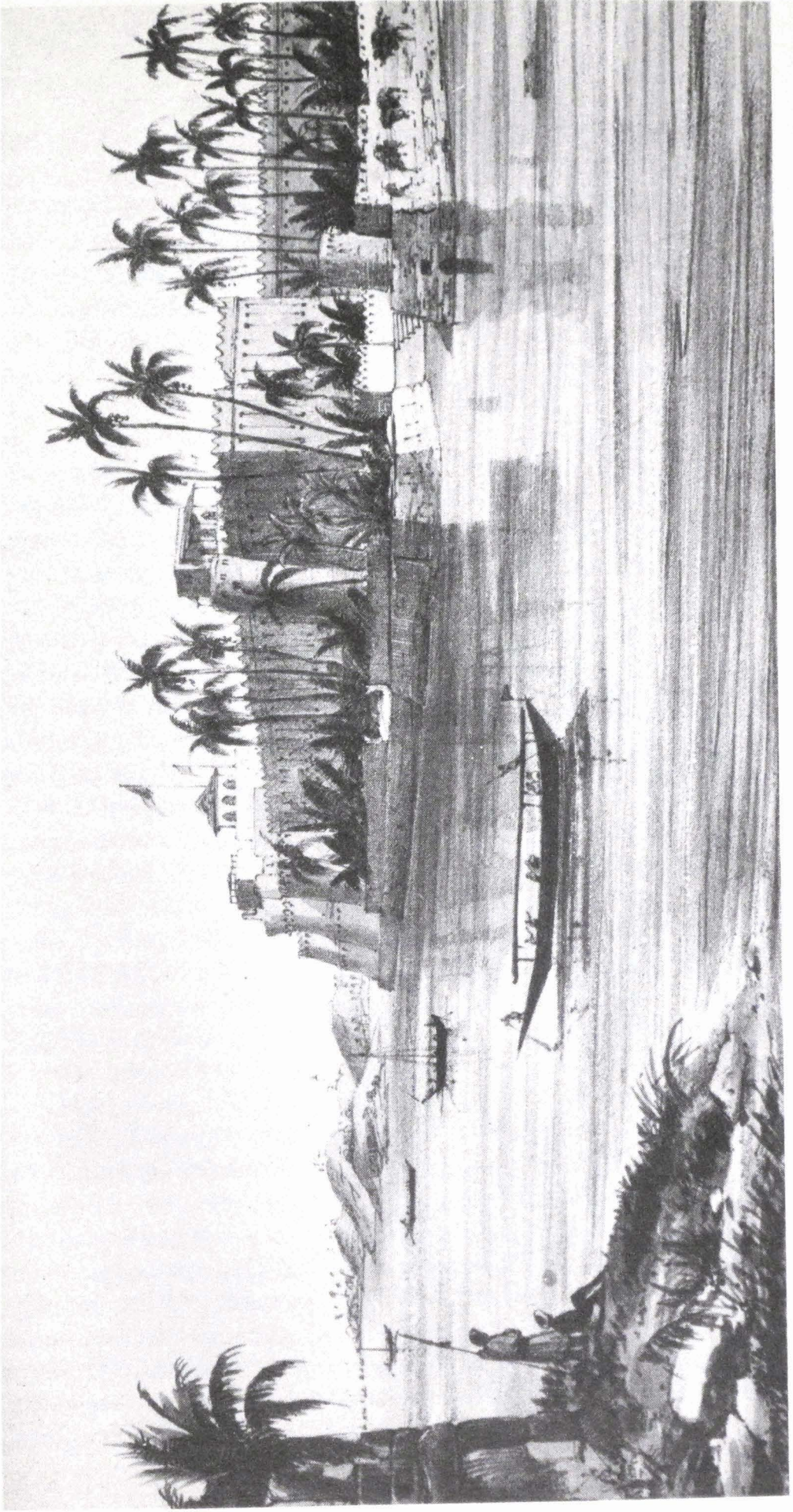
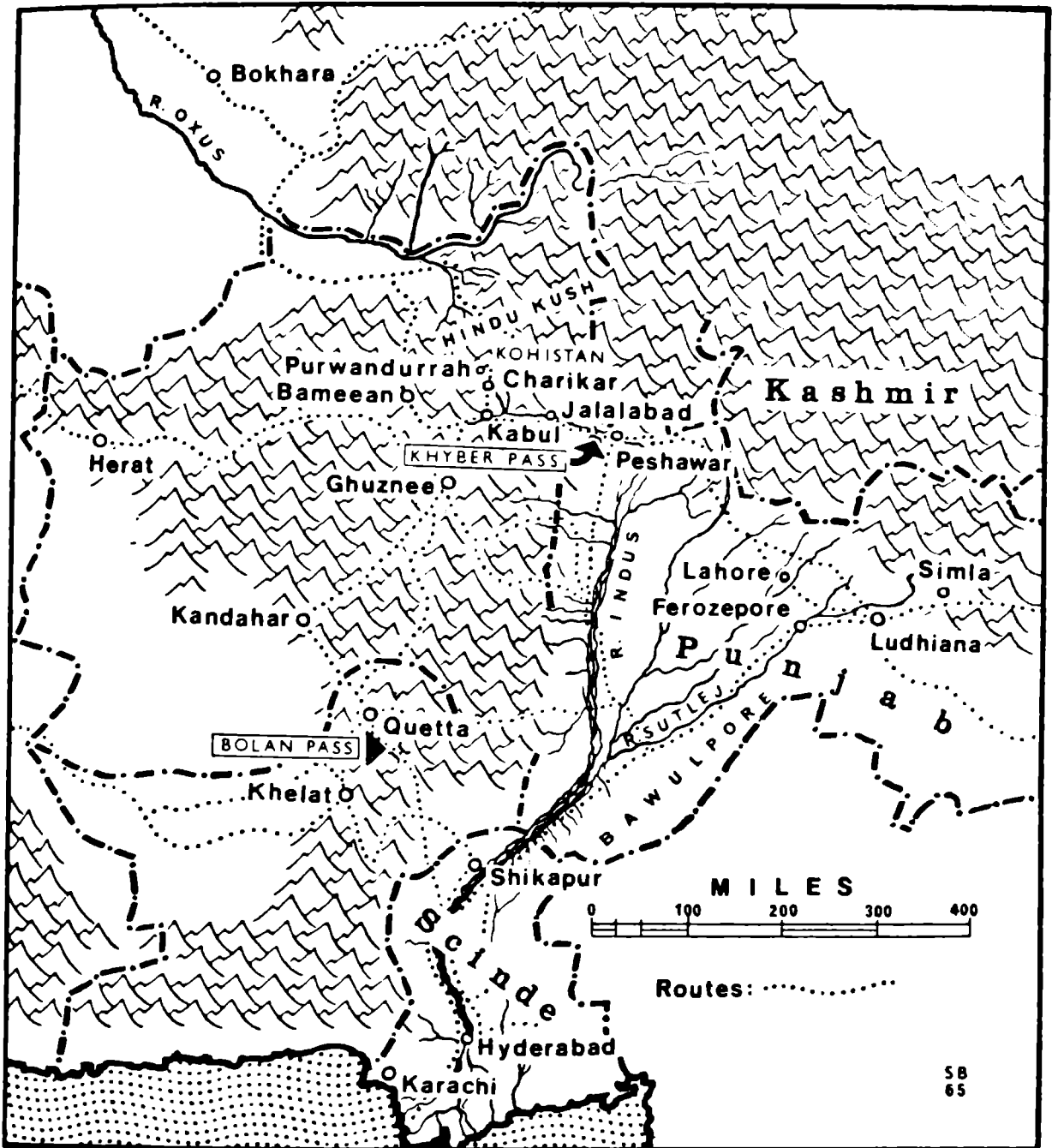


Plate 6. The Fortress of Bukkur in the River Indus



Map 1. The advance of the Army of the Indus

ers. Macnaghten sent Burnes on a mission to Mehrab Khan at Khelat with a view to securing provisions. But the Khan had little to offer, and was also accused of failing to restrain his Baluchis from harassing the column. Macnaghten in time took an unjustified revenge on him. To add to the difficulties, the Bengal and



Plate 7. The Bolan Pass

Shah Soojah's forces had different commissariat departments, competing with each other for what could be found and paying ruinous prices. The soldiers, racked by heat and thirst and on a starvation diet, struggled on.

Cotton decided to march without delay through the 60 miles of the Bolan Pass, (plate 7) and soon found new problems. The camels were useless in the rocky defiles, and more marauders appeared to raid the column, capture baggage, and cut off stragglers. In one engagement, when a pocket of tribesmen were cornered Major Daly 'killed four men himself with a simple bamboo hunting spear, used for killing boars'.⁹ Versatility was needed. But the Bengal Army traversed the pass, which rises from 745 feet at Dadhar to nearly 6,000 feet at its summit in a creditable six marches, and on 26th March reached Quetta. Cotton now had rations for only ten days.

Soojah's force which had been delayed at Shikarpur from lack of draught animals, and Keane who had travelled in advance of the Bombay Army to assume overall command, next made their way through the Pass, and the Bombay column brought up the rear. They found the Bolan littered with the detritus of those had gone before. Lieutenant Holdsworth of the Queen's Regiment describes finding the bodies of 20 to 30 sepoy of the Bengal Army. 'Some were in a tolerable state of preservation, but others had been badly wounded; tripes torn out by jackals, and one or two perfect skeletons. We kept on coming also upon an arm or a leg or an ugly-looking skull; but the most disgusting sight of all was an arm and leg, protruding out of the centre of the stream, washed to the consistency of a washer-woman's hand after a hard day's washing'.¹⁰ The Afghan passes were to exhibit many such grotesque spectacles before the British finally withdrew.

On 7th April Keane, with Soojah's contingent now tactfully in the lead along with the Bengal troops, broke ground and moved towards the last obstacle before Kandahar—the Khojak Pass, shorter but steeper than the Bolan, and with the narrowest of tracks. Commissariat conditions were now so bad that 60 horses, weak from starvation, had to be shot, and camp-followers were existing on the fried skins of sheep, the congealed blood of animals, and any roots they could find. Vehicles and guns had to be manhandled through the defile. Marauders were still active and on the 19th they impertinently carried off two elephants

belonging to Macnaghten. Troops had to dismount and drive their horses before them. George Lawrence doubted if more than a hundred men from three regiments—the 16th Lancers, and the 2nd and 3rd Light Cavalry—could have been mustered to resist attack. But Keane was soon in high spirits and entertained some of his officers to dinner, 'a pleasant party and he was on his good behavior'. This was unusual as Keane's coarse behaviour often offended his staff. There was further encouragement when 200 Kuzzilbashe deserters came in, and when Dost Mahomed's brothers the Kandahar Sirdars were reported to have fled over the Helmand river.

On the 25th Shah Soojah made his formal entrance into Kandahar. There is some conflict about the warmth of his reception, either on arrival or at the grand review on 8th May. This was the first test of the validity of Auckland's manifesto. Macnaghten and Burnes wrote glowing accounts of Soojah's popularity, and said his subjects welcomed him with feelings amounting almost to adoration. Two reliable officers, Outram and Hough, who were at the review, left accounts which do not disclose any disappointment at the attitude of the Kandaharis, but George Lawrence noted that 'none of his own subjects came in to pledge their allegiance, and the country was clearly against us'.¹¹ Have-lock, who was not present, thought the whole affair had been viewed with the most mortifying indifference. But the army were glad to be there, and for the time being their privations were at an end. The fields were full of ripening crops and the trees heavy with fruit. Dennie enthused over apples and grapes, cherries, apricots, mulberries, greengages and pomegranates. The milk, butter and cheese were excellent and the mutton unsurpassable. Dennie found the natives very handsome, and 'in feature complexion and limbs & resemble, or rather surpass Europeans; the bloom on their cheeks being indeed quite English'. He also noted that the women painted their cheeks red 'when they fancy themselves deficient in colour'.¹² The troops, though suffering intestinally from too much fresh fruit, were given a special liquor ration for the Queen's Birthday, and their morale improved. But it was two months before the ravages of the march had been sufficiently repaired to allow Keane to move on.

At Kandahar Macnaghten addressed his mind to events at Herat. If the pieces in his mosaic were to fall into place it was

strategically necessary to remain on cordial terms with Shah Kamran. But it was evident from Eldred Pottinger's despatches that he thought Kamran and Yar Mahomed were up to their old tricks, and relations were becoming strained. Macnaghten in his wisdom decided to send D'Arcy Todd on a special mission to Herat. Todd, as we will see, was eventually to displace Eldred. Their successive misfortunes in Kamran's capital are described in the next chapter, but first the end of the great promenade.

On 27th June Keane started the 230 mile march to Ghuznee. Sir Jasper Nicolls, who succeeded Fane as Commander-in-Chief in India, noted in his personal journal, 'Keane has set out again from Kandahar, and we shall soon see whether Dost Mahomed continues to make head against us. Our cavalry must be in very low condition, but their hearts are good—the prize may be great—the enterprise interesting—and a finer climate in prospect'. But referring to the supply deficiencies he added 'they can never entirely overcome the derangement of the Government's plans'. Keane's force was however in better condition; the farriers and armourers had been busy over the past weeks. But he took a strange decision to leave his siege guns at Kandahar. Ghuznee was known to be strongly fortified, and one might have supposed that heavy artillery would be needed, but the bullocks were too weak to draw the guns and keep pace, and Keane had apparently been advised that the walls could be breached without his siege train. On 20th July the Ghuznee citadel was sighted. For the first time Keane ordered his army into battle formation with the infantry on the left, the artillery with the indefatigable Augustus Abbott's battery well to the fore in the centre, and the cavalry flanking on the right. An early brush with the Afghan outposts soon confirmed that Keane had a fight on his hands.

So far he had met only guerilla attacks by Baluchi, or latterly by Ghilzye tribesmen. Now he was faced with the first major action for fifteen years involving the Indian Army. The Afghans believed that Ghuznee (plate 8) was impregnable. It had an able commander in one of Dost Mahomed's sons, Haider Khan, while another son Afzul Khan was lying in wait in the hills with the main body of the Afghan cavalry. The fortress was well supplied with food, water and ammunition. Dost Mahomed, who had been perplexed by Keane's delay at Kandahar, thought that the British would bypass Ghuznee and not expend troops on a lengthy siege. He

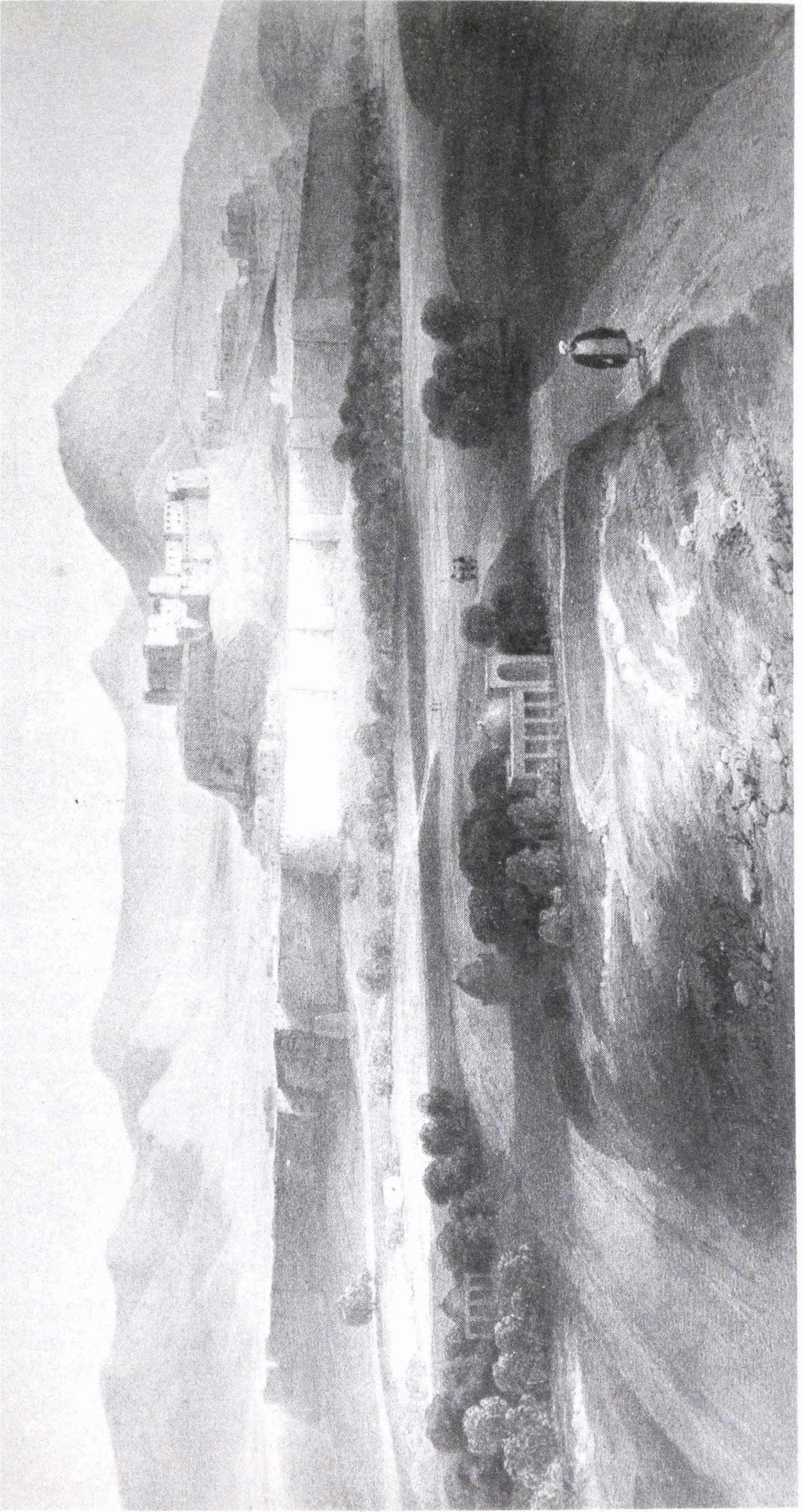


Plate 8. Ghuznee

did not know that Keane was once again desperately short of food and fodder. Nor was he aware that treachery had revealed how the stronghold could be taken.

Bribed by Mohun Lal (who was always busy on some furtive project), a deserter called Abdul Rashid Khan advised that unlike the gate facing them on the Kandahar road, the city's Kabul gate had not been properly walled up. Captain Thomson, the chief Sapper, surveyed the walls through his telescope and thought the gate could be blown. Keane then moved the main part of his army astride the Ghuznee-Kabul road. His plan was simple and bold—an artillery bombardment by his six and nine pounders to make the enemy keep their heads down, an infantry diversion on the south side, the destruction of the gate, and a direct assault through the breach. It was to be a night attack, and by 2 a.m. on the 23rd the troops were in position. The Sappers, 3 Officers, 3 Sergeants and 18 men, all volunteers chosen by seniority, carried 300 lbs of gunpowder in 12 sandbags and a hose 72 feet long.

The 'forlorn hope', or storming party, was to be led by Colonel Dennie who would be followed in turn by the main column under Brigadier 'fighting Bob' Sale. Lieutenant Holdsworth, who was one of the storming party, gives an account of the last hours before the attack that rings very true. 'There was a nervous irritability and excitement about us the whole day and then fellows began to make their wills, and tell each other what they wished to have done in case they fell: altogether it was not at all pleasant, and everyone longed most heartily for the morrow, and to have it over At one o'clock we turned out; I took a cup of tea and a couple of ginger biscuits, and joined my company I never saw fellows more merry'.¹⁴

Miraculously, though they came under fire, not one of the Sappers was hit as they crept up to the gate. Lieutenant Durand could not at first manage to ignite the fuse. Then he thought of firing the powder with his pistol, which would certainly have killed him and his party. Finally the fuse started to splutter, and in two minutes an enormous explosion blew the gate open. The fog of war descended as the forlorn hope rushed forward. Thomson had overestimated the amount of gunpowder needed, and not only the cavern of the gate but the tunnelled entrance behind it were filled with falling timbers and masonry. The storming troops

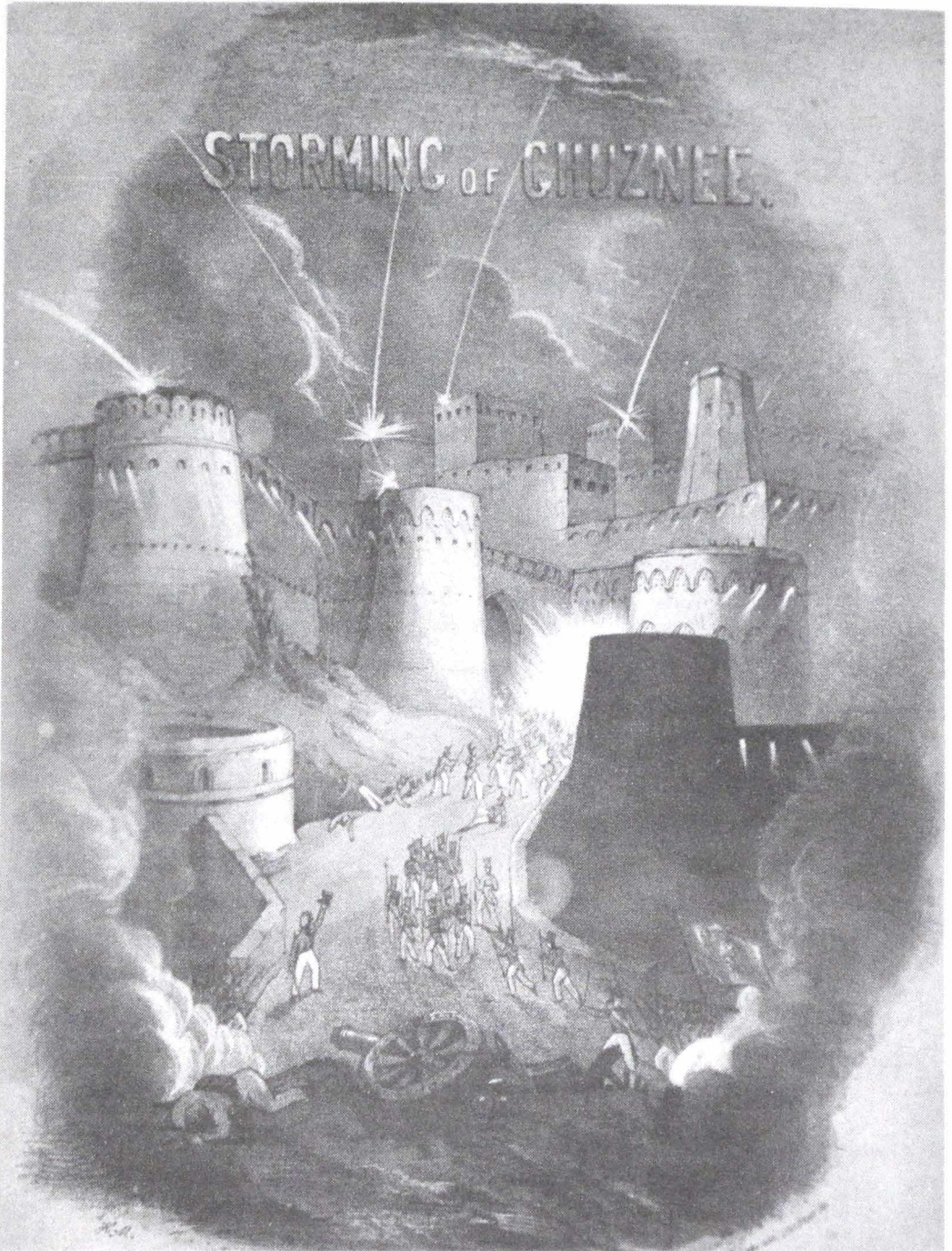


Plate 9. The Storming of Ghuznee (contemporary music sheet)

clambered over the debris. The bugler could not be found to sound the main advance and there was an appalling confusion of order and disorder before Sale and his men forced their way through. (Sale was in the midst of the fighting, cleaving open an Afghan's skull and getting wounded himself.) The garrison fought

tenaciously, but by 5 a.m. Ensign Frere of the 13th Light Infantry had hoisted the regimental colours on the citadel.

Keane (later ennobled as Lord Keane of Ghuznee) reported in fulsome terms that his army had succeeded in performing 'one of the most brilliant acts it has even been my lot to witness during my service of 45 years, in the four quarters of the globe'. Soojah had been astounded that they had captured a place 'conceived to be impregnable when defended, in the short space of two hours and in less than 48 hours after we came before it'.¹⁵ Keane also claimed that a place of such strength had not been taken before by such simple means, and even discounting his rhetoric it had been a famous victory. The British losses were 17 dead and 165 wounded; the enemy had at least 600 killed and there 1500 prisoners. A large quantity of grain, flour, and horses was found in the city, and Keane's supply difficulties were eased. The one discordant note was struck by Dennie who felt that Keane, who had a grudge against him, had unjustly given Sale all the credit.¹⁶

The effect on Afghan morale was dramatic. Afzul Khan, leaving his elephants and baggage, fled to Kabul where he got a cool reception. On the 28th Nawab Jubbar Khan, one of the most respected and trustworthy of the Afghan chiefs, came in under a flag of truce with a message from his brother Dost Mahomed. The Dost offered to surrender his throne if he could be made Wuzeer, an office long held by the Barukzye tribe. Soojah was not amused, and all the Dost could be offered was 'honourable asylum' in British India. Jubbar Khan rejected this as an insult and departed promising fierce resistance.

There was nothing for the Dost but a last stand. Akbar Khan with his horsemen had been recalled from Jalalabad and the Amir came out from Kabul at the head of his army which could still muster 13,000 men and 30 guns. It was his intention to hold the narrow valley of Arghandeh. With its many small defiles it was ideal for ambushing, and Keane's army was still only accustomed to open warfare. But with the fall of Ghuznee the Afghans had no heart for a fight; they were impressed, perhaps overimpressed, by the might of Keane's force. The Kuzzilbashes were the first to desert; other nobles followed them; and it was futile for the Dost to brandish the Koran and invoke the name of the Prophet. His troops would not follow him. The Dost abandoned the field and made off with his family towards Bameean.

On 6th August Keane reached Kabul and on the following day Soojah returned to his capital, escorted by Macnaghten and Burnes riding with a cavalry escort. All were ceremonially dressed. Soojah's long coat was studded with precious stones, his waist surrounded with embroidered bullet cases and powder horns and his head covered with a kind of three-cornered cap, from one corner of which hung a large emerald—but not the Koh-i-noor, which Runjeet Singh had appropriated long before. As at Kandahar, there is no unanimity in the accounts of Soojah's reception by his subjects. It is best summarised as resignation.

Keane was cock-ahoop. He had carried out an unprecedented march, much of it through unknown territory, and he had driven the enemy from the field. A successful commander needs luck, but Keane did not realise how lucky he had been. For example, if Runjeet Singh had been openly treacherous and cut off British supplies at source; if the Bolan or Khojak passes had been defended; if the powder bags at Ghuznee had misfired; or if Dost Mahomed had stood at Arghandeh; the outcome might have been very different. The commissariat system was a disgrace to experienced soldiers. As General Nott, who much to his chagrin was left behind with his brigade at Quetta, wrote, 'no language can describe it, nor give any idea of the rascality of its native agents. This department has, moreover, proved itself totally inefficient; there is not a native understrapper attached to it who has not plundered a fortune'.¹⁷ In short, it is not difficult to agree with those, Durand among them, who thought that the campaign had violated all the canons of military planning. The political implications of our occupying Kabul were soon to become apparent. Meanwhile, before August was over, Eldred Pottinger was reporting from Herat that a Russian expedition was about to leave Orenburg and advance on Khiva. It is to Eldred's activities that we now return.

CHAPTER VII

'Who would fardels bear?'

Shakespeare, 'Hamlet'

After the Persian army struggled away from Herat in September, 1838 the fortress enjoyed a respite from military activity, but it was the 'repose of utter exhaustion'.¹ Much of the fabric of the city had been destroyed; the people, reduced to one-fourth of their former number, were near starvation; there was no peaceful surge of arable crops; the fields had been trodden bare; and trade had been brought to an end. If left to itself Herat would soon have been in the possession of the jackals. Shah Kamran's coffers were empty and there was little scope for further exaction by Yar Mahomed and his acolytes.

It was an unpromising scene for Eldred Pottinger, helped for a few weeks by the presence of Charles Stoddart, but something had to be done if Kamran was to be persuaded that an alliance with the British was to be preferred to listening to Persian overtures. At first he made some progress, advancing modest grants to merchants to starting trading. With Stoddart's approval he announced that since Herat was now under British protection there would be a year's moratorium on taxes, and that the British Government would give Kamran a loan to cover the deficit. But Yar Mahomed, fearful lest his own influence should be undermined, was not of a mind to refrain from extorting all he could by way of taxation, or from resuming his slave traffic. Eldred and Stoddart, whose abrasive temper was usually at flash point, made the mistake of complaining to Kamran about his Wuzeer's conduct. Colvin's eventual comment—from the security of Hindustan—was that the two British officers behaved as senselessly as the Russian enemy could hope. Pottinger, he thought, had 'endeavoured to make a Utopia of justice and forbearance among these rude and hungry Afghans, fresh as they are from a prolonged and desperate contest'.²

It is quite likely that Eldred was too impetuous. An older man.

his uncle Henry for example, would have been more chary about confronting iniquity head-on. In any event Kamran was far too weak a ruler to go against Yar Mahomed, and after publicly humiliating the two officers he sent them a peremptory order to leave the city. Eldred went straight to Yar Mahomed. 'I told him that as he had quarrelled with me, not with the State, he had better throw himself on the clemency of the Governor-General, and neither fight nor rejoin with Persia, either of which courses must ensure him and his family inevitable ruin'.³ Auckland, with but scant consideration for Eldred, later seized on this and let it be known that he regarded the dispute as a personal one which he did not expect to have any permanent ill-results.

On 5th November Stoddart left Herat. He was under orders to proceed on a mission to Bokhara, where he was to meet with torture, degradation, and finally his death along with his would-be rescuer Arthur Conolly. Eldred, who rode out to speed his friend on his journey, returned to receive a half-hearted apology from Yar Mahomed. There were disquieting whispers that the Kandahar chiefs, paid by the Russians, were moving on Herat, but there were also bazaar tales about the assembly of a large British army at Ferozepore. On 20th November he wrote to Macnaghten, reporting rumours and the intractable behaviour of the Wuzeer and concluding that he could see no way in which he could remain at his post.⁴ But, before he could leave, a letter arrived from Macnaghten enclosing a cordial greeting from Auckland to Kamran, assuring him of British friendship, and enjoining him to speak friendly to his 'true friend Lieutenant Pottinger'. Macnaghten's letter also said he was to consider himself attached to the Kabul mission from 1st October. He was to cultivate good relations with Kamran, and should money be required he could draw on Burnes for up to a lakh of rupees. Burnes was still at Shikarpur, and it was some time before Eldred heard from him.

Burnes, though he had in the past quarrelled repeatedly with Henry Pottinger, did appreciate Eldred's difficulties. In December he wrote to Hobhouse saying he had transmitted the lakh of rupees and advised Eldred to draw on him for what he needed to repair the Herat walls and relieve the suffering inhabitants.⁵ Burnes had some experience of the problems facing officers on solitary mission.

Eldred observed a nominal truce with Yar Mahomed while he

busied himself with restoring trade and such humane activities as organising a soup kitchen to feed the poorest. By the turn of the year he could count on some success. Yar Mahomed, keeping a wary eye on the British presence, refrained from the most blatant extortion, and the local economy was improving. But this precarious amity could not last. Eldred was enraged to discover that slaving had been restarted. Then to his annoyance a letter came from Macnaghten confirming his appointment at Herat, and ordering him to avoid giving offence and to practice the strictest economy. Macnaghten conveniently ignored the inherent conflict in this injunction. He must have been aware that Eldred's acceptability depended on how much he disbursed. When he wrote his formal report two years later Eldred revealed something of his own feelings about the Envoy. 'As an agent I could not keep on the jostling, shouldering and retaliatory system by which men of rank hold their own in Afghanistan'.⁶

On 12th January a package of domestic letters arrived belatedly to cheer him up. One, dated 3rd August from his brother John, back in Ireland on sick leave, had some light-hearted advice. 'Make up your mind not to marry under fifty thousand pounds! The women here make desperate love to me, but when they find I am not heir apparent (query, to what?) it is amusing to see how soon their ardour cools. I am really not joking, though, when I hope to see you some day spliced to a fortune'.

John also returned to a familiar topic. Their father had given up his interest in the Kilmore property, 'and, such as it is, it will come to you unencumbered, which is more than I expected. For what my grandfather began my father has finished; and you are the sufferer! But careless as he has been of your interests and his own, he loves you, Eldred, better than you think; and has, even at the eleventh hour, done all in his power to retrieve his former extravagance'.

Another from Uncle Henry dealt with the same subject. 'Save every rupee you can to buy an estate and reestablish yourself as Head of the Family On one point I must warn you. That is not to advance a rupee to your father, or any of your relations I am determined you shall *save money*. 'Them's my sentiments''.⁸ This was one occasion when he did not follow his uncle's advice. For the rest of his life he was concerned to send regular remittances to his stepmother.

But January brought renewed friction. Eldred had felt compelled to undertake to pay Yar Mahomed's men in return for stopping their slave traffic, and there was a furious row at the end of the month over the payments. Eldred's servants were abused; for a time he was in practice confined to his miserable quarters; and he was under constant supervision. The subsidy used to bribe Yar Mahomed was ever more expensive, and with Macnaghten's exhortation to economy the management of his official accounts was impossible. In February came the distressing news of Stoddart's imprisonment at Bokhara. Eldred wrote to the Bokhara Wuzer and sent authority to provide his colleague with funds, but there was nothing he could do that would be effective. On 12th March he was dismayed to get a reproof from Macnaghten which still enclosed friendly messages to Kamran and Yar Mahomed. Eldred was stung to send an indignant reply, pointing out that he was obliged to make as public as possible his 'disapproval and disallowance of Yar Mahomed's acts, for the sake of preserving our reputation for good faith'.

His flagging spirits were slightly restored by a letter from his brother Tom, an eager young officer in the 54th Native Infantry who was pressing for permission to join the Army of the Indus. There was the usual anxiety about their father's improvidence. 'John mentions that my father entertains some wild scheme of coming to Bombay as agent for the Asphalt Association, which is some damned speculation for covering roads with asphalt, etc'. We have already seen (Chapter I) that Eldred helped to dissuade his father from this adventure. Tom's advice was also very like Uncle Henry's. 'Save all cash you can and get back, if possible, the 'dirty acres'; as in these days family honour, or anything else, is a mere name without money; and at home, were you another Sir Isaak Newton, or a Napoleon, without cash you would be looked on as inferior to a grocer with money. So save what you can and buy back the estates. Above all do not be fool enough to marry!'⁹ The concern about Eldred's marriage plans looks strange in retrospect. There were no likely spouses in Herat, and neither then nor at any other time, so far as can be gleaned from his letters, did he have the inclination to marry. A letter from another uncle, William, a Major in Bombay, still condescended on the same topic. 'The chief beauties here are Miss Voyle, a great pet of Mrs Pottinger's, and a Miss Hewitt, whom Ensign

Montague saved from destruction last evening when her horse ran away with her. They are both little angels; I wish you had either of them (lawfully of course) to solace you at Herat'.¹⁰ Eldred's reaction to this teasing is not recorded.

