

EAST INDIA (EASTERN TURKESTAN).

RETURN to an Address of the Honourable The House of Commons,
dated 23 July 1869;—for,

“COPIES of a NOTE on *Selstán* by the Officiating Under Secretary at Fort
William, dated the 20th day of December 1867 :”

“And, of DESPATCHES and MEMORANDA, or EXTRACTS from DESPATCHES or
MEMORANDA, which have been sent to the Government of *India* since 1866,
by Mr. *Forsyth*, or other Officers on the Frontier, as to the TRADE of *India*
with *Eastern Turkestan*, or the Countries between it and the *Punjab*.”

India Office, }
29 July 1869. }

J. W. KAYE, Secretary,
Political and Secret Departments.

(*Mr. Eastwick.*)

Ordered, by The House of Commons, to be Printed,
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COPIES of a NOTE on *Seistan* by the Officiating Under Secretary at Fort William, dated the 20th day of December 1867:—and of DESPATCHES and MEMORANDA, or EXTRACTS from DESPATCHES or MEMORANDA, which have been sent to the Government of *India* since 1866, by Mr. Forsyth, or other Officers on the Frontier, as to the TRADE of *India* with *Eastern Turkestan*, or the Countries between it and the *Punjab*.

S E I S T A N.

NOTE on the Relations of *Seistan* with *Afghanistan* and *Persia*, by the Officiating Under Secretary to the Government of *India* in the Foreign Department. Fort William, 20 December 1867.

SEISTAN is situated on the banks of the Helmund, and comprises an area of not more than 500 square miles, being bounded on the north and north-east by Khorasan, on the west by Persia, and being separated from Mekran on the south and south-east by an uninhabited desert. Previously to 1749 A.D., the province, equally with Afghanistan, formed part of the Persian dominions; but in that year it was added to the new kingdom of Afghanistan by Ahmed Shah, the founder of the Sudozye dynasty. During this monarch's long reign it remained subject to his authority, and it was only towards the close of his successor's (Timoor Shah) life that it attempted to shake off its allegiance. On Timoor Shah's death its independence was complete, and it remained for many years unmolested either by Persia or Afghanistan.

When in 1796 Aga Mahomed Khan subdued Khorasan and annexed that country to Persia, he left Seistan in undisturbed enjoyment of its freedom, and later, in 1810, when Captain Christie travelled through the province, he found it still governed by independent chiefs.

To the north of Seistan lies the small district of Lash Jowein, whose history and fortunes are intimately connected with those of the larger principality. When Seistan belonged to Persia, Lash Jowein was also Persian, and it appears to have been included with it in the new kingdom of Afghanistan by Ahmed Shah. In later days, however, it would seem not to have established its independence so thoroughly as Seistan, for within the last 30 years there is proof of its having paid tribute to Herat.

About the time of the English expedition into Afghanistan the Persian Government took advantage of the Afghans' attention being diverted elsewhere to renew their pretensions to sovereignty over Seistan. In 1853 the Persian standard was hoisted at the capital, and the protection of that power admitted at least by one or more of the chiefs. Kohendil Khan, at that time the ruler of Candahar, despatched an envoy to the Persian Court by way of remonstrance, but during the negotiations which ensued Kohendil Khan died, the subject was dropped, and the Persian flag retained its position. It is probable that the claims of rival chiefs in Seistan made interference more easy by enabling the Shah to espouse the cause of one or other, in the hope of eventually re-establishing the old supremacy of Persia. Indeed in 1858 we learn that one aspirant after power procured the assistance of two Persian regiments on condition that, if successful, he should rule in the Shah's name. Unfortunately for the latter's object the chief was put to death in the same year, but since that event the Persian Government have never allowed any long interval to elapse without reasserting its claim. Mr. Thomson, attaché at Teheran, writing to the English Government in June 1863, considered that the Persian Government had never taken upon themselves any direct interference in the local government of Seistan, nor had they exercised any

real authority over the country, but had limited their efforts to a certain amount of indirect influence over the reigning chief by giving him pecuniary aid, and by occasionally conferring dresses of honour on subordinate chiefs who acknowledged his title. Subsequent events, however, seem to imply a very decided wish on the part of the Shah to establish a footing in Seistan under cover of protecting Taj Mahomed Khan, the reigning chief, from the inroads of the Afghans. Taj Mahomed Khan has held the reins of government since 1861, having succeeded to power by killing his uncle, Ali Khan, the former chief, in a rebellion. His tendencies are evidently towards Persia, and as without external aid he has difficulty in maintaining his territory intact, he looks to Teheran for support. His greatest rival at home is Ahmed Khan, governor of Lash and Jowein, who has enormously increased his interest and influence in Seistan and Beloochistan during the last few years by marrying the daughter of Ibrahim Khan, a Beloochee chief, whose principal estates are on the eastern and southern sides of the Seistan Lake. Originally Ahmed Khan was also an ally of Persia. In 1856-57 he acquiesced in the Lash Fort being stored with grain by the Persian Government. But his relations changed in time, and for some years he has thrown in his lot with Shere Ali Khan.

