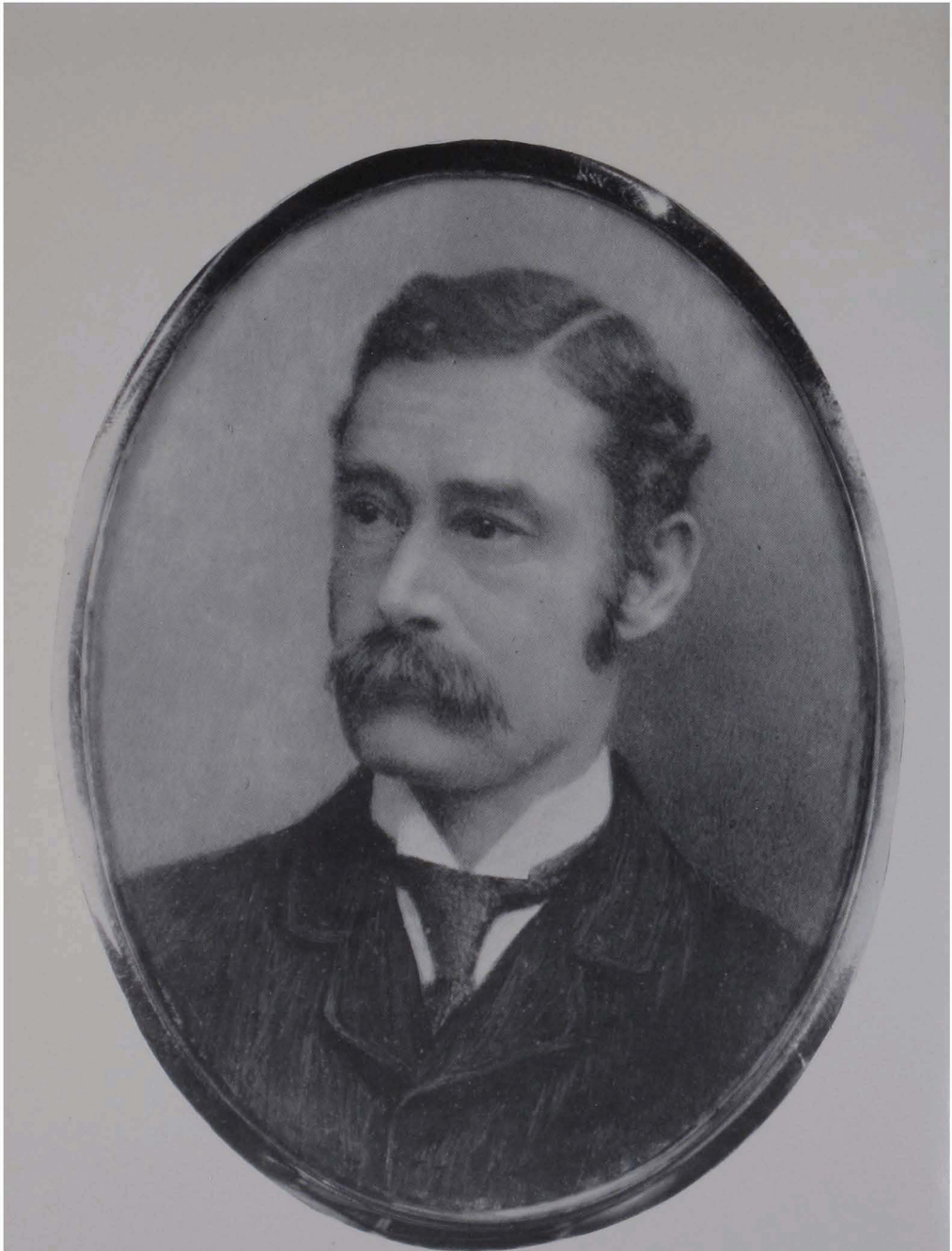
NEY ELIAS

Explorer and envoy extraordinary in High Asia

Gerald Morgan

GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN



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

NEY ELIAS

Explorer and Envoy Extraordinary in High Asia

by Gerald Morgan

London · George Allen & Unwin Ltd
RUSKIN HOUSE MUSEUM STREET

First published in 1971

ISBN 0 04 910046 7

Printed in Great Britain
in 10 on 11 point Plantin
by Unwin Brothers, Gresham Press, Woking