Macnaghten's next letter, written en route for Kandahar with Cotton, was not calculated to improve Eldred's temper, struggling as he was with a fever which gave him periods of delirium. Macnaghten was displeased at what he called the fresh misunderstanding between Eldred and the Herat rulers; and that he was 'interfering too minutely in the domestic affairs of the Herat Government'.¹¹ Eldred was too ill to reply.

While the British army was reequipping at Kandahar, Macnaghten learned of the Governor-General's 'deep concern' at the continued lack of harmony with Shah Kamran.¹² During the unopposed advance of Keane's force it did appear that Herat was the one place where the strategy was not succeeding. Macnaghten felt that Auckland's view coincided with his own. A senior political officer who could report impartially must be despatched. Burnes was first offered the job, but saw at once the hazards involved and made his reluctance known. In a letter to his brother he confided 'Young Pottinger allowed himself to be apologised to for threatening to murder him The wretches have again quarreled with Pottinger, and cut off a hand of one of his servants; but this also is for the present made up, and Major Todd starts tomorrow for Herat, and I predict can do nothing, for nothing is to be done with them. Kamran is an imbecile, and the Minister, Yar Mahomed, is a bold but doubtful man'.¹³

The choice had in fact fallen on D'Arcy Todd. He had good qualifications. From his service under McNeill at Teheran he knew something of the Persian mentality; he had visited Herat during the siege; and he had made a good impression on Auckland when he carried despatches to Simla. The naive proposal was that Todd should negotiate a treaty that would guarantee the independence of the Herat state, stipulating at the same time that slave-trading would be abolished and the Heratis would not correspond with foreign powers without British consent. It says more for Macnaghten's credulity than his common sense that he imagined that Yar Mahomed would honour a concordat in these terms. Eldred's letter of 4th May, again denouncing the Wuzeer's rapacity, only served to confirm Macnaghten in his opinion that he was right to

send a special mission.¹⁴ It was not explicitly charged with superseding Eldred, but there seems no doubt that, as Durand recorded, Macnaghten could not conceal his 'dissatisfaction with Pottinger's activities', and determined to replace him.¹⁵ But it was done very furtively. The Heratis were due to send a deputation to make their obeisance to Soojah at Kandahar, and this was eventually done, but Eldred had urged that no decision for the future should be taken till he could talk to Macnaghten. In reply he received a copy of the treaty which the Envoy had hastily agreed on the spot with the Heratis, together with a note that Todd would be bringing it to the city for ratification. Eldred was a junior officer, but he was entitled to feel that he had been shabbily treated. He applied for leave of absence, intending to give up his appointment.

On 25th June Todd set out from Kandahar. He had with him two of the most promising young officers in the Army, James Abbott and Richmond Shakespear, who were to act as political assistants, and the surgeon James Login. Exactly a month later they made a formal entry into Herat, to be received with all Yar Mahomed's treacherous flattery. Though Eldred's natural reserve had been accentuated by his long months without European companionship, he got on well with the mission, particularly Todd, whom he knew, and Login who soon became a close friend. Login later wrote a shrewd comment. 'Pottinger was as remarkable for his candour in making known his mistakes as for his modesty in alluding to his services. Although he had faithfully reported to Government that he had kicked Yar Mahomed's brother out of his house for giving him the lie (which led Lord Auckland to declare him unfit to be our representative at Herat), he had said nothing at all of his conduct in driving back the Persians at the last assault, when the city was almost in their hands Pottinger was one of those men who do not shine on paper, and who should never be asked to give a reason for their acts'.¹⁶

The congenial company of his colleagues, and their appreciation of the humane work he had carried out under duress, gave Eldred second thoughts about resigning his appointment. He was encouraged by the enthusiasm with which Login not only cared for the sick but also tried other experiments, such as reviving the

once-famous manufacture of Herat carpets. A month later he agreed that while Todd remained to act for him he would take the treaty, now bearing the dubious Herati signatures, back to Kabul and apply for leave. He took with him Hoosain, his companion of many months, an escort provided by Todd, and a detachment of Herati horsemen.

He did not hurry to Kabul, no doubt revelling in his unaccustomed freedom, and on his arrival at the beginning of November he found that Macnaghten had left to accompany Soojah to his winter quarters at Jalalabad. Before he left, Macnaghten had taken steps to end Eldred's appointment, still nominally effective, as Political Agent. He had been embarrassed to learn from a recent minute that Auckland was now inclined to look at Eldred's activities in a more favourable light. 'I would not disturb Lieutenant Pottinger at Herat. His name is attached to the establishment of British influence in that city. He has had a most difficult task to execute; and I would suspend all opinion on his instructions till I have had a report of the result of the Mission of Major Todd'. (Auckland also wrote to Hobhouse that Eldred deserved credit for the way he had coped with Kamran and Yar Mahomed, and admitted the difficulty of fixing relations 'with a government so loose and suspicious as that of Herat'.)¹⁷ But Macnaghten was not to be deflected. On 10th October he wrote to Torrens that he thought it 'proper and expedient to relieve Lieutenant Pottinger'. He was at pains not 'in any way to disparage so able and zealous an officer'. It would have been tactless to do so in view of Auckland's minute, but he argued that Eldred 'had made many powerful enemies, whose influence would obstruct the success of any negotiations conducted through him', and ended with the hope that other employment could be found for him.¹⁸ In replacing Eldred by Todd, Macnaghten though he did not know it, had done the former a good turn.

Looking ahead, Todd's time at Herat can be disposed of briefly. In October, 1839 he wrote to his brother, 'I received my present appointment under very flattering circumstances As yet I have succeeded in the object of my mission, which was to report on the state of affairs here, and to conclude a treaty of friendship with Shah Kamran; but the maze of politics here is very intricate'.¹⁹ A month later he was told that he was to

be stationed permanently at Herat, and that some other situation would be found for Pottinger. Todd, for his part, concluded that he was 'a very fortunate fellow'.

At first, things appeared to go well. 'All is quiet here', he wrote on 1st April 1840, 'We are on the best possible terms with the authorities of the place, and I believe that Yar Mahomed, who is the de facto ruler of the country, is beginning to understand that honesty is the best policy'.²⁰ Todd, a romantic character with a taste for literature and a keener sensibility than Eldred, was soon disillusioned. While the Wuzeer took every opportunity to present specious schemes as a pretext to acquire more British rupees, his intrigues with the Persians went on. But Macnaghten was insistent that this most doubtful alliance must be retained, and Auckland was ready to turn a blind eye to some of the Heratis' disreputable activities. In time, however, the Governor-General felt that these were more than could be condoned, and in September, 1840 Macnaghten was told that no more money was to be spent on Herat. Yar Mahomed was encouraging discontent among the Douranee tribes as well as sending emissaries to Teheran, and on 1st February, 1841 Todd suspended payments to the Wuzeer. There had long been a tentative plan to admit a detachment of troops under British officers into Herat. Yar Mahomed now said he would agree in return for an immediate payment and a larger monthly subsidy, but he would not give the assurances Todd sought, and the request was refused. Yar Mahomed declared that if the money was not forthcoming the British must go, and Shah Kamran professed concern about their safety. Todd saw that nothing would be achieved by remaining at risk, and on 9th February he closed the Mission and left Herat.

Yar Mahomed was, for once, somewhat put out. The prospect of the subsidy being renewed had disappeared, and with typical mendacity he addressed a long letter of self-justification to Todd. 'Thou departest, and my assembly was broken up! My assembly and my heart were alike broken up by thee. O brother of my soul, my heart is torn in pieces by separation from you So long as I live I am your brother and your servant'.²¹

Todd did not expect to be criticised for his withdrawal. He thought that the next step would be an expedition against Herat, and that he would again be the political Agent. But the reaction was very different, and he was more summarily treated than

Eldred had been. A formal minute from the Governor-General's Secretary recorded that 'His Lordship in Council has read the account of Major Todd's proceedings with extreme surprise, concern, and disapprobation. They are directly at variance with all the orders received by him. They are inconsistent with the most obvious dictates of sense and prudence and they may involve his government in the most unexpected and serious embarrassments . . .' Todd appealed; he submitted a Memorial on his activities; he had an interview with Auckland; but he got no satisfaction. He received no further political employment. Instead, he returned to his regiment and was killed in action on 21st December, 1845, during the Sikh War.

It was the frequent lot of Political Officers to be thrown into remote stations, confronted by suspicious chiefs and semi-hostile tribes, with little to rely on but their own sense of what was proper and expedient. Seldom, however, can anyone have met more intractable or treacherous enemies than Todd and Eldred found at Herat. The orders they were given were incapable of execution. They were to nourish the friendship of the Herat rulers; they were to apply subventions, in effect bribes; but they were to safeguard the public purse. They were to guide the Heratis' relations with other tribes, and to restrain any approach to the Persians—the real concern about Herat; but they were not to interfere. Auckland and Macnaghten had other things to worry about, but in their treatment of these two zealous officers they lacked perception.

Eldred did not linger in Kabul. It was essential to traverse the mountain passes before snow fell, and he set off by the route through Khoord-Kabul, Tezeen, Jugdulluk and Gandamack that was soon to earn a tragic notoriety. In the Neemla valley he caught up with Soojah and Macnaghten on their way to Jalalabad. Though warmly received, he was ill at ease with the formal etiquette observed at the Envoy's headquarters. George Lawrence, the dashing cavalryman newly appointed to be Macnaghten's Military Assistant, dismissed him in rather supercilious terms. 'He seems an active intelligent fellow, but not very bright He dresses entirely as an Afghan; and hasn't a morsel of European clothing, except three shirts, made for him with great difficulty by an old lady at Herat!'

The interview with the Envoy was bound to be difficult.

Macnaghten, the polished Oriental scholar, was not a dishonest man, but Eldred's bald account of Yar Mahomed's ineradicable duplicity was not what he wanted to hear. There was no doubt that Eldred spoke from conviction, but Macnaghten's facile optimism, which coloured all his approach to the Afghan scene, prevented him from giving the report the weight it deserved. Macnaghten assured him that the Governor-General would want to hear from him in person, but as he departed Eldred was conscious of the antipathy between them. There is no record of Macnaghten telling him, in terms, that his first political appointment was at an end, but Eldred must have been aware that he did not enjoy the Envoy's confidence.

He continued his journey south, still with his faithful friend Hoosain, through Ferozepore to Kurnal. There he passed a few agreeable days with brother Tom, now acting-adjutant but eager for service in Afghanistan. It was not till January that he reached the Governor-General's camp at Gwalior where His Excellency was engaged on a winter inspection of stations in Central India. Auckland greeted him with obvious marks of esteem and invited him to dine. The story, which if true reflects adversely on the vigilance of Auckland's A.D.C.s, is that Eldred, still in Afghan dress, made his diffident way to the great crimson-lined dining tent and stood leaning uneasily against a tent-pole. Officers in full mess kit glanced inquisitively at the intruder. There were murmurs that his impertinence should be rewarded with summary ejection when Auckland and his sisters Fanny and Emily made their entrance. Auckland at once brought Eldred forward and introduced him as 'the hero of Herat'. Emily to her credit curtsied to him, and the amazed company broke into cheers as he took his place at table between the Governor-General and his sister.

Auckland's personal kindness, and there is no reason to suspect it was not genuine, was, however, only a palliative to Eldred. It did not make up for his disappointment that his mission to Herat, after the siege, was regarded as a failure. Nor was he enthusiastic about being sent to Calcutta in order to prepare at leisure a geographical and political memoir of his journeys in Afghanistan and his time at Kamran's capital. (It is not clear when he withdrew his application for home leave.) But there was a fillip early in 1840 when he was promoted to Brevet

Major and appointed a Companion of the Bath. No one could say that his advancement was not earned. For the next year he applied himself to unfamiliar, and uncongenial, office duties. He found little compensation in the Calcutta social round. Hostesses were taken aback by his occlusive reticence, and when his curiosity value had diminished he was seldom seen at their soirées. This was surely the time when Eldred might have found a wife, but instead he seems to have taken his brother's advice about the financial consequences of marriage to heart, and it must be admitted that his interest in the opposite sex was confined to the affection for his sisters, especially Harriet, shown in his letters. Promoted, decorated, eminently eligible but still celibate, he was far from popular with the Calcutta match-makers. It is significant that Maud Diver, who wrote two long novels about Eldred, could not, despite her voluminous and accurate research, make him out to be a romantic hero. Like Alfred de Vigny, he might have said 'I could never bring myself to parade in peacock's feathers; beautiful though they may be, each one of us, I think, should prefer to wear his own'.²³

News from North of the Indus filtered back slowly to Calcutta, and it gave Eldred only rueful satisfaction to learn of Todd's troubles. When he ingenuously offered to go back to Herat he was snubbed for his pains. He later wrote to his mother about the report that Todd had given up his mission, 'We are now virtually at war with Herat. I pointed in 1839 to these very results if certain things were not done. I was disregarded . . . indeed a few months ago when I considered it my duty to caution Government I was told it was none of my business'.²⁴ To Harriet he wrote that Macnaghten had prevented his return to Herat. But at last, when he was becoming a bit of a bore about his treatment, came the signal he had been so eagerly awaiting. His letter to his mother was in a new vein. 'I have just been appointed to take charge of the Turkestan frontier . . . The appointment has the same salary as I had before, but it is one requiring much larger expenditure, and I think holds forth a chance of some service. I, however, at present know very little regarding its duties'.²⁵

An assignment even more dangerous and spectacular than Herat lay ahead. There was only one cloud on the horizon. He would again be subject to Macnaghten's orders.

CHAPTER VIII

Miraculous Tranquillity

At the end of May, 1841 Eldred came within sight of Kabul, first the black rocky heights of the Seeah Sung range, then the skyline broken by the grey silhouette of the Bala Hissar, the citadel brooding over the capital where Soojah now held court (plate 10). As he rode in, he reflected on the changes in his fortunes over the four years since he had first crept into the city in Afghan disguise. Then he was on a clandestine personal mission, and his *poshteen* smelled of smoke, sweat and rancid oil. Now he wore the sun helmet and travelling uniform appropriate to a Political Agent. He would have preferred to travel light, but he had to take twelve servants, about twenty camp-followers whom he described as out-of-doors hangers on, and twenty six camels to carry the equipage. It was, he thought, far too numerous a contingent, but, as he wrote to his mother, he could not appear respectable with fewer.¹ He was not comfortable in the hierarchy.

During his brief stay in Kabul in November, 1839 on his way back from Herat, he had noticed signs that the British were taking root. Eighteen months later he found that all the totems of garrison life had been given their customary place of honour. Pennants fluttered at regimental race meetings. Major Daly of the 4th Light Cavalry won a valuable sword given as a prize by Shah Soojah.² A cricket pitch had been rolled and the Afghans gaped with wonder at the players' weird postures—as they had done earlier in the year at the sight of officers skating on the frozen lake. Dennie describes them 'wrapped in furs which lords and ladies would have envied at home', and equipped with 'skates made by our armourer after a pattern of one of our ingenious mechanics'.³ Now in the early summer sails fluttered on two boats skimming over the lake. Built to the design of Lieutenant Sinclair of the 13th Light Infantry (a Caithness man from Thurso), they were the first that the Afghans had seen. The natives were allowed to share in some of these sporting activities:



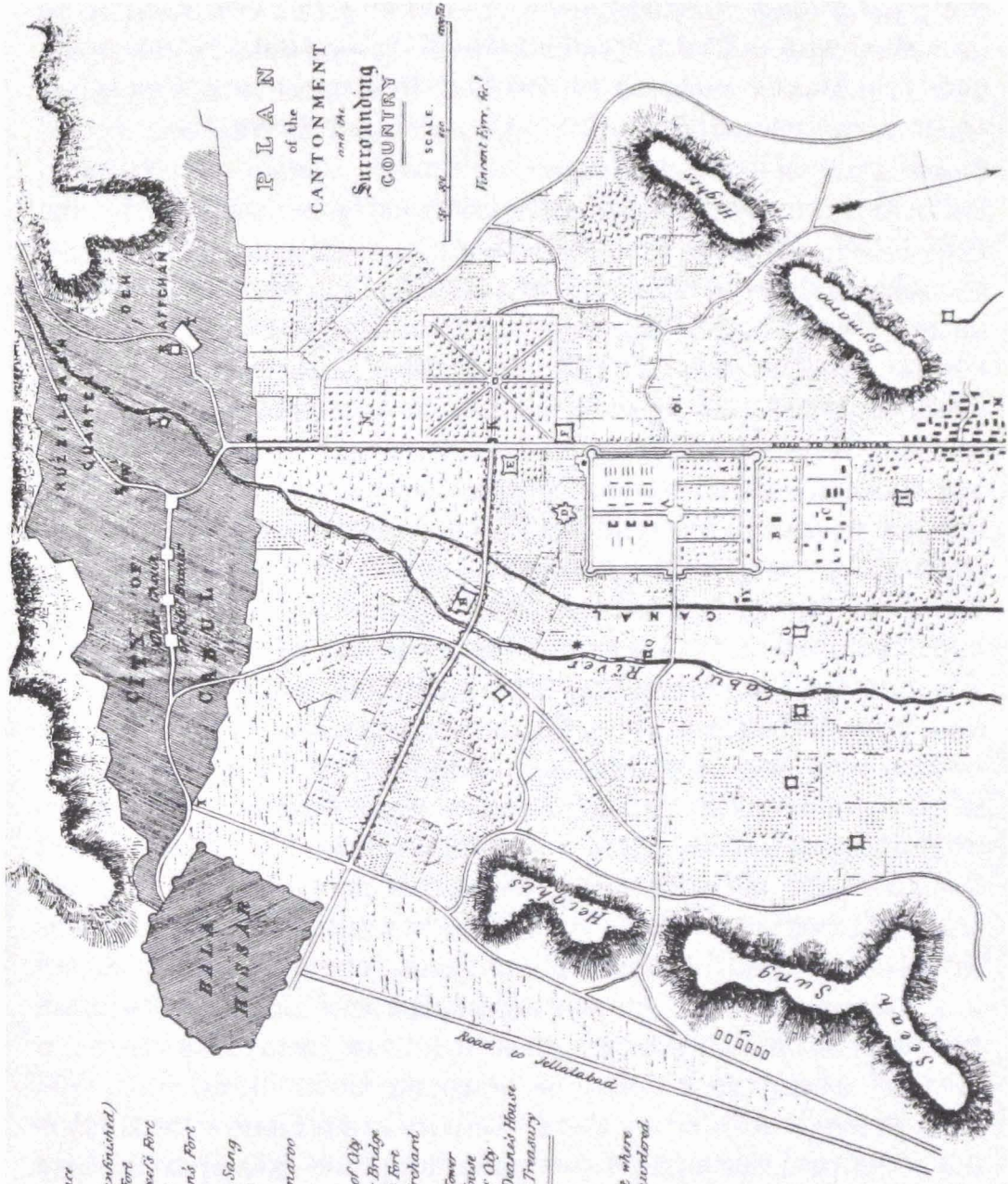
Plate 10. Kabul and the Bala Hissar

they entered their horses for the races and staged their own cockfighting and wrestling matches. But this was not mere recreation or an exercise in good public relations. The gymkhana, organised with all the precision practiced in Indian stations, had a near-religious significance. It was the symbol of invincible power, of superiority assumed without regard to the tribesmen's resentment at the infidel presence.

Apart from these strenuous male pursuits, a formal social round had started when a convoy of wives and families was brought up from India, and the pecking order was soon established. On the top perch sat Lady Macnaghten, preening herself with her jewellery, silk shawls and cats. Next in eminence was the egregious Florentia, the consort of Sir Robert Sale. Handsome rather than beautiful, with a frank open countenance, Lady Sale had a sharp turn of phrase, quick to add an ironic touch. Few aspects of regimental life escaped her, and junior officers in particular scurried to retain her favour. With her was her daughter, Emily, about to be married to Lieutenant Sturt, the Engineer who succeeded Durand in charge of public works. These ladies, and the wives of other officers, were later to show qualities of unbelievable courage and endurance, but meanwhile their appearance in Kabul, with all their baggage and paraphernalia, was watched by the Afghans with some apprehension. They had evidently come to stay. The *feringhees* were not contemplating an early departure.

Eldred paid his respects in the Mission drawing room, but he did not make any immediate impression on Lady Macnaghten and her *zenana*. He was impatient of etiquette. He had not been interested in acquiring more than a veneer of social grace, and he was not an obvious recruit for her ladyship's amateur theatricals. (His nephew Brabazon was later much addicted to this anti-social pursuit.) Besides, Eldred was only one of her husband's assistants, passing through on his way to an outstation. Before long he was to share many dreadful hazards with these ladies, and eventually to accomplish their rescue from captivity, but Lady Sale's diary is more often critical than appreciative of him. There was never any great warmth in their relationship. Though Eldred was polite, he did not essay gallantry.

He was not attracted by the elegance of the salon, but he was



PLAN
of the
CANTONMENT
and the
Surrounding
COUNTRY

SCALE.
1/4 MILE
1/2 MILE

Envoys' House, No. 1

- A. Cantonment
- B. Mission Residence
- C. Dc Offices
- D. Magazine Fort (unbarricaded)
- E. Commissariat Fort
- F. Mahomed Sherer's Fort
- G. Rikhabshah Fort
- H. Mahomed Khan's Fort
- I. Lookout Fort
- J. Camp at Saah Sang
- K. King's Garden
- L. Masjid
- M. Village of Begmatro
- N. Private Garden
- O. Bazaar
- P. Kohistan Gate of City
- Q. Empty Fort near Bridge
- R. Bing Augustin's Fort
- S. Magazine in Orchard
- T. Sikoo Khan's
- V. Capt. Travers' Tower
- W. Sir A. Burnes's House
- X. Lahore Gate of City
- Y. Ruins of Very Dear's House
- Z. Capt. Johnson's Treasury

* Denotes the spot where the Envoy was murdered.

Plan 1.

appalled by the disposition of the cantonment (plan 1) that surrounded it. No great professional expertise was needed to see that the British lines were in the wrong place. Despite the wealth of documentation it is not certain who was responsible for the siting. The first idea, supported by Burnes, had been to occupy three small forts several miles from Kabul, but this was rejected on Durand's advice. Then there were attempts, including a scheme to lodge native troops in the Shah's stables, to retain a foothold in the Bala Hissar. But the Shah found a variety of specious objections, and Macnaghten weakly agreed to move the entire British force outside the citadel. The final choice was probably made by Cotton. When Brigadier Roberts, who commanded Soojah's contingent, saw the barrack layout, an unimaginative replica of the long rows of buildings at Cawnpore and Meerut, he said it was most objectionable and pressed for radical alterations. But he was succinctly informed by Captain Douglas, the Assistant Adjutant General, that Cotton had approved the plan.⁴ Vincent Eyre, the gunner subaltern charged with preparing the defences, later observed in a masterly understatement that the credit for selecting the site or building the cantonment was 'not distinction now likely to be claimed by anyone'.⁵ Eyre added his wonder that officers with even a smattering of experience in the field should, in a half-conquered country, have placed their forces in so extraordinary and injudicious a military position.

Although it was widely recognised that the Bala Hissar was the only suitable place from which to control the city and the surrounding countryside, the site finally chosen was a piece of low, swampy ground, about a mile and a half along the Kohistan road and commanded on all sides by hills or forts. This was not a hostage to fortune; it was, as events proved, a sacrifice. The cantonment, bounded by a low rampart and a narrow ditch, took the form of a rectangle 1,000 yards long and 600 broad. There were bastions at each corner, but they too were under direct observation. At the north end of this unimpressive work stood the 'Mission Compound', nearly half as large as the main enclosure and surrounded by no more than a simple wall. The Compound housed the Envoy's residence, together with a haphazard clutch of buildings occupied by his staff and bodyguard. The lines were much too extended; the walls could not be properly manned by the troops available; and the very existence of the Compound

made the whole cantonment 'nugatory for purposes of defence'.⁵ Brigadier Shelton said it was protected by a rampart and a ditch an Afghan could run over with the facility of a cat. Augustus Abbott noted that Captain Younghusband of the 35th Native Infantry, a heavy man, won a bet of two gold *mohurs* by riding his pony across the parapet, without much difficulty.⁶

Apart from these defects in construction, the surrounding terrain could not have been more inviting to a potential attacker. To the East, parallel with the Kohistan road lay the bed of the Kabul river and a wide canal about 150 yards from the rampart—both splendid hiding-places for enfiladers. General Elphinstone, who took over command from Cotton, was horrified at the cantonment's obvious vulnerability. He offered to purchase at his own expense the land in the immediate vicinity in order to raze the enclosures and gardens which would afford cover to the enemy. But nothing was done. No better fate met the proposal, canvassed by both Elphinstone and Macnaghten, to build a small citadel in the cantonment, where guns and equipment could be placed in safety. Calcutta would not sanction the estimated cost of £2,400. Official parsimony was to have tragic consequences. The arms and ammunition were left in the open. Just as incredibly, the commissariat stores were lodged in an old fort detached from the main cantonment. Captain Skinner, the chief commissariat officer, protested at the time that the stores must be within the rampart, but received the unhelpful reply that 'no such place could be given him, as they were far too busy in erecting barracks for the men'.⁷ Even Macnaghten was moved to protest against this lunacy, but he met with no response.

To complete the mournful story, across the road Mahmood Shereef's fort looked straight into the south west bastion. Attached to the fort, the Shah Bagh, or Shah's Garden, surrounded by a high wall provided admirable shelter for an enemy. The commissariat fort stood innocently opposite the entrance to the Shah Bagh. There were various forts, not occupied by the British, at different points, and only slightly further away were two ranges of hills—Seeah Sung to the East, and the Beymaroo ridge to the West. Those with memories of service at Cassino or Anzio in the last war do not need to be reminded of the crippling effect on morale of being perpetually under hostile observation. Eyre's conclusion was that the Kabul cantonment 'whether we

look at its situation or its construction, must ever be spoken of as a disgrace to our military skill and judgment'.⁸ Strong words, but it would be hard to find any argument to exculpate those responsible.

A cursory march round the lines was enough to convince Eldred that this was a crass piece of folly, a folly whose effects he was before long to experience in person. For the time being he found other grounds for disquiet. His first conversations were no doubt with his brother Tom, whose regiment had at last been posted to Kabul, and with his friends Todd and Login whose return to India had been delayed by reports of disturbances in the Punjab. They compared notes about their misfortunes at Herat. Todd explained ruefully how he thought he had called Yar Mahomed's bluff by asking him to allow his son to proceed to Girishk to conduct the British force, which he pretended to welcome, to Herat. Todd also expressed his amazement at the continuing indulgence to the Herati Wuzeer. This was, however, only one of their misgivings about the Envoy's policy.

Young officers, even those who have been hardened in a cruel cauldron as Eldred and Todd had been, are not normally preoccupied with tiresome strategic matters. Eldred heard indignant comments on the lack of claret and the price of cheroots. The camel loads brought up with the advancing army had long been exhausted. Replacements could be bought, but prices had spiralled. There was also a shortage of 'perfumes, Windsor soap and eau-de-cologne', luxuries relished the more in uncivilised surroundings. But other exotic goods could be bought in the bazaar, and 'in the shops', wrote Dennie 'which were tastefully laid out, were disposed large blocks of ice and pails of snow, to cool the sherbet and lemonade all indulged in'.⁹ For those who were bored with the socialising of the cantonment there was ready access to the local beauties. Afghan ladies were available for dalliance—especially in the houses in the city where British officers occupied the former homes of displaced chiefs. It was easy to find partners whose appetite had been whetted by the glamour of the British uniform and the affection of Afghan men for those of their own sex. In one instance the liaison became serious when Captain Warburton of the Bengal Artillery married the niece of Dost Mahomed, with Burnes and Macnaghten as witnesses at the ceremony. (Mrs Warburton later had great

difficulty in escaping the wrath of Akbar Khan, but her son became Sir Robert Warburton, a name feared among the Afri-dis.) Even Sepoys were allowed to bring their wives and camp-followers, but British other ranks had to be content with the Kabul brothels. Sexual *mores*, however, were not the main subject of discussion, for there was a much more worrying issue. Many of those who formed the garrison or the embassy wondered why they were still in Afghanistan.

This was not a simple question to answer. There had appeared to be good political and military reasons for the British to leave many months before, probably as early as the autumn of 1839. Soojah had by then been restored to his dominions. True, he had been received by the inhabitants with little more than restrained curiosity, but he was there, and the declared object of the expedition, namely to replace a hostile chief by a sovereign friendly to British interests, and popular with his former subjects, had on the face of it been achieved. Auckland's Simla Manifesto had promised that the British army would be withdrawn when Soojah was 'secured in power and the independence and integrity of Afghanistan had been established'.¹⁰ The undertaking was qualified, but this was the time for decision. On one alternative, the Army of the Indus could withdraw with a victorious reputation, leaving Soojah, fortified by his mercenaries, to rule without the obloquy of being seen to rely on the armed might of the invaders. On the other, if the Shah was not to be trusted to retain his throne by himself—and this made nonsense of the original proposition—Auckland could argue that the commitment extended to securing both the Shah's power and the country's independence, and for the time being the British should stay.

There was much to be said for the first course. The Shah's military prowess was doubtful, but he had proved that, if nothing else, he was a survivor. He now had the reins of power in his hands and if he was clever he could play the petty ambitions of the chiefs off, one against the other. The winter, which made large rebellion unlikely, was at hand to give him time to consolidate. But Macnaghten, despite his professed confidence in Soojah, may have doubted whether he could survive on his own. Dost Mahomed had been expelled, but he was still at large. Auckland, supported by all informed opinion, was still apprehensive about the Russian menace which might take the form of a renewed

attack on Herat. Auckland also had another consideration at the back of his mind. Writing to Fane he had defended Palmerston's, and McNeill's, doctrine that interference could be justified in self-defence.¹¹ This led to the commercial argument. The Indus was to be the route for the carriage of British goods to Central Asia, and this in turn meant that there must be a friendly government west of the river. Macnaghten for his part believed that to remain in Afghanistan would be consonant with Auckland's inner motives, and he framed his despatches accordingly. It is relevant that in May and June, 1839 Auckland was already discussing with Macnaghten the possibility of having to retain troops in Afghanistan. In November he told Hobhouse that if commerce with Afghanistan was to be developed they must for a time support Soojah, but he shared the anxiety that British troops should be withdrawn. A year later the same theme recurs in his briefing of Elphinstone. 'Though I am impatient gradually to withdraw our regular troops from that country, I feel that, before we can do so, the new dynasty must be more strongly confirmed, than it yet has been, in power, and that there must be better security than is yet established against menace or aggression from the extreme north or West'.¹²

The decision to retain a British presence in Afghanistan ignored the manifold difficulties involved. Forces greater than the Government—looking uneasily at the Punjab—could afford, were needed. The lines of communication were fragile. Troops and essential supplies had to be conveyed across intervening states whose loyalty was suspect, and through defiles impassable in winter and beset with tribes whose only instinct was to plunder. Burnes was not the only one who thought that, whatever the political advantages, 'the man who recommends the cantonment of a British or an Indian soldier west of the Indus is an enemy of his country'.

It may well be asked, and the Kabul garrison certainly enquired, how these weighty military objections were discounted. The explanation lies in the division of powers between the Governor-General and the Commander-in-Chief. Sir Henry Fane, and his successor as C-in-C Sir Jasper Nicolls, would be entitled to express a forceful view on defence aspects and on the allocation of troops, but it was the Governor-General who in effect planned the operation, and as the campaign developed he

depended for its execution on the advice of the Envoy. This dichotomy did not make for harmonious administration. Macnaghten had been at odds with Cotton on the march. At Kabul he was often in dispute with his senior officers. For example, Brigadier Roberts, who had criticised the cantonment, was sarcastic about Macnaghten's policy of dispersing British forces in small packets. When Roberts' views seemed to be finding endorsement in Calcutta Macnaghten was furious. He was not, he alleged, receiving the support he might expect, and following his complaints Roberts was replaced by the more pliable Anquetil. Nott, the blunt commander at Kandahar, had no time for the 'unthinking and inexperienced people' who made up the political staff, or for the Envoy. 'The system of government in this country' he wrote 'is, and has always been wrong, *very* wrong, and never will be right until Macnaghten is withdrawn It would take many years to *undo* what that man Macnaghten has done. How could Lord Auckland allow such a man to remain in authority here, bringing into contempt everything connected with the name of Englishmen? It is horrible!'¹³ Nott had earlier declined to pay a courtesy call on Soojah when the Shah's progress halted at Kandahar. Macnaghten took this as a personal slight and insisted on a formal complaint to the Governor-General about Nott's 'outrage'.

Some suspension of disbelief is needed to comprehend affairs of Afghanistan in the two years that followed the British occupation of Kabul in August, 1839. When Nicolls heard that Kabul had been taken he noted in his journal 'We may fairly say that the game is over. Consolidating and regulating this new monarch's power must now be for Macnaghten's care'.¹⁴ But the concept of stable government in Afghanistan, in the sense that Macnaghten claimed to be pursuing it, was from the start an illusion. It is doubtful how far Auckland, however fully possessed of the strategic imperatives, really appreciated that allegiance to the throne of Kabul existed only when its occupant was strong enough to dominate the fractious tribal chiefs. It was soon apparent that this was beyond Soojah's capacity. From the fastness of Kandahar Nott inveighed monotonously that nothing would make the Afghans submit to the hated Shah 'who is certainly as great a scoundrel as ever lived'.¹⁵

Soojah's reliance on an occupying army of infidels was not

likely to endear him to a fiercely independent people, and the policy on which Macnaghten embarked ensured that his tenure of the throne could never be acceptable. Soojah's predecessors had survived by the simple precept of divide and rule. They manipulated the chiefs' feuds to make certain that their own power was unassailed. It was a system of management. So long as the Afghan nobles' cupidity was assuaged their loyalty would last. Dost Mahomed kept his position by combining adroitness with intermittent daring. Soojah had either to carry on conciliating and managing the chiefs, or attempt to contain and erode their influence. Macnaghten steered towards the latter course. He tried to raise levies of Afridis, Kohistanis, and Jezailchis, etc. The theory was that, paid from the royal coffers and supervised by British officers, their loyalty would be to the Shah, but this measure by itself did much to alienate the chiefs who readily saw how it would undermine their own authority. They discouraged recruitment. The levies had no scruple about deserting when it seemed expedient.

Civil administration at the Shah's court consisted of applying retribution when the law was broken, awarding office to those in favour, and collecting revenue. Here too the activities of Soojah and Macnaghten fomented discontent. The Shah ignored the claims of the leading nobles and gave lucrative posts to those who had followed him into exile at Ludhiana. Macnaghten did not dissent when the aged Moolah Shikore, whose ears had been lopped and whose memory had gone, was made Minister of State and allowed to prosecute venality on a scale remarkable even by local standards.¹⁶ The collection of revenue was left to the Shah's minions and the tax gatherers proved over-zealous and oppressive. There was an ingenious method of making assessments on whole districts, the collectors living at the expense of the impoverished natives till their demands were met. The oppressed complained to the British; Macnaghten's staff represented to the Shah's Minister; and the Minister punished the impertinence of those who complained.