As early as 1863 Taj Mahomed Khan, fearing the threats of annexation made by the Afghans, sent his brother Kohendil Khan to Teheran. His object was to ascertain what support, if any, Persia would give in case of attack. The intentions of the Afghans were at this time well known in Teheran. An expedition ordered by Dost Mahomed had only been abandoned in consequence of that chief's death. In the course of conversation with Mr. Thomson in August 1863 the Persian Minister for Foreign Affairs had certified his opinion that sooner or later the Afghans would be sure to "renew their project and attempt the occupation of Seistan, but that the Persian Government considered that country to belong to the Shah's dominions, of which it formed an integral part, and that they would not hesitate for a moment should Afghan troops enter Seistan, but would at once despatch a force to resist any such aggressive movement." This determination was reiterated two years later by the Shah himself to the British Minister at Teheran, although he knew that the Government which the latter represented considered Seistan as a disputed territory between Persia and Afghanistan. In connection with this assertion of Persia's ownership in Seistan it is curious to notice that, in the map of Persia and the adjacent countries published 30 years ago, and now current in Teheran, and recognised as correct by educated Persians, neither Seistan nor Lash Jowein are included within the limits of the Persian dominions.

In July 1863, it was rumoured in Meshed that Mahomed Ameen Khan had marched upon Seistan with an Afghan force, and had taken two forts. Kohendil Khan, on his way home from Teheran, applied thereupon to the Prince Governor of Khorasan for a military force and ammunition, and was told in answer that the demand would be complied with if the Chief of Seistan himself sent in a requisition, in writing, to show what he wanted in the way of ammunition, and to what extent. The writer, however, who gives this information hints at the uselessness of the promise, by stating, that when Abbas Khan was a little time before on the Seistan frontier with a view to counteract any inroad of the Afghans, though Taj Mahomed Khan was very desirous that permission should be given him to march with his men on the capital of Seistan, in order to be prepared for the Afghans, the rest of the Seistan chiefs and the principal people of the country would not hear of such an arrangement, and refused to allow the Persian regiment to enter their territory.

The next we hear from Meshed is in February 1864, that four guns were being sent to Seistan, and that of three regiments ordered thither one had left, and another was ready to start. With reference to the operations of this same year, Sir Henry Green (*see* paragraph 5 of his letter, in page 26 of the printed correspondence) also reports that the Persian officer in charge of Meshed wrote to Mahomed Ameen Khan, then ruler of Candahar, informing him that a Persian force would be stationed in Seistan merely for the purpose of keeping the roads open for merchants. The arrangement was agreed to on the part of Afghanistan, but no force was actually sent.

No further movements of Persian troops are reported till May 1866, when, in the absence of Shere Ali Khan on an expedition against Sirdar Mahomed Afzul Khan, in Cabul, Mahomed Ismael Khan, Governor of Kerman, by special orders from

from Teheran, entered Seistan with six guns and four regiments. This is probably the same force as is mentioned by Sir H. Green, in paragraph 2, of his Letter, No. 1,451 (see page 27 of the printed correspondence). His details differ a little. He puts their strength at 6,000 men and 12 guns, and gives as their commander Salee Mahomed Khan. He further states, that the principal chiefs of the country, Taj Mahomed Khan, Kohendil Khan, a son of Ali Khan, Ahmed Khan, and many others of lesser note, were forthwith deported to Teheran.

About the same time a body of 10,000 men, under Mirza Ibrahim Khan, arrived from Meshed by way of Kayn,* and occupied the territory north of the Helmund, erected four large and strong forts, and began to collect the revenue. Sir Henry Green alludes to this latter inroad in paragraphs 6 and 8 of his Letter, No. 1326 (see page 26 of the printed correspondence), but mentions the erection of one fort only, called Dost Mahomed Khan, the position of which he places near Sekooha, the capital, at longitude 61° E. and latitude 30° 45' N. on Keith Johnson's Map, No. 31. He reports that the troops were maintained with ease by the produce of the country, throughout which, as on the entire length of the road from Meshed to the Helmund, everything needful for an army of from 10,000 to 50,000 men could be found in abundance.

On 17th June 1867 the British Embassy at Teheran was officially informed by Mr. Thomson, writing from Meshed, that Taj Mahomed Khan was there awaiting the Shah's permission to return to Seistan. In common with the Governors of other neighbouring provinces he had been summoned thither to pay his respects to his Majesty, who was making a royal progress through the Persian dominions. His reception at Meshed had in no wise differed from that of Governors holding office as subjects under the Persian Government, but it was doubtful whether, under the circumstances of the Persian occupation of Seistan, and the fact that his brother, Kohendil Khan, had been for some time detained at Teheran as a sort of hostage for the chief's conduct, he would be allowed to return without first agreeing to such terms as the Persian Ministers might choose to impose upon him either for service to be performed, or for the payment of tribute or revenue to the Shah's Treasury. This account, with a liberal allowance for discrepancy in dates,† probably refers to the same movement on the part of Taj Mahomed Khan, as that which Sir H. Green mentions in his Letter, No. 1451, referred to above, when he says that the chief was, with others named, transported to Teheran. The assumption in this case is rendered more likely by later intelligence, furnished by Mr. Thomson from Teheran, under date 1st October 1867. He announces the arrival, some weeks before, of the chief of Seistan and his brother, who had been recently seized in Meshed, and sent as prisoners to the Persian capital. They would not, he added, be permitted to return to their own country, but would have a present allowance from the Shah at the rate of 700 tomans a year, and would be at liberty to send one of their attendants to Seistan, under the charge of a Government officer, to make such arrangements as they chose regarding their private property, and to bring to Teheran any such members of their family as they might wish to have with them.