Contents

Illustrations

Maps

Acknowledgments

I have met with so much help and good will in preparing this book that the result is practically a co-operative enterprise. As most of my three enjoyable years of research were spent at the India Office Library, my first acknowledgment must be to the staff there and in particular Mr Martin Moir who not only put me on the right track initially but patiently levered me back whenever, as frequently, I found myself astray in the archival labyrinths. Dr Bingle gave me much help with the Private Papers.

I have to thank the staff of the Public Record Office for their helpful advice and prompt production of the necessary records and the Government of India Archives, New Delhi, for kindly supplying me with photostat copies of various important records. Nor must I omit my thanks to the Library of State Publications, Leningrad, and the Geographical Society of the USSR for their friendly co-operation.

Turning to the learned societies, I am grateful to the Royal Asiatic Society and the Royal Central Asian Society for permission to use material which has appeared in their respective journals. I have referred elsewhere to the Royal Geographical Society, but I would like particularly to record here the help given me by Brigadier Gardiner and Miss Ingrid Briar of the Map Room in respect of maps and photographs.

The Editor of the *Contemporary Review*, Mr Gordon Godfrey, has kindly allowed me to use material from three articles which have appeared in it in September 1967, November 1960 and May 1970, the last article accompanied, at his own suggestion, by a short biographical note.

I am obliged to Messrs John Murray for permission to quote from *Scott of the Shan Hills* by G. E. Mitton and to reproduce the photograph of the Burma–Siam Border Commission. The extract from *A Persian Spring* by Wilfred Blunt is quoted by permission of Messrs Barrie and Jenkins.

The photograph of the Turkoman bodyguard, Meshed, is Crown Copyright, as also is the letter to Sir John Sanderson, and the photograph of the Mir of Hunza is reproduced by permission of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. The photograph of the Kungur Range was taken by the late Sir Eric Teichman. Sir Clarmont Skrine has kindly allowed me to reproduce his photograph of Muztagh Ata and I have greatly appreciated his valuable advice,

based on his years of experience as Consul General in Kashgar and Meshed.

The portraits of Ney Elias and his mother Sophia Elias are from paintings in the possession of Lieut. Colonel E. R. Daglish of Thurston, Suffolk.

For the contemporary assessment of the *History of the Moghuls of Central Asia*, the *Tarikh-i-Rashidi*, I am indebted to Mr G. M. Meredith Owens lately of the Oriental Printed Books and Manuscripts Department, The British Museum, and to Professor Joseph E. Fletcher of the Department of Eastern Languages, Harvard University.

The text has benefited considerably from a careful reading by Dr Raymond Greene. Apart from being an old friend his participation in two Everest Expeditions stimulated in him a lasting interest in Central Asia. Miss Gwen Oliver also read the manuscript at an early stage.

Finally I cannot adequately thank Miss Winifred Oliver of The Haydon Bureau, Guildford, for all she has done for me in the past five years. Patiently she has supervised and typed my recurring revisions and has made innumerable helpful suggestions, until by the end she came to know Ney Elias as well as I did myself.

In conclusion, I am happy to say that the gloomy prognostication on page 258 concerning the Residency at Meshed has not been fulfilled. The British Council inform me that it has been restored, and that it is now occupied by the Council.

A Note on Nomenclature

I have been faced with a wide linguistic variety of place names as well as a diversity of spellings, ancient and modern. For example Chingis has at least half-a-dozen variations both eastern and western. Many names now have agreed international spellings, thus Prejevalski is properly Przheval'skiy, Urga is Ulan Bator, and Kungur is Qungur. Many other Chinese and Russian names have been changed unrecognizably, whilst others, notably in the Shan Province of Burma have disappeared altogether. Consequently I decided very early that compromises were inevitable. With the general reader in mind I have therefore chosen names and spellings which will be most easily recognizable either because they were current at the period covered by this book or because they can still be identified in a modern atlas. Faced with these difficulties the maps inevitably reflect the compromise. If they fall short it is I who must take the blame and not the cartographer, who has made the best possible job of a complex problem.