Macnaghten ignored this simmering discontent. On 4th August, 1840 he wrote to Colvin that he believed Soojah to be 'the best and ablest man in his kingdom. The history of this poor country may be given in a few words. The whole is consumed in the pay of the priesthood, the soldiery and the support of His

Majesty's household'.¹⁷ Some saw that disaster must follow. Durand observed that 'the farce was too broad, and too cuttingly insulting'.¹⁸ Keane, about to leave Kabul told him 'I wished you to remain in Afghanistan for the good of the public service, but since circumstances have rendered that impossible, I cannot but congratulate you on quitting the country, for, mark my words, it will not be long before there is some signal catastrophe'.¹⁹

It can be argued that the government at Kabul was no worse than elsewhere beyond the Indus. It was certainly better than at, say, Herat or Bokhara. It could also be said that the faults of the Soojah/Macnaghten regime have been subjected to a more searching scrutiny simply because they were the prologue to a humiliating British disaster. But Macnaghten might have been entitled to his view that he had achieved a state of 'miraculous tranquility' only if he had been able to point to some semblance of peace with the warring tribes, and this he could not do. He entirely failed to grasp the significance of the incurable rash of battles and uprisings in the months that led up to the uneasy summer of 1841. These will now be briefly recapitulated and examined, as the background to Eldred Pottinger's next assignment.

CHAPTER IX

Trompe l'oeil

The omens were always there. When Dost Mahomed deserted the field at Arghandeh in August, 1839 a pursuit force was quickly put in train. There was no shortage of volunteers as a combined force of British cavalry and Soojah's levies set off under Captain Outram. Hadjee Khan Khaukur, who had professed allegiance to Soojah at Kandahar, was impressed as guide and the hunt was on. For the next fortnight Outram chased the Amir to Bameean, but he escaped across the frontier to take refuge with the Uzbeks beyond the Hindu Kush. It soon became apparent that the Hadjee, a melon vendor who had wriggled to high rank by changing sides whenever profitable, had no intention of allowing Dost Mahomed to be taken. He conjured up obstacles in the way of the pursuit and refused to advance when the Amir was known to be within reach. On Outram's return to Kabul, to face the ribald comments of his fellow-officers, the Hadjee was arrested for treason, but the moral was not taken to heart. It was already clear what reliance could be placed on the Afghans' loyalty to the restored monarch.

On 3rd September Prince Timour, Soojah's son, and the contingent under Wade which had made the diversionary march through the Khyber, arrived in Kabul. This part of the plan, at least, had gone well. Wade had been mistaken in his enthusiasm for Soojah's cause, but he could not be faulted for the way in which he brought his troops from Peshawar. Wade had a strange composite force. There were Sikhs provided under the Tripartite Treaty, but they became disaffected after the death of Runjeet Singh at the end of June. Otherwise Wade had to rely on a few British cannon and a hotch-potch of levies recruited for Soojah's service. In the Khyber the Afridi tribesmen made a show of resistance in the prestige fort of Ali Musjid (plate 11), but Lieutenant Barr of the Bengal Artillery brought his guns to bear with such effect that they fled in confusion. Akbar Khan had camped south



Plate 11. Ali Musjid

of Jalalabad to oppose Wade's advance—a tactical error that weakened Dost Mahomed's capability in the west—but when he heard that Ghuznee had fallen he withdrew to join his father and the route to Kabul was open. Wade had earlier established contact with chiefs at Kabul who were willing to declare for the Shah, using rupees to pave the way for the enthronement that so impressed Macnaghten.

Outram was now sent off on a punitive expedition to the Ghilzye country between Ghuznee and Kandahar in order to secure submissions to Soojah. This was a mopping-up operation, and Outram, more successful than he had been in pursuing the Amir, replaced rebel chiefs by Soojah's adherents, destroyed fortresses, and recovered camels and property that had been plundered from the British troops on the march. The tribesmen who had murdered Colonel Herring of the 37th Native Infantry on his way from Kandahar were captured. But the very need for these activities was in itself evidence of the immensity of the task that awaited Macnaghten if the new régime was to be made acceptable. As a diversion, Soojah now exercised his royal right to institute his own order of chivalry—the Order of Merit of the Douranee Empire, heraldically designed with a star and a ribbon of green and crimson silk. A grateful British Government was not to be outdone, and the London Gazette added to their Douranee distinctions an earldom for Auckland and a barony for Keane. Macnaghten became a baronet; Wade was knighted; and there were numerous lesser awards. As Nicolls, whose journal reveals his perpetual concern with this subject, noted, 'Brevet rank has been lavishly given—and the Bath has been freely bestowed'.¹ The whole army was awarded a medal commemorating the triumph at Ghuznee, the first great military success of Victoria's reign. It was a much decorated force. Only the unfortunate Dennie, who had volunteered to lead the storming party at Ghuznee was overlooked. Keane's enmity deprived him of either brevet rank or a British decoration. As a further insult, only the third class of the Douranee order was offered to him. He refused to accept it.²

Meanwhile there were disturbing reports from Bameean to the west, on the route to the Hindu Kush. Dost Mahomed was said to be drumming up support among the Uzbek chiefs, and though there had not been time for the Amir to muster sufficient strength

to descend on Kabul, it was still thought prudent to send the Shah's Ghurka Regiment with two troops of artillery to the Bameean area. With them went Dr Percival Lord as Political Officer. Lord had been with Burnes on his earlier mission to Kabul and shared something of the latter's restless character. While the great fault of the Kabul administration was to under-rate the latent hostility of the Afghans, Lord's tendency was to take fright at shadows. Before long he was back with dramatic accounts of the Amir's growing strength, and Macnaghten was, for once, impressed by reports that Soojah's authority was but imperfectly established. They added to his growing belief that a stronger military presence than had been intended would have to be retained at Kabul.

Macnaghten had recently received the Governor-General's Minute of 20th August. In unusually objective terms it acknowledged the advantages of withdrawing the Army of the Indus from Afghanistan, but came to the view that the risks were too great. His Excellency concluded, however, that five or six regiments would be enough to sustain Soojah and also man garrisons at Kabul and Kandahar, with outposts on the main routes to Hindustan-Ghuznee, Quetta, Jalalabad and Ali Musjid.³ Keane had independently reached the same conclusion in the General Orders he issued on 2nd October. But Macnaghten, alarmed by the Bameean reports argued that more troops should stay and an amending order was issued a week later. The Bombay Division then marched from Kabul for Kandahar and the Bolan Pass, and on 15th October Keane led the first column of the Bengal force that was to return by the Eastern route. The troops left in Kabul comprised the 13th Light Infantry, the 35th Native Infantry, and three guns from No 6 Light Field Battery, together with most of the Shah's cavalry and some of his artillery.

Just to emphasise how unwelcome the British were, Keane's troops were given a hostile envoi on their way through the Khyber. The Khyber chiefs had traditionally allowed traffic through the pass in return for a subsidy from the Kabul rulers. The blackmail payments had been cut by Dost Mahomed and the chiefs hoped for better things from Soojah. But negotiations hung fire, and the tribesmen, becoming suspicious, attacked the small detachments that Wade had left at Jumrood and Ali Musjid. They held their fire while Keane made his way through the defile

to Peshawar, and then returned to besiege Ali Musjid. Keane had to halt, and on 14th November he sent back half his sepoy and 800 Sikh infantry to hold the fort till reinforcements arrived from Jalalabad. A full scale battle was avoided only when Lieutenant Mackeson, the Political Officer, conceded a subsidy of £8,000 to the rebels. As a parting shot, the Afridis swept down on the column as it returned to Peshawar, hamstringing camels and riding off with booty. Keane, by now heartily tired of Afghanistan, reached Ferozepore early in January, 1840. He embarked for Bombay and proceeded to England, where he was voted a pension of £2,000 a year, to extend to his successors for two generations.

The next conflict was at Khelat. The decision to depose Mehrab Khan, the Khelat ruler, was at best doubtfully justified. The wretched Khan was blamed for the hardships that had afflicted the Army of the Indus on its march, both the scarcity of supplies and the marauding by the Baluchis, but there is little evidence that the Khan had been unfriendly. He could, had he wanted, have prevented the passage of the Bolan. Still, Auckland in his Minute of 20th August had authorised Macnaghten to annex Khelat. With a twinge of guilt Auckland remained Macnaghten that the Khan had given succour to Soojah after his ill-fated expedition in 1834, and recommended him to 'second any proposition of a liberal personal support to the chief which the Shah may be disposed to make, in generous acknowledgement of these services'.⁴ As it turned out, Mehrab Khan—indignant at the threat of deposition and now preparing to defend himself—was not to be spared. The storming of Khelat by the Bombay column under General Willshire had all the classic elements of an assault on an Afghan fortress. The citadel occupied a commanding position, and the Khan had placed infantry and artillery on three heights outside the walls. Willshire decided to take the heights first, in the hope that the citadel could be breached in the resulting confusion. Despite fierce resistance this was achieved by the scientific use of artillery and conspicuous gallantry on the part of the foot soldiers.⁵ In a final heroic exploit Lieutenant Loveday advanced alone to secure the surrender of a group of fanatics who continued to fire from the inner apartments of the citadel. Mehrab Khan and eight of his Sirdars and Chief Ministers were killed. On the next day the Khan's servants brought in his body

for burial. They asked for a shawl to cover the corpse. In Loveday's words, 'Alas! I had nothing of the kind, but luckily remembered a brocade bed-cover, which I had bought in my days of folly and extravagance at Delhi. I called for it immediately, and gave it to the Khan's servants, who were delighted with this last mark of respect, and wrapping up the body in it, placed their deceased master on a *charpoy*, and carried him to the grave'.⁶

Macnaghten, who had accompanied Soojah to the winter capital at Jalalabad, did not hear of Willshire's success till he was being entertained to dinner by the Sikh Governor, Avitabile, at Peshawar. The victors' health was drunk in bumpers all round, and Macnaghten felt that his plans were maturing. For the moment he was not concerned that Mehrab Khan's son had escaped to remain a focus of discontent. Nor was he disturbed that there were still chiefs who were refusing to declare for Soojah, as for example at Pushoot, about 45 miles from Jalalabad. On 18th January, 1840 Colonel Orchard attacked the Pushoot fort, but when powder was applied to blow open the gate in Ghuznee fashion it would not ignite. Another attempt was no more successful, and Orchard withdrew with 65 killed or wounded. The enemy made good their escape, leaving behind nothing but a small quantity of grain and—in a contemptuous gesture—about 100 lbs of powder.⁷ Stories in the bazaars confirmed that the *feringhees* were not by any means invincible.

For the time being Macnaghten was more apprehensive about moves outside the Afghan frontier. There had been tales from Herat that a Russian expedition against Khiva was imminent, and this soon became a reality. The Russians were explicit that the Khivans were harassing their borders and detaining Russian subjects as slaves; they would deliver their fellow-countrymen from slavery and enforce respect for the Russian name; when this was done their troops would be withdrawn. Although the Russians had emphasised that their objectives were limited, throughout the winter of 1839–40 the British authorities were convinced that another card had been played in the Great Game. Burnes, who had been left in charge at Kabul, wrote to a friend in December that the Russian 'attack on Khiva is justified by all the laws of nations. . . . Yet the time chosen wears a bad appearance, if it at once does not lead to the inference that Russia has put forth her forces merely to counteract our policy. This latter is

my opinion; and by our advance on Kabul we have hastened the great crisis'. Burnes, whose imagination seldom failed him went on to foresee the time when England and Russia would divide Asia between them, the two empires enlarging like circles in the water till they were both lost in nothing, and future generations searching 'for both of us in these regions, as we now seek for the remains of Alexander and his Greeks'.⁸

Macnaghten had two other reasons for casting his eyes beyond the Hindu Kush. First, there was the necessity of rescuing Stoddart from his imprisonment at Bokhara. Stoddart had been sent there at the end of 1838 by McNeill, with instructions to obtain the liberation of Russian captives and conclude a treaty with the Amir. But Stoddart had arrived with an introduction to a Minister who was already in disgrace and was promptly thrown into a verminous cell with snakes for companions. There he was kept for two months and compelled to adopt the Moslem faith. His treatment improved with the British success in Afghanistan, but he was still subject to recurring indignities. Second, Dost Mahomed was also a prisoner at Bokhara, where he had gone to seek the Amir's support. But the Bokhara Khan was displeased that the Dost's family remained with his brother Jubbar Khan in the protection of the Wallee of Khooloom. Macnaghten saw some advantage in offering asylum to the family and told Lord to proceed accordingly if the chance occurred, which it did in July, 1840.

Earlier, in May, came the news that the Russians had failed to reach Khiva, being overcome by snow, plague and famine. Auckland who was aware that Palmerston was playing a long-term game with the Muscovites over the wider Turkish question, had not been moved by Macnaghten's naive proposal to send a force against Bokhara. Instead he counselled him to concentrate on strengthening Soojah's regime. For once Auckland was paradoxically disposed to think of Macnaghten as—to use one of the Envoy's own favourite words—a 'croaker'.⁹ Though the immediate Russian threat could now be discounted, Macnaghten still saw much to distract him from what should have been his real concern—the growing unpopularity of Soojah and his acolytes. In the Punjab, those very doubtful allies the Sikhs were harbouring rebel Ghilzye chiefs. More significantly, they raised objections to the regular passage of British troops, essential to support our army in Afghanistan, and Macnaghten was vociferous in his call

that the route through the Punjab must be 'macademised'.¹⁰ Meanwhile the tenuous British lifeline depended on the goodwill of that strange baroque character Paolo Avitabile, the Italian-born Sikh Governor of Peshawar. Most of the British who were at various times entertained by Avitabile were fascinated by his outré appearance in a Horse Artillery jacket, Turkish trousers and gold-laced forage cap, and by his nonchalant way of hanging culprits when he was not playing with his musical snuff-boxes.¹¹ But for some inexplicable reason Macnaghten thought that Avitabile's affection for public executions would do the British 'infinite mischief'.¹²

Affairs at Herat were equally unpromising. The difficulties that Pottinger faced with the infamous behaviour of Yar Mahomed have been described. Auckland, however, would not yield to Macnaghten's pleas for punitive measures against Herat and extended an amnesty for Yar Mahomed's past misdemeanours. So the policy of subsidy continued. But while the Envoy wrote insistently that expeditions against the Heratis and the Sikhs were all that was needed to win his 'beautiful game', the Ghilzies in West Afghanistan were preying on our lines of communication between Kabul and Kandahar. Nott had to send a force under Captain William Anderson to exact retribution, and on 14th May the rebels were routed.¹³ But Macnaghten again opted in favour of the purse instead of the bayonet, and the chiefs were granted an annual stipend for promises of good behaviour.

Rebellion soon spread through the southern provinces where the Baluchis were waiting their time to avenge Mehrab Khan. Lieutenant Clark was killed on his way from the fort of Kahun with a train of camels. A survivor, Captain Lewis Brown of the 5th Bombay Native Infantry, related Clark's dying murmur. 'Don't say a word. It has gone through me, but I don't want to show these fellows their shot has taken effect'.¹⁴ Major Clibborn failed to capture Kahun and the Baluchis appeared in force before Quetta. In August, Khelat where the defences were poor and the troops depleted, was taken by rebel chiefs, and Loveday, the Political Officer made prisoner. It was not till the beginning of November that the relieving column found his body, half-naked, emaciated, and tied to a camel-pannier with his throat cut. (This was the Loveday who had provided the shroud for Mehrab Khan.)

Reports of disillusion in the British troops reached Nicolls. His

journal for 12th May records that 'The officers in Afghanistan are in general very tired of it. They all want to return'. Nicolls added unsympathetically 'I laugh at those who mention it. For 20 years the line of the Indus was in everybody's minds as our natural boundary. Whereas now they have a climate colder than England'.¹⁵ But throughout the summer of 1840 Macnaghten indignantly refuted suggestions that all was not well at Soojah's court, though he admitted that the rival Barukzyes had 'most inflammable material to work upon'. In August he was deaf to the lesson that might have been learned from the remote fortress of Bajgah which had been occupied by a detachment of Soojah's 4th Ghurka Regiment on instructions from Lord at Bameean. The Ghurkas were soon attacked and only rescued by the fortuitous appearance of Lieutenant Sturt's detachment. But Macnaghten would not see this as evidence of the temper of the country. 'I think but little of this affair', he wrote to Rawlinson at Kandahar.¹⁶ Before the month was over he had much cause for further anxiety. Dost Mahomed had escaped from Bokhara to rejoin his old friend the Wallee of Khooloom and raise his standard among the Uzbegs.

The Dost's troops, upwards of 6,000 men, attacked Bajgah. The Ghurkas fell back upon Syghan, which could not be held, and retreated to Bameean. A regiment of Afghan levies mutinied and went over to the enemy. For once the signs were too alarming for Macnaghten to ignore. On 6th September he wrote that the whole of Kohistan was ripe for revolt: on the 9th that Kabul was in a feverish state, with merchants closing their shops and sending their families away; and on the 12th that Cotton had advised that unless the Bengal troops were strengthened at once the country could not be defended. But at the height of the crisis, when Macnaghten's nerve was wavering, he was encouraged by an unexpected victory. On the 14th Dennie reached Bameean with much-needed reinforcements. Four days later he set out to meet what he thought was a hostile patrol, only to find the Dost's whole army facing him. Dennie was equal to the occasion; his artillery was too much for the Uzbek cavalry; and the Afghans were driven off. The Wallee of Khooloom now came to terms, but the Dost reappeared in Kohistan, always the seat of disaffection. For once Macnaghten did not think too precisely on the event, and a further force was despatched under Brigadier Sale,

with Burnes accompanying him. On 29th September Sale captured and destroyed the fortified village of Tootundurrah. He was less successful at Julgah on 3rd October, although the tribesmen who had repulsed him soon withdrew. The Dost was still evading his pursuers, but on 2nd November Sale found him in the Nijrao country at Purwundurrah. The battle was inconclusive, the 2nd Bengal Cavalry showing no eagerness to follow their officers' order to charge. (In disgrace, the regiment was removed from the Bengal Army List.) Poor Lord, present as a volunteer, was among those killed. The Afghans had the better of the engagement, but instead of pressing home their advantage they hesitated and retired. Burnes sent back a signal advising concentration at Kabul.

On the next day came the most unlikely event of the entire Afghan war. Dost Mahomed (plate 12) rode into Kabul, by chance encountered Macnaghten, and surrendered to him personally. The Dost had realised that despite his showing at Purwundurrah continued resistance would be futile. He was treated with respect and on 12th November departed under escort for a pensioned existence in India, to be housed in the same quarters where Soojah had spent his years of exile. Macnaghten, who had earlier thought of putting a price on the Dost's head, wrote in a rare moment of candour,

‘I trust that the Dost will be treated with liberality. His case has been compared to that of Shah Soojah; and I have seen it argued that he should not be treated more handsomely than his Majesty was; but surely the cases are not parallel. The Shah had no claim on us. We had no hand in depriving him of his kingdom, whereas we ejected the Dost, who never offended us, in support of our policy, of which he was the victim’.¹⁷

This was as far as the Envoy ever went in acknowledging the inherent contradictions in the British attitude. Two other comments are apposite. Nicolls, when he heard that the Dost was in our hands, wrote ‘It was done in a very chivalrous manner, without any previous negotiations—or any promises’.¹⁸ Burnes, the Dost's old friend, had an affectionate interview with him. ‘On our parting, I gave him an Arab horse; and what do you think he gave me? His own, and only sword, and which is stained in blood’.¹⁹



Plate 12. Dost Mahomed Khan

By the middle of December Soojah and the Envoy were back in Jalalabad for their winter sojourn. Macnaghten looked forward to a period of leisure to plan improvements in administration, but he was soon disappointed. For the next six months there were constant uprisings by the tribes in West Afghanistan, while from Herat Yar Mahomed was active in stirring up trouble. The Douranees having long suffered from the hated Barukzyes in the time of Dost Mahomed had hoped for some easement with Soojah's return. Soojah promised much but did little, and taxes were still collected by the same oppressive officials. There were overt rebellions in January, July and August, largely inspired by the Douranee chieftain Aktur Khan. Fortunately Nott at Kandahar was ready to deploy his troops with resolution; the rebels were quelled and Aktur Khan took to flight. (Another chief Akrum Khan was captured and, as an example, blown from the mouth of the cannon.) But Major Rawlinson, the shrewd Political Officer alongside Nott, consistently warned Macnaghten that these were not isolated outbreaks. Disaffection was serious and widespread.

The immediate cause of trouble among the Ghilzyes was a skirmish at Khelat-i-Ghilzye, where in an exceptional surge of tactical wisdom it had been decided to rebuild a fortress from which the surrounding tribes could be controlled. A further insurrection in May had to be put down by a sizable force, despatched by Nott, under Colonel Wymer. Macnaghten was not prepared to admit that all these manifestations were evidence, not of spasmodic dislike but of deep-seated hatred of Soojah and his *feringhee* supporters. His views are epitomised in a letter he wrote to Rawlinson on 2nd August, when he urged him to regard matters a little more '*couleur de rose*'. Why could not Rawlinson not agree that from Mookoor to the Khyber all was content and tranquillity? It was true, he went on, that 'we have Hazaras, Ghilzyes, Douranees, and Kuzzilbashes, all at daggers drawn with each other, and in every family there are rivals and enemies. . . . But these people are perfect children, and should be treated as such. If we put one naughty boy in the corner, the rest will be terrified. We have taken their plaything, power, out of the hands of the Douranee chiefs, and they are pouting a good deal in consequence'.²⁰ On 20th August, writing to another correspondent, he appended his oft-quoted remark 'The country is perfectly quiet from Dan to Beersheba'.²

Such was Macnaghten's temper when Eldred Pottinger reported to him for briefing a few weeks earlier, in June, 1841. But the most interesting developments in this period affecting Afghanistan were largely unknown to Macnaghten. They lay in the exchanges between Auckland and the Government at Westminster. On 31st December, 1840 Hobhouse who had been pressing for an early withdrawal, wrote that he now agreed that for many years to come the restored monarchy would need a British force, and since 'the British were masters of the country' they alone could do the job.²² This Auckland understood. What he did not appreciate was that hatred of Soojah and the British would unite the Afghans in religious fervour. In his reply of 21st March the Governor-General condescended on the question of expense—a subject of rapidly growing concern since Afghanistan was now costing over £1m. a year—but he outlined his policy for continuing to stay in the country on the existing basis.²³ (Nicolls for once was more perceptive. On 26th March he noted in his journal 'We are clearly in a great scrape—that country drains us of a million a year or more—and we only, in truth, are certain of the allegiance of the people within range of our guns and cavalry'.²⁴ On 12th May, 'the whole thing will break down; we cannot afford the heavy, yet increasing drain upon us—troops and money'.²⁵

Then came a strange non-event. The Heratis suddenly offered to submit to the Persian Shah. At home Palmerston, as soon as this unwelcome news was broken to him, sent orders to march on Herat without delay. But these were immediately followed by other instructions that were much more ambiguous. No expedition was mounted. This interlude is mentioned in fairness to Auckland. It shows how difficult it was for him to cope with vacillations from Westminster while he tried to interpret the realities behind Macnaghten's impermeable confidence. But Auckland's days were numbered. The Tories were now in power and on 16th August he decided to resign. Lord Ellenborough, succeeding to Hobhouse's place at the Board of Control, told Auckland not to proceed against Herat. Otherwise Ellenborough was feeling his way, and there was no apparent change in policy. Before long he had himself accepted the post of Governor-General. He sailed in November.

CHAPTER X

A nod to a blind horse

There were three people in Kabul to whom Eldred could look for official advice before taking up his post in Kohistan—Macnaghten, the Envoy, General Elphinstone the military commander (plate 13), and Burnes, the Resident.

Macnaghten was not over-joyed at the arrival of the new Political Officer; he had not asked for him; and he may have been resentful that the appointment had emerged direct from Auckland's headquarters. Eldred knew that Macnaghten had engineered his removal from Herat, and the memory still rankled. Against this unpromising background there could be no cordial, or worthwhile, discussion. Macnaghten was already peeved that Rawlinson would not subscribe to his view that all was undoubtedly well, and he did not want another young officer to start sending factious reports. He admitted that there were minor problems in Kohistan, and it was regrettable that the Nijrao valley always seemed to harbour the more unruly chiefs. Pottinger would remember to keep a vigilant eye on the area, but above all he must be careful to practise strict economy. Eldred had to be satisfied with these empty vapourings; he knew that his contemporaries did not share the Envoy's facile confidence; but there was no point in arguing.

Eldred knew of Elphinstone's reputation, although he had not served under him, and he was not encouraged by what he heard. He was aware of Elphinstone's fashionable connections. William George Keith Elphinstone was a cousin of Mountstuart Elphinstone, historian and former Governor of Bombay. He was a grandson of the tenth Baron Elphinstone, and his second cousin had been Governor of Madras from 1837 to 1842. That well-thumbed handbook the Army List disclosed that he had not been active in the field since he commanded the 33rd Foot at Waterloo, more than twenty five years ago. After a long spell on half-pay he had been promoted to Major-General in 1837, and in



Plate 13. Major-General William George Keith Elphinstone

1839 he had been sent to India to take charge of the Benares Division. He was now nearly sixty. Many thought that William Nott (plate 14) should have been given the Kabul Command; but they were equally certain that he would not get it. The irascible Nott was a soldier's general whose professional merit was not enough by itself to advance him in political circles. Besides, he



Plate 14. Major-General Sir William Nott

seemed to thrive on insubordination and he had already offended Soojah. Nott made no secret of his contempt for Macnaghten, or for Elphinstone, 'the most incompetent soldier that was to be found among the officers of the requisite rank.'

Nott imagined he had another grievance. He was in the Company's service, and Queen's Officers—as Elphinstone was—appeared to have a preemptive right to plum posts. But this was not in Auckland's mind. Quite simply, he wanted a general who would get on with Macnaghten, and who would act with 'extreme caution and reserve' instead of chasing every illusory Afghan hare.¹ His letter of 14th November, 1840 offering Elphinstone the appointment makes clear that he wrote with Sir Jasper Nicolls' approval. He also gave him the opportunity to decline if he thought his health was not good enough.² But Elphinstone immediately accepted, and in Eyre's words 'committed the fatal error of transporting himself suddenly from a state of prolonged luxurious repose, at an advanced age, to undertake the fatigues and cares inseparable from high military command, in a foreign uncongenial climate'.³

Eldred's conversations in the various messes at Kabul had revealed some affection for Elphy Bey, as he was known, but no great confidence in his military capacity or that of this staff. (Captain Grant, the Assistant Adjutant General, was distinguished only for his forbidding hauteur.) Whatever Eldred's misgivings may have been, when he reported for audience with Elphinstone he was alarmed at what he saw. Here was no eye to threaten and command. In an age when senior officers were elderly, and did not make a fetish of physical fitness, Elphinstone was still palpably unfit for active service. Crippled by rheumatic gout, racked by fever, he was now little more than an emaciated cypher. Unable to walk without the aid of sticks, he received his visitors lying prostrate in a low chair. His mental vigour was also impaired. Courteous to his juniors, gently spoken, he was a good listener, but he was incapable of making up his mind. He knew that the British tenure at Kabul was more precarious than Macnaghten would admit, but he did not have the energy to make an effective protest. Conscious of his impotence, he complained that he had been 'degraded from a general to the Lord-Lieutenant's head constable'.⁴ Eldred had to accept that he would get nothing in the way of tactical advice or instruction from Elphinstone's mumblings.

He had hopes that Burnes would give him a shrewder appreciation. Burnes was, after all, preeminently the old Afghan hand. He had conducted two memorable missions to Kabul on his own; he had marched with the Army through the Bolan; and he had been with Sale at Purwundurrah. He was accessible and he was not slow to voice his opinions. But there were many who disliked him. Henry Pottinger, a stern but just man, found him an impossible colleague, and Wade had consistently sneered at Burnes's despatches. Colvin thought he was unstable. Was he 'really a fit and proper person to be appointed Envoy at Cabool?'⁵ Kaye's verdict was that Burnes's misfortune was to be overrated at the beginning and underrated at the end of his career.⁶ His early advance had certainly been spectacular, but the triumph he enjoyed when he went home to be lionised by London society had dimmed. A knighthood failed to make up for his chagrin at not being made Envoy at Kabul; and he had rejected the offer of posts at Kandahar and Herat as being beneath him. Burnes, in short, was suspected of vaulting ambition, and ever since he was appointed Resident at Kabul, with the expectation but not the promise of succeeding Macnaghten, he had been required to carry out the most difficult task for one of his temperament—to bide his time *en second*. 'Be silent', he wrote on 11th January, 1840, 'pocket your pay. Do nothing but what you are ordered, and you will give high satisfaction'.⁷

In his two years as Macnaghten's number two Burnes described himself as 'a highly paid idler'.⁸ For there was no empathy between the two men. Burnes saw the implications of our strategy more clearly than anyone else on the Kabul staff. His *munshee*, Mohun Lal, kept him informed about what was happening in the bazaars and the valleys. He knew that Macnaghten, interfering too directly in Afghan affairs, was being manoeuvred into an impossible position. 'We shall never settle Afghanistan at the point of the bayonet'.⁹ But since such advice as he tendered was ignored he became increasingly disillusioned. It was a sad decline for the energetic officer who had declared four years earlier 'I like difficulties—they are my brandy'.¹⁰ In the balance Burnes's virtues may be said to outweigh the defects adduced by his detractors. As regards the charge of being too volatile, Burnes was probably one of those who are never more serious than when, on the surface, they appear flippant or sarcastic. In one of the last letters he wrote (16th October, 1841) he said 'One trait of

my character is thorough seriousness; I am indifferent about nothing I undertake—in fact if I undertake a thing I cannot be indifferent'.¹¹

When Eldred went to see Burnes he found him immersed in the extensive collection of books he had caused to be sent from home. His choice of authors revealed a catholic taste—Tacitus (the pro-consul's vademecum), Horace Walpole's letters, the lives of Warren Hastings and Sydney Smith. The last supported one of Burne's own beliefs 'that all great men have more or less charlatanerie'.¹² He was also addicted, if rumour is to be credited, to the pleasures of the harem, and more certainly, to those of the table. His own account illustrates both the sybaritic existence he affected and the insouciance of the Kabul mission on the eve of the débacle.

'I lead, however, a very pleasant life; and if rotundity and heartiness be proofs of health, I have them. Breakfast I have long made a public meal. Covers are laid for eight, and half a dozen officers drop in, as they feel disposed, to discuss a rare Scotch breakfast of smoked fish, salmon grills, devils and jellies, puff away at their cigars till ten (the hour of the assembly being nine). Then I am left to myself till evening, when my assistant and I sit down to our quiet dinner, and discuss, with our Port, Men and Manners. Once in every week I give a party of eight, and as the good River Indus is a channel for luxuries as well as commerce, I can place before my friends at one-third in excess of the Bombay price, champagne, hock, madeira, sherry, port, claret, not forgetting a glass of Maraschino, and the hermetically sealed salmon and hotch-potch (all the way fra Aberdeen). And deuced good it is: the peas as big as if they had been soaked for bristling! . . . I wish I were provost myself here. I would be as happy as the Lord Mayor!'¹³

Such celebrations were soon to take on a darker hue. Burnes, when Eldred 'dropped in', was anxiously watching the mail from India. The Envoy's promotion was known to be imminent, but the long-expected signal which would confirm that Burnes was to succeed him had not arrived. Meanwhile, he had no authority, and probably little inclination, to suggest what should be the disposition in Kohistan. But it would have been out of character for him not to say that the chiefs were less docile than Macnaghten imagined. With this general warning Eldred had to be content

as he set out on the two-day march to Charekar. Fortunately his friend John Login, the Surgeon, went with him. Login was an Orkneyman by origin; many of Eldred Pottinger's namesakes came from the same Northern Isles; and perhaps from that common, though distant, ancestry grew their close friendship. Unhappily for Eldred, Login was soon recalled to Kabul.

Charekar lies some forty miles north of Kabul on the main trade route to the Turkestan frontier. The three valleys of Charekar, Ghorbund, and Panjshir combine to form the region known as Kohistan (hill country). To the east the valleys unite to flow into the Nijrao district—where the chiefs had not made even a formal obeisance to Soojah. The township of Charekar is hemmed in by high mountains on all sides except the south, where the low foothills lead to Kabul, and beneath the distant snow-capped peaks the whole area had a forbidding aspect. For the most part it consisted of bare rocks, and only near the beds of streams or the canal that ran parallel to the road were there signs of cultivation, an avenue of mulberries or an occasional orchard. Eldred's station was to be the castle of Lughmanee, a mile and a half from Charekar which was garrisoned by Soojah's Ghurka Regiment. 'Castle' was rather a grandiose term for the fortress, a hundred yards square, with mud walls about twenty feet high. Against the walls, on the inside, rough sheds served as living quarters. Eldred's rooms were on two floors. 'The carpentry work' he wrote, 'is the most singular I have ever before seen in a house for Europeans. We cannot live below on account of the fleas, and our passage up and down the low stairway is most dangerous. . . . wasps are never-ceasing in their attempts to lodge themselves in the bare beams'.¹⁴

The contrast with Burnes's elegant ambience was at once evident, but there were other worries more serious than incidental discomfort. The convention that the political staff should be housed separately from the military was carried to absurd lengths at Charekar. Eldred, together with his young assistant Charles Rattray and Grant, the Medical Officer, occupied Lughmanee castle, protected by an escort of 75 Kohistanee levies and a company of Ghurkas detached from the garrison. The main body of the Ghurkas was engaged on improving the defences of the fortress at Charekar itself. Before long the Afghans were to show how this ridiculous dispersal doubled the vulnerability of the

British contingent. An initial inspection of his area soon convinced Eldred that Kohistan was not tenable from the existing outposts. It was really essential, he recommended in his first report, to overawe the independent tribes. A force should be stationed in the valley which would be strong enough to prevent any rebel attack. Eldred's cumbrous Victorian diction does not conceal the underlying urgency. 'My reason for suggesting heavy artillery is to have the power of destroying castles without exposing the lives of our own soldiers; and besides the saving of time at the commencement of an insurrection, it is desirable to avail ourselves of the moral influence which a knowledge of our perfect readiness is sure to establish'.¹⁵ Macnaghten would have none of it.

Throughout July there were portents—insignificant in themselves, but sinister in sum. A musket was stolen from the Charekar camp; the bugler woke to find his bugle and been filched; both trophies were paraded in the Nijrao valley. The tribesmen were becoming more openly insolent. The chiefs complained that Soojah's promise to exempt them from the land-tax was not being fulfilled, and Eldred could obtain only a temporary easement. Captain Codrington, the garrison commander was alarmed at the signs of growing hostility, and Eldred tried to reassure him that he could provide 48 hours notice of any concerted move by the chiefs. Macnaghten's contribution was to reiterate the need for economy and reduce Eldred's escort from 75 to 25 men.

By the third week in September Eldred, who had a gift for picking up local intelligence, decided that discontent was now so widespread that he must report his views in person. He already had reason to suspect that the Ghilzyes, the Douranees, and the Kohistanees were planning a general rebellion, but he lacked evidence firm enough to persuade the satraps at Kabul. So he found when he rode back to the British lines, 'the sheepfolds on the plain'. He could not have come at a time when he was less likely to get a sympathetic hearing. Elphinstone pooh-poohed Eldred's claim that Charekar was at risk and that a demonstration in force was urgently needed. Elphinstone had no appetite for sending an expedition to that difficult terrain; he wanted no further trouble. On 9th August he had submitted a medical certificate and applied to be relieved of his appointment and

return to England. On 6th September he was told that his request was granted, and that until a successor was appointed the command was to devolve on the next senior officer. This was Brigadier John Shelton, the Colonel of the 44th Infantry. Shelton was a Peninsular veteran who had lost an arm at San Sebastian, standing impassively outside his tent while the limb was amputated. Some allowance might be made for his disability to explain his perpetual foul temper. His troops hated him and were often nearly mutinous. He openly despised Elphinstone, and at times he seemed to hate himself. His physical courage could not be faulted, but temperate advice was foreign to his nature. He had no high opinion of Political Officers, and Eldred was later involved in a bitter dispute with him which it required a Court Martial to settle.