The relations of the Shah with the various parties interested in Seistan are made more complicated by the arrival of Shah Newaz Khan at Meshed on 6th July, 1867, to wait upon his Majesty. This man was the son of the late Sultan, Ahmed Khan, formerly ruler of Herat, and sided with Ameer Afzul Khan in his struggle against Shere Ali Khan in 1866; but for some reason not clearly known, he withdrew himself or was dismissed from the Cabul chief's force at Candahar. Thence he proceeded to Seistan, and afterwards reached Meshed, by way of Beepjend, having previously received the Shah's permission to his visit. His object in going is supposed to have been a desire to obtain the countenance of Persia towards re-instating himself in the government of Herat, in case Shere Ali Khan should sustain a second defeat at the hands of his brother, Afzul Khan, and so render the position of Mahomed Yakooob Khan (the present ruler of Herat and his own son) precarious. Later in the same month, on the 15th,

* The various correspondents use differently the words Kayn, Gayn, Kayen, and Kainat, to designate, as far as I can ascertain, one and the same place.

† Such variation will not, perhaps, be deemed so important as it otherwise might be when it is considered that both at Meshed and Jacobabad our only sources of information are Natives.

15th, Mahomed Yakoob Khan himself arrived, having been apparently summoned to Meshed by special Envoy. His reception, as also that of Shah Newaz Khan, was marked with all due ceremony and outward signs of respect.

Meanwhile, in July 1867, a Persian force of 4,000 infantry and 12 guns had entered Seistan under the command of Meer Allum Khan, the chief of Kayn. On its arrival the force brought in the previous year by Salce Mahomed Khan was withdrawn to Teheran. It is reported that neither of the above commanders has levied any taxes upon the people except taking one head of cattle in every 40. Several chiefs of note who had made themselves obnoxious have been seized during last autumn and carried away to Teheran. Two chiefs have also been taken into the pay of the Persian commander, and entrusted each with a body of 100 horsemen to act as police. A new fort has been erected at Dustuck, on the north bank of the Helmund, and at a little distance from the eastern shore of the Seistan Lake. It is built in the form of square, with sides of about 700 fathoms each, and the walls have so far reached a height of five feet. The Persian forces, to the number of about 5,000 men, including mounted troops and 12 guns, are encamped near the fort, and are, in the absence of Meer Allum Khan, who has proceeded with 100 horse to Kayn, under the temporary command of Zaim-collah-deen. The fort of Sekoolha, the Seistan chief's residence and stronghold, has been destroyed, as likewise have 24 lesser forts in various parts of the country. Some iron machinery has also been received from Teheran, by which the stream of the Helmund has been turned for irrigational purposes, and thereby rich and plentiful crops have been ensured.

Ibrahim Khan, the Beloochee chief of whom mention has been made above, is reported to have been forced by the Persian troops under the command of the chief of Kayn, to evacuate several forts which he held on the left bank of the Helmund, and to have retired with his people to the right bank. The Persians had likewise crossed the river and captured the fort of Nad Ali, and were only restrained from following Ibrahim Khan into his stronghold of Cheken Soor by the remonstrance of Sirdar Afzul Khan, Afghan Governor of Furrak. On desisting from their intention they recrossed the Helmund, leaving only a few men in Nad Ali. A still later account from Sir H. Green announces that the Persian commander had done his best to have Ibrahim Khan seized, and for this purpose had applied to Mahomed Azim Khan, the ruler of Cabul, but without the wished-for effect.

Shah Newaz Khan is reported on the same authority to be on his way to Kurrachee, and Meer Afzul Khan, son-in-law of Shere Ali Khan, is said to be in treaty with the ruler of Cabul to deliver over to him the Fort of Furrak, which commands the north-east corner of Seistan.

It only remains to be added that the present correspondence does not show what has become of the force of 10,000 men which entered Seistan by way of Kayn, under Mirza Ibrahim Khan's command in May 1866. Sir Henry Green, in his letter of December 9th, merely says—"The Persian troops, who are encamped near the fort, consist of 5,000 horse and foot, with 12 guns." This expression leaves it doubtful whether he writes of all the Persian troops in Seistan, or only of those about the fort. Under the former supposition, it is to be presumed that Mirza Ibrahim's force has been withdrawn.

Charles Girdlestone.