Introduction

In the second half of the last century the journeys of explorers were thrilling a wide public. The interest in their work ranged from the purely romantic (the day of 'wondrous tales' was scarcely over) to hopes of expanding markets and in some quarters of christianizing the savages. The element of competition between the western nations, all bent on expansion, gave added zest to exploration and raised strategic problems for statesmen. During that period two of the best known British explorers were Henry Morton Stanley in Darkest Africa and Ney Elias in High Asia. In the year 1873 they both received the highest award of the Royal Geographical Society, its Founder's Medal; the former for his rescue of Dr Livingstone, the latter for a journey of over 4,500 miles from Peking, across Western Mongolia, through Siberia to Nijni Novgorod. Today whilst Stanley is still remembered, if only for his 'Dr Livingstone, I presume', Elias has been forgotten. And yet in his day he was recognized internationally as the most widely travelled man in Asia and its greatest practical authority. Altogether he either led or took part in eight major expeditions. The first two were independent and purely geographical explorations; the remainder were primarily diplomatic missions undertaken during his subsequent career as an Indian Civil Servant. All eight of them were as dangerous as they were exacting, as were several minor, almost unrecorded journeys. There are many books by and about Stanley but Elias wrote only for the Press and learned journals. The aura of secrecy which shrouded his movements was imposed partly by the nature of his work but partly also by his temperament, and this added piquancy to his exploits. In the circumstances it is scarcely surprising that he has been forgotten, but more than a century has passed since his career began and it is high time to tell his story.

It ranges from Peking to St Petersburg, and from Burma to Persia, crossing and re-crossing the Roof of the World. Much of it is concerned with the battle of wits between Russia and Britain along India's northern frontier, and is therefore bound up with the secret diplomacy and military strategy of the period. The Pax Britannica was nearing its heyday and Kipling caught the excited amateurish mood of the time. *Punch* depicted the Russian Bear tweaking the British Lion's tail. Today we would have called it more soberly a Cold War. Through it all is reflected the character of a courageous and utterly devoted profes-