Macnaghten would not entertain Eldred's argument that the policy of retrenchment was removing our only lever against the tribes. He was distracted by the prospect that his years of loyal service were about to be recognised by promotion to be Governor of Bombay. The formal letter from the Court of Directors had been signed on 4th August and was on its way to Kabul. He hoped that he and Elphinstone could leave together before the end of October, and that they would be escorted by Sale's Brigade. He was, however, upset by rumours that opinion in England, as the Whigs tottered, was moving to a withdrawal from Afghanistan. 'If they deprive the Shah altogether of our support I have no hesitation in saying (and that is saying a great deal) they will commit an unparalleled political atrocity'.¹⁶ This was in a private letter to his friend Thomas Robertson at Agra. Macnaghten did not want to see his great work given up. On 15th September he had reported that the country between Kabul and Kandahar was perfectly tranquil; and that Captain Macgregor, the Political Agent at Jalalabad, had come in with news that conditions in the intervening country were satisfactory. The Envoy was not to have many more weeks to harp on tranquillity. For the time being, however convincing the evidence that Eldred produced, however eloquent his protestations—and eloquence was not his strong point—he was not going to get any support. It would have been logical for him to resign his appointment, but his was not a resigning nature. Full of foreboding, he returned to his station at Charekar.

Aware that he was regarded at Kabul as an irritant, denied the reinforcements he needed, Eldred spent October collecting information about the attitude of the chiefs. By the end of the month events elsewhere, in the Eastern Ghilzye country, confirmed that he was no mere alarmist sounding in a vacuum. The Ghilzye chiefs had traditionally drawn their income from preying on caravans that came through the passes between Jalalabad and Kabul and levying tribute. (It was the same in the Khyber. In 1809 Mountstuart Elphinstone, happily protected by an Afghan escort, had noted a horde of tribesmen sitting on the hills at the mouth of the pass 'looking wistfully at the camels passing'.)¹⁷ Alternatively, the Kabul rulers gave the chiefs a handsome annual stipend to commute their alleged prescriptive rights. Macnaghten had been paying the chiefs a subsidy of 80,000 rupees a year. They had been quiet; they kept their side of the bargain and refrained from plunder. Macnaghten, in deference to the need for economy, now thought he could halve the payments. He summoned the chiefs to Kabul to hear this unpalatable news. They listened quietly; they withdrew to the hills and fell on the next convoy; the passes were blocked. Soojah was reported as telling the chiefs that they had the remedy in their own hands. The great rebellion had started.

Macnaghten was annoyed, but no more. He wrote to Rawlinson that the Eastern Ghilzyes were 'very kind in breaking out just at the moment most opportune for our purpose. The troops will take them *en route* to India'.¹⁸ It was not to be so easy. On the 7th October Colonel Monteath and the 35th Native Infantry were ordered to be ready to march to clear the passes. George Broadfoot, an exemplary officer who had raised a formidable unit of Sappers and Miners as part of Soojah's force, was told to accompany Monteath. What follows exemplifies the incredible confusion that prevailed at Kabul. First, Broadfoot could not get the trenching tools he wanted. The local armourers refused to provide them because they were too busy forging weapons—whose purpose soon became apparent. Broadfoot solved this problem by setting his men to stand individually over the Afghans till the work was done. Next he went to Elphinstone and then to Macnaghten for orders. Neither would give him any. Four times he went from one to the other, only to meet with indignation from the Envoy and indecision and professed ignorance from the

General, ending with Elphinstone's pathetic plea, 'If anything occurs, and in case you have to go out, for God's sake clear the passes quickly, that I may get away. For, if anything were to turn up, I am unfit for it, done up body and mind, and I have told Lord Auckland so'.¹⁹ Broadfoot, his sappers and his equipment, later played a decisive part in the defence of Jalalabad. Repeatedly, there was no lack of valour or determination among the junior officers; but there was no firmness in the higher échelon.

On the night of the 9th October Monteath was attacked while encamped at Boothak, only twelve miles from Kabul. The enemy included many who had openly ridden from the city to take part. On the 11th Sale, with the 13th Light Infantry, marched to reinforce Monteath and together they forced the Khoord-Kabul pass. Sale was, of course, wounded, but remained to direct operations until compelled by loss of blood to make over command to Dennie. On the 22nd Sale, with the addition of the 37th Bengal Infantry, moved towards Tezeen. The Ghilzyes faced him in strength, but Macgregor, the Political officer, accepted the chief's overtures and concluded a treaty which did not restore the whole subsidy but gave them a bribe of 10,000 rupees to keep the peace. The treaty, which proved a hollow sham, was later described by Durand as 'calculated to stamp with crass imbecility the conduct of affairs'.²⁰ Sale sent back the 37th and marched to Gandamak, which he reached on 30th October. He had to fight all the way; his casualties amounted to 250 killed and wounded. He took counsel with his officers and decided to proceed to Jalalabad. Though he did not know it at the time, this was one of the most important decisions of the whole war.

The complacency of the Kabul mission was not to be ruffled. The furniture and equipment belonging to Elphinstone and Macnaghten which would not be wanted on their return journey to Hindustan were sold by auction on the 12th and 23rd. They fetched extremely high prices. Macnaghten's coolness could be admired, if it was not so mistaken. "One down, t'other to come' is the principle with these vagabonds. . . . Only imagine the impudence of the rascals'.²¹ He still discounted Eldred's reports from Charekar, though he at last reluctantly agreed that hostages should be taken from the Kohistanee chiefs. On 26th October he wrote to Rawlinson that Pottinger thought he was about to be invaded from Nijrao, but that he saw little ground for alarm, 'the

fellows will sneak into their holes again when they hear that the Ghilzyes are quiet'.²² And on the 29th 'I trust I have at last got Pottinger into a pacific mood, though I tremble, whenever I open any of his letters, lest I should find he has got to loggerheads with his neighbours'.²³ Well might he tremble.

CHAPTER XI

A Ball in his Leg

The sorrowful happenings at Charekar in the first fortnight of November, 1841 form but a single, short episode, but they exemplify both the weaknesses and the strength of the British presence in Afghanistan. On the debit side is the Envoy's determination to economise on the subsidies which alone could support an unpopular régime, to turn a deaf ear to repeated warnings of unrest, and to leave a small British contingent unsupported in the middle of hostile country. Credit can be claimed for the valour of the young officers in their beleaguered outpost, their ingenious improvisation, and the loyalty of the Ghurka soldiers when properly led. Unhappily for Eldred Pottinger and his companions, these virtues were not enough to redress the balance. Charekar is the Afghan war writ small.

The first move in the insurrection was the reappearance of the rebel chief Mir Musjidi. Driven from Kohistan by Sale's operations, he refused to acknowledge Soojah; he had spent the last year in the Nijrao valley, banding together with chiefs of like mind; and now he put himself at the head of a powerful and well-organised party to sweep out into the plain between Charekar and Kabul. On the first two days of November some of the local chiefs presented themselves at Lughmanee, ostensibly offering their help to pursue Mir Musjidi, and asking what rewards they could expect.¹ Eldred temporised, trying to probe their real intentions, but by the morning of the 3rd November the number of professedly friendly warriors mustering in the fields was in itself enough to cause alarm. To defend himself Eldred had no more than his depleted escort of 25 horsemen, and a company of 100 Ghurkas. His assistant Charles Rattray, Dr Grant, and Captain Codrington who had come down from Charekar to report that the Kabul road was cut about twelve miles south, were also in the castle. As the morning wore on, it became increasingly evident that they were surrounded by a small

army of about 3,000 men, many of whom had taken up their stance between Lughmanee and the main garrison. The folly of dispersal into two units was painfully apparent.

It was time to put on a bold front. Eldred admitted the principal chiefs to the castle and discussed what the payment for their services should be. At their request he came out of the fortress to repeat the terms to a gathering of petty chiefs in the garden. Could someone, they asked, reassure the leading tribesmen who were grouped in a nearby stubble field? There was no room for hesitation, and young Rattray went forward. From the Afghans' demeanour he sensed a trap, but as he turned away he was shot down. Eldred had just realised from one or two gestures that a trick was intended when he heard the sound of firing. He ran back through the postern gate, and from the rampart he saw rebels pouring shots into Rattray's body. The Ghurkas opened fire to clear an open space in front of the gate, but the enemy went to ground behind the garden walls and kept up a hail of musketry.²

The next round went, surprisingly, to the Charekar garrison. At two o'clock Lieutenant John Colpoys Haughton (plate 15), the tall Dubliner who was Adjutant of the Ghurkas, heard the firing at Lughmanee and at once marched at the head of two companies. Knowing he must reach the castle unobserved, he left the road and made his way through the cultivated ground across the canal. In his own words 'the enemy was completely taken by surprise, and at once ran. The entrances to gardens are usually made so small that but one person can enter at a time, and he must bend double to do so. This is done to keep out cattle; thus before the enemy could get out, a good many were killed. The coats (padded with cotton) of several were set on fire by their own gunmatches'.³ While the Ghurkas were busy with their *kukris*, Eldred's force sallied out from the castle and the Afghans were driven off. Though it would have been wise to use what could only be a breathing space to evacuate Lughmanee and concentrate at Charekar, according to the accounts left by Eldred and Haughton this was not considered. Codrington strengthened the Lughmanee complement to 120 men, and agreed that the next morning he would send down provisions and ammunition. Codrington, Haughton, and the remainder of the Ghurkas retired to Charekar at sunset. Both garrisons stood to throughout the night.



Plate 15. Lieutenant John Haughton

The imperturbable Haughton records that his usual post was 'in a chair near the gate, where I soothed my wearied nerves with a cheroot'.⁴

Before dawn on the 4th Haughton was on the move again with a train of ponies carrying supplies. He was accompanied by Ensign Salisbury, and they had with them 200 infantry and one six pounder gun. Haughton was 'much embarrassed' to see the enemy in some strength threatening his flank from a hill on the right, and ordered Salisbury and one company to disperse them. This they did, but the young Ghurkas pressed forward too eagerly. The Afghans had feinted to cut them off from the main body. Haughton's bugler sounded the recall, but, as commanders have found in many subsequent battles, it is difficult, if not impossible to restrain Ghurkas who have been launched into attack. The rest of Haughton's men had to be deployed to get them back, and the engagement was severe. This was only five hundred yards from Lughmanee, but there was now no hope of reaching the castle. The troops re-formed and retreated on Charekar. Haughton worked his gun to good effect against enemy cavalry charges till the trail gave way, but Salisbury was carried in mortally wounded.⁵

Eldred's disappointment can be imagined. He did not believe there would be another attempt to relieve him. He had only the ammunition in the men's pouches. The Afghans surrounded the castle and the noise of mining against one of the walls could be heard. His only course was a night march to Charekar. To mislead the enemy, he gave orders for grain to be collected and brought into the fort, as though for a long defence, and at nightfall he led his men through the postern gate. Left behind were the hostages he had taken from the Kohistanee chiefs, two chests of money, and a number of horses. Most of the escort had fled at the beginning of the affray, although the six Heratis remained loyal.⁶ The few Ghurkas who were manning the towers did not hear the order to come down, but made good their escape two days later. The night march, skirting the foothills, was accomplished in complete silence—the silence when a snapped twig sounds like a cannon shot. Eventually Haughton, who had gone out on a solitary partol, was delighted to make contact with Eldred and Dr Grant who 'had across his shoulders the account books of the Political Agent tied up in a cloth'.⁷ Eldred had not

forgotten Macnaghten's strictures about the way he had kept the books at Herat.

It is time to look at the troops available to meet the attack which all knew must come with daybreak. Under Captain Codrington, Lieutenant Haughton, young Ensign Rose and two European non-commissioned officers Sergeant-Major Byrne and Quartermaster-Sergeant Hanrahan, there were 16 native officers and 750 rank and file Ghurkas. There were over 200 campfollowers, women and children. Half of the Ghurkas had been present at the capture of Ghuznee, and some had seen service at Bameean; the remainder were recruits who had not heard a shot fired before they arrived at Charekar. As artillery there were two six and one eighteen pounder guns. Thanks to Macnaghten's parsimony there was no cavalry to make sorties.

When the Ghurkas relieved the Kohistanee Regiment in May, 1841 they found that the barracks were still being built, and by the time of the uprising they were only partly finished. The barracks, a hundred yards square, had walls ranging from seven to twenty feet in height, gateways east and west, and a row of flat-roofed living quarters round the inside. The eastern entry unhappily had no gate. The Barrack square was on a slope, which meant that its interior could be overlooked from the trees bordering the canal about a hundred yards in front. The square was also commanded by the castle of Khojeh Meerkhan on the outskirts of the town of Charekar, and on the north by a Mahomedan oratory and a butt erected beyond the musket range. In front, or to the east, the canal, gardens and some buildings that had been used as a mess house offered ready cover for the enemy. Strict economy had been enjoined on those building the barracks, and as Haughton said 'our arrangements were as bad as they could well be'.⁸ (plan 2) The same had, with equal justification, been said of the Kabul cantonment.

As the sun rose on the 5th, if morale was not high—Haughton could not understand why they had been sent there 'unless the Government are in a hurry to get rid of us'⁹—it was steadfast. There were plenty of troops in Kabul, less than fifty miles away, and Eldred had already sent off a hurried despatch. (It would appear that this reached Macnaghten, as did another written in invisible ink between the lines of a native manuscript. Neither produced any response. The Envoy was already faced with his

own 'major insurrection' in the city.) But while they prepared for action, inspected arms, and piled ammunition, it was difficult not to be affected by the atmosphere of doom that lay over the fort. The officers remembered that three of their colleagues, Dr Lord and Lieutenants Broadfoot and Christie, who had been killed in 1840, were buried on the hill behind the barracks.

The assault was as fierce as they had expected. Haughton estimated that they were besieged by more than 20,000 Afghans, and without help the odds against survival were heavy. The initial defence plan was simple. Haughton took charge of the outposts which must be held to safeguard the only water supply in the bed of the canal. Eldred (who made no attempt to use his superior rank to assume command) reverted to his old role of artillery officer and supported him with the two six pounders. Codrington supervised the defence of the barracks, especially the open gate where the obsolete eighteen pounder was mounted. Haughton's detachments stood their ground and inflicted casualties on each wave of attackers, but it was a disastrous day for the garrison. Eldred was wounded by a ball in his thigh and Codrington was shot in the chest, although his men held the open gateway. Salisbury died in the course of the afternoon.

On the 6th it seemed that the whole country had risen against them as the assault was pressed with renewed vigour. The garden was taken, retaken, and taken again. Despite two successful sallies the outposts were driven in, and thereafter the defenders were confined to the barrack building. Sergeant-Major Byrne was killed and Haughton was lucky to escape when a ball grazed his neck, fortuitously protected by 'an extremely thick silk handkerchief consisting of a square yard of Mooltan silk'.¹⁰ Codrington died after stoically handing over his telescope and pistol to Haughton. News of his death was kept from the troops and he and Salisbury were secretly buried during the night.

The next day started with a prolonged beating of Afghan drums. The enemy fire was intense and prolonged. More sinisterly, 'shots began to drop into the interior of our square'.¹¹ They were coming not only through the gate, but also from Khojeh Meerkhan's fort, which the small Ghurka unit had been compelled to surrender. In a desperate improvisation the canvas walls from the officers' tents were hung on the gateway and on the roofs of the barracks so as to prevent the enemy taking aim. It

proved an efficient expedient. 'Who would think of canvas stopping a bullet? It could not do so, but it stopped the firing! Men would not fire aimlessly'.¹² The conduct of the defence depended entirely on John Haughton and Eldred. Haughton had been ceaselessly on his rounds for three days and nights but his energy did not seem to be sapped. Eldred, lying wounded on his *charpoy*, could only offer encouragement. There was no chance of sleep as the Afghans drove out the inhabitants of Charekar to keep up a ceaseless barrage of imprecations throughout the night. And there was a much more pressing anxiety. With the loss of the canal there was now no water for the horses and cattle, and the troops could draw only the most meagre supply from a few pools in the ditch of the rampart.

On the 8th two Nijrao chiefs came in under a flag of truce and were brought before Eldred. They claimed that they were acting under Soojah's orders to expel all *feringhees* from their country, and offered terms for raising the siege, provided the infidels would agree to become Mahomedans. Eldred replied with some asperity that they had come to assist a Mahomedan sovereign to recover his throne and were consequently within the protection of Islam. He would leave only when a written order from Shah Soojah had been produced.¹³ The chiefs withdrew. Fresh demands by later emissaries were not taken seriously. Eldred knew he was in no position to negotiate; he must keep up at least an appearance of confidence; but it was difficult enough to do so. That afternoon the garrison buried its dead. 44 men were interred in the great pit in the barrack square which, in happier days, had been dug to make a water tank. 'Foolishly we would not bury the horses and cattle killed by the enemy's fire in the same place. They were quartered and thrown over the wall, in the hope that we would have an opportunity of removing them to a distance. This never occurred, and the stench became abominable'.¹⁴

The frayed state of the defenders' nerves was illustrated by an event on the morning of the 9th. Some movement was seen on the Kabul road, and through his telescope Haughton identified 'our own 5th Cavalry, a fact rendered certain by their white head-dresses'. Unhappily it was no relieving column. 'The fantastic play of mirage had so acted on a herd of cattle grazing, as entirely to deceive us'.¹⁵ But there were occasional diversions to maintain morale. One device was to expose a sepoy's hat, 'one of

the old Belltoppers', on a stick above the wall to attract the enemy's fire, then to raise it on high, 'giving at the same time a derisive shout'. There was some slight encouragement in finding that the Afghans were so short of lead that many of their bullets were only quartz pebbles with a lead covering. Then came an exploit that warmed Eldred's heart. When an enemy picket took up station close to the barrack wall on the north side one of the guns was moved to the furthest part of the square. An artillery subadar climbed to the roof and 'with the aid of a plumb line' laid the gun like a mortar, elevating it sufficiently to fire over the opposite wall and land shells among the picket.¹⁶ Despite minor successes like this, the Afghans managed to blow up the south west corner of the barracks, and Haughton was hard put to rally his men and block up the breach with boards and sand-bags. The dust had scarcely settled when a messenger brought the most unwelcome news. A Syud from Istalif came in to report that Burnes had been killed and there was fighting throughout Kabul.

Eldred had to recognise that conditions were now infinitely worse than they had been when he endured the siege of Herat. There the battered ramparts had till the end afforded protection; at Charekar it was only a question of time before the mud-walls proved too fragile. There was no hope of relief. (He did not know that, in Kabul, George Lawrence's offer to lead a *ressalah* of cavalry carrying ammunition to the fortress had been turned down by Elphinstone.) Worst of all, their miserable supply of muddy water was almost exhausted. On the 10th each fighting man was issued with half a wineglass. Troops were sucking the flesh of raw mutton to assuage their thirst. 'Our voices were hoarse, our lips cracked, our faces begrimed with dust and smoke, and our eyes bloodshot'.¹⁷ Haughton adds that his rations consisted of dried mulberries or fried flour. On the night of the 11th a patrol sent through the enemy pickets to obtain water from the canal was surprised and came back with a few half-filled containers.

Without water they could not survive, and two expeditions were mounted on the next evening. In the confusion that followed the Ghurkas succeeded in destroying enemy pickets, falling on them with pent-up ferocity, but they returned empty-handed. Scaling ladders were now being openly paraded outside, and Eldred took counsel with Haughton, Ensign Rose and Dr Grant.

The native officers had for the first time said they could not carry on. It was a melancholy stocktaking. Since the siege started two officers, the Sergeant-Major, and fully 100 soldiers had been killed. The wounded were twice that number, and 50 had been taken prisoner. The fighting force was encumbered with 140 women and children and nearly 100 campfollowers, all in great extremity for lack of water. Ammunition had been carefully husbanded, but the muskets 'were so foul, that it was with difficulty balls could be forced into them; even urine could not be obtained to wash them out'.¹⁸ Some ingenious methods had been used to serve the three guns. Lead dug from the target butt was cast into bullets and placed in carpet bags to act as grape and canister shot. When it was clear that the bullocks would not again pull the guns, the drag chains were cut into lengths and bound up for shot. But Eldred and Haughton knew they were living on borrowed time. There was no argument about whether or not to retreat towards Kabul, perilous though the attempt would be for exhausted troops who had been pinned within the barrack compound for the last ten days. Casualties were bound to be heavy, but there was no alternative. It was agreed that the withdrawal plan should be kept secret till the last moment.

On the afternoon of the 13th Haughton saw a gunner coming towards the gate. Confirming that this was a man who had earlier deserted, Haughton seized his collar but fell to the ground still grappling with him. As he did so, the artillery jemadar struck at Haughton with his sword, wounding him repeatedly. The gunners, who were part of the conspiracy, ran off through the gateway. This was the signal for a spirited attack by the enemy, but Haughton, though weak from loss of blood, still managed to raise the alarm. Eldred had himself carried to the gate, and he and Dr Grant worked the eighteen pounder. The Ghurkas rallied; and enemy were, for the last time, repulsed. But mutiny is infectious. The campfollowers began looting the officers' boxes. Discipline was almost at an end. Haughton, whose narrative is full of vivid details, recalls that Grant urged him to preserve the valuable collection of Bactrian coins he had amassed from neighbouring sites. Haughton disagreed, feeling that the principle of jettisoning all baggage must be upheld.

Attempts were still made to keep some semblance of order. A Ghurka jemadar held a pay parade. Dr Grant spiked the guns.

and then, by the light of an oily rag, amputated Haughton's right hand 'rapidly sewing the skin together with three stitches of needle and thread'. Haughton's comment was 'As may be supposed, I was dreadfully faint, but not a drop of any liquid was to be found, some ether excepted'.¹⁹ The magazine was not blown, lest the explosion should alert the enemy. The loyal Bugle Major remained behind to sound a final reveille a few hours later and deceive the besiegers for a little longer. Eldred, with Haughton beside him, led the advance guard and the main body—so far as they could be organised—through the postern; the rear party left by the canal gateway. The plan was that they would form a single column when they had cleared the vicinity of the barracks, but in practice there was no effective march discipline. Haughton was so weak that he had to be held by a man on either side of his horse, with a cushion under his chin to keep his head up. Grant, who went back to find the main body, was not seen again, and after halting several times to wait for Rose and Hanrahan (still recovering from his wound), Eldred decided that they must go on without them.

They took a route along the foothills, thinking that they would find water in the streams, and that it would be difficult for Afghan horsemen to attack them on the broken ground. By dawn, though their horses had previously been ten days without water and five without food, they had made surprisingly good progress before they sought a hiding-place. They thought of taking to a nearby hill, but fortunately on Haughton's advice they lay up in a ravine. Fortunately, because they soon saw the enemy hunting Ghurkas who had been sighted on the hillside.²⁰ One party of Afghan cavalry came within two hundred yards of the *nullah* where they were hiding. A whinny would have given them away, but they kept the heads of their horses—and Eldred's bull-terrier Caesar whose throat was too parched to bark—covered. The contingent was now reduced to Eldred, his *munshee* Mohun Bar, Haughton with his orderly Maun Sing, and a single Ghurka, the last two on foot. At nightfall they set off again, reaching the last range of hills before Kabul. The gleam of fires on the ridge warned them that the passes were watched, and they had to essay a direct ascent of the rock hillside.

Haughton was so weak that he kept falling off his horse. 'I therefore entreated Pottinger to leave me to my fate, and attend

to his own safety'.²¹ But Eldred refused and told him to rest while he searched for a goat-path, which he eventually found. Across the hill they stumbled on an encampment of nomad Afghan shepherds 'whose black goat's hair tents we could not see till we were among them. Their dogs barked furiously, but luckily the night was bitter cold, and no one had the courage to face it'.²²

Nearing Kabul, their faculties numbed with exhaustion, they again lost their way and came too near Deh Afghan, a large castle on the outskirts. The sentries shouted to them, but Eldred answered confidently in Persian and they pushed their horses on as fast as they would go. In the city—it was now about 3 a.m.—they met only one person awake, a fakir smoking his pipe, who gave them his blessing. In Eldred's own words, 'The most singular part of our escape was our actually passing through, as the enemy's picquets of investment were much on the alert and Haughton could not put his horse out of a walk. I considered we would be less likely to be questioned if we came from the city than from any other quarter, so skirting the line of investment we rode into the city by the rear and, as I had anticipated, we got through unnoticed till we passed the last guard, who suspecting us from the direction we were riding gave us a volley, but before they could repeat it we were under cover of our own guns'.²³

Lady Sale's laconic entry in the diary for 15th November reads 'Major Pottinger and Mr Haughton have made their escape from the Kohistan; the former has a ball in his leg; the latter has lost his hand and is severely wounded in the back and neck'.²⁴ The entry for the 19th adds that the Afghans were 'highly indignant at Pottinger and Haughton having ridden through the town. It certainly appears to us very wonderful that they did so in safety'.²⁵ In a letter to Haughton's father, written on 29th March, 1842, when he was a prisoner, Eldred paid tribute to his companion's fortitude. 'it was particularly owing to his example and his exertions that we were able to hold out as long as we did'.²⁶ He makes no mention of his own part.

As a postscript to this chapter, Haughton was too ill to be moved when the British retreated from Kabul at the end of the year. He did, however, survive as a prisoner, though he received no recognition for his defence of Charekar. In December, 1842 he was back on regimental duty, later transferring to the political branch where he served in the Andaman Islands, in Burma, and

as Commissioner for Cooch-Bihar. He retired as Major-General in 1880 and was made up to Lieutenant-General in 1882, but his only decoration was the C.S.I. The other two British officers who set out from Charekar did not reach Kabul. Dr Grant, separated from the main party, was killed at the foot of the last range before the city. Rose and Quartermaster-Sergeant Hanrahan were surrounded and cut down on the second day of the retreat. A few Ghurka stragglers made their way back to the cantonment.

CHAPTER XII

A Brace of Pistols

Eldred Pottinger and John Haughton had their wounds dressed, but there was nothing else in Kabul for their comfort. After listening to an account of the dire happenings in the city, Eldred's indignant, but lucid, reaction was that 'we were doing everything we could to destroy ourselves'.¹ During the next few weeks, until he was called on to play a decisive part, he found no reason to revise his judgment.

The sad thing was that, once again there had been plenty of warnings. Security was never a great Afghan virtue, and there were individuals in Kabul who from tribal rivalries, the prospect of reward, or even a preference for Soojah, were ready to report that a plot was hatching. Shopkeepers were evasive or deliberately rude, and there were other signs of disaffection. On 29th October the cavalry pickets encamped at Seeah Sung were fired on. Then Lieutenant Melville was lucky to escape an ambush, the fourth attempt within a few days to assassinate British officers. But the rising caught the British entirely unprepared. It is not clear why it came exactly when it did. Coups are most often started by a single circumstance which triggers off an unforeseen sequence of events, and on this occasion it was the indignation of Abdoolah Khan, one of the most unsavoury Afghan chiefs. Along with another Khan, Amenoolah the camel-driver's son who had got control of the tribesmen in the Logur valley, Abdoolah had been spreading rumours that Macnaghten intended to seize the leading chiefs and deport them to England. They had also circulated forged documents under Soojah's name calling for a *jehad*. The simmering conspiracy was brought to the boil when Burnes detected Abdoolah intriguing with rebel Ghilzies and threatened to crop his ears. Abdoolah wanted the insult avenged. Moreover, Burnes living in his Residency within the city offered an easy target, and as an extra prize the treasury from which Soojah's troops were paid was kept in the house of the

Paymaster, Captain Johnson, just across the street. In the early hours of 2nd November the Afghans closed in on the Residency.

Burnes, in his comfortable idleness, was fretting for the moment of his promotion. His journal for 31st October reads 'Ay! What will this day bring forth? It will make or mar me, I suppose. Before the sun sets I shall know whether I go to Europe or succeed Macnaghten'.² On 1st November he still had not heard. Concealing his impatience, he called on the Envoy to wish him Godspeed on his journey to Bombay and to felicitate him on leaving the country 'at a season of such tranquillity'.³ But there is evidence that on the same day he received at least two warnings, first from Mohun Lal and then from Soojah's Wuzeer who urged him to take refuge in the cantonment.⁴ Why did this advice go unheeded? He was preoccupied with his own future, but there is more to it than that. Burnes, the man who was better informed about Afghan affairs than anyone else in the Mission, had throughout his career been too cocky, too self-assured. He could not believe that he would be subjected to personal indignity, or attacked, within reach of the British forces. But that is what happened. As the *ghazis* pressed round the Residency, brandishing their knives and shouting for blood, Burnes tried to reason with them and ordered the small guard not to fire. He sent off a hurried signal to the Envoy. He harangued the crowd from the balcony, but shooting broke out, and the two officers with him—his young brother Charles and Lieutenant William Broadfoot—were killed. Burnes, still trying to reason with his assailants, vainly offered them money. Then he was induced to come down and effect his escape in disguise, only to be discovered. To the shout 'See friends! This is Sekunder Burnes!' the Afghans fell on him⁵ (plate 16). His house and Captain Johnson's treasury were sacked by the mob. Johnson, exceptionally and fortunately, was spending the night in the Mission compound.

By daybreak the smoke and flames rising from the pillaged houses were clearly visible from both the Bala Hissar and the cantonment. The only person to take any immediate, positive action was, improbably, Shah Soojah. Thinking he had only to quell a local riot, and unaware that Burnes had been murdered, he at once sent one of his sons with a detachment into the city. Ill-trained for street fighting, they met with sustained fire from the roof-tops. Their guns, which were useless in such confined



Plate 16. The Death of Sir Alexander Burnes

quarters, had to be abandoned, and they retired in bad order to the citadel.

In the cantonment there were already signs of 'that indecision, procrastination, and want of method, which paralysed all our efforts'.⁶ Shortly after 7 a.m. George Lawrence, the Military Secretary, reported to Elphinstone and Macnaghten who were studying Burnes's appeal for help. When asked his opinion, Lawrence said that a regiment should be marched into the city without delay to occupy the Residency and arrest Abdoolah and Amenoolah. His proposal 'was at once set down as one of pure insanity'.⁷ After further shilly-shallying between Elphinstone, too infirm to make up his mind, and Macnaghten who did not as yet understand the implications but saw that some exemplary action was needed, a warning order was sent to Brigadier Shelton to march part of his troops from the lines at Seeah Sung to the Bala Hissar. Lawrence, who was attacked on the way, went to warn Soojah; the Shah demurred at allowing more troops into the citadel; and a signal was sent to Shelton to stand fast. During this conference Sturt, who had been despatched by Shelton to find out what was happening, staggered into the audience chamber. He was badly wounded. Lawrence had him carried back under escort to the cantonment, where Lady Sale found 'he was covered with blood issuing from his mouth, and was unable to articulate. From the wounds in the face and shoulder, the nerves were affected; the the mouth would not open, the tongue was swollen and paralysed. . . .'⁸ But Sapper officers are made of stern stuff and Sturt recovered to fight a little longer.

Lawrence now galloped back to Shelton to tell him he could move. There was another untidy scene when the Brigadier asked Lawrence's advice. Lawrence, consistently, said he, should make straight for the city, but Shelton snarled his disagreement and marched for the Bala Hissar. He had a mobile contingent that might have been deployed to better effect—a squadron of the 5th Light Cavalry, a company of the 44th, a wing of the 54th Native Infantry, four Horse Artillery guns, and the Shah's 6th Infantry. There was another altercation when Soojah asked why they had come instead of taking some punitive action. As Lawrence said, 'he seemed, as well he might, to be deeply annoyed that they had done nothing'.⁹ Soojah was now in a frenzy; his troops had been driven back, losing over 200 men; there had been desertions from

his own guards; and he screamed that if peace was not restored next day he would burn Kabul to the ground. But, perhaps realising how dependant he now was on British bayonets, Soojah insisted on giving a regal dinner. His invitation was received with extreme disgust by those who had reached the Bala Hissar, 'neither men or officers having an article of any sort or kind beside what they wore'.¹⁰ The protocol of wearing mess kit dies hard, even when the enemy are whetting their blades outside.

This prandial incident—Shelton's behaviour was described as 'pitiful and childish'—is of no consequence in itself, but it shows how completely the British failed to grasp that the merry days of the Kabul gymkhana were over.¹¹ Equally inept was Elphinstone's reaction. After a day's deliberation, quaintly communicating with Macnaghten by letter, he wrote half-heartedly canvassing various courses of action, but concluded 'We must see what the morning brings and then think what can be done'.¹²

Neither the next, nor the following days yielded any inspiration. The return of Major Griffiths and the main body of the 37th Native Infantry brought back from Khoord Kabul, had a heartening effect, and Shelton was reinforced in the Bala Hissar. But it was evident that more would be needed. Orders went to Nott to despatch Maclaren's Brigade from Kandahar, and to Sale to return. (Eventually, as will become apparent, neither complied.) Vincent Eyre placed every available gun round the lengthy perimeter of the cantonment, but he had only six nine pounders, four howitzers, and three 5½ inch mortars. The inadequacies of the cantonment as a defensible position, which Eldred Pottinger had already deplored (Chapter VIII) were soon to be tragically exposed, and there was another basic defect. There were simply not enough troops both to man the ramparts and take the offensive. And just as the Charekar force had been brought down by thirst, so the troops in Kabul were before long faced with an equally compelling hazard—famine.

Nothing roused Elphinstone from his lethargy. A detachment under Major Swayne, attempting to reach the Lahore Gate to join up with Shelton's force in the Bala Hissar, was driven back. The enemy occupied the Shah's garden and the forts of Mahmood Khan, 900 yards south east of the cantonment, and of Mahmood Shereef from which they attacked Lieutenant Warren and the men guarding the Commissariat fort. As at Charekar,

there were sounds of mining, and escalating ladders were being fetched up by the Afghans. Warren reported that he could not hold out much longer. There were interminable debates about how to relieve him. Elphinstone did not like night attacks and wearied his impatient officers with anecdotes proving their ineffectiveness. Before the rescuing force was assembled Warren marched in, being unaware that anyone was coming to his aid. Eyre had no doubt that the loss of the Commissariat fort containing food, medical supplies, and as a final insult the rum ration, was 'the first *fatal* blow to our supremacy at Kabul',¹³ and at once persuaded those chiefs who had been neutral to join the rebels. The fort's surrender was made worse by the loss of the only other source of supply, the small *godown* fort on the outskirts of the city which housed rations for Soojah's troops. Captain Colin Mackenzie defended it for forty eight hours till his ammunition ran out. The garrison now had only two days' supply and had to scrounge what they could from the Beymaroo village. Elphinstone wrote petulantly to Macnaghten on the 5th 'I do not know how we are to subsist or, from want of provisions, to retreat. You should therefore consider what chance there is of making terms, if we are driven to this extremity'. He may already have seen what the end would be, but for the moment it was another sign of impotence.

The next two months until the British retreat from Kabul began on the 6th January were marked by mournful variations on a few recurring themes—the vacillation of the high command, constant sniping and harassment by the Afghans, engagements where initial British successes were not exploited, and reports of disasters elsewhere in the country. As a sinister backcloth to the tragedy that now unfolded, the skies were full of snow and there was an ever-increasing shortage of rations and fodder.

Elphinstone's health never recovered from a heavy fall from his horse on 2nd November, when his mount rolled over him, and he became even more incapable of anything approaching leadership. Eyre, who had a strong affection for the General, could say no more in his defence than that every allowance ought, in common justice, to be made for his infirmities. Eldred Pottinger, when he came in from Charekar, was less forgiving. 'Elphinstone', he wrote, 'who I fancy was never a strong or independent-minded man, was reduced by severe illness to one remove from dotage'.¹⁵



Plate 17. Brigadier John Shelton

Elphinstone soon felt that the direction of operations was beyond him, and on 9th November he recalled Shelton from the Bala Hissar to take charge of the cantonment. But many saw that this would not make for improvement. Seldom can there have been such a rift as existed between Elphinstone and Shelton (plate 17). The General wrote ruefully that the Brigadier's manner was 'most contumacious', and that 'he appeared to be actuated by an illfeeling towards me'.¹⁶ Shelton, for his part, paraded his contempt for his senior officer. His usual posture at Elphinstone's never-ending councils of war was to wrap himself up in his bedding roll on the floor and to answer questions with snorts, snores or silence. There were others who added to the confusion as Elphinstone pathetically sought the opinion of anyone, however junior, who was present. Captain Bellew invariably had an 'observation' to throw in, or 'begged to suggest' something, but Captain Thain, always disregarded, in time declined to give any advice at all.¹⁷ The lack of 'confidence soon spread to the other ranks. Eyre was distressed at the number of croakers in the garrison. Lady Sale said it was more than shocking, it was shameful to hear the way that the officers went on croaking before the men. 'It is sufficient to dispirit them, and prevent them fighting for us'.¹⁸ There were at Kabul young officers—Sturt, Mackenzie and Lawrence, to name only a few—who were capable of showing the same example as Eldred Pottinger and John Haughton had offered at Crarekar, but their proposals were not taken seriously.

From the general charge of shameful mental atrophy it is, however, necessary to acquit the Envoy. Macnaghten's misjudgments led to his own murder, but as the enemy tightened their grip on the British forces, Eyre conceded that 'scarcely an enterprise was undertaken throughout the siege, but at the suggestion, and even the entreaties, of the Envoy'.¹⁹

Captain Trevor, when he came in from his outpost in the city two days after the insurrection started, confirmed that if we had sent only a few hundred troops into Kabul (Lawrence's solution) the rebels could have been put down.²⁰ Events over the next weeks demonstrated, in the three main engagements, that with resolution the garrison could still have prevailed. On 10th November, for example, Shelton at Macnaghten's insistence led an attack on the Rikabashee fort. The storming party, instead of

making for the main gate, blew up the wicket, but fought their way in. Then the Afghans drove back the 44th in disarray. Here, it was generally admitted, Shelton 'proved a trump'. Three times he rallied his forces to take new heart. Lady Sale noted approvingly 'The conduct of the 37th is highly spoken of: they drove the enemy (who had got on top of a bastion) with their bayonets clean over the side, where they were received on the bayonets of the 44th'.²¹ It was a fierce encounter, the British losses being over 200 killed and wounded. The savagery was exemplified by the discovery of the headless corpse of an Afghan chief. This was the Afghan practice when they could not take the body, and the head was buried with full rites. The Rikabashee fort contained a large quantity of grain; half was immediately carried to the cantonment; but Shelton would not occupy the fort overnight, and the next day the rest had gone.

Two other engagements showed the capacity, and the limitations, of the garrison to carry the battle to the enemy. The Afghans had been subjecting the cantonment to harassing fire from two guns on the Beymaroo ridge. After an angry dispute with Macnaghten—an argument in which Elphinstone seems to have taken no part—Shelton belatedly marched out on the afternoon of the 13th. The footsoldiers had made progress up the hill when the Afghan cavalry charged. From her vantage point in the barracks Lady Sale noted that her very heart 'felt as if it leapt into my teeth when I saw the Afghans ride clean through them. The onset was fearful. They looked like a great cluster of bees'.²² But under effective fire from Eyre's two guns the infantry reformed, gained the ridge, and took the enemy cannon. (They had been brought up by the Shah's elephants; unfortunately the animals had been sent back; they would have been fine prizes.) The advantage was not followed up. Shelton withdrew at nightfall and soon afterwards the enemy were back on the ridge. The day's battle was 'the last success our arms were destined to experience'.²³

In Eyre's view the third battle, again for the Beymaroo heights, on 23rd November, 'decided the fate of the Kabul force'.²⁴ As a preliminary, on the previous day Major Swayne had made an unsuccessful attempt to oust the enemy from Beymaroo village, which the Afghans had occupied knowing it was a source of supply for the British. Macnaghten was emphatic that the village

and the hills above it must be captured, and Shelton reluctantly marched again. This time he had 17 companies from three regiments of infantry, two squadrons of cavalry, 100 Irregular Horse, and 100 Sappers and Miners.

The column moved off at 2 a.m. and before daybreak had gained the high ground. Shelton would not agree to a night attack on the village, and when it was attempted in daylight Major Swayne again made a botch of it, lost his way, and had to be recalled. By now the Afghans were thoroughly alerted; they reinforced the village; and hordes of infantry and cavalry swept out from the city to contest the ridge. The enemy had seized the initiative. Their marksmanship was good, and the British, ineptly positioned, suffered. Lady Sale, at her usual observation post behind the chimneys, thought 'It was very like the scenes depicted in the battles of the Crusades. The enemy rushed on; drove our men before them very like a flock of sheep with a wolf at their heels'.²⁵ The solitary British gun, now too hot to fire, was captured, but Shelton exhorted his men to further effort and it was retaken. The tide of battle seemed to be flowing in the British favour. Lady Sale 'hastened home to get breakfast ready for Sturt, everyone supposing that the enemy were routed and that Brigadier Shelton was coming back with the troops'.²⁶ In fact he was surrounded on all sides except that facing the cantonment. Shelton vainly offered a hundred rupees to any man who would take the enemy standard insolently placed on the ridge. Officers were reduced to pelting the enemy with stones. Then the first British square was overrun; the second gave way; and the whole force retreated in confusion down the hill. The gun was borne away in triumph. As they poured back into barracks the British troops would not look Elphinstone in the eye.

Eldred Pottinger in his sick bay was highly critical of the conduct of the battle, and his was not a lone voice. Eyre identified six 'great errors' in the British leadership.²⁷ The first, and perhaps most fatal mistake was to take out a single gun. A General Order by the Marquess of Hastings (Governor-General, 1812-23) had expressly forbidden taking less than two guns least, as happened at Beymaroo, a single one should overheat and become unserviceable. Other examples of foolishness were the failure to take the village by night; the omission to build a *sangah*, or breastwork, to provide protection on the ridge,

although Sappers were there for the purpose; the hemming-in of the cavalry between the two British squares; and Shelton's unwillingness to retire in time and in good order. It seems, however, that the worst mistake was to deploy the infantry in two squares. This formation had been admirable against Napoleon's cavalry, but it now merely served to afford the easiest of targets for the Afghan jezails, out of range of our muskets. In short, Shelton might stand firm although hit five times by spent bullets, but he had no tactical sense. It was no wonder that Colonel Oliver of the 5th Native Infantry, an elderly obese officer, resigned himself to his fate and walked straight into the enemy. His body was found with his head and one finger cut off, 'the latter was probably done to obtain a diamond ring which he always wore'.²⁸

Apart from Shelton's misguided deployment, the British were found wanting in other respects. Both European and native troops were prone to fire at random, and the Afghan cavalry learned that they could brave the discharge of musketry, even at close quarters. The Afghans had one ruse which they found very effective. Each horseman carried a footsoldier behind him. When the initial charge was spent the horseman would wheel and drop the footsoldier, fresh for combat and ready to fire from the ground that had been gained. (plate 18)

The Kabul garrison felt increasingly isolated. There seemed to be little chance of reinforcements reaching them. The Ghurkas had been destroyed at Charekar and the whole of Kohistan was known to be up in arms. Captain Woodburn and 150 men of Soojah's 5th Infantry were slaughtered 30 miles from Ghuznee.²⁹ Macnaghten had sent repeated signals by '*cossids*', natives who carried letters concealed about their person, to Sale, but on 17th November he finally learned that 'fighting Bob' had headed for Jalalabad. Hopes that Maclaren's Brigade would appear gradually waned, although it was not till 20th December that Macnaghten heard with despair that snow-blocked passes had made it turn back from Tazee. On 22nd November Akbar Khan (plate 19) arrived in the city to join the insurgents, and Eyre observed that the crisis of the struggle was already nigh at hand.³⁰

Elphinstone was always vague about the supply position. He was perpetually exercised about ammunition, though stocks were plentiful. Grain and fodder were a different matter. After the loss of the Commissariat fort supplies had to be bought from any

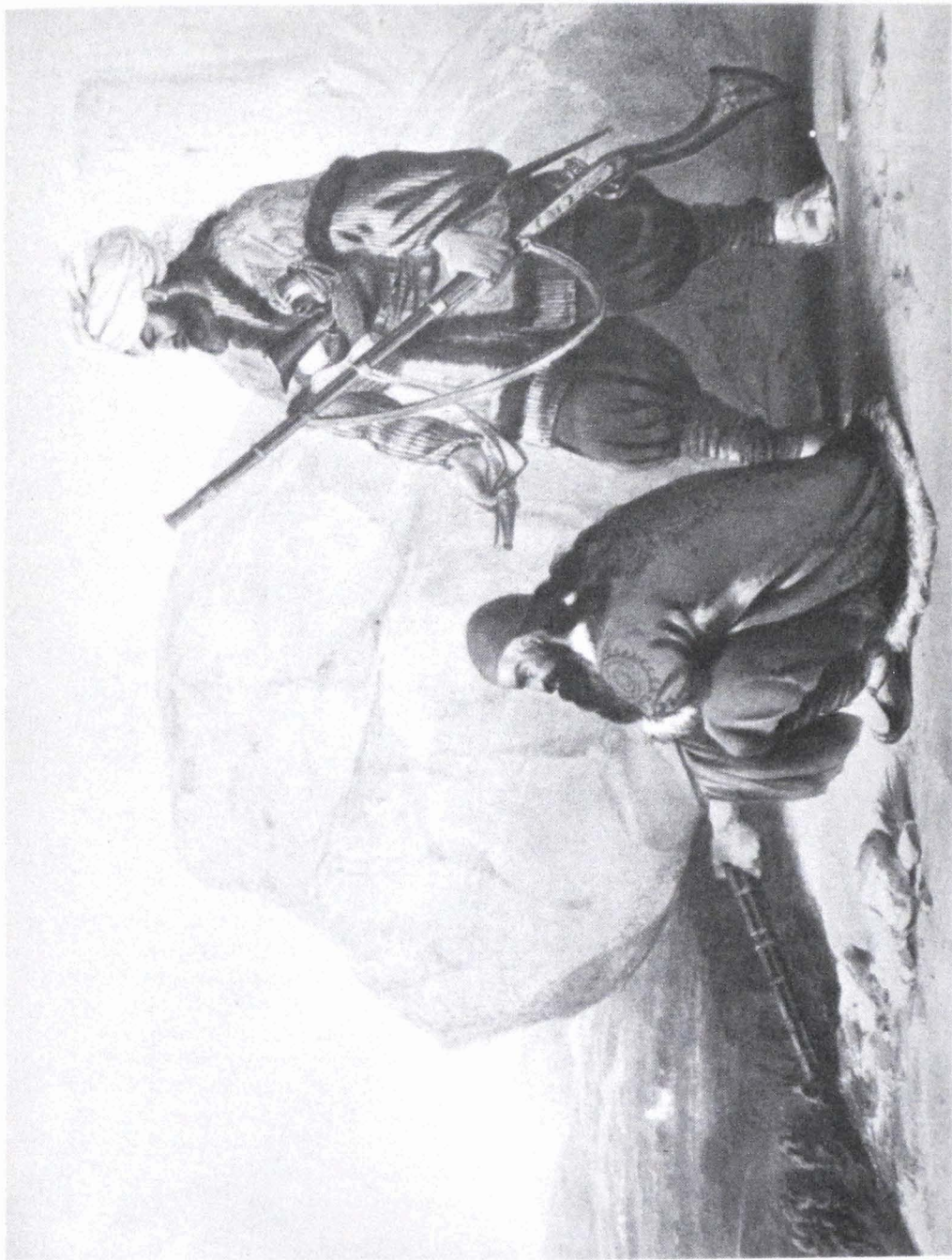


Plate 18. Afghan soldiers



Plate 19. Akbar Khan

native who would sell. Lady Sale commended Sergeant Deane, 'a particularly intelligent man, and very superior in his present station in life', who was fluent in Persian and energetic in obtaining grain.³¹ But the British could never count on enough for more than a few days. By mid December there was no forage. Horses were stripping the bark of trees, gnawing at tent pegs and cart wheels, and 'eating their own dung over and over again'.³² The implacable Kabul climate was now an additional hardship. Lady Sale recorded a great increase of snow on the hills on 6th November. Native troops were succumbing to pneumonia 'which carries them off in a couple of days'.³³ There were severe snow storms on 26th and 28th November, and on 18th December five inches of snow, which never disappeared, fell. The garrison was either going to be frozen or starved into submission.

There was a continuous debate about moving the entire force into the Bala Hissar, a much more defensible position than the cantonment, but no agreement was reached. First there was the problem of moving the sick and wounded. But the distance was short, less than two miles, and Eyre argued that if guns were placed on the Seeah Sung hills the enemy could not have impeded the march without risking a battle in the open 'to which they were generally adverse'. Then there was the absence in the citadel of forage for the cavalry; but the horses would probably have to be shot in any case and they would not be needed to defend the Bala Hissar. The enemy would gain a psychological advantage if we gave up the cantonment, but this would be offset by the security of the new position. Sturt, Eldred Pottinger, and most of the junior officers were strongly in favour of holing up in the citadel, but Shelton would not listen. Macnaghten reluctantly deferred to his view. Lady Sale scornfully summed up with 'the cry is, how can we abandon the cantonments that have cost us so much money?'.³⁴

Osman Khan, one of the more friendly chiefs who had spared British lives at Beymaroo, sent Macnaghten a letter saying that their desire was not to destroy the British force but to see them quietly leave the country. Elphinstone said the Envoy should avail himself of the offer to negotiate. Macnaghten was hesitant; he still hoped against hope that something more positive might emerge from the military commander; but Elphinstone remained inactive while the enemy destroyed the bridge over the river

(closing another line of retreat) and reoccupied Mahmood Shereef's fort. On 8th December Macnaghten asked for the General's formal opinion, and was told that with 600 sick and wounded he should lose no time in entering into negotiations. Elphinstone's letter was countersigned by Shelton, Anquetil and Colonel Chambers.³⁵ There was no spirit left in the troops, and, as Eyre recorded, starvation stared them in the face. A first approach delivered by a minor Barukzye chief was firmly rejected by Macnaghten, but on 11th December he met Akbar and Osman Khan and a gathering of Afghan nobles outside the cantonment.

The Envoy had brought a draft treaty. Swallowing his words, he read out the preamble to the effect that since the restoration of Soojah, the cause of the British presence, 'was displeasing to the great majority of the Afghan nation' it no longer became the British to persist in a course so unwelcome. The terms proposed were that the British would return to India; Dost Mahomed would be sent back; Soojah could either stay or accompany the British; and there would be an amnesty for Soojah's supporters.³⁶ Akbar objected violently to the amnesty, but was overruled by the other chiefs, and it was agreed that the evacuation should start in three days' time. In the days that followed the chiefs increased their demands. At one stage it was proposed that Soojah should stop the most offensive features of his regal protocol and that his daughters should be married to selected chiefs. Soojah, who had long been described as '*gobrowed*' (an expressive eastern term, to be rendered something between dumbfounded and at one's wits' end) refused.³⁷ On the 13th the small contingent that still remained in the Bala Hissar was withdrawn, being fired upon despite Akbar's alleged protection. The few outlying forts in British hands, guns and ammunition, were given up for the promise of food. The chiefs wanted Shelton as a hostage, but he 'expressed a decided objection', and they had to be satisfied with four junior officers, of whom two, Captains Conolly and Airey, were given over. It is a fair criticism that throughout the negotiations carried out, first by Macnaghten and then by Eldred Pottinger, the British surrendered hostages when they should have been demanding them from the Afghans. Departure was postponed till the 22nd.

Events now moved quickly to Macnaghten's tragic dénouement. Neither side trusted the other. The Afghans were not

delivering the promised provisions. Machnaghten had for some time been secretly trying to win over the Ghilzyes and Kuzzilbashes to break with the other chiefs. This was suspected by Akbar and his colleagues, and Akbar now wove a web to ensnare Macnaghten. On the evening of the 22nd Captain Skinner, who in some unexplained way had stayed in Kabul, came with Akbar's cousin to offer terms as surprising as they were welcome to the Envoy. Briefly the plan was that Soojah would remain king; Akbar would be his Wuzeer and receive 30 lakhs of rupees and an annual pension of 4 lakhs; and the British could stay in Afghanistan for a further eight months 'so as to save their credit'.³⁸ Macnaghten was to have troops ready to seize Mahmood Khan's fort and the hated Amenoolah Khan, who would be handed over by Akbar. The Envoy, who had always been amazed at the chiefs' united front, was ready to believe that this specious offer was genuine and grasped it with an eagerness engendered by despair. Mackenzie's view was that beset by Elphinstone's imbecility on one hand, and by systematic treachery on the other, the unfortunate Macnaghten was as *gobrowed* as Soojah and broke his own rule of not dealing with individual chiefs.³⁹ He gave his consent in writing to Akbar's plan. It was his death warrant.

An ironic aspect of the tragedy that followed is the way in which the pattern repeated itself. Mohun Lal had warned Burnes of the plot against him. Now (still in Kabul) he sent a message to dissuade Macnaghten from trusting the Afghans. So did one of Mackenzie's jemandars, as well as Mackenzie himself. But Macnaghten, like Burnes, would not take heed. On the morning of the 23rd he told Elphinstone what was in train and asked for two regiments with guns to be ready to take Mahmood Khan's fort. When the General was doubtful, Macnaghten challenged him for the last time, saying that if Elphinstone would march out and meet the enemy he would accompany him, 'and I am sure we will beat them'. The mumbled reply was 'Macnaghten, I can't; the troops are not to be depended on'.⁴⁰ So with Captains Lawrence, Mackenzie and Trevor, Macnaghten rode out to meet Akbar Khan. Typically, the regiments he asked for were not ready, and even his escort was not up to strength. Lawrence warned again of possible treachery. Macnaghten agreed that there was a danger, but added 'The life I have led for the last six weeks you,

Lawrence, know well; and rather than be disgraced and live it over again, I would risk a hundred deaths; success will save our honour, and more than make up for all risks'.⁴¹

What follows might have come from the pen of Webster, Tourneur, or some other Jacobean tragedian. A few days earlier Macnaghten had sent Akbar a gift of a brace of pistols, originally belonging to Lawrence. Today the Envoy brought an Arab horse on which Akbar had cast a covetous eye. Macnaghten's party found Akbar and the Afghan chiefs assembled on a slope by the river bank. Akbar conveyed his thanks for the presents. They dismounted and sat on a carpet of horse-cloths. 'Men talk of presentiment', Mackenzie wrote later, 'I suppose it was something of the kind that came over me, for I could scarcely prevail upon myself to quit my horse'. Akbar asked Macnaghten if he accepted the previous night's plan. The Envoy did not know it, but this was his last chance. 'Why not?' he replied, confirming that he was ready to betray the formal treaty. Lawrence observed that there were too many chiefs crowding about, but Akbar, grinning, said they were all in the secret. Mackenzie heard Akbar shout 'Begeer! Begeer! (Seize! Seize!) as he grasped the Envoy's left hand with 'an expression in his face of the most diabolical ferocity'. Sultan Jan, Akbar's cousin, laid hold of his other hand. The only words Macnaghten had time to utter were 'Az barae Khooda! (for God's sake?).⁴² Mackenzie, Lawrence and Trevor heard no more. They were dragged off and placed on horses behind their captors. The Envoy's escort fled except for Ram Sing, a Rajput jemadar who was cut down. So was Trevor. But Mackenzie and Lawrence were ridden through the *ghazis* who threatened and struck at them. No British eyewitness actually saw Macnaghten killed, but Captain Skinner later said that Akbar, with a nice sense of propriety, had shot him with Lawrence's pistols.

From the cantonment Lady Sale noted a great crowd about a body, evidently a European, which the Afghans were seen to strip. She was not at the time aware that the fanatics were dismembering Macnaghten, but she was surprised that 'no endeavour was made to recover the body, which might easily have been done by sending out cavalry'.⁴³ Eldred Pottinger, still suffering from his inflamed wound, was about to be summoned to the most contentious part of his career.

CHAPTER XIII

Winding the shroud

The British Envoy had been murdered before, and within musket-shot of, a British army. 'What' Eyre asked 'were our troops about all this time? Were no steps taken to rescue the Envoy and his friends from their perilous position? Where was the bodyguard which followed from the cantonment?'¹ Eyre wished it was in his power to give satisfactory answers.

The third question was the easiest. The bodyguard, on their way to Macnaghten's fatal rendezvous, turned back as the first shots were fired. Lieutenant Le Geyt, seeing his men would not advance, galloped back for assistance exclaiming that the Envoy had been carried off. Nothing was done. Le Geyt's appearance 'instead of rousing our leaders to instant action, seemed to paralyse their faculties'. There was, to be true, no certainty about the reports, although Lieutenant Warren at the cantonment gate stoutly maintained that he had seen Macnaghten fall and the Afghans hacking at his body. Elphinstone, though habitually more given to despondency than optimism, would not believe what had happened. He persuaded himself that 'Sir William had proceeded to the city for the purpose of negotiating', and sent Captain Grant to reassure each regiment in turn.² They were not reassured. They could hear the *ghazis* in Kabul firing volleys from their jezails and preparing to defend themselves against the British who, they thought, must soon sally out to avenge the dead Envoy. But Elphinstone's only step was, in his own words, to ensure that 'the garrison was got ready and remained under arms all day'.³

Next morning, the 24th, came a letter from Lawrence confirming the murders, and Lady Sale had the sad task of breaking the news to Lady Macnaghten and Mrs Trevor. It was now known that the bodies were hanging 'in a public *chouk* (bazaar): the Envoy's decapitated and a mere trunk, the limbs having been carried in triumph about the city'.⁴ Elphinstone, unmoved by the

indignation seething through the troops who were anxious to be led against the enemy, was more concerned with Lawrence's news that the Afghans wished to renew a negotiations. He now asked Eldred Pottinger to take over as negotiator.

Eldred, who had been confined to quarters since his escape from Charekar, nursing an open wound and an inflamed leg, wrote 'I was hauled out of my sick room and obliged to negotiate for the safety of a parcel of fools who were doing all they could to ensure their destruction, but they would not hear my advice'.⁵ He had already urged Elphinstone to launch an immediate attack on Kabul. He protested once more about renewing discussions with those who had treacherously slain the Head of the British Mission, and agreed to his new role with the greatest reluctance, 'plainly perceiving,' as Eyre sympathetically observed, 'our affairs to be so irretrievably ruined as to render the distinction anything but enviable, or likely to improve his hardly-earned fame'.⁶ Eldred might have added that Macnaghten, who while alive had repeatedly frustrated him and ignored his advice, had left him a bitter legacy.

On the evening of the 24th Elphinstone held a Council of War with Brigadiers Shelton and Anquetil, Colonel Chambers, and Eldred. The Afghans were now demanding that the British should at once withdraw from all their stations in Afghanistan—Kabul, Ghuznee, Kandahar and Jalalabad—and return to India; Dost Mahomed was to be restored and hostages left as surety; Soojah could remain, or depart, as he chose. New conditions beyond those agreed with Macnaghten were proposed. The rupees in the British Treasury were to be handed over; most of the guns were to be left behind; and the existing hostages were to be replaced by the married officers, their wives and children.

Elphinstone seemed prepared to accept even the humiliating suggestion that families should be left to the mercy of the Afghans, and sent Major Thain to ask the married officers if they would agree. He got a spirited response. Captain Anderson said he would rather put a pistol to his wife's head and shoot her. Sturt gave notice that his wife and mother-in-law would 'only be taken at the point of the bayonet'. But the gallant Eyre said that 'if it would be productive of great good' he would stay with his wife and child.⁷ Elphinstone eventually informed the chiefs that it would be contrary to the usages of war to give up ladies as

hostages, and that he could not consent to an arrangement that would brand him with perpetual disgrace in his own country.

Eldred was in an unenviable position. He could not agree with Elphinstone that further resistance was useless. He was totally opposed to Shelton's whining that there was no alternative to immediate withdrawal at any cost. Nor did he share the Council of War's opinion that they were committed by Macnaghten's activities to accept the treaty. The Afghans, for their part, had shown no inclination to cease from harassment or to make provisions available, and Eldred asserted that all previous undertakings were made void by the murder of the Envoy. But he stood alone against the rest of the Council. To them he was merely the senior Political Assistant who had been called in to carry out their wishes, and who must not aspire to the full powers of an Envoy. He might protest, but, as had been shown in his earlier brushes with authority, he was never an eloquent advocate. Nor was he sufficiently devious to win individual members of the Council in private to support him. This might conceivably have succeeded, since Shelton's sneering hostility to Eldred had caused offence. There remained the desperate possibility of appealing to the army over the heads of the senior officers. But Eldred was not mutinous by nature—for mutiny it would have been—and Lawrence and Mackenzie, apart from Sturt the two officers most likely to join him, were still imprisoned in Kabul. It is not clear how far he contemplated this final expedient. He was still in poor physical shape. But he could continue to argue. Logic was on his side. No one, he claimed, could believe anything said by the Afghan chiefs. The Council would not be justified in sacrificing large sums of public money to buy their own safety. Finally, there was no right to order the garrisons at Jalalabad, etc., to abandon their posts since once Elphinstone capitulated he could not compel them to do so. There were only two honourable courses, Eldred argued vehemently, to occupy the Bala Hissar and hold out to the last at Kabul, or to force their way to Jalalabad—a fighting retreat unencumbered by baggage and essentials. 'However', he recorded, 'I could not persuade them to sacrifice their baggage; and that was eventually one of the chief causes of our disaster'.⁸

On the 26th came letters from Macgregor at Jalalabad and from Mackeson at Peshawar, saying that reinforcements had

reached the latter station, and that other troops—the 16th Lancers, the 9th and the 31st, were not far behind. (As it happened, the advance column was opposed in the Khyber pass in mid-January and had to withdraw.) There were reports that inside Kabul a Shah Soojah faction was gaining strength. Osman Khan had sent a clandestine message that he would escort the British to Peshawar for a third of the price demanded by Akbar and his associates. Eldred again tried to persuade the Council—Captains Grant and Bellew were also present—that negotiations should be discontinued.

He met with no success. Against occupying the Bala Hissar it was said that the cantonment guns could not be ferried to the citadel, and that the guns already there were short of ammunition. As an artilleryman, Eldred suggested an ingenious manoeuvre. ‘Another excellent project of Major Pottinger’s’, Lady Sale was pleased to comment scornfully.⁹ It was, briefly, to erect a battery on the Seeah Sung hills, fire shot from the cantonment guns into the battery area, and then transmit the shot from the Seeah Sung guns to the citadel. It was not attempted. The Council listened impatiently to Eldred’s arguments, and Shelton was moved to denounce him personally. Eldred recorded ‘Indeed, I went so far that I remember telling him it would be better to lead the troops out, and either carry the city by assault or die in the attempt; since by his proposal we should be dishonoured and disgraced, and the stigma of cowardice fixed on us for ever’.¹⁰

But Shelton was the dominant figure in the Council. His views prevailed, and Eldred, who had placed his objections on record and emphasised that he acted only as the Council’s agent, was instructed to renew negotiations and give effect to the treaty. Mackenzie’s comment is pertinent. ‘He signed the treaty in soldierly obedience, knowing full well that he would be held responsible for that which was the work of others. The General and five other officers were unanimous against him; and the hero of Herat was obliged to do the thing that he abhorred’.¹¹

A recurring motif in the Afghan tragedy lies in the warnings that went unheeded. The signing of the treaty, ratified by the chiefs on 1st January, was preceded and accompanied by admonitions from friendly Afghans that the British were cutting their own throats. Much the same had happened before the murders of

Burnes and Macnaghten. Mohun Lal, as usual, warned Eldred that the chiefs would destroy the army as soon as it marched. He could only shrug and say that they had signed the treaty, and 'as for attacking us on the road, we are in the hands of God, and in him we trust'.¹² Moolah Ahmed Khan told Captain Johnson that Akbar had sworn to exterminate the British force. Taj Mahomed, a well-disposed chief repeated that the Afghan leaders were not to be trusted. Lady Sale noted the Afghans' gruesome intention 'to kill every man except one, who is to have his hands and legs cut off and is to be placed with a letter *in terrorem* at the entrance of the Khyber passes, to deter all *feringhees* from entering the country again'.¹³ Still the preparations for departure went on.

The Afghans' demands for money could be met only by bills drawn on the Government of India. Eldred insisted that they must be signed by Lawrence, as Secretary to the Envoy, and made this a pretext for obtaining his release from Akbar's custody. Lawrence came in on the 29th, and the bills were duly signed, with the wise proviso that they could be cashed only on the safe arrival at Peshawar of the British troops. Lawrence's fellow-captive, Mackenzie, was released on the next day, along with 'Gentleman Jim' Skinner. Eyre adds the cryptic comment that Skinner had passed through some curious adventures 'in the disguise of an Afghan female'.¹⁴ Then came the most bitter humiliation, the surrender of the guns. Eldred tried to temper the pain of the concession by handing them over two at a time, on different days, but this did not really palliate the disgrace.

On 30th December Eldred got a letter off by *cossid* to Mackeson at Peshawar. Since there were those in the enemy's camp who could read English, he wrote in French, and signed his name in Greek.

'Mon cher Mackeson,

J'ai eu le plaisir de recevoir votre lettre du 12me au feu Envoye. Notre situation est des plus dangereuses. . . . Nous avons aujourd'hui finis les termes du traité, et nous esperons partir d'ici demain ou après demain. De leur promesses je m'en doute. . . . Il faut que vous tenez ouvert le Khyber, et que vous soyez prêt nous aider le passage; car si nous ne sommes pas protégés, il nous serait impossible faire halte en route pour que les troupes se rafraichissent, sans laquelle j'ai peur qu'ils soient disorganisés.

Votre ami,
Eldred Pottinger (in Greek characters)'.¹⁵

The garrison was kept in a state of perpetual anxiety as the departure was, on various pretexts, postponed, the chiefs contending that they were not ready with the escort. Eldred suggested improvisations. One, the proposal to carry a large quantity of planks to ford the streams in the Khoord-Kabul pass, was rightly dismissed as impracticable. More might have been made of his suggestion that puttees should be made from horse-blankets, thus emulating the Afghans whose legs were so attired from the first snow-fall. But this eminently practical idea was not adopted and frost-bite became widespread. The *ghazis* were now thronging impertinently round the cantonment to increase British discomfort.

Snow had been falling heavily—on 30th December it fell all day—and on 3rd January there were 32° of frost. The sick, including Eldred's co-survivor John Haughton, had already been sent into the city, although Lady Sale and her ladies had been busy making hammocks to carry them on the march. The hostages, Captains Walsh and Drummond and Lieutenants Warburton and Webb, were sent to join Lieutenants Conolly and Airey. (Akbar was however frustrated in his attempt to get hold of Warburton's Afghan wife.) No historian of the Afghan war has been able to overlook Lady Sale's comment when, among Sturt's books which had to be discarded, she found Campbell's poem on the Battle of Hohenlinden.

'Few, few shall part where many meet,
The snow shall be their winding sheet;
And every turf beneath their feet
Shall be a soldier's sepulchre'.

The verse, she noted in her diary, 'haunted her day and night'.¹⁶ Her presentiment was soon to be fulfilled, but another incident symbolised the futility of the whole Kabul exercise. Her last dinner and breakfast were cooked on a fire made of her mahogany dining table. Through how many countries, by how many hands and different modes of conveyance, and at what expense, had that piece of furniture been carried to serve as firewood?

Spare a thought for Shah Soojah, the nominal cause of the expedition, peering from the Bala Hissar to see his allies on the

point of departure, taking with them most of the troops which had been recruited for him. He offered sanctuary to British wives, but not surprisingly no one would accept. He appealed to Anquetil, who had been his commander, asking 'if it were well to forsake him in the hour of need'.¹⁷ He sent a message by Sturt enquiring if not even one officer would stand by him. There were suspicions, not confirmed, that Soojah had been a party to the insurrection, but his final abandonment by the British was markedly callous.

As the remnants of the once-victorious Army of the Indus started their retreat, it is relevant to ask what were the causes of this shameful capitulation. Some, as we have seen, are self-evident—the confusion in command between the civilian and military leaders; the dispersal of the British force to scattered outposts; the siting of the cantonment, especially leaving the commissariat fort outside the perimeter; the failure to occupy the Bala Hissar; the demoralisation caused by the climate; and the tactics of the Afghan cavalry which were superior to the antique Waterloo disposition of the British in the few pitched battles. When it comes to personalities, Eyre attached much of the blame to Keane, who contented himself with superficial success, and hurried off 'with too great eagerness to enjoy the applause which awaited him in England', taking with him a large part of the Bengal army, (the entire Bombay force had gone at the same time) and leaving the fort of Ali Musjid in the Khyber as the only occupied stronghold in the 600 miles from Kabul to Ferozepore.¹⁸ Keane's successors were too easily satisfied with the outward semblance of tranquillity.