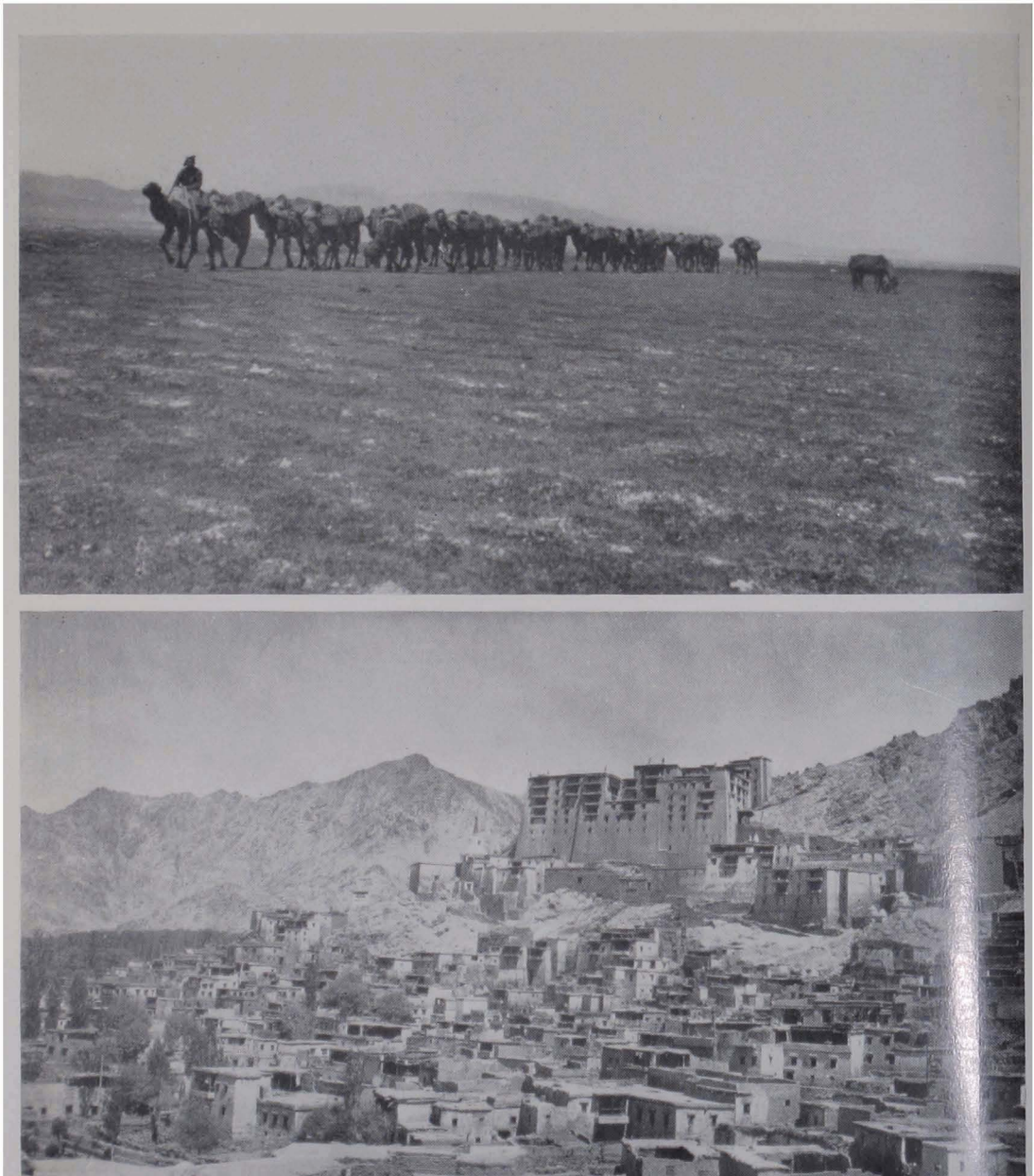
sional, who forced himself to work in the face of almost perpetual and latterly severe illness. Many men have made great contributions whilst suffering ill-health; with the controversy about whether his illness was fancied or real, Darwin is one who springs to mind. But the contributions of Darwin and men like him have been primarily intellectual, whereas the life of an explorer demands exceptional physical fitness and endurance. It is not possible to recall any traveller suffering under such prolonged physical handicaps whose feats can be compared with those of Elias. Inevitably the question arises, what forced him on when others would have given up? He himself would have been the last to see any deep motive behind his career; he would have claimed no more than a single-minded devotion to geography and exploration, and only secondly a reluctant sense of duty. But even by exploring standards he led an unusual life and, although this biography may dispel some of the mystery and will offer a possible clue to his inner processes, it cannot detract from the fascination of his achievements.

Elias did not travel for fame and emphatically not for reward. He had already earned an international reputation as a reliable explorer and an accurate geographer before financial stringency forced him to forfeit the independence he valued so highly and to join the Foreign Department of the Government of India. It took the Government a long time to learn what sort of man it had acquired, but in due course he became one of its small band of trusted Political Agents living lonely lives in primitive conditions on the outposts, often a month's journey from the relative comfort of India, and taking the risks in their stride.

It was a Viceroy, Lord Curzon, who said: 'Frontiers are indeed the razor's edge on which hang suspended the modern issues of war or peace, of life or death to nations.' For twenty-four years Elias's life was bound up with the particular edge of India's immense frontier, and he came to know it at first hand better than any other official of his day. The Indian Government worked him hard, sometimes inconsiderately so, because his experience of Asia was unique and his reports and judgment were so dependable. Curzon, who was no mean judge, described him as one of India's most distinguished civil servants.