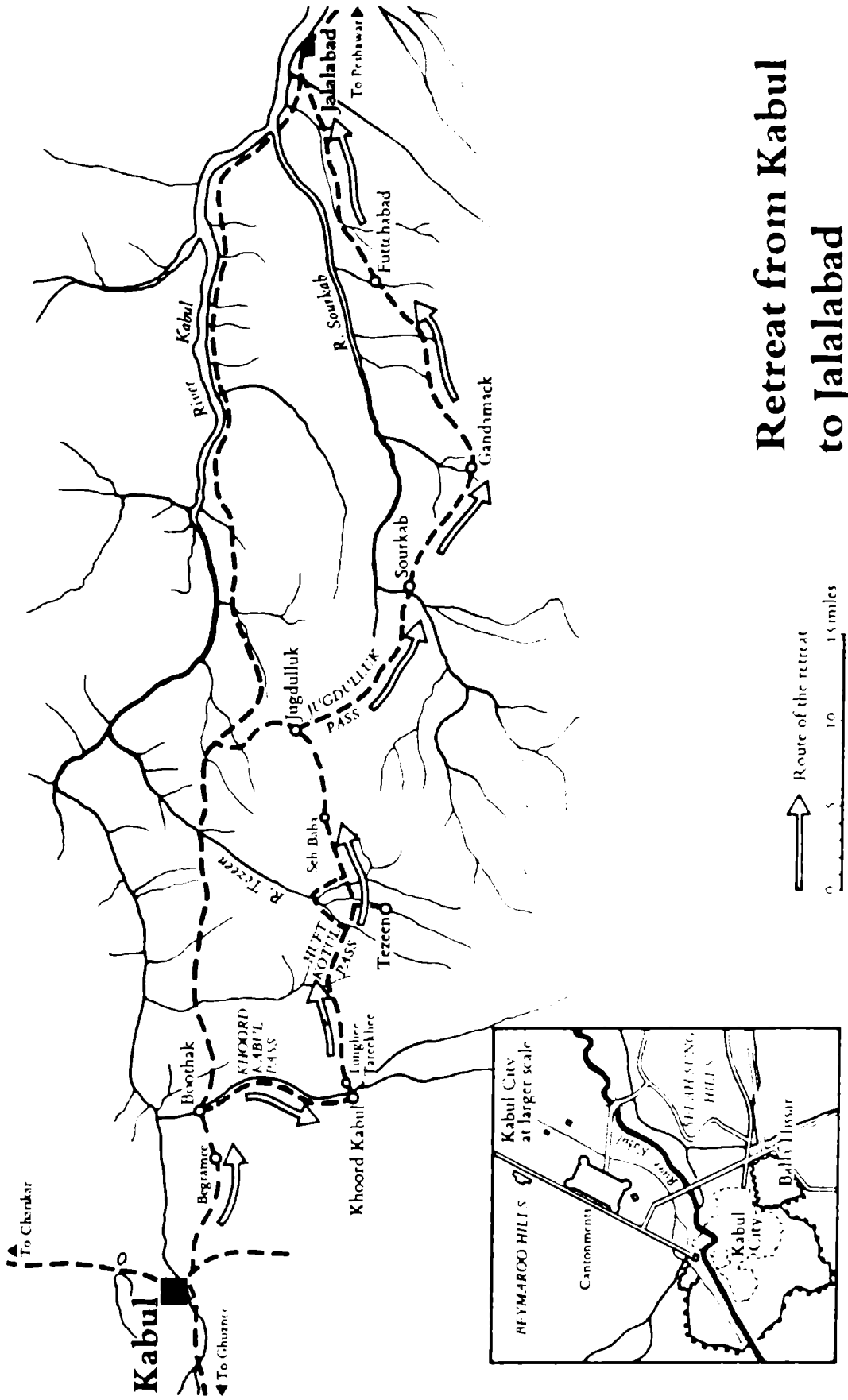
At home, when Wellington, still regarded as the fons et origo of military wisdom, came to pass judgment, he said a basic fault had been to form Soojah's force as a compound of British and Indians, instead of native Afghans. Although he naturally deplored the failure to safeguard our lines of communication, jealous of the army's reputation he asserted bitterly 'never did I hear of a resident Minister who had control of troops'.¹⁹ But Elphinstone was the military commander, and Macnaghten, despite his earlier misjudgments, had distinguished himself by his zeal for action from the time of Burnes's death. The truth must be that the British army was beaten because it was commanded by an incapable chief in Elphinstone. On the argument that the

British were starved out of Kabul, Kaye observes that the troops fought neither to keep their food when they had it, nor to procure victuals when they had none. It was all a question of leadership, and though Shelton's faults were manifest, the real charge against him was that he was not the man to make good Elphinstone's defects. The junior officers were keen to fight, but as Kaye concludes, 'Even Pottinger with all the influence of recognised official position, and with the prestige of an heroic character, could only lift up his voice in remonstrance against the sacrifice of national honour involved in the humiliating treaty with the Afghan Sirders. The military chiefs were fixed in their determination to abandon Afghanistan and leave Shah Soojah to his fate'.²⁰

On the morning of 6th January a bright wintry sun shone to mock the doomed army as it straggled from the cantonment (map 2). The advance guard under Anquetil comprised the 44th Foot, Sappers and Miners, a squadron of Irregular Horse, and three mountain train guns. In the main column, commanded by Shelton, travelled the escort with the ladies, the 5th and 37th Native Infantry, two horse artillery guns and the rest of Anderson's Irregular Horse. Chambers was in charge of the rear guard—the 54th Native Infantry, the 6th Shah's Infantry, the 5th Light Cavalry and four horse artillery guns. With 4,500 fighting men, it was still a force able to give a good account of itself, but it was impeded by 12,000 campfollowers, their wives and children. These proved 'from the very first mile a serious clog upon our movements,' wrote Eyre, 'and were, indeed, the main cause of our subsequent misfortune'.²¹

There was no more than a semblance of order. At eight a.m. Shelton, furious that the baggage train had not been marshalled earlier, interrupted Elphinstone's breakfast to urge greater expedition, but 'got offended' for his pains.²² A move was made at half past nine, but Elphinstone was even then swithering. The army started without the promised escort, and when half the troops were out of the cantonment Eldred received a message from Zemaun Khan urging him to wait for 24 hours. It was too late. As Eldred later reported, the enemy had already seized the Mission compound and the British troops would have had to fight their way back.

Confusion was compounded by the folly of erecting a bridge



Retreat from Kabul to Jalalabad

Map 2. The retreat from Kabul to Jalalabad

over the Kabul river. Sturt vainly pointed out that the river was fordable and that it made little odds to troops marching through a foot of snow if they got their feet wet. But he was overruled, and had to make a temporary structure with guncarriages. Lady Sale and Mrs Sturt scorned the bridge and rode through the river, but the campfollowers, determined not to go into the water, jostled for position. This delay, Lady Sale thought, was the origin of the day's disasters 'which involved the loss of nearly all the baggage and the greater part of the commissariat stores'.²³ It was a sad contrast to the brave scene when the bands played the advancing troops over another improvised bridge—at Bukkur, three years earlier.

The order of the march was soon lost as campfollowers, camels and *yaboos* became hopelessly intermingled with the soldiery. There was a time, after crossing the bridge, when the column was actually heading for Kabul, and Eldred would still have preferred to march straight into the citadel rather than attempt the madness of the 90 mile journey through the passes to Jalalabad. But Elphinstone was not given to taking spot decisions, and the army shambled on towards the mountains. At four o'clock he halted, having accomplished a bare five miles. Meanwhile the rear guard (including Tom Pottinger with the 54th) had been having a miserable time. In the cantonment the Afghans, who at first had been too busy looting, lined the ramparts to fire on the departing troops. 50 rank and file of the 5th Cavalry were killed and two guns had to be spiked. The *ghazis* now set fire to the Mission compound and the cantonment. Eyre caught something of the Wagnerian sight when he wrote that 'the conflagration illuminated the surrounding country for several miles, presenting a spectacle of fearful sublimity'.²⁴ At Begramee, where there was no cover and only a few small tents, men lay down to shiver, sleep, or die. Only Mackenzie and his loyal Jezailchis made anything of it. Clearing a space in the snow they huddled in a circle under their *poshteens* with their feet meeting in the centre.²⁵ But their example was not followed and many perished overnight, their dying breath forming macabre icicles on their moustaches and beards.

The next morning, as Anquetil and Chambers attempted to reverse the order of march, it was found that Soojah's infantry had deserted. Afghans, at first thought to be the escort, appeared

on the flanks and attacked the rear guard, capturing the three mountain train guns, and charging into the baggage train with impunity. Akbar Khan was seen hovering on the fringe. His behaviour throughout was never better than ambivalent, and for the most part he appeared and disappeared like the Demon King in some hellish pantomime. During the day Eldred heard him calling to the tribesmen 'Spare' in Persian, and 'Slay the *kaffirs*' in Pushtoo, which few Europeans understood. Eldred sent Skinner to protest at Akbar's failure to produce the promised escort. Akbar cynically replied that the British were at fault for marching too soon—although they had moved on the agreed day—but said he would now escort them. Hostages must, however, be given as a surety that the British would not go beyond Tezeen till Sale had evacuated Jalalabad. (As part of the treaty Eldred had been compelled to write to Sale with orders, which he doubted would be observed, to withdraw.) The night was spent at Boothak, still only ten miles from Kabul.

On the 8th demoralisation was rife as the remnants of the column entered the Khoord-Kabul pass, whose cliff-like sides shut out the sun and whose bed was a raging torrent which had to be crossed twenty eight times. The 44th had a temporary success when they dispersed Afghans at the entrance to the pass with a brisk bayonet charge. Then there was a long delay while attempts were made to form an advance guard of the 5th Native Infantry and Anderson's Irregular Horse. Lady Sale admitted that 'she was very grateful for a tumbler of sherry' which at any other time would have made her 'very unladylike'.²⁶ The elusive Akbar came to demand his hostages. He asked for Shelton, who refused. Eldred then volunteered, and as he later wrote, Elphinstone 'assured me he was much obliged, and that I would be of more use there than with the army. Not a very complimentary speech, you will say, but it was true for I could scarcely sit on my horse and could not move without help'.²⁷ Eldred went over, with Lawrence and Mackenzie.

At midday the column struggled on through the pass, enduring a merciless fire from the Ghilzies on the heights. In the advance guard were, improbably, Lady Sale and her daughter, who seeing their only chance was to keep on the move, galloped forward until they were fairly out of the defile: (Victorian artists were inspired by many aspects of the retreat from Kabul; it is a pity

that they missed the two dauntless memsahibs at full stretch.) Lady Sale was slightly wounded, but was grateful that she had only one ball in her arm, three others having gone through her *poshteen* without doing her any injury.²⁸ Later she recalled that a part of the pass was known as 'Sale's stone' since three members of her family had been wounded nearby—her husband during his earlier march to Gandamak, her son-in-law Sturt, and herself. Poor Sturt was less lucky than the others. He was mortally wounded and died the next day to be, thanks to Lady Sale, the only one of the force to be given Christian burial. Through the pass, at Khoord-Kabul, snow began to fall and continued till morning. At a higher altitude the climate was now even colder, and in Eyre's words 'the snow was the only bed for all, and of many, ere morning it proved the *winding-sheet*'.²⁹ Three thousand soldiers and campfollowers died on the 8th.

There was no perceptible advance on the 9th, an early start having been countermanded by Elphinstone when Akbar gave his usual specious promise to supply provisions and afford protection. Desertion was now common among the native levies. Then Skinner, acting as liaison officer with Akbar, came with an unexpected proposal which had emerged from conversation with Eldred. It was that Akbar should take the English ladies and their families in his charge and escort them a day's march behind the main body to Peshawar. On the face of it, the idea that the murderer of the British Envoy should coolly offer his protection to the dead man's widow, among others, was a startling one. Something very like it had been turned down at Kabul, but Eldred had decided to recommend acceptance, for two reasons. First, Akbar's own family were in British hands, which should guarantee good treatment; second, it was evident that 'our own people were too much diminished to protect them'.³⁰ Elphinstone at once concurred. It is not clear whose idea it was that the husbands should leave the force to accompany their wives, but Elphinstone apparently intended to send all wounded officers as well. In the event, the original party, of which we will hear more in the following chapters, consisted of Lady Macnaghten, Lady Sale, and Mrs Sturt; Captains Boyd and Anderson, Lieutenants Waller and Eyre (both wounded) and Mr Ryley, each with a wife and child; Mrs Mainwaring with her child; Mrs Trevor and her brood of seven offspring; Sergeant Wade and family; and Captain

Troup and Lieutenant Mein of the 13th, both wounded and unserviceable.

Four more days, from the 10th to the 13th January, saw the destruction of the British army. On the morning of the 10th the enemy picked off their men at will as they struggled, single file, through the narrow gorge of Tunghee Tareeke. Dr Brydon's comment was 'This was a terrible march—the fire of the enemy incessant, and numbers of officers and men, not knowing where they were going from snow-blindness, were cut up. . . . I applied a handful of snow to my eyes, and recommended others to do so, as it gave great relief'. By the time the survivors were through the gorge 'there was not a single sepoy left in the whole Kabul force'.³¹ All the baggage was gone, and Elphinstone had left only 250 men of the 44th, 150 cavalrymen, and 150 horse gunners. Their passage was still impeded by demented campfollowers, whose number was now reduced to about 3,000.

Stumbling down from the Huft-Kotul pass—at last out of the snow—the remnants reached Tezeen. Akbar proposed that the British should lay down their arms, abandon the campfollowers to their fate, and accept his protection, but Elphinstone refused. Elphinstone and Shelton set off again at 7 p.m. hoping to make the Jugdulluk pass by early morning, but they were held up seven miles further on at Seh Baba. By mid-afternoon on the 11th, only vaguely aware of what they were doing, they had fought their way to Jugdulluk, at the mouth of the pass. Elphinstone's last, courageous if mistaken, flurry was to call his officers to form a line and show a front. Captain Grant at once 'received a ball through his cheek, which broke his jaw'. But nothing, wrote Captain Johnson, 'could exceed the bravery displayed by Brigadier Shelton. He was like a bulldog assaulted on all sides by a lot of curs trying to get a snap at his head, tail, and sides. Shelton's small band was attacked by horse and foot, and although the latter were fifty to one, not a man dared to come close. . . . we cheered him in true English fashion as he descended into the valley, notwithstanding we, at the time, were acting as targets for the marksmen of the enemy on the hills'.³² But such determined resistance was rare, and too late.

Throughout the 11th the exhausted troops lay at Jugdulluk, enduring endless fire from the Ghilzyes. Skinner, still on liaison duty, came with a message from Akbar inviting Elphinstone,

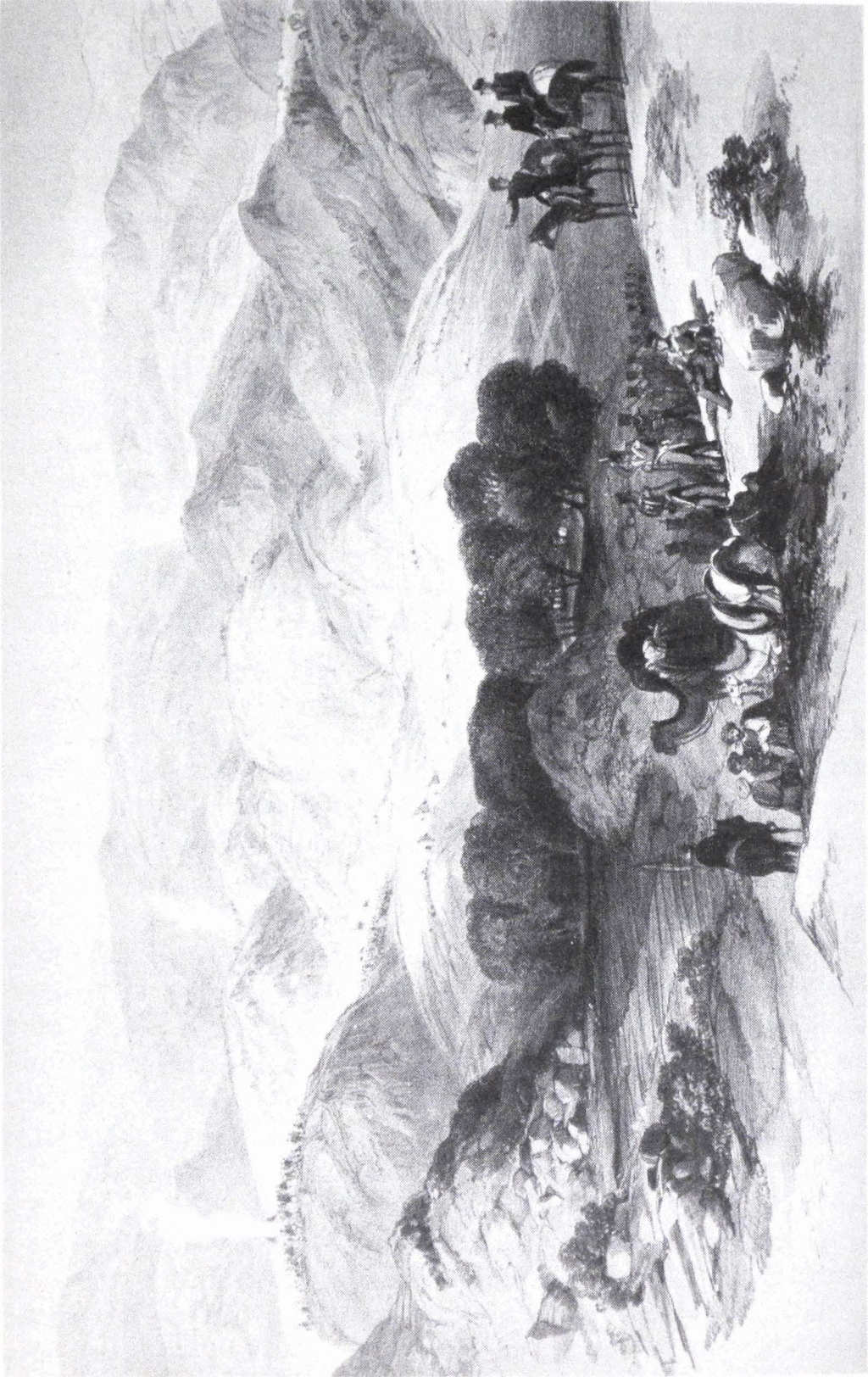


Plate 20. Jugdulluk



Plate 21. The last stand at Gandamak

Shelton and Johnson to confer again on terms. Elphinstone left Anquetil in charge and followed Skinner to Akbar's camp. The troops were in despair as they watched him go; they did not expect to see him again, and they were right. Receiving his guests with professions of kindness and welcome draughts of tea, Akbar as usual promised to supply food for the British. Elphinstone and his companions were given a tent to sleep in. On the morning of the 12th a conference of Afghan chiefs threatened to kill every *feringhee* left. Elphinstone asked to return to his men, but it soon became obvious that the British officers had been decoyed and were now prisoners or hostages. Later in the day, Anquetil, after seeing Skinner brought in wounded to die in great pain, decided to march.

The British force was exterminated in the Jugdulluk pass (plate 20). At the head of the defile the Afghans had made a barrier of prickly oak. There, pouring fire even more devastating than at Tunghee Tarakee, they slew the officers and men tearing with their hands at the breastwork. Anquetil, Chambers and Thain were all killed, and only 20 officers and 45 European soldiers escaped through the pass. They straggled in scattered parties through the open country to Gandamak. Here, on the morning of the 13th, the brave but haughty Grant died. Captain Soutter of the 44th, who had wrapped the regimental colour round his waist, and three or four of his men were the only ones to be taken prisoner (plate 21). Soutter later wrote 'In the conflict my *poshteen* flew open and exposed the colour. They thought I was some great man'.³³ Bellew and Hopkins reached Futtehabad, where they were hacked to death. Only one European reached Jalalabad. Doctor Brydon, mounted on a wounded pony, incredibly rode through three bands of Afghans, finally throwing the hilt of his broken sword at his assailants before he came within view of the ramparts.³⁴

Havelock, who was one of the Jalalabad garrison, remembered that a large light was kept ablaze at night near the Kabul gate and that every half hour buglers sounded the signal to advance. They were sounding a salute to the dead.

CHAPTER XIV

Mutton Bones and Greasy Rice

Lady Sale and the women and children who had been detached from the main body and committed to Akbar Khan's care were escorted to the Khoord-Kabul fort. There, on 9th January, they found Eldred and his two fellow-hostages, Lawrence and Mackenzie. Captain and Mrs Boyd were overjoyed to be reunited with their youngest boy whom Eldred had managed to keep under his protection. Six officers in the combined party were wounded; some of the women had recently given birth, or were about to do so; and the nerves of all were shattered by their experiences since they left Kabul. They had eight months of captivity ahead of them, though on that grim night none expected to live so long. Throughout the twists of Fortune which they had to endure until their rescue in September they faced frightening climatic hazards; they had to live on a diet which was far from congenial to the European palate; they had to put up with filth, squalor and every conceivable kind of discomfort. But the physical conditions were easier to tolerate than their constant apprehension that at any moment they might be cut to pieces by the fanatical *ghazis* who surrounded them.

Eldred, still the senior Political Officer, though his authority was greatly reduced, realised very clearly that the hostages were now pawns in Akbar's game. The Sirdar, he believed, would think it worth while to keep them alive while his father remained in British custody at Ludhiana; that had been the basis for handing over the women and children. But it remained to be seen how he would use them, and there was already ample evidence of his bland hypocrisy. On the very day when Lady Macnaghten came under his care, for example, he had the impertinence to tell her how much he regretted having been the instrument of her present misfortunes and that he hoped to contribute to her comfort as long as she remained his guest. In the same vein, Akbar's cousin Sultan Jan, who had murdered Captain Trevor, later affected a particular concern for his little son Edward.

The first night of captivity saw the British party cramped in three small hovels. Eyre recorded thankfully that they enjoyed the warmth of a wood fire, though blinded by the smoke and almost overcome by the pungency of the burning artemisia, or southernwood. Realistically, Eyre's view was that eating from a common trough, or being stifled by smoke fumes, was of small moment when weighed in the balance against the horrors they had escaped.¹ Lady Sale was not so thankful, merely noting that 'at midnight some mutton bones and greasy rice were brought to us'.²

The next few days, as they followed the route taken by the retreating army, were as bad as anything they had to suffer. The awful spectacle of their dead comrades, many of whom were recognised, was more desolating in its effect than the previous fighting had been. The road was covered with mangled corpses, stripped naked by the *ghazis*. The snow was dyed with 'streaks and patches of blood for whole miles'.³ 58 European dead were counted in one *nullah*, and Lady Sale found it required care to guide her horse so as not to tread on the bodies. As the captives picked their sorrowful way over the 16 miles to Tezeen the Afghans rode round them, laden with booty, 'their naked swords still reeking with the blood of their victims'.⁴ At Tezeen they came across 400 Irregular Horse who had deserted, now happily encamped outside the fort. They also found Lieutenant Melville of the 54th Native Infantry who, in Lady Sale's account, had been severely wounded defending the Regimental colour before bribing an Afghan to take him to Akbar. Eyre was much less impressed by Melville who, he thought, had given himself up with only 'some slight sword cuts'.⁵ Of another officer in the 54th there was no good news. Eldred's brother Tom, the light-hearted, impetuous Tom who had been so keen to see service in Afghanistan, was missing. Eldred anxiously sought for news of him from Melville and other stragglers who later joined the captives, and it was not till many weeks later that he wrote resignedly to his mother 'I greatly fear he has gone as so many other brave fellows have done'.⁶ Tom was killed at Neemla, not far from Gandamak, on 13th January.

The next march—another 16 miles past Seh Baba to Abdoolah Khan's fort at Surroobee—was no less distressing. They found the last horse artillery gun, its carriage still burning. Beside it lay

the bodies of the gun detachment, together with Dr Cardew and, a little further on, Dr Duff the chief surgeon who had previously had his hand amputated with a penknife. But Dr Macgrath of the 37th Native Infantry, who had been taken prisoner, joined them. At Surroobee they were all crowded into a single room. An old woman cooked *chupatties*—three for a rupee, rapidly increased because of demand to a rupee each.

On the 13th they reached Jugdulluk, and in the ruined enclosure where the army put up its last desperate fight they saw 'a spectacle more terrible than any we had previously witnessed, the whole interior space being one crowded mass of bloody corpses'.⁷ Skinner's body was identified and buried during the night. At Jugdulluk they met Akbar, along with Elphinstone, Shelton and Johnson. It was now beyond doubt that the rest of the force had been annihilated. The captives' morale was low. It seemed ever more likely that Akbar would yield to his more intemperate colleagues and have them killed. There was no encouragement, or leadership, to be had from the General. Elphinstone had lost the will to live; he had no stomach to face the obloquy that would face him if he should reach Hindustan. Shelton maintained his usual surly, unhelpful silence.

Soon after sunrise on the 14th the party changed direction, moving north to surmount the steep pass of Udruk-budruk. As on previous days they passed two or three hundred miserable Hindustanees who had escaped the massacre. They were naked, frost-bitten and starving. At times cannibalism broke out, and hardly any of the wretches survived. Akbar could show some concern for his European prisoners; he had none for their native ancillaries, and judging only by the numbers involved the extermination of the camp followers is one of the most horrible aspects of the whole campaign. When the captives reached the fort of Kutz they were refused admittance and had to bivouack in the cold wind. On the move again they had to ford the Kabul river. The chiefs helped the ladies to cross, Akbar carrying Mrs Waller behind him on his own horse. They were now in the Lughman valley. From the villages on the plain emerged natives to pour scorn and abuse on the British prisoners as they passed. But such was their resilience that by this time some rapport had been established between captors and captives. 'We found the Afghan gentry' wrote Eyre, 'most agreeable travelling companions'.⁸

That night, and the next day the 16th, were spent at the walled town of Turghuree. The halt on the 16th was especially welcome as it was a Sunday. The gregarious Lawrence, who in time began to supervise most of the party's domestic arrangements, just as Eldred was responsible for relations with Akbar, held a Church service using a Bible and Prayer Book 'picked up on the field at Boothak'.⁹ The dreadful appositeness of the first Psalm for the day was not lost on his congregation.

'O God, the heathen are come into Thine inheritance The dead bodies of Thy servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of the air O let the sorrowful sighing of the prisoners come before Thee: according to the greatness of Thy power preserve Thou them that are appointed to die'

On subsequent Sundays Lawrence and Colin Mackenzie conducted worship in turn.¹⁰

They were now only 30 miles from Jalalabad, but hopes that they would be escorted there were dashed when Akbar, alleging concern at the hostility of the local inhabitants, led them a further nine miles up the valley to Budeeabad. There they were to stay till 11th April. The local fort was about 80 yards square, with walls 25 feet high, and they had to make the most of it in their quarters which amounted to six rooms in the Zuna-Khaneh, or private dwelling, in the centre. The conditions were primitive; lice were discovered, much to the ladies' horror; and the diet was barely edible. 'The rice even is rendered nauseous by having quantities of rancid *ghee* poured over it, such as in India we would have disdained to use for our lamps'.¹¹ The Afghans were courteous, but avaricious. Mossa Khan, charged with the general surveillance of the household, plundered Lady Macnaghten's cashmere shawls and twice stole her favourite cat to obtain a reward of 20 rupees for restoring it to its owner.

Akbar remained cooperative, and on one occasion gave them 1,000 rupees (of their own money) to buy sugar and other little luxuries. There were diversions. On 29th January came clothes, letters and newspapers from Jalalabad—the newspapers with letters dotted to convey messages in code. On 10th February Lade Sale received 'boxes from Sale, with many useful things'.¹² But the pecking order had, regrettably, been reestablished. Lady

Sale did not see why she should even part with a single needle from her box at Mrs Eyre's request. Lady Macnaghten would not lend one of her dresses. Only Mrs Mainwaring was to be commended for distributing the contents of the box she had received from her husband at Jalalabad. The children played hopscotch and blind man's buff, while their parents improvised games of cards and backgammon.

In mid-February Major Griffiths and Captain Soutter arrived to join the captive party. The 19th was a day no one was likely to forget. The fortress was severely shaken by an earthquake. In Captain Johnson's narrative, 'we heard a heavy rumbling noise, as of thousands of heavy carriages The high massive walls heaved to and fro most fearfully there was a fearful crash the earth around us was giving way'.¹³ Lady Sale, who was hanging up her washing on the flat roof of her quarters, was lucky to escape before the building caved in. Elphinstone was rescued by his servant Private Moore. Shelton and Mackenzie also had to hasten from their roof—Shelton, with no sense of the ridiculous, berating the junior officer for preceding him. There were repeated tremors while the prisoners stayed at Budeeabad, but none so severe as the first.

Despite these frightening occurrences their minds were firmly concentrated on events at Jalalabad. Akbar was incensed that the British had not, as ordered by Eldred's instruction sent from Kabul, left the fortress. There was constant sparring between them and Eldred was far from happy. As early as 17th January Akbar asked him if he could guarantee an exchange of prisoners, and the evacuation of Jalalabad. Eldred emphasised that, as a prisoner himself, he could give no such undertaking, but said he would write to Macgregor. His letter reported the Sirdar's views. 'Our release and that of the hostages at Caubul appears to depend upon his (Dost Mahomed's) release You must use your influence . . . They tell me we shall be forwarded to Peshawar if you evacuate Jalalabad'.¹⁴ On the 23rd, after further heated discussion with Akbar, Eldred wrote again saying the Sirdar was still most anxious to secure his father's release and now claimed to be a friend of the British. But in a private letter to Macgregor, written at the same time, Eldred added bitterly that while Akbar had been brought up in the midst of treachery, 'I regret that our own conduct in this country has put our

Government's faith on a par with themselves'. Trying to strike a balance after this reference to the dead Envoy's intrigues, Eldred added 'Our defeat, though sufficiently galling to a soldier, really loses its sting when the taunts of our broken promises, which we know to be true, are thrown in our teeth by men who know the truth only by name'. In another letter he fancied that Akbar's humanity was 'only a sham, and every sinew was strained to destroy our poor fellows. He has, however, treated us personally well, and very much so'.¹⁵ Unfortunately Akbar learned about the despatch of the last letters, and though Eldred retorted that he had given no undertaking not to write privately the Sirdar promptly made the British officers surrender their arms, as a mark of his displeasure.

But what was happening at Jalalabad, at the other outposts in Ghuznee and Kabul, and for that matter in India itself?

In mid-November George Clerk, the Agent on the North West frontier, had transmitted to Auckland the unwelcome news of the Kabul rising and the murder of Burnes. With great expedition Clerk also ordered two regiments the 64th Bengal Native Infantry, closely followed by the 60th, to move from Ferozepore to Peshawar. He also called for more troops from Ludhiana. Auckland was in a quandary. He at first thought the rebellion might not be too serious, and he doubted the value of sending another Brigade across the Sutlej, since it could not hope to reach Kabul before April. As he wrote to Nicolls, then on his way through the Upper Provinces, 'I fear that safety to the force at Caubul can only come from itself'. While he waited for the arrival of his successor he was not giving to panic, but on 20th January, when he heard of Macnaghten's murder and the intention to retreat to Jalalabad, he told Nicolls to send forward another Brigade. He reported to the Court of Directors that he was disposed to look at things more calmly than his colleagues, and 'decide immediately on no other policy than that of advancing only for objects of rescue'.¹⁷ Then he heard that the forward relieving troops under Brigadier Wild had completely failed in their march from Peshawar through the Khyber. Next came the news that Brydon had ridden into Jalalabad to confirm that the Kabul army was no more, and Auckland's cup of bitterness was full. He at once published a defiant proclamation promising 'the most active measures',¹⁸ but a letter from Colvin to Clerk disclosed that no

second invasion of Afghanistan—other than a limited rescue operation—was in Auckland's mind.¹⁹ His time was nearly over, and he had no inclination to start a huge military deployment before Ellenborough, the New Governor-General, arrived.

Not so easy to understand was the remark in his self-exculpatory letter of 18th February to Hobhouse that among those who had expressed 'unlimited confidence in the growing improvement in our position at Cabul' was Eldred Pottinger.²⁰ This cannot be reconciled with other contemporary evidence.

Bearing in mind Elphinstone's shortcomings, the selection of the General to command the reinforcements now being mustered for service beyond the frontier was crucial. Auckland's first choice was Major-General Lumley, the elderly, ineffective Adjutant General, but fortunately medical advice precluded his acceptance. Nicolls wanted Sir Edmund Williams, a former Light Infantry officer to get the job, but Auckland would not agree and the appointment was given to Major-General Pollock, the commander at Agra. It was a happy choice. Unassuming, conscientious, moderate, Pollock was the man for the moment. One of Ellenborough's first actions when he landed at Calcutta on 28th February was to send a signal of encouragement to Pollock.²¹ But when he arrived at Peshawar on 5th February Pollock found much to distress him; 1,800 men in hospital; sepoys saying they would not again face the Khyber; and the Sikhs encouraging desertion. With admirable patience Pollock succeeded in restoring morale. He waited for further reinforcements, and despite frantic pleas from Sale it was not till the beginning of April that he felt ready to march.

At Jalalabad Sale had been the recipient of letters from Shah Soojah asking why he had not evacuated the fortress, as required by the treaty. Sale was much better in the heat of battle than in diplomacy, and but for the determined opposition led by George Broadfoot he would have withdrawn to Peshawar. In the event he first temporised, and then replied that he was now under Pollock's orders. But the garrison was in good heart. Sale was blessed with an outstanding collection of officers—George Broadfoot, Dennie, Havelock, Monteath and Abbott. They repaired the 2,300 yards of rampart, originally only 2 feet high, using the tools on which Broadfoot had insisted on at Kabul; they cleared fields of fire; they expelled the Afghans from the town, and they

made sorties to secure food. By far their greatest anxiety came not from the enemy but from the same earthquake that had terrified the British prisoners at Budeeabad. The fortifications were levelled, but the troops set to with enthusiasm to make good the damage before Akbar realised how vulnerable they were. Havelock, something of a martinet and a vehement abstainer—the parallel with Montgomery in the last war seems to have gone unnoticed—commented pompously that the excellent behaviour of the British troops was due to the absence of a spirit ration. In all they made four successful skirmishes, and it was notable that Akbar, however threatening in his talks with Eldred, was not keen to attack the fortress. At the beginning of April, however, he had assembled a large force and arrived outside the walls. But Sale was persuaded by his young officers to go out and give battle. Well led, eager for action, the British troops enjoyed a memorable success, routing Akbar's tribesmen and, as a most acceptable prize, regaining four of the guns from Kabul. The triumph was marred only by the death of Dennie, unnecessarily sent by Sale to reduce a small fort. Dennie, as he leaves these pages, deserves a salute. For forty years of exemplary, usually active, service he received only the C.B., although just before his death he learned he had been made one of Queen Victoria's A.D.C.s. Keane's earlier enmity had denied him the recognition he deserved, and it was with a twinge of guilt that Nicolls later recorded in his journal that a pension of £80 a year for life had been awarded to his four daughters.²²

Meanwhile Pollock was advancing through the Khyber. His forcing of the pass was one of the most skilful engagements of the war. No one, including the sage Avitabile at Peshawar, was sanguine about his prospects. Despite his careful preparation Pollock was still short of ammunition and transport, and Eldred Pottinger later observed that he had been given 'some of the worst officers in the army'. But Pollock had a shrewd eye for country. Not for him a reckless attack on the vast breastwork which the Afridis had thrown up at the entrance to the pass. Early on the morning of 5th April he outflanked them by crowning the hills on either side. The enemy's defences were turned. Then, and only then, the centre column moved forward to Ali Musjid. There was little further opposition. This was the first time that the Khyber pass had been forced. It was also the

earliest occasion on which the British showed they had mastered the art of hill-picketing. Some say Pollock learned it from Mackeson, who had it from the Afridis themselves. At all events it was a splendid success, and a few days later when Pollock, colours flying, marched into Jalalabad to relieve what Ellenborough soon dubbed the 'Illustrious Garrison', there was a moment of military history to savour. Sale had cobbled up a band to play him in to the old Jacobite air 'Oh, but ye've been lang o'coming'.²³

Elsewhere there was less reason for satisfaction. Colonel Palmer had to surrender Ghuznee, and Brigadier England advancing from Quetta to reinforce Kandahar only made it at the second attempt, and then not till 10th May. Nott did better on his own. Esprit de corps was high under his leadership, and on 7th March he led out a punitive column to deal with the troublesome Douranees. He was initially outmanoeuvred, having been lured away from the city while the tribesmen turned in their tracks to attack the weakened garrison. But he got back in time, and when he made another sweep on 25th March the enemy would not stay to face him.

The comparative impunity with which both Sale's and Nott's troops were able to roam over the surrounding country gives point to two questions which often recurred in the minds of Akbar's prisoners. Could either have come to the aid of Kabul, and in Sale's case could the Jalalabad heroes not have tried to rescue the captives when they were a bare 30 miles from them? Nott, forthright, courageous and efficient though he was, can be criticised for his lack of zeal to reinforce the beleaguered force at Kabul. True, he sent Maclaren's Brigade, but he did so with evident lack of enthusiasm, and Maclaren turning back because he claimed snow made route impossible knew that Nott would not be entirely displeased. In view of Nott's declared dislike of all the leaders at Kabul it seems probable that he made too much of maintaining his base rather than assisting his comrades.

Sale's decision is more difficult to assess. He had strong personal reasons for wanting to return to Kabul. His family were still there. But he was short of baggage-cattle; his troops were exhausted; and he had more than 300 sick and wounded whom he could not transport. The decision not to fight the 70 miles back to Kabul was endorsed by his officers, though not all agreed. It made military sense to defend an outpost on the line of retreat,

but it remains for argument whether he could not have stayed at Gandamak where he could still have checked the Ghilzies. Mackenzie's considered view was that Sale should at least have marched back to Gandamak when he heard that the retreat from Kabul had started.²⁴ Likewise, it is debatable whether a detachment from the 'Illustrious Garrison' could not have freed the captives—either when they were confined near Jalalabad or after Akbar had been beaten on 7th April. Certainly their captors expected Sale to move rapidly to attempt a rescue.

While the prisoners were still at Budeeabad they learned that Soojah had been killed. Poor Soojah had issued streams of letters to Macgregor and Mackeson asserting his loyalty to the British.²⁹ He spoke in similar terms to Conolly, still a prisoner in Kabul.²⁶ But the chiefs now required him to prove his loyalty to them and march against the *feringhees*. With great misgiving the Shah put on his ceremonial dress and was carried from the citadel. He did not get far. Soojah-ool-Dowlah, his godson and son of Zemaun Khan, shot him in front of the tomb of John Hicks (see Chapter II) outside the Bala Hissar gate. Soojah, vain, obese, and decidedly unheroic, was one of nature's losers. There is much dispute about his role in the insurrection and there is evidence both to acquit and to convict him of treachery. Most likely he tried to swim with the tide, whichever way it was flowing, and he was not a strong enough swimmer.

On 9th April Mahomed Shah Khan rode into Budeeabad with the news of Akbar's defeat by Sale. Eldred strenuously, but vainly, urged the Sirdar to release his prisoners. Instead they were told to be ready to march, and for good measure relieved of any superfluous baggage. Lady Macnaghten lost the jewellery and shawls to which she had clung so tenaciously. From Lady Sale they took a small chest, whose contents she hoped they would use as medicine—nitric acid and 'a strong solution of lunar caustic'.²⁷ Much more serious was Mahomed Shah Khan's account that there was a strong opinion among the chiefs that all the prisoners should be slaughtered at once, and it needed all Eldred's impassiveness to keep them from despair. On 10th April they marched, only to return on a false alarm that Pollock had been repulsed in the Khyber, and on the next day they were off again. The days that followed were among the most hazardous, and their stamina

was severely tested. After crossing more than one steep and rocky pass they came down again to the Kabul river, which once more had to be forded. With heavy rain the whole company was perpetually drenched. Shivering in their *poshteens* they reached Tezeen on the 19th. (Lawrence recalled that Eldred had offered to share his rug and cloak with him, but was so exhausted that he fell down and could not be wakened.²⁸) On the next morning Mrs Waller gave birth to a daughter, and to show that morale was not entirely broken she was named Tazina. She was the fourth child born in captivity. Two more baby daughters were to arrive—Mrs Trevor's eighth on 14th and Mrs Sturt's only child on 24th July. Eyre noted the 'peculiar Providence' that seemed to watch over the ladies. The heavens saluted Tazina's arrival with another earthquake.

Akbar's authority with the chiefs, both those in the field with him and those still in Kabul, was meanwhile far from secure. Rumours began to circulate about an impending attack on the prisoners and another march was made, this time a short one of about eight miles to Zanduk. This proved too much for Elphinstone, for long a helpless invalid, and he died on the night of the 23rd. Akbar arranged for his corpse, wrapped in blankets and housed in a wooden framework, to be escorted to Jalalabad. It was desecrated by Ghilzyes on the way, but Akbar eventually ensured that it reached the fortress. The General's body was buried with full military honours, and still lies there in an unmarked grave.

Since Akbar's own position was precarious—the internecine feuds at Kabul need not worry us in detail—he was the more willing to be persuaded by Eldred to negotiate with Pollock. Colin Mackenzie (plate 22), who was selected to be the emissary, later wrote that the Afghan chiefs 'all pitched upon me, for they had got into their heads that I was a Moolah (no doubt from his officiating at Sunday worship) and they thought I would come back'.²⁹ Mackenzie made the hazardous journey through the hills, arriving on 25th April. He took Eldred's letter of the 20th. It set out the Afghan proposals for mutual recognition, and the following rider which must have escaped Akbar's notice. 'The leaders appear panic stricken, and endeavour to raise reports of our inhumanity and unforgiving nature, the better to keep the



Plate 22. Captain Colin MacKenzie

lower orders from awaiting our approach; they have, moreover, recourse to force when any of the clansmen show dilatoriness in moving’.

Pollock’s reply offered a ransom of two lakhs of rupees for the release of the prisoners, but was otherwise non-committal. Akbar sent Mackenzie back again, this time with complicated demands for an amnesty, a lump sum, and an annual payment. Mackenzie also carried Eldred’s next letter to Pollock—a singularly objective answer from someone who had spent months in the squalor of captivity. He said coolly that he had always opposed any proposition for ransom, as being an improper precedent and contrary to British interests since it would provide the enemy with resources, and he still considered ‘ransoming prisoners for money as very objectionable’. He ended by apologising for ‘the blotted state of my letter, as I have only time to write this while Captain Mackenzie is sleeping, preparatory to resuming the march’.³¹ Two observations may be made on this exchange. First Ellenborough, as soon as he heard, repudiated the ransom offer, which had already lapsed. Second, Eldred, despite the impeccable moral tone of his letter, eventually secured the release of the captives by promising payment to their guard Saleh Mahomed (Chapter XV). Presumably in his mind the distinction between a formal offer to the enemy leader and a bribe from the prisoners to make their chief gaoler change sides was more than a semantic one. Besides, this was months later and the rigours that Eldred and his companions had suffered had begun to have a cumulative effect.

Eldred also transmitted to Pollock a letter from Akbar Khan himself, professing friendship, and adding in attempted self-exculpation that ‘according to Pottinger Sahib’s advice, if I allow the English ladies to depart before the gentlemen all Mahomedans will look upon me as their enemy’.³² But by mid-May Mackenzie could bring only a disappointing message that carried the matter no further. Eldred’s dilemma was that Pollock, though anxious to rescue the prisoners, would not treat with Akbar on the terms he wanted. A complete impasse had been reached and Eldred could find no way of resolving it.

The captives fretted. On 11th May Lady Sale had to record that ‘Major Pottinger writes that there is no present chance of our liberation’.³³ On the 16th, however, she celebrated her wedding

anniversary by dining with the ladies of Mahomed Shah Khan's family. She was not impressed by their couture, or their cuisine. 'Those who had not taken a spoon with them ate with their fingers, Afghan fashion—an accomplishment in which I am by no means *au fait*. We drank water out of a teapot'.³⁴

Following yet another report that the chiefs intended to take possession of the prisoners, Akbar now had them moved over very rough country to Ali Mahomed's fort, three miles from Kabul and close to the Logur river. On the way, as though to remind them of the horrors of the past, they had to go once again past the bodies of their dead comrades. The Khoord-Kabul pass was 'now absolutely impassable from the stench of dead bodies', so they took the direct road to Kabul.³⁵ There, however, their quarters were a great improvement on any they had been given before. On 26th May Amenoolah Khan and a group of chiefs came to remonstrate with Eldred that the bills drawn on the Government of India before the army left Kabul had not been met, and that he should make fresh missives. Eldred treated this impertinence with proper contempt, and they got short shrift. On 1st June he wrote to his brother John, 'A day or two ago the rascals here threatened to hold me responsible for the bills which Government dishonoured; they may say whatever they like, I'll not give them a scrap of my pen'.³⁶

At about the same time he wrote to the father of his Charekar comrade John Haughton. He had not seen Haughton, still a prisoner in Kabul, but he had heard of him and hastened to reassure his father. The letter is, however, most notable for a remarkably perceptive comment. After criticising recent military activities, he went on 'If the Government does not take some decided steps to recover the affections of the Army, I really think a single spark will blow the sepoys into mutiny; for the zeal of the officers is cold; and it has been that alone which has prevented this spirit hitherto'.³⁷ Fourteen years after his death his prophesy was horribly realised.

Early in July Akbar got custody of the Kabul prisoners, whom he removed to the Bala Hissar, but he still kept the original party three miles outside. On 10th July—Mackenzie being ill with typhoid—Captain Troup was sent on another mission to Pollock. Eldred still stuck to his original theme, much to Mackenzie's admiration. 'At present I do not think it would be advisable to

ransom us for money, as he (Akbar) is in want of that necessary; and the name and character of the British must suffer'. He argued that if Pollock paid for the release of a few Europeans while so many thousands of native soldiers and campfollowers were 'reduced to a condition of slavery, the Government would be open to a charge of undue partiality'.³⁸ Pollock replied that he had told Troup all that 'appears necessary on the subject of an exchange of prisoners', and he added 'While you continue a prisoner, and consequently not a free agent, I see no necessity for your being the channel of communication'.³⁹ On the face of it, this reads like a rebuff, but its purpose was to save Eldred from further pressure, and to leave Pollock's hands free. To understand it, we have to see what was in the General's mind.

O Happy Band of Pilgrims!

At Jalalabad, Pollock was fully appreciative of Eldred's problems. He believed, however, that the prisoners' welfare would best be served if he made it clear to Akbar that the British were now in a position of strength; that he need make no concessions; and that it would serve the Sirdar's own interests to come into line. He had another preoccupation. He had no intention of abandoning Afghanistan to leave the chiefs exulting in their triumph over Elphinstone's army. But he was aware that this view was not shared by the Governor-General, and it says much for Pollock's skilful procrastination that he was still at Jalalabad. In March Ellenborough had mentioned to Nicolls the need to strike 'some signal and decisive blow' before quitting Afghanistan, but he soon began to hesitate.¹ In April he told Nott to retire from Kandahar. Pollock received a similar direct order to 'withdraw every British soldier from Jalalabad to Peshawar'.² Delay would be justified only if the release of the prisoners was imminent or, improbably, if the enemy should threaten to attack him. In the face of Ellenborough's swithering Pollock showed remarkable strength of character. He wrote privately to Nott telling him to stand fast till he heard from him again. (He subsequently admitted to his biographer that stopping Nott was perhaps a very bold step, and he knew that if it had not succeeded he might lose his commission.) On 13th May he sent the Governor-General a minute which was a masterpiece of respectful non-compliance. To retreat now, he said 'would have the very worst effect—it would be construed into a defeat'. He politely reminded Ellenborough that the prisoners could not be disregarded, and, as a sweetener, added that under no circumstances would he advocate either the Jalalabad or Kandahar forces staying beyond November.³ Nott, when he heard from Pollock, replied bluntly that he could not, for lack of transport, retire before October.

This was not the most glorious episode in Ellenborough's

career. Eventually he admitted to Pollock that 'retirement after six months of inactivity before a following army of Aghans' would look odd. The Generals' passive, almost insolent, delay was having effect, and on 4th July Ellenborough gave in. He issued new orders. Pollock and Nott could withdraw to India by way of Kabul, though Nott, should he think it prudent from lack of resources, could opt to come back by the Quetta route.⁴ This equivocal instruction would strike most as suggesting a backward movement that went forward, and Ellenborough was accused of Jesuitical cunning in putting the onus on Nott to decide whether to move on Kabul. A charitable view would be that he left the decision to the men on the spot. (Wellington later said they were the handsomest instructions ever issued.) In any event, the Generals had no doubt what to do. On 7th August Nott marched north for Kabul. Pollock started from Jalalabad a fortnight later.

The prisoners were now finding the climate, if nothing else, more agreeable. Eyre had time to indulge his sensibility. 'The most common trees are the poplar, willow, mulberry, and oleaster, or *sinjut*, the bright silvery foliage of the latter contrasting strikingly with the deep green of the rest, and its flowers scattering a powerful and delicious perfume through the surrounding air'.⁵ But their nerves were frayed. Spasmodic shooting could be heard from Kabul as the Afghans sorted out their intrigues—and the outcome might well affect their future. Eldred kept increasingly to himself, thinking morosely that there was no sign that Pollock would establish any kind of concordat that would satisfy Akbar.

Troup returned from his mission on 27th July, but the only indication from Pollock was that if Akbar sent the captured British guns and the prisoners to his camp Dost Mahomed and his family would be freed. As for leaving Afghanistan, Pollock would do this at his convenience. Akbar was disappointed, but asked Troup to go back to Jalalabad, this time with Lawrence, to obtain a written agreement. Before they left he heard that Pollock intended to march on Kabul. Not surprisingly he was enraged, but he still despatched the British officers as his emissaries. (From Eldred's point of view it was desirable to keep talking.) Pollock was now busy with preparations for the long-awaited advance, and sent only an inconclusive reply which Akbar received on 9th August.

Eyre records that on 29th July Akbar had told Troup 'with an expression of savage determination on his countenance, that so surely as Pollock advances, he will take us all into Toorkistan, and make presents of us to the different chiefs. And depend upon it, he will carry his threats into execution, for he is not a man to be trifled with'.⁶ As soon as Akbar heard that Pollock had started he ordered the prisoners to be taken to Bameean. They left on 25th August, and only Mrs Anderson and Mrs Trevor, who were both dangerously ill, were allowed to stay behind with their families. Before they left, Eldred and his companions were joined by Colonel Palmer (still weak from his privations) and the other officers who had been taken at Ghuznee, and by John Haughton and those who, being sick or wounded, had spent the last months as prisoners in Kabul.

As they rode off, most of the ladies and the wounded in the hideously constricting camel panniers, they were profoundly depressed. On their way through the Maidan valley Eldred reflected that it was just over five years since—a happy warrior in Afghan disguise—he had first set eyes on the orchards and cornfields. Then he had been full of hope; now it was impossible to entertain any thoughts beyond the immediate problems of survival. The captives' prospects, as they saw them, could scarcely be more discouraging. They were travelling in the wrong direction, away from the advancing divisions of Nott and Pollock, and there were two possibilities, both equally alarming. If Akbar was defeated, he or his fellow-chiefs might take a speedy revenge on the prisoners. Alternatively, if Akbar carried out his threat and they were dispersed to the tender care of individual chiefs beyond the Hindu Kush they might never be heard of again. Lawrence summed up their feelings when he wrote that this was the most mournful of all their moves, and that many of them were quite despondent and abandoned all hope.

Meanwhile their escort at least was less threatening than some of their earlier guards had been. It consisted of some Irregular Horse and Infantry who had once belonged to Captain Hopkins' regiment and who had deserted at Bameean in October, 1840. They still affected some of the drill movements they had learned and even retained the relics of a military band—a few fifes, bugles and drums. This bizarre detachment was commanded by Saleh Mahomed, who had served under Hopkins, and this proved

the first hopeful sign. From past experience, Saleh, a cheerful braggart who liked to wear a blue frock coat he had acquired in Kabul, was ready to change sides at a moment's notice if it would benefit him personally. There was one other portent which afforded a little comfort. During their exhausting march, past hamlets and forts, and across the treacherous defiles, including the 13,000 feet of the Irak Pass, till they reached Bameean on 3rd September, they met with no hostile demonstrations. The local inhabitants would turn out to stare at them, but as Captain Johnson observed there was not a single uncivil word or gesture.⁷ It may have been that the natives felt genuine pity for the *feringhees*. It is also possible that rumours had reached them that a great army of retribution was on its way to Kabul.

A subtle change took place in the prisoners' inter-relations. Shelton, of course, remained moody, unapproachable, and bloody-minded. Mackenzie was too ill to take part in their counsels. The extravert, indefatigable Lawrence, who had long arbitrated on all domestic disputes, now withdrew into the background. In his place Johnson became more prominent, and subject to Eldred's well-recognised authority played a leading part in what followed. Johnson, it appeared, was winning Saleh Mahomed's confidence. He found the Afghan 'a good-humoured, jolly fellow, and without any prejudices against us Kaffirs He is the greatest hero in his own estimation I am a ready listener, for two reasons; firstly, that I am amused; secondly that he is flattered by my being so good a listener—by which I hope to turn him to good account'.¹⁸

From the 3rd to the 9th September they were moved from fort to fort in the neighbourhood, all filthy, confined quarters. Before they left the Kabul vicinity Lady Sale had recorded a long, philosophical musing in her journal. It was true, she wrote, that they had been moved about the country, and exposed to heat, cold, and rain, but so were the Afghan women. The British ladies had suffered most from uncleanness. It was not until their arrival near Kabul that they got rid of lice 'which we denominated infantry; the fleas for which Afghanistan is famed (and particularly Kabul) we call light cavalry'.⁸ Now as she and her companions tried to carve out windows in the mud walls at Bameean she was near the end of her formidable resources.

Johnson reported that he had obliquely suggested to Saleh

Mahomed that cooperation in restoring the prisoners would be rewarded, and invited Eldred to take over the negotiation. Eldred wisely declined, leaving his more flexible colleague to profit from his growing intimacy with their captor. Then on 11th September Saleh summoned Eldred, Johnston and Lawrence to a meeting. He brandished instructions to take the prisoners to Kooloom and hand them over to the Wallee. Hard-bitten though they were, the British officers blanched at the thought of perpetual imprisonment with the Uzbeks. But, having made his point, the wily Saleh had other news much more to their liking. Syud Morteza, a Kashmiri known to Johnson, had brought a proposal which had apparently originated in the fertile mind of Mohun Lal at Kabul (Troup had also been a party to it). This was that in return for releasing the prisoners Pollock should pay him 20,000 rupees and a monthly pension of 1,000. Saleh said blandly that he would accept if Eldred and his colleagues would underwrite the offer. It took them only a short time (despite Shelton's dissent) to draw up an agreement whereby Eldred, Johnson, Lawrence and Mackenzie 'in the presence of God and Jesus Christ' undertook that, on their release, the payment would be made, and that they would obtain for Saleh 'the command of a regiment in the Government service'. (Johnson's hand can be seen in this last sweetener.)¹⁰ The other captives, officers and ladies, bound themselves to make over a sufficient number of months' pay or pension as might be needed to fulfil the undertaking. In short, they promised, if necessary, to find their own ransom.

The thought of freedom promotes remarkable resilience. Eldred, who had recently been 'grim and grumpy', and whose wound was still chafing, now took complete charge. Saleh bowed to his command and the fort hummed with activity. In the space of the next few days Saleh's defection to the British was openly announced. A flag was run up; the fort's governor was replaced by a more friendly chief; and passing merchants were subjected to a levy to provide funds. Eldred even had the impertinence to issue proclamations calling upon nearby chiefs to come and make their obeisance. Clothes were collected to be presented as dresses of honour. Work was started to make the fort more defensible. Lady Sale, who as we have seen was not one of Eldred's greatest admirers, could not refrain from a complimentary entry in her journal.

‘It would be a great injustice to Major Pottinger not to mention the active part he took in affairs. From his perfect knowledge of the Persian language, and his acquaintance with the manners and customs of the people, he well knew how to manage them, and take advantage of the slightest opening on their part in our favour. His coolness and decision were only equalled by the promptness with which he met the wishes of the chiefs; giving them *barats* on the neighbouring lands, empowering them to receive the government rents, etc.; all which documents, though he executed them with an air of great condescension and with the gravity of a judge, he well knew were mere pieces of waste paper: yet they had a magic charm for the time which was all that we required’.¹¹

Eldred’s version was more restrained. To Mohun Lal he wrote offering his thanks. ‘Your good servant Sayad Murtza Khan Kashmiri arrived a few days ago, and has succeeded in getting Salah Mohammed Khan to change sides, and in consequence of the letters from the Qizalbash, most of the Hazarah chiefs have come in’. He ended ‘I trust we may be strong enough to move into the Afghan country in a few days; but lest we should not, I have written to General Nott to send some troops if he possibly can’.¹² That letter, which in the circumstances shows a remarkably relaxed disposition, was at once overtaken by events. A horseman brought news that Akbar had been decisively beaten, and was in full retreat. Eldred knew what he had to do. The prisoners were in poor shape, but it was time to make for Kabul. Orders were hastily issued, and the battered column moved off on the 16th.

The message they had received was no more than the truth. Pollock had made a triumphant march along the route of Elphinstone’s retreat—Gandamack, Jugdulluk, Tezeen. Only at the last two did the Afghans offer serious resistance, and at Tezeen Akbar saw his remaining force completely overcome. Pollock’s men stormed the heights in a cold fury following the discovery of the skeletons of those who died there in January. At Tezeen they found the naked bodies of 1,500 sepoy and campfollowers. In the Khoord-Kabul pass, wrote Captain Backhouse, the sight was heartrending ‘our gun-wheels passing over and crushing the skulls and other bones of our late comrades at almost every yard, for three, four or five miles’. An even more distressing picture was

drawn by Lieutenant Greenwood who wrote that although eight months had elapsed since the massacre, some of the bodies had been preserved in the snow, and 'their ghastly faces seemed to call on us for revenge'.¹⁴ On the 15th Pollock encamped on the Kabul race-course and the British flag fluttered from the Bala Hissar. Nott, stopping to take and partly destroy Ghuznee, advanced in good order to reach Arghandeh,—where three years previously Dost Mahomed had abandoned his guns in face of Keane's troops—on the 16th. Coming in sight of Kabul the next day, he was greatly chagrined to find that Pollock had outstripped him.

But on the 16th all Eldred and his companions knew was that Akbar had been defeated. They did not know where he was heading, and they had the uncomfortable thought that they might meet him. To add to their anxiety, they picked up reports that Akbar's cousin Sultan Jan and his adherents were at large in the vicinity. So the British struggled on. The extent to which their physical and mental strength was impaired was evident when Saleh Mahomed told Lawrence that he had succeeded in collecting a few muskets, and suggested that they should form a small European advance guard to make a show. (Enough soldiers had at various times joined the party to make this possible.) Lawrence called for volunteers. The few Horse Artillerymen seized on the offer, but there was a dead silence among the remaining men of the 44th. Then Lady Sale, still game and thinking they might be shamed into doing their duty called out 'You had better give *me* one, and I will lead the party'. But there was no response, and Lady Sale had to record 'It is sad to think the men were so lost to all right feeling'.¹⁵

During the early morning of the 17th the weary pilgrims were wakened by a messenger with a letter from Sir Richmond Shakespear saying he was on his way with 700 Kuzzilbashes. Greatly heartened, they broke camp in a hurry and pushed on to the foot of the Kaloo pass. At about 3 o'clock in the afternoon a cloud of dust appeared on the ridge in front of them. Horsemen, as yet unidentified, could be seen coming down the pass. Wise precautions were taken; drums beat; an extended line was formed; and ammunition was shared out to load the muskets. (Eldred and Haughten remembered a time when the Charekar garrison imagined grazing cattle to be friendly cavalry coming to

their rescue.) But soon the Kuzzilbashes came into focus and Shakespear was greeting his comrades. One discordant note jarred amidst the rejoicing. Shakespear had failed to make his first salute to Shelton as the senior officer and was therefore rebuked.¹⁶ Neither earthquake nor release from captivity could shake Shelton's sense of his own importance.

Eldred did not learn till much later that Shakespear had volunteered to take out the rescue party, and had readily obtained Pollock's consent. In his despatch Pollock mentions that the use of a detachment of Kuzzilbashes was suggested by their chief Khan Sheereen Khan, who was believed to be a steadfast supporter of the British, and, once again, by Mohun Lal. Pollock, who had no idea what conditions Shakespear would find, also thought it desirable to provide him with adequate funds—10,000 rupees—in case that form of persuasion were needed.¹⁷

Shakespear confidently expected reinforcements from Kabul to follow him, but there was no sign of them on the next, or the following day. Though the captives had now been given better horses by the Kuzzilbashes and by friendly Hazara chiefs, they were scarcely able to ride them. Among the wounded and disabled officers—Haughton, Mackenzie, Eyre and others—it seemed that their physique, which had endured many cumulative stresses, could not support the emotional strain of being on the verge of release. But if no one else was to come to their aid they must still carry on towards Kabul. Sultan Jan was known to be nearing them, and there were rumours, fortunately not confirmed, that the Wallee of Kooloom was also in pursuit. On the afternoon of the 20th their fears finally disappeared with the happy spectacle of an English officer cantering towards them. Incredibly, but most appropriately, he was from Sale's Brigade, and fighting Bob himself was not far behind.

The choice of Sale requires explanation. It should have been one of Nott's Brigadiers. As early as the 14th, Major Rawlinson recorded, it was suggested to Nott that he should despatch a Brigade from Argandeh, where the road strikes off for Bameean. Nott disagreed, declaring that he had only one objective, namely to return to India via Kabul without turning to right or left, and that 'he considered from the tenor of all Lord Ellenborough's despatches the recovery of the prisoners to be a matter of indifference to government'.¹⁸ (Nott must have appreciated that

Ellenborough's priority was very different from that of Auckland, who in his last instruction to Pollock had regarded the release of the prisoners as 'one of the first objects of your solicitude'.¹⁹ He was equally obdurate when his officers tried again, and on the 17th when Lieutenant Mayne arrived at the General's tent with an instruction from Pollock he was soundly abused. Nott, brave and efficient officer though he was, had not overcome his anger at finding Pollock in Kabul ahead of him. His reply does not make pleasant reading. His troops, he argued, needed a rest; he was short of supplies and transport; he did not agree with sending out individual detachments, and expected to hear that Shakespear had already been added to the roll of British prisoners. 'I have been so very unwell for the last two months' he concluded lamely, 'that I am sure you will kindly excuse me'.²⁰ Nor was he any more tractable when Pollock, waiving his superior rank, called on him. He would obey only under protest. According to Mackenzie, he had exclaimed indignantly that 'Government had thrown the prisoners overboard. Why then should he rescue them?'

Pollock did not press his recalcitrant colleague and invited Sale to undertake the mission. Sale's Brigade was encamped at Seeah Sung, ten miles further from Bameean than Nott, but on the 19th (his sixtieth birthday) he made a forced march to Argandeh. On the following day he left his camp standing and pushed on with the 3rd Dragoons to meet the prisoners. It would be an understatement to say that Sale's reunion with his family and the other officers was charged with emotion. He had come just in time. Lady Sale's view was that if they had not received help their recapture was certain. Pollock was of the same mind in his despatch. 'A delay of twenty four hours would have enabled Sultan Jan, who was in pursuit, to overtake our people'.²¹ But this dreadful prospect was soon forgotten. Lady Sale found her happiness 'actually painful, and accompanied by a choking sensation, which could not obtain the relief of tears'.²² Mackenzie said that Sale rode in silence alongside him for a quarter of an hour before he could speak. Then the Brigadier's feelings were too strong for him. 'He made a hideous series of grimaces, dug his spurs into his horse and galloped off as hard as he could'.²³ But when they reached Sale's camp, to be greeted by a royal salute from the mountain train guns, and when the men of the 13th



Plate 23. General Sir Robert and Lady Sale

Light Infantry pressed forward to welcome their commanding Officer's family, the intrepid Lady finally broke down and the tears 'found their course'. (plate 23)

The captives' composure was restored in time for their march back to Kabul. As they passed Nott's division his troops sought to make amends for their General's churlish behaviour with the warmth of their cheering. The convoy wound its way through the Grand Bazaar, but it no longer teemed with merchants and their customers. The shops were shut; there was no movement in the streets; the inhabitants had either fled or were waiting behind closed shutters to see what vengeance the *feringhees* would exact. Johnson, riding past the street where he and Burnes had occupied houses, was amazed at the desolation. 'Not one brick was left standing There was nothing but a heap of dirt, covering the mouldering remains of our unfortunate people'.²⁴

For Eldred it was the second time in less than a year he had ridden in after escaping from the enemy. But he expected no hero's welcome. 'I have, thank God, got released' he wrote to his brother John on 22nd September, 'and better still, I may say I owe it, and that of the other prisoners, under Providence, to my own exertions'. After a brief account of their rescue, he ended resignedly 'I have been turned out of my appointment and expect to be ordered down to Calcutta. If I can I will see you on the way. I am floored still (with my leg)'. It is clear from the letters that have survived that, even in captivity, Eldred wrote in a firm, strong hand. When materials were understandably scarce he would overwrite the pages at right angles to the initial script. This makes them difficult, but not impossible, to decipher.

CHAPTER XVI

Calcutta Races commenced

Throughout the regimental lines on the old Kabul race course there was much rifting of harness, polishing of leather and smartening-up of uniform—all believed to have a therapeutic effect on the soldiery. The Bameean prisoners were at last able to change their Afghan rags for something more civilised. Ceremonial parades were held for the solemn exchange of compliments greatly cherished by the higher command. But other emotions could be detected beneath the general air of self-congratulation. The distressing sights which Pollock's troops had encountered on their way through the passes, and the memories of the murder of Burnes and Macnaghten could not be put aside. The Afghans for their part might now appear, if not subservient for they were seldom that, friendly and complaisant, but they could scarcely conceal their apprehension. It was the way in oriental wars for vengeance to be exacted. There were accordingly two topics uppermost in the minds of all those beneath the shadows of the Bala Hissar in September, 1842. What punishment would Pollock inflict on the defeated rebels, and when would the Army of Retribution start its withdrawal?

Eldred's first task was to submit a report on the measures to which the prisoners at Bameean had recourse in order to obtain their release. There was an accounting problem which, bearing in mind how he had been criticised for his disbursal of funds at Herat, he was anxious to put on record. It would not be long before ledger entries were thought more significant than the preservation of lives. After a bald, unvarnished account of the assistance he had received from Saleh Mahomed and Syud Mor-teza, he emphasised his hope that Pollock would approve the action he had taken, and agree that his 'assuming the powers of a political agent under the circumstances of the case may be pardoned, for I believe in no other way would the release of our captives have been achieved, though I could with ease have

effected my own escape'. As regards the pension of 1,000 rupees which had been promised to Saheh Mahomed he added tartly 'the prisoners have agreed to pay the amount if Government consider it too large, but considering that the man was then in receipt of that sum monthly, and that he may be obliged to flee the country if the Barukzyes regain power, I trust you will not consider it too large a sum to recommend the payment'.¹

On the 24th the ex-prisoners held a merry reunion in the tent which had been allocated to Lady Sale. It was a christening party for the four children who had been born in captivity. Regrettably Lady Sale had already brought her notes to an end, observing that any further journals could be of interest only to her family, but it does not appear that the company showed any sign of the reaction that might have been expected. On the contrary, Henry Lawrence, George's brother who had come up with Pollock's force, wrote that 'The ladies and children look lovely'. He added his own tribute to Eldred, for once unbending with his friends. 'Pottinger managed admirably. All his comrades were surprised at the excellence of his arrangements. We are all well and in great glee at getting our friends'²

Meanwhile, although Pollock's troops were with difficulty restrained from plundering, some deprivations were carried out in the neighbourhood of Nott's camp. Unfortunately much of the property raided belonged to Kuzzilbashes, who had always been most friendly to us. Their chief, and Gholam Mahomed Khan the acting Wuzeer, complained to Pollock who in turn sent their letter to his fellow-General. Nott was unrepentant. 'What insolence in this man whose hands are still red with the blood of our countrymen'. His verdict was that the writer 'should be instantly seized and punished for sending such a grossly false and insolent statement'.³ Nott might mature, but he did not mellow.

A few days later Eldred, somewhat to his surprise, was on his way back to Kohistan. Pollock had decided that, while he collected supplies for his return to India, a punitive column should be sent to the area from which so many of the insurgents had come. The hated Ameenolah Khan was said to be assembling the Barukzye at Istalif, and though he now professed allegiance to the British no one took this at even face value. Moreover Akbar Khan was still hovering in the vicinity of the Ghorebund valley.

He now released the last prisoner, Captain Bygrave and sent him to Kabul with a friendly letter. Bygrave, suffering from excruciating frostbite, had been a favourite of Akbar, who had taken him to Kohistan after the last battle at Tezeen pass. Bygrave was warmly received; not so Akbar's communication. A strong combined force drawn from both Pollock's and Nott's divisions marched for Istalif under General McCaskill.

Eldred wrote to his brother that he had been ordered to accompany the expedition, but he was in some doubt what his role was to be. 'I had no authority and was merely a guide, but I managed to do a little'.⁴ Pollock's motive in sending him is not clear. It may have been the thought that the survivor of Charekar would derive some grim satisfaction from seeing punishment inflicted; or he may simply have in mind that Eldred knew the country. Eldred's letters cast no light on this, but he had a poor opinion of McCaskill, 'a man too old for his work, and unaccustomed to the business'.⁵ Later he added that McCaskill had quite outlived his faculties. It is arguable whether these strictures were justified. McCaskill in his despatch was generous in acknowledging Eldred's assistance, and Istalif was taken in exemplary fashion.⁶ The terraced town, built in the form of a fortified pyramid sitting astride two hill spurs, was not the easiest place to assault. But the plan of attack, which involved turning the flanks to make possible a steady climb, under heavy jezail fire, through the vineyards and terraces, was highly effective. It owed a great deal to Havelock, who wrote the orders for battle, and George Broadfoot whose Sappers and Miners once again distinguished themselves. McCaskill, in the accounts left by Mackenzie and Havelock, was able to watch the operation from an orchard where he concentrated on eating plums. Istalif was captured on 29th September and about a third of it was set on fire. It was alleged that the troops committed atrocities, roasting some of the inhabitants alive: certainly they were enraged at finding 500 sepoy prisoners in pitiful condition: and McCaskill subsequently had to justify himself to the Adjutant General. The avengers moved on to Charekar, where special orders were issued to prevent pillaging since it had been the scene of 'treacherous barbarity towards our officers and troops'.⁷ Eldred, with painful memories of the deaths of Rattray, Codrington and Salisbury, and the last gesture

of the Bugle Major, watched impassively as Charekar was effectively destroyed. The punitive force returned to Kabul on 7th October.

Pollock had one more task before he withdrew to Hindustan. Retribution had to be visited on the city of Kabul. In an effort to leave behind a government with some semblance of friendliness towards the British—a forlorn hope, it may be thought—he had agreed that the Bala Hissar, which was the obvious target, should not be rased. The Kuzzilbashes had urged that it should be left as a palace for the Suddozye prince who had been elected as ruler. (Prince Shahpur, a son of Soojah, was chosen by assembly to replace his brother Futteh Jung.) Pollock said succinctly that he had destroyed with gunpowder the Grand Bazaar, which might be considered the most frequented part of Kabul, and ‘known as the grand emporium of this part of Cebtral Asia’.⁸ The Bazaar was selected because the body of Macnaghten had been exposed to public insult there. An understandable motive, but Eldred regretted that the destruction fell most heavily on the Kandor merchants and shopkeepers who believed they had been given promises of protection. A mosque derisively called the ‘Feringhee Mosque’ and decorated with captured British relics was also destroyed. Abbott’s trail of gunpowder had scarcely been lit when the soldiery burst into the city to make the most of their last opportunity for plunder. The fires were still burning two days later when Pollock led the 1st Division on their final journey through the passes. But the Afghans had the last, ironic, word. The British left to the sound of the Bala Hissar guns thundering a salute in honour of Prince Shahpur’s succession. His reign was shorter than that of his father, for Akbar had deposed him before Pollock reached India.