Words such as 'morbid', 'retiring' and 'fascinating' have all been used to describe him by past as well as present authorities. By nature he was highly sensitive and some of his seniors must have found him prickly, perhaps even priggish, but not the few who understood him. The complete professional himself, he appreciated the same standard in others; with Lord Curzon, for instance, he had no difficulty in collaborating but then Curzon was an experienced traveller and an expert on Asian affairs. Elias never boasted and he hated pretentiousness. The story was told in *The Scotsman* that at a dinner given in honour of a traveller

2. Sophia Elias in her wedding dress.



3. *Top:* A camel caravan in Mongolia (R.G.S.)
Bottom: Leh (R.G.S.).

recently arrived in India from Russian Turkestan, the guest was loudly proclaiming the magnitude of his achievement in crossing a certain pass. Elias made no remark until one of the hosts, somewhat irritated by the guest's self-satisfaction, turned to him and asked, 'You've crossed this pass more than once, Elias, haven't you?' 'Yes,' said Elias, 'eighteen times.' Further questions drew the quiet admission that some of these crossings had been made in winter. He must have relished that little episode, for like all perfectionists, even though he might deprecate his own work, nevertheless he secretly wanted it appreciated, above all by experts.

The general public, as may be imagined, knew very little about the man himself. Nevertheless the feat of his solitary journey from Peking across Mongolia and Siberia captured its imagination and thereafter he was always 'news'. But for the most part the public had to be content with cryptic nuggets of information in the Press. 'We hear on good authority that . . . the well-known Central Asiatic traveller Mr Ney Elias, has just returned from an interesting journey in the Pamirs region . . .' was a typical example.

Only the Press knew how often articles on Central Asian affairs emanated from his anonymous pen. (In terms of space now measured in inches the length of his contributions was formidable; one in *The Times* measured 4 feet 10 inches, and an even longer one was 5 feet 10 inches, but that was in *The Bombay Gazette.*) Those were the days before public relations and on most of his expeditions Elias was 'Our Correspondent', even when he was the leader as well. His discretion was always immaculate; anonymity suited his character as well as his role and there are no signs that he was ever in trouble with the Government of India for overstepping the mark. On the other hand he certainly used the newspapers to express his own views, especially about China and Tibet, concerning whom our policy, or more often the lack of it, was so often based on ignorance. His writing was always informative and above all accurate. He never mentioned his own part, nor ever referred to the hardships and risks inseparable from his work.

Throughout his life Elias regarded himself first and foremost as a scientific explorer. But when he joined the Indian Government he went through long periods of frustration when there was no chance for this kind of work. He felt he was being misused and his talents neglected, and he saw others, especially the Russians, carrying out the exploration which he longed for. So acutely did he feel this that when there appeared in his earlier articles the usual reference to himself as 'the celebrated traveller' or 'the noted explorer', one wonders whether it was he or the Editor who inserted the description. If it was himself it was not for self-praise, for he was modest to a degree, but as a means of preventing

his qualifications from being overlooked for possible further explorations, hence surely an excusable piece of guile. Twice at least in middle life he wrote papers suggesting regions for future explorations, once when he still had hopes for himself and once just before he died. They showed how much he thought about the subject and how much it meant to him. He was always strongly against the adventurous type of explorer and would have had a very low opinion of the kind of modern traveller who makes much play of his misadventures. When Lhasa was still the Forbidden City he wrote that he saw no point in going there, for there was nothing more to be learned than Manning and the Abbé Huc had already told; but he saw every point in the thorough exploration of Tibet with the objects of forestalling Russia and of assessing its trade possibilities with India. For him exploration meant primarily mapping unknown country and secondly the study of its inhabitants and the history of their tribes; thirdly it meant investigating the possibilities of useful trade.

The fact that he had unique qualifications for his political work and that his reputation for it stood as high as for his purely geographical work never seems to have weighed with him. It was a job to be done, and done as well as he knew how, but he allowed himself to take little real pleasure in it. More often than not his reports and recommendations were adopted as matters of policy, sometimes of the highest policy, but he remembered the successes less than those fewer occasions when his advice was not followed. Such occasions rankled when others would have forgotten them.