Eldred, travelling with Pollock, had little excitement to report, though he noted with professional approval the expert drill of Captain Blood’s battery of nine pounders.⁹ The Jalalabad fortifications, so laboriously built by Broadfoot’s Sappers, were levelled to the ground. Pollock prudently crowned the heights of the passes, and met with no opposition other some raiding on the baggage train. The centre and rear divisions under McCaskill and Nott, who were not so meticulous about hill-picketing, were less fortunate. Nott had a smart engagement on the Huft-Kotul pass and lost sixty officers and men, killed or wounded.¹⁰ Throughout

the defiles the Afghans kept up their steady sniping. As their jezails echoed against the rocks they were issuing a reminder—just as they had done to Keane three years ago when he hurried back through the Khyber—that this was not the *feringhees'* country.

At Peshawar Eldred was once again entertained by Avitabile, whose farouche behaviour and appearance did not impair his consistent kindness to the British. Then, as he had no official duties, along with Airey and the Lawrence brothers he pushed on ahead of the main column. He had plenty of grounds for thought. Brother John, incensed that the Bombay Times and the English press had, to his mind, traduced Eldred for his part in signing the treaty with the Afghans, had written to the Times in London, his letter appearing on 22nd August. It was in strong terms. After pointing out that Eldred had 'spurned with contempt' the terms offered to Macnaghten and had urged that the British should cut their way through, or die like men and not 'move out to be shot like dogs', John argued indignantly that his brother should not be made a scapegoat for errors he had opposed.¹¹ It was a loyal, understandable exercise, but Eldred knew that a public controversy would not do either John or himself, as serving officers, any good.¹² Then he received formal notification that the circumstances of his conduct would be investigated by a Court of Inquiry. This he expected, but he did not relish the thought that the principal witness would be Shelton, and there was no saying what malice he could exhibit. It was a resigned, if not disillusioned, Eldred who rode into Ferozepore.

The Governor-General had been there since 9th December awaiting the return of his victorious army, but none of Ellenborough's recent activities had enhanced his reputation (plate 24). Some of them gave rise to a great deal of ribald comment. First, there was the Proclamation which he dated 1st October—before he knew that the prisoners were safe—and signed in the very room at Simla where Auckland had put his name to his ill-fated Manifesto four years ago to the day. Auckland's statement had been a pretty dubious distortion of the facts, but Ellenborough now appears in his Proclamation (Appendix II) as 'smiler with the knife under the cloak'. The Afghans were to be left to stew in their own anarchy and the British army withdrawn to the Sutlej. No exception could be taken to that, or to the ending of the

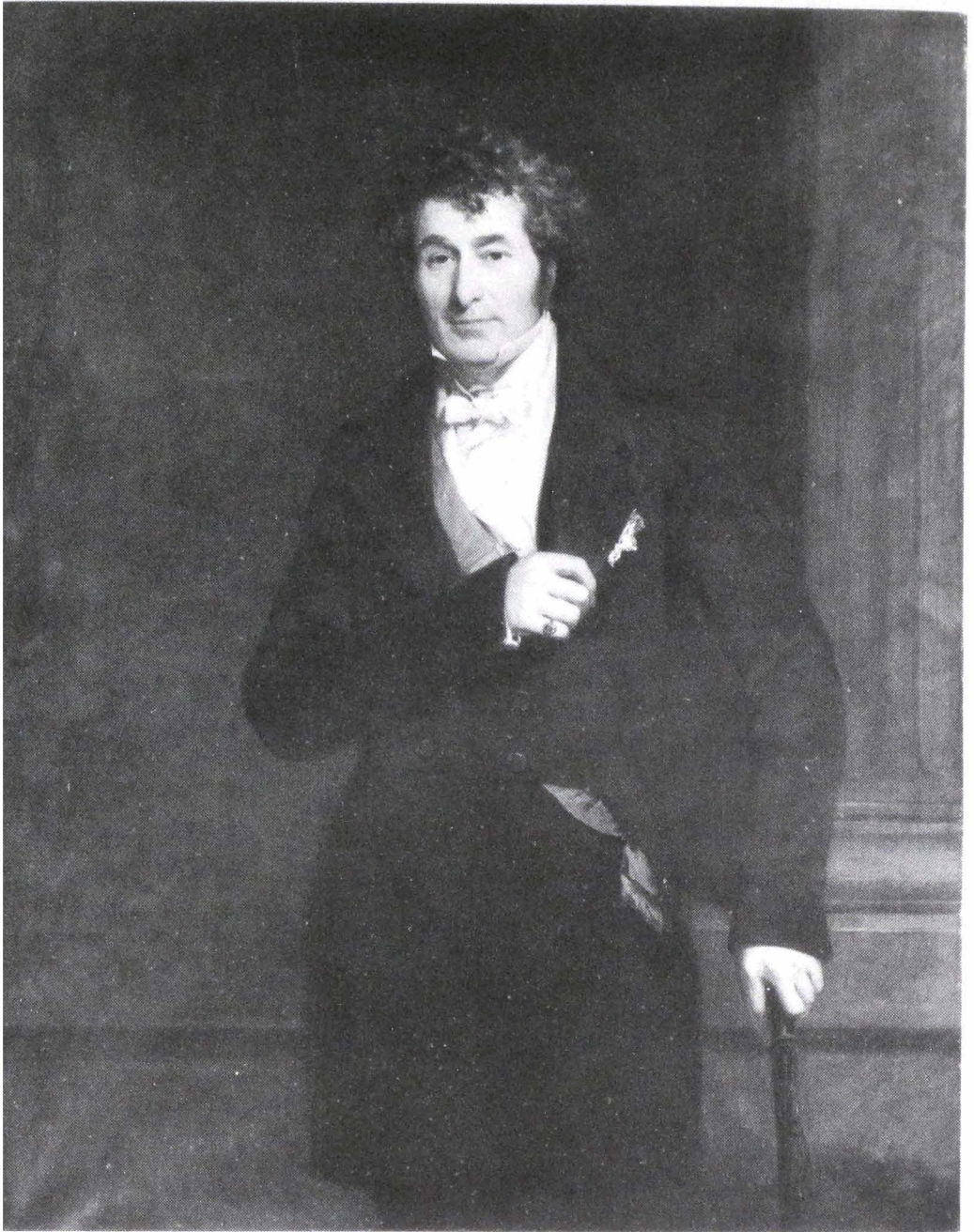


Plate 24. Lord Ellenborough

enormous expenditure required to support a large force 'in a false military position'. But the admission that to force a sovereign upon a reluctant people would be inconsistent with British policy and principles was both a gem of hypocrisy, and, as it proved, a hostage to fortune from the man who soon annexed Sind, attacked Gwalior, and was a party to the first Sikh war. The most

objectionable passages, however, are those containing snide references to Auckland's 'errors' in representing Soojah to be friendly (his fidelity was now questioned) and Dost Mahomed to be hostile to British interests. The Governor-General had, in short, decided that his predecessor's policy should be publicly disowned. The fate of the prisoners was conveniently overlooked, and no one liked the context, manner, or timing of Ellenborough's apologia.

Ellenborough also came under ridicule for the puerile business of the gates of Somnath. The sandalwood gates, whose authenticity was very suspect, were supposed to have been carried off from Gujerat by the great Sultan Mahomed and lodged in his tomb near Ghuznee. Nott had been instructed to bring them back. On 16th November Ellenborough addressed an exceptionally pompous proclamation 'to all the Princes and Chiefs, and people of India' commending the return of the gates to them as 'this glorious trophy of successful war'.¹³ Apparently Ellenborough did not realise that the Moslem princes thought this was an outrage, while the Hindus did not want the gates which they believed had been polluted. British India at first imagined that this effusion was a pasquinade from some humorist on the Governor-General's staff, but it was perfectly genuine. Eventually the gates were left at Agra.

Ellenborough's third *bêtise* arose from his treatment of Dost Mahomed and his family. It was recognised that the Dost could not, consistently with the October proclamation, be retained in custody, and a Government statement indicated that when the British army had passed the Indus all the Afghan prisoners would be allowed to return to their country. But Ellenborough added a codicil that the released princes were first to present themselves before him at a Durbar in Ferozepore. The popular view was that this was an unnecessarily humiliating condition and Ellenborough was moved to delete it.

Nothing, however, could deter the Governor-General from acting as ringmaster in the grand circus—again in emulation of Auckland—which he organised to welcome the returning troops. Ellenborough was really a soldier *manqué*. He had asked, unsuccessfully, for the old military title of Captain-General when he got his Indian appointment. Now, if he could not hold military rank, he could still arrange a great military display. The Army of

Reserve had already assembled on the Ferozepore plain, but Eldred and his companions were astonished to see the supreme representative of the Crown taking a close personal interest in the painting of the 250 elephants who were to greet the returning heroes, and in the construction of a huge ceremonial arch of bamboos and bunting through which they were to pass. Further embarrassment awaited Ellenborough on the 17th December when the troops of the 'Illustrious Garrison' led by Sale laughed in derision as they marched under the gibbet and the elephants obstinately declined to trumpet their greeting. But guns fired: the Lancers' band played the 'Conquering Hero': and soldiers greeted each other. Pollock arrived on the 19th and Nott on the 23rd, both to a markedly less effusive welcome, since Ellenborough had taken another captious decision to treat the defenders of Jalalabad with obvious preference.¹⁴ The Indian press put matters in a deft perspective when the table of events, for December read

'—The Army, under the command of Major-General Pollock, crossed the Sutledge, and were received by Lord Ellenborough and the Army of Reserve with all the honours of war.—Calcutta Races commenced'.¹⁵

At Ferozepore there was feasting; there were fêtes; there were reviews. But little attention was paid to the Bameean prisoners. Only Lady Sale and her daughter, having a connection with the 13th Light Infantry, were admitted to the ceremonial banquet. Those who had been taken prisoner, and had not been handed over as hostages, had to await clearance by court of inquiry. Ellenborough managed to strike another discordant note. He had long evinced a strong dislike for Political Officers—an unusual aberration for one with his military proclivities since the Political Officers included some of the best young officers in the army. The Governor-General had been prompt to cancel all their appointments beyond the Indus, and he displayed a positive dislike for those who had returned. He ignored Macgregor who had been one of the inspirations of the Jalalabad defence, and he had no time for Eldred Pottinger. A mean streak appeared in his character when, according to Mackenzie, he refused to authorise the payment of political allowances to Eldred, Lawrence, and Mackenzie, denying that they were political because they were

hostages, and even denying that they were hostages—although Akbar had specially demanded them because they were political officers.

The prisoners and hostages (Appendix III) had no doubt where their own obligation lay, and on 19th December Eldred was delighted to get a letter signed on their behalf by Lieutenant Webb of the 38th Native Infantry. It read

‘My dear Sir,

Your exertions at Bameean for our release have elicited the warmest feelings of gratitude and admiration. The chief praise is due to you of making the Hazarah Sirdars friendly to us, of binding Saleh Mahomed Khan firmly to our interests, and of perfecting the whole plan successfully. The cheerfulness and determination with which you entered on the difficult task imposed upon you must be ever gratefully remembered by us; and in token of our esteem and regard, we beg your acceptance of a piece of plate, which will be forwarded to you as soon as completed.

Wishing you every success in your future career,

We remain,

Your obliged and sincere friends’

Thirty two of the Bameean survivors appended their signatures, and only Shelton and Palmer declined to sign, or subscribe to the testimonial. Eldred’s reply shows that, undemonstrative though he might be, he was greatly touched by their gesture.

‘My dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with real and heartfelt gratification that I acknowledge Lieutenant Webb’s letter conveying your sentiments on my humble endeavours towards our release. I shall always consider your unsought testimony to my exertion in liberating so many of my country-women and their children, and my comrades, as the proudest reward I could receive. I therefore beg you will accept my warmest thanks; and believe me, that I should prize any memorial of your esteem and regard as above all price. It would be unbecoming in me to undertake the credit you have, in so kind a manner, borne witness to; but permit me to say I also am under deep obligation to you all for the courage displayed by you and the trust you placed in me, which, joined with the cordial cooperation of my coadjutors (Captains G. St P. Lawrence, 11th Light Cavalry, and Johnson, 26th Native Infantry), gave me the confidence necessary to take advantage

of the favourable opening, which a merciful Providence had vouchsafed to us, when it was apparent to all that human aid was nearly hopeless. Trusting that the same Providence may prolong your lives in 'happiness, and shield you from a recurrence of the sad scenes we have lately undergone.

I remain,

Your obliged and faithful friend'.¹⁷

The proceedings on New Year's Day, 1843, when Eldred presented himself before a Court of Inquiry, were less euphoric. The President was George Clerk, the distinguished Agent for the North West Frontier, while General Lumley, Sir Harry Smith the Adjutant General, and two Afghan veterans Colonels Wymer and Monteath made up the Court. The questions at issue were Eldred's conduct in drawing Bills on the Government of India, and in signing the treaty. On the first, only Lumley was not convinced by Eldred's explanation. He thought drawing the Bills was unauthorised and indiscreet. Much more serious was Eldred's part in the treaty with the Afghans. Here Shelton, apart from Eldred the only survivor of the Kabul Council of War, was the crucial witness. After Eldred had stated that he had remonstrated against the views of Elphinstone and his colleagues, but having been overruled had acted as a mere agent of the military authorities, Shelton grudgingly admitted that the Council had been of the opinion that the Army should retire on Jalalabad. Then came the key question. Shelton was asked whether Eldred coincided in that opinion. 'To the best of my recollection, he did not coincide', was his reply.¹⁸ That was enough. Clerk recorded that Eldred had omitted nothing to maintain the honour and safety of the army, and the Court concluded that his conduct 'was marked by a degree of energy and manly firmness that stamps his character as one worthy of high admiration'.¹⁹

Writing to his mother, Eldred said that the Court's verdict was 'as favourable as you could wish',²⁰ but he was incensed that Ellenborough did not publish the verdict in full. He knew his reputation was cleared, in fact enhanced, by the Court. So did everyone else, but the failure to publish the full proceedings was a reminder of the Governor-General's animosity. Eldred reflected sadly that he 'must perforce rest content'.²¹

Another Court of Inquiry (Brigadiers Moore and Graham and Colonel Bolton) then looked at the two letters written by Eldred

and Lawrence which commented most adversely on Shelton and which had become public knowledge. The Court, which was anxious to bring this embarrassing business to an end, found that although there was some excuse for writing the letters, they did not provide grounds for court-martialing Shelton. This might have been expected to settle the matter, but after further exchanges when Shelton declared with some venom that the allegations made about him were untrue and actuated by malice, the Court decided that he should stand court-martial after all.

So they all had to parade again at Ludhiana on 26th January, and in the event Shelton was lucky. To charges of issuing unauthorised orders to prepare for retreat, of showing open contempt for his senior officer Elphinstone, and of negotiating secretly with Akbar for forage to feed his own horse, he blustered, conveniently forgot details, and abused Eldred and the other witnesses. But he got off with a reprimand for his correspondence with Akbar, and was acquitted on the other two counts.²² He even earned a rider that he had shown 'considerable exertion personal gallantry of the highest order and noble devotion as a soldier'. Eldred and the others who, with some reluctance, gave evidence against him felt that justice had been tempered with seniority.

The camp at Ludhiana—'as dirty as ever', Nicolls noted with distaste—now broke up, and Eldred took some leave to pay a first visit to Simla.²⁷ Then he made his way down to Agra with the express intention of seeking an interview with Ellenborough 'to state my services and ask for my pay as a hostage'.²⁴ But he got no interview, nothing more than an acknowledgement that his case and that of the other hostages serving under him had been referred to the Court of Directors. Eleven years later Mackenzie, thanks to the tenacious friendship of Lord Dalhousie, succeeded in getting his arrears of *batta*.²⁵ Eldred did not live long enough to secure parity of treatment. Belated, and partial, amends were made by the award of an annuity of £100 to his stepmother and £20 to his four half-brothers.

At Agra he attended the ceremonies when Pollock and Nott were installed as Knights Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath. 'Lord Ellenborough' he wrote 'made a fluent speech, praising them and himself, and abusing the late government. Nott made a speech in reply, but so low as to be scarcely audible He

also gave Lord Auckland a rub, but more justly than the Governor-General had done'.²⁶

Armed with a medical certificate, Eldred's thoughts were firmly fixed on home leave, and learning that his uncle was now installed in some state as Governor of Hong Kong, he decided to come back by way of China. At the end of June he was in Calcutta for a farewell meeting with Colin Mackenzie, and on 1st July he sailed on the 'Prince Regent'. From the new Government House at Hong Kong he wrote to John, reporting that the voyage had been disagreeable. His uncle, who as usual was working too hard, had asked him to stay as temporary Consul at Canton; he was inclined to accept and return with him at the end of the year. But there was a sinister addendum. 'This place is very sickly at present. A sort of typhus is laying hold of the people and doing much to thin our numbers'.²⁷ Two months later he was himself a victim, but there is no record of the actual circumstances of his death, beyond the official notification which reached Calcutta in December.

To adapt the Jacobean Webster, 'Cover his face. Mine eyes dazzle. He died young'. Had he survived there can be no doubt that he would have shared the fame which his colleagues later earned in the Mutiny. He would not, perhaps, have been surprised to see 23 out of the 24 Bengal Native Infantry and Cavalry Regiments that served in Afghanistan either mutiny or be disbanded in 1857-8. As Eldred feared, they had perceived that we were not invincible. Akbar Khan had driven the first nail into the coffin of British Imperialism.

The Simla Manifesto, 1838

Proclamation

1. The Right Hon'ble the Govr. Genl. of India having, with the concurrence of the Supreme Council, directed the assemblage of a British force for service across the Indus, His Lordship deems it proper to publish the following exposition of the reasons which have led to this important measure.

2. It is a matter of notoriety that the treaties entered into by the British Govt. in the year 1832, with the Ameers of Sind, the Nawab of Bahawalpore, and Maharajah Runjeet Singh, had for their object, by opening the navigation of the Indus, to facilitate the extension of commerce, and to gain for the British Nation, in Central Asia, that legitimate influence which an interchange of benefits would naturally produce.

3. With a view to invite the aid of the *de facto* rulers of Affghanistan to the measures necessary for giving full effect to those Treaties, Capt. Burnes was deputed, towards the close of the year 1836, on a mission to Dost Mahomed Khan, the Chief of Cabul. The original objects of that officer's mission were purely of a commercial nature.

4. Whilst Capt. Burnes, however, was on his journey to Cabul, information was received by the Govr. Genl. that the troops of Dost Mahomed Khan had made a sudden and unprovoked attack on those of our ancient Ally, Maharajah Runjeet Singh. It was naturally to be apprehended that His Highness the Maharajah would not be slow to avenge this aggression; and it was to be feared that the flames of war being once kindled in the very regions into which we were endeavouring to extend our commerce, the peaceful and beneficial purposes of the British Govt. would be altogether frustrated. In order to avert a result so calamitous, the Govr. Genl. resolved on authorizing Capt. Burnes to intimate to Dost Mahomed Khan that, if he should evince a disposition to come to just and reasonable terms with the Maharajah, His Lordship would exert his good offices with His Highness for the restoration of an amicable understanding between the two powers. The Maharajah, with the characteristic confidence which he has uniformly placed in the faith and friendship of the British Nation, at once assented to the proposition

of the Govr. Genl., to the effect that, in the meantime, hostilities on his part should be suspended.

5. It subsequently came to the knowledge of the Govr. Genl., that a Persian Army was besieging Herat; that intrigues were actively prosecuted throughout Affghanistan, for the purpose of extending Persian influence and authority to the banks of, and even beyond, the Indus; and that the Court of Persia had not only commenced a course of injury and insult to the officers of Her Majesty's mission in the Persian territory, but had afforded evidence of being engaged in designs wholly at variance with the principles and objects of its alliance with Great Britain.

6. After much time spent by Capt. Burnes in fruitless negotiation at Cabul, it appeared, that Dost Mahomed Khan, chiefly in consequence of his reliance upon Persian encouragement and assistance, persisted, as respected his misunderstanding with the Sikhs, in using the most unreasonable pretensions, such as the Govr. Genl. could not, consistently with justice and his regard for the friendship of Maharajah Runjeet Singh, be the channel of submitting to the consideration of His Highness; that he avowed schemes of aggrandizement and ambition, injurious to the security and peace of the frontiers of India; and that he openly threatened, in furtherance of those schemes, to call in every foreign aid which he could command. Ultimately he gave his undisguised support to the Persian designs in Affghanistan, of the unfriendly and injurious character of which, as concerned the British power in India, he was well apprized, and by his utter disregard of the views and interests of the British Govt., compelled Capt. Burnes to leave Cabul without having effected any of the objects of his mission.

7. It was now evident that no further interference could be exercised by the British Govt. to bring about a good understanding between the Sikh Ruler and Dost Mahomed Khan, and the hostile policy of the latter Chief showed too plainly that, so long as Cabul remained under his Govt., we could never hope that the tranquillity of our neighbourhood would be secured, or that the interests of our Indian Empire would be preserved inviolate.

8. The Govr. Genl. deems it in this place necessary to revert to the siege of Herat, and the conduct of the Persian nation. The siege of the city has now been carried on by the Persian Army for many months. The attack upon it was a most unjustifiable and cruel aggression, perpetrated and continued notwithstanding the solemn and repeated remonstrances of the British Envoy at the Court of Persia, and after every just and becoming offer of accommodation had been made and rejected. The besieged have behaved with gallantry and fortitude worthy of the justice of their cause, and the Govr. Genl. would yet indulge the hope, that their heroism may enable them to maintain a successful defence, until

succours shall reach them from British India. In the meantime, the ulterior designs of Persia, affecting the interests of the British Govt. have been, by a succession of events, more and more openly manifested. The Govr. Genl. has recently ascertained by an official despatch from Mr. McNeill, Her Majesty's Envoy, that His Excellency has been compelled, by the refusal of his just demands, and by a systematic course of disrespect adopted towards him by the Persian Govt., to quit the Court of the Shah, and to make a public declaration of the cessation of all intercourse between the two Govts. The necessity under which Great Britain is placed, of regarding the present advance of the Persian Arms into Affghanistan as an act of hostility towards herself, has also been officially communicated to the Shah, under the express order of Her Majesty's Govt.

9. The Chiefs of Candahar (brothers of Dost Mahomed Khan of Cabul) have avowed their adherence to the Persian Policy, with the same full knowledge of its opposition to the rights and interests of the British Nation in India, and have been openly assisting in the operations against Herat.

10. In the crisis of affairs consequent upon the retirement of our Envoy from Cabul, the Govr. Genl. felt the importance of taking immediate measures, for arresting the rapid progress of foreign intrigue and aggression towards our own territories.

11. His attention was naturally drawn at this conjecture to the position and claims of Shah Soojah-ool-Moolk, a monarch who, when in power, had cordially acceded to the measures of united resistance to external enmity, which were at that time judged necessary by the British Govt., and who, on his empire being usurped by its present Rulers, had found an honorable asylum in the British Dominions.

12. It had been clearly ascertained, from the information furnished by the various officers who have visited Affghanistan, that the Barukzye Chiefs, from disunion and unpopularity, were ill fitted, under any circumstances, to be useful Allies to the British Govt., and to aid us in our just and necessary measures of national defence. Yet so long as they refrained from proceedings injurious to our interest and security, the British Govt. acknowledged and respected their authority. But a different policy appeared to be now more than justified by the conduct of those chiefs, and to be indispensable to our own safety. The welfare of our possessions in the East requires that we should have on our Western Frontier, an ally who is interested in resisting aggression, and establishing tranquillity, in the place of chiefs ranging themselves in subservience to a hostile power, and seeking to promote schemes of conquest and aggrandizement.

13. After a serious and mature deliberation, the Govr. Genl. was

satisfied that a pressing necessity, as well as every consideration of policy and justice, warranted us in espousing the cause of Shah Soojah-ool-Moolk, whose popularity throughout Affghanistan had been proved to His Lordship by the strong and unanimous testimony of the best authorities. Having arrived at this determination, the Govr. Genl. was further of opinion, that it was just and proper, no less from the position of Maharajah Runjeet Singh, than from his undeviating friendship towards the British Government, that His Highness should have the offer of becoming a party to the contemplated operations. Mr. Macnaghten was accordingly deputed in June last to the Court of His Highness, and the result of his mission has been the conclusion of a Tripartite Treaty by the British Government, the Maharajah, and Shah Soojah-ool-Moolk, whereby His Highness is guaranteed in his present possessions, and has bound himself to co-operate for the restoration of the Shah to the throne of his ancestors. The friends and enemies of any one of the contracting parties, have been declared to be the friends and enemies of all. Various points have been adjusted, which had been the subjects of discussion between the British Govt. and His Highness the Maharajah, the identity of whose interest with those of the Hon'ble Company, has now been made apparent to all the surrounding states. A guaranteed independence will, upon favourable conditions, be tendered to the Ameers of Sinde; and the integrity of Herat, in the possession of its present ruler, will be fully respected; while by the measures completed, or in progress, it may reasonably be hoped that the general freedom and security of commerce will be promoted; that the name and just influence of the British Govt. will gain their proper footing among the natives of Central Asia, that tranquillity will be established upon the most important frontier of India; and that a lasting barrier will be raised against intrigue and encroachment.

14. His Majesty Shah Soojah-ool-Moolk, will enter Affghanistan surrounded by his own troops, and will be supported against foreign interference, and factious opposition, by a British Army. The Govr. Genl. confidently hopes, that the Shah will be speedily replaced on his throne by his own subjects and adherents, and when once he shall be secured in power, and the independence and integrity of Affghanistan established, the British Army will be withdrawn. The Govr. Genl. has been led to these measures, by the duty which is imposed upon him of providing for the security of the possessions of the British crown; but he rejoices that, in the discharge of this duty, he will be enabled to assist in restoring the union and prosperity of the Affghan people. Throughout the approaching operations, British influence will be sedulously employed to further every measure of general benefit; to reconcile differences; to secure oblivion of injuries; and to put an end to the distractions

by which, for so many years, the welfare and happiness of the Affghans have been impaired. Even to the Chiefs, whose hostile proceedings have given just cause of offence to the British Govt., it will seek to secure liberal and honorable treatment, on their tendering early submission; and ceasing from opposition to that course of measures, which may be judged the most suitable for the general advantage of their country.

By Order of the Right Hon'ble the Govr. Genl. of India,

(Signed) W. H. MACNAGHTEN,

Secy. to the Govt. of India, with the Govr. Genl.

Notification

With reference to the preceding declaration, the following appointments are made:—

Mr. W. H. Macnaghten, Secretary to Govt., will assume the functions of Envoy and Minister on the part of the Government of India at the court of Shah Soojah-ool-Moolk. Mr. Macnaghten will be assisted by the following officers:—

Capt. Alexander Burnes, of the Bombay Establishment, who will be employed under Mr. Macnaghten's directions as Envoy to the Chief of Kelat, or other states.

Lieut. E. D'Arcy Todd, of the Bengal Artillery, to be Political Assistant and Military Secretary to the Envoy and Minister.

Lieut. Eldred Pottinger, of the Bombay Artillery; Lieut R. Leech, of the Bombay Engineers; Mr. P. B. Lord, of the Bombay Medical Establishment, to be Political Assistants to the Envoy and Minister.

Lieut. E. B. Conolly, of the 6th Regt. Bengal Cavalry, to command the Escort of the Envoy and Minister, and to be Military Assistant to the Envoy and Minister.

Mr. G. J. Berwick, of the Bengal Medical Establishment, to be Surgeon to the Envoy and Minister.

(Signed) W. H. MACNAGHTEN,

Oct. 1st, 1838.

Secy. to the Govt. of India, with the Govr. Genl.

APPENDIX II

A Proclamation made at Simla, 1 October 1842

The government of India directed its army past the Indus in order to expel from Afghanistan a chief believed to be hostile to British interests and to replace upon his throne a sovereign represented to be friendly to those interests, and popular with his former subjects.

The chief believed to be hostile became a prisoner, and the sovereign represented to be popular was replaced upon his throne: but, after events which brought into question his fidelity to the government by which he was restored, he lost, by the hands of an assassin, the throne he had only held midst insurrections, and his death was preceded and followed by a still-existing anarchy.

Disasters unparalleled in their extent, unless by the errors in which they originated, and by the treachery in which they were completed, have in one short campaign been avenged upon every scene of past misfortunes; and repeated victories in the field, and the capture of the cities and citadels of Ghazni and Cabul, have again attached the opinion of invincibility to the British arms.

The British army in possession of Afghanistan will now be withdrawn to the Sutlej.

The Governor General will leave it to the Afghans themselves to create a government amidst the anarchy which is the consequence of their crimes.

To force a sovereign upon a reluctant people would be as inconsistent with the policy as it is with the principles of the British government, tending to place the arms and resources of that people at the disposal of the first invader, and to impose the burden of supporting a sovereign without prospect of benefit from his alliance.

The Governor General will willingly recognise any government approved by the Afghans themselves, which shall appear desirous and capable of maintaining friendly relations with the neighbouring states.

Content with the limits nature appears to have assigned to its empire, the government of India will devote all its efforts to the establishment and maintenance of general peace, to the protection of the sovereigns and chiefs of its allies, and to the prosperity and happiness of its own faithful subjects.

The rivers of the Punjab and the Indus, and the mountainous passes, and the barbarous tribes of Afghanistan will be placed between the British army and an enemy approaching from the west—if, indeed, such an enemy there can be—and no longer between the army and its supplies.

The enormous expenditure required for the support of a large force in a false military position, at a distance from its own frontier and its resources will no longer arrest every measure for the improvement of the country and of the people.

The combined army of India and of England, superior in equipment, in discipline, in valour, and in the officers by whom it is commanded, to any force which can be opposed to it in Asia, will stand in unassailable strength upon its own soil; and for ever, under the blessing of providence, preserve the glorious empire it has won in security and honour.

The Governor General cannot fear the misconstruction of his motives in thus frankly announcing to surrounding states the pacific and conservative policy of his government.

Afghanistan and China have seen at once the forces at his disposal and the effect with which they can be applied.

Sincerely attached to peace for the sake of the benefits it confers upon the people, the Governor General is resolved that peace shall be observed, and will put forth the whole power of the British government to coerce the state by which it shall be infringed.

By order of the Right Honourable the Governor General of India,

T. H. MADDOCK

Secretary to the Government of India,
with the Governor General.

APPENDIX III

List of Officers saved of the Kabul Force

(Extracted from 'The Military Operations at Cabul'
by Lieut. Vincent Eyre, 1843.)

List of Officers saved of the Cabul Force

In imprisonment in Afghanistan

POLITICAL

Maj. Pottinger, C.B.	Wounded at Chareekar on	6 Nov.
Capt. Lawrence	Wounded in action at Cabul on	23 Nov.
Capt. Mackenzie, Madras Est.	Wounded in action at Cabul on	23 Nov.

STAFF

Maj.-Gen. Elphinstone, C.B.	Wounded on retreat at Jugdulluk (Died at Tezeen on 23 April)	12 Jan.
Brig. Shelton		
Capt. Boyd, Asst. Comm.-General		
Lieut. Eyre, Arty D.C.O.	Wounded in action at Cabul	22 Nov.

HORSE ARTILLERY

Lieut. Waller	Wounded in action at Cabul	22 Nov.
	H.M. 44 TH	
Capt. Souter	Wounded on retreat at Gundamuk	13 Jan.
	H.M. 13 TH	
Lieut. Mein	Wounded in action under Gen. Sale at Khoord- Cabul Pass	Oct.

37TH N.I.

Maj. Griffiths	Wounded on retreat in Khoord-Cabul Pass	8 Jan.
Dr. Magrath		

SHAH'S SERVICE

Capt. Troup	Wounded on retreat in Khoord-Cabul Pass	8 Jan.
Capt. Johnson		
Capt. Anderson		

PAYMASTER

Capt. Bygrave	The toes of one foot nipped off by frost on retreat	
Mr Ryley, Conductor of Ordnance		

54TH N.I.

Lieut. Melville	The toes of one foot nipped off by frost on retreat near Huft Kotul	10 Jan.
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SHAH'S SERVICE

Dr Brydon	Escaped to Jellalabad	
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Ladies

Lady Macnaghten
 Lady Sale
 Mrs Trevor, eight children
 Mrs Anderson, three children
 Mrs Sturt, one child
 Mrs Mainwaring, one child
 Mrs Boyd, three children
 Mrs Eyre, one child
 Mrs Waller, two children
 Conductor Ryley's wife, Mrs Ryley, three children
 Private Bourne's (13th Light Infantry) wife, Mrs Bourne
 Mrs Wade, wife of Sergeant Wade.¹
 Mr Fallon clerk Not in the service
 Mr Blewitt, do.

¹ Sergeant Wade, who is described as 'baggage-sergeant to the Cabul mission', also survived the captivity in Afghanistan. But Private Bourne's name does not appear in the list of survivors.

Glossary

Amir	Commander or chief.
Bala Hissar	Upper citadel of royal palace.
Barats	Legal documents, promissory notes.
Batta	Field allowances.
Barukzye	An Afghan tribe.
Beymaroo	A village near Kabul. The name means 'the husbandless'.
Charpoy	A bed made of four poles, with crossed ropes.
Chouk	A bazaar, or a street.
Chupatties	Unleavened cakes, made of ottah.
Cossid	A courier or foot messenger.
Douranee	An Afghan tribe; also a generic term covering subsidiary tribes.
Feringhees	Europeans, or foreigners.
Ghee	Clarified butter.
Ghazis	Religious devotees; fanatics.
Ghilzye	An Afghan tribe.
Godowns	Storehouses, granaries.
Hazara	An Afghan tribe.
Humman	A hot bath or baths.
Jehad	A holy war.
Jemadar	A lieutenant in the native troops.
Jezeil	The long rifle of the Afghans.
Jezeilchis	Afghan riflemen.
Kaffirs	Infidels.
Kallyans	Oriental smoking pipes.
Khan	A nobleman; a term used indiscriminately in Kabul.
Kukri	Crescent-shaped knife used by Ghurka troops.
Kuzzilbashes	Afghans of Persian descent; a tribe hostile to the Barukzye.
Lakh	One hundred thousand.
Lakh of rupees	Ten thousand pounds sterling.
Mirza	A secretary.
Mohur	A coin, usually gold, worth about thirty shillings.
Moolah	A priest.
Munshee	A secretary or interpreter.
Musjid	A temple or place of worship.
Nullah	The bed of a river.
Poshteen	A sheepskin coat.

Pushtoo	Language spoken by Afghan natives.
Ressalah	A troop of horse.
Sangah	A breastwork, usually made of dry stones.
Shah bagh	The king's garden.
Sheeahs	A large Mahomedan sect; opposed to the Soonees.
Sirdar	A general. The title assumed by Akbar Khan.
Soonees	A large Mahomedan sect; opposed to the Sheeahs.
Suddoyze	An Afghan tribe.
Syud	A holy man.
Tumasha	A spectacle.
Wuzeer	Vizier, or Chief Minister.
Yaboos	Afghan ponies.
Zenana	A harem.
Zuna	A dwelling.

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- 13 Backhouse, 13 August, 1842, Macrory, *Signal Catastrophe*.
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