When his active travelling days were over he was well on the way to making a name for himself as an historian. Bacon said: 'Studies serve for delight', and for many years it had been his delight, as a means of escape from his political work, to make a study of the history of the many tribes of Central Asia. His practical knowledge of them was unique: he met them on his travels, and he knew nearly all of them from actual personal acquaintance. It was a tribute to his standing in Central Asia that from Governors of provinces down to lowly village Hakims he was accorded respect and trust in quite unusual degree. In this field of history and ethnology he had time to make only one major contribution, but even before then his authority had been recognized by the leading European Orientalists of the day.

We are not all born under a benign star and Elias's star was, to say the least, not only unusual but of exceptional magnitude. Some it might have deterred, but in his case it spurred, and he followed it single-mindedly all his life. Almost at the outset of his career he gave a hint of his star as he himself saw it. Lamenting what he regarded as his social shortcomings he said he felt he had the capacity to do something

worth doing and he was not going to give in. He never did give in, and the story of his life is testimony to his constant dogged determination.

Presenting a picture of the man he was, as opposed merely to describing his career, has proved singularly difficult. Elias so totally screened himself from scrutiny by revealing nothing of himself unconnected with his work that it must have been deliberate. The explanation may well be that confident and courageous as he was in his career he was unconsciously afraid of any self-revelation that concerned his private emotional life. It must be for the reader to decide whether by the end he emerges as a human being, or whether his elusiveness has finally defeated not only the reader but the writer too.

He was only in his early fifties when he died, leaving his work unfinished and without having revealed a single personal reminiscence of thirty years of risk and adventure.

In a work of this kind I have not thought it necessary to list my sources. The key series in the Indian Office Archives has been the Political and Secret Letters from India from which stemmed many sidelines of research in other series. The Library's collection of the Private Papers of Lytton, Ripon, Dufferin, Lansdowne and Durand all yielded varying amounts of information. Sir Thomas Wade's lengthy Despatches from Peking and Elias's own Despatches from Meshed were easily found in the Foreign Office Archives. From the Indian Government Archives, New Delhi, came some more personal records, notably the medical reports supporting his long periods of sick leave to England. One of the most exciting and unexpected rewards came from the Library of Russian State Publications, Leningrad, through the assiduity of the Russian Geographical Society: an article from the French language *Journal de St Petersbourg* dated March 1873, meticulously copied in longhand in French by someone not familiar with the language. Some of his private papers are of historical importance. They contained in particular his journal and letters written during his journey across the Pamirs to Afghanistan, which disclosed some interesting and unsuspected aspects of the three missions in the field in Central Asia during a critical period of Anglo-Russian relations between 1885 and 1887. Written under severe stress, when at times he obviously feared he might not survive, he bares his mind in this journal for the only time, and it contains the only description he ever gives of the physical hardships he endured. Unfortunately they are written on blue paper in indelible pencil which is now fading, and before long unless treatment is feasible the papers will be indecipherable.

It would be a poor tribute to the memory of such a modest man if I allowed myself to exaggerate his contribution to the geography and

the political history of the Asia of his day, but in any case the facts speak for themselves. I have been careful to make no claims which cannot be fully authenticated and I have tried throughout to be fair in my judgments, I hope with success. If in the process some reputations have become slightly tarnished, others at any rate have been enhanced.

In conclusion it may interest readers to know how this book about a forgotten man came to be written. Nearly forty years have elapsed since Owen Lattimore and the present writer met at the British Legation in Peking to discuss the idea of writing the life of Ney Elias which was already in Lattimore's mind. His own recent travels in Mongolia had whetted his interest in what hitherto had been a life of mystery. But work, war and other matters supervened and nothing came of it. In 1963 when he became Professor of Chinese studies at Leeds University the project was discussed again, and as a result I decided to undertake the task myself. He has, however, given me immense help throughout by making innumerable historical and ethnical emendations, and finally by most carefully editing the whole work. It is not too much to say that without his original inspiration and subsequent encouragement this book would never have been written.

Chapter I

THE FIRST TWENTY YEARS

Little enough is known of Ney Elias's antecedents. He was born in 1844, and he was the second of a family of five sons and two daughters whose parents were Ney and Sophia Elias. (There is no record of how the unusual name of Ney came to be given.) They were both Jewish, most probably of Sephardic origin; they were married according to the Jewish rites at Bristol in 1839, and both came of established merchant families. Sophia's family was probably the more prosperous and it was founded on the fortunes of Barnet and Company, merchants who traded between Bristol and Shanghai. They were well enough off to give their sons an unusually wide education: Ney junior was educated partly in London, partly in Dresden and later in Paris, thus acquiring a facility for languages and literature which was to stand him in good stead later on and also enabled him to write with distinction.

His schooling at Dresden must have been quite an ordeal. He was only thirteen when he was taken there by his father in 1857 and he stayed for over two years without going home for a holiday or even being visited by his parents. His eldest brother Robert and a cousin were at the school for some of the time which may have helped a little, but he was not robust and the stress showed itself in fairly frequent illness. In the first winter a persistent sore throat, an inflamed eye and a poisoned finger all necessitated spells in the sick room. Throughout the two years he kept a daily diary. In meticulous handwriting he noted weather every day, the weekly arrival of *Punch* and the *Illustrated London News*, and letters from home which he always answered by return; and he read *The Last of the Mohicans*. It is not the sort of diary a small boy could have written just to please himself for, besides being unemotional, it is much too solemn. He must have done it because he was told to and it is significant that his mother preserved it all her life. Besides lessons, the school was taken to art galleries, theatres, and museums, and several boys including Ney went on a grand tour of the big cities. Magdeburg reminded him of Paris which he had already been shown on his way to Germany. There he had to share an attic with nine boys and slept on the floor in his clothes. But at Nuremburg they stayed in an hotel where he noted that they had a 'middling dinner'; whilst at another he ate wild boar. After such mature activities

it is quite a relief to find one sign of the little boy: he 'got into a row' for going to the station to see some of his friends off. At Christmas he helped to decorate the tree and took part in a French play. But there were no games, only skating in winter and daily walks. Often he walked in the town alone, particularly observing the architecture. Thus early he began to explore. It is impossible to tell whether he enjoyed himself. His parents were all too obviously ambitious in sending him there at such an age, but he did learn very early to be self-reliant and a keen observer, and the experience must have greatly affected his choice of career. His continental education as well as his Jewishness must both have contributed to his later intuitive understanding of other races, which was unusual in the English traveller of his day.

Not long after their marriage Ney Senior and Sophia renounced their faith (it would have made an unusual notice in the Agony Column of *The Times*), and all the children were brought up as Christians. For Jews this can sometimes be a very big step since it means renouncing not only their religion but the whole racial and moral structure which has sustained them throughout their history and gives them the security everyone needs. However, the step did not trouble the Elias family and none of the sons and daughters regretted it. If they did not all accept Christianity whole-heartedly, at least in respect of its dogma, they lived the lives of Christians in the everyday meaning of the word. With one exception, their Jewish origin did not matter to them at all. It was only Ney who was extremely sensitive on the point and greatly disliked being taken for a Jew.

Only four of this large Victorian family married. Partly the change of faith may have inhibited their choice, but there were other factors at work as well which may have had a particular effect on Ney. The Jewish race has a well-known tendency to matriarchy, and it was very marked in the Elias parents. Ney senior was much older than Sophia, who was still a minor when he married her, and in doing so he joined her family's firm which may have put him at a moral disadvantage. He was a shadowy figure, hiding behind the customary beard of the day and emerges only once in this story. Sophia lived till she was eighty-five and there is enough family evidence to show that to the last her children were in considerable awe of her.

Ney's career was quite unlike those of his brothers. George went sheep-farming in Australia, but he was not successful and became what was known in those days as a 'remittance man', living largely on subsidies from the family at home. In due course he returned to England with no money but with a strong-jawed Australian wife who kept him in order. He settled down to potter for the rest of his quite long life, cheerfully unabashed and always immature.

The other three brothers all went into the Services, where Robert the eldest was most successful and found his métier in the army. He was Master of the Staff College Hounds and held good staff appointments. His last post was in Mauritius, where for a time he acted as Governor. His fluency in French and his natural courtesy were greatly appreciated and when he left the tributes from the Mauritius newspapers showed how popular he had been.

It is nowadays considered a sign of undue maternal influence when sons either do not marry or else do not marry or else marry late in life. Robert did not marry till he was sixty-one but nevertheless brought up a son to follow him in the army, and a daughter. When he retired he interested himself in county affairs in Suffolk and he also wrote a book, *The Tendency of Religion.* Its theme was the universality of religion and opposition to dogma, which has been developed by others, notably Sir Francis Younghusband.

Gerald joined the Navy and passed his early service in sail. His last post was ashore as a Commander in the Coastguard Service, which was then considered a good appointment. He was one who remained a bachelor, and when he retired he became a club man in London with a wide circle of friends of both sexes. Every year he went to Biarritz, where he played golf, and being a devoted fisherman he also went every year to Norway to fish. Even the outbreak of the First World War did not stop his last year's fishing, though he had been extremely ill and had to take a nurse with him. He was very quiet about her and some of the family began to fear the worst. He was something of a *bon viveur* and liked giving lunch parties, which were generally enlivened by a row with the waiter because the coffee was cold or the wine not properly *chambré.* He himself preferred whisky, his measure being a generous 'two fingers', which became nearer three in later life. He also liked his game hung till it was more gamey than the rest of the family could tolerate. He did not share the brothers' facility in foreign languages; in fact he treated them with Churchillian disdain. Thus of his boatman on a river in Norway he was heard to ask 'Ebben or flooden?' But like Churchill he always managed to make himself understood.

Apart from Ney, and perhaps because in his case he was the youngest son, it was Arthur who seems to have escaped least from his mother's influence. He was very small but he was not coddled, for he was sent to Rugby, a school noted for its hardening of boys, and not so long after *Tom Brown's Schooldays* was written. Though he must have found life hard there, he dared not show it. He wrote to his mother: 'My dear Mother, Thank you for the book. It is very cold here. I played football to-day. I cannot write any more, my hand is shaking. Your faithful and devoted son.' Making due allowance for the remoteness of Victorian

1. Central Asia

parents this letter surely indicated an unusual amount of inhibition. After Rugby he went to a Paris *lycée* and thereafter he too became a soldier, spending twelve of his twenty-four years service in India. Thirty years after his schoolboy days and still unmarried, in a letter to his mother he said that he was due for leave but did not want to come home. He thought he would 'potter' up to Kashmir for some shooting instead. He did not need his money at the bank and would she please give it to a charity. This letter showed the same studied lack of affection and enthusiasm. Unlike Ney he may never have found his full potential in life. His mode of retirement from the army was unusual. He was home from India at last and on leave fishing in Norway with Gerald when he was summoned to return to his regiment to serve as second-in-command under a Commanding Officer he did not like, and in Aldershot where there was little escape from army life. The combination was too much; nonchalantly he sent in his papers and continued to fish. Somewhat to his disgust, this story became rather widely known and remembered and he did not at all like it when his son heard it twenty years later. He showed unusual consideration for those under him, which was typical also of Ney. Some serjeants in his regiment told his cousin Wynne Elias serving in the Ghurkhas how sad his men had been when he retired. 'They simply swore by him and said he was the finest little man that ever walked.' Two years later they still recalled his coolness in action on the North West frontier in India. Once when he had stood on the parapet under fire the men had said, 'Look at the old Major, he's walking about as if he was in the Strand.' 'It was really quite pathetic', wrote Wynne, 'to hear the serjeants talk and to hear how they regretted him.'

In the years between the Crimean and the Boer Wars an officer could serve his full career without ever seeing active service. However, each of the brothers in the services took part in one campaign. Robert was in the Second Afghan War of 1879, Gerald was in H.M.S. *Encounter* during the Ashanti War of 1873 and Arthur saw his active service in the Tirah Campaign on the North-West Frontier of India in 1897. When they retired Gerald and Arthur intended to set up a bachelor establishment somewhere in the country. The story went that they made three stipulations: Gerald would live nowhere in sight of the sea, Arthur would not be within sound of a bugle, and they were both agreed that they would not settle in any part of the country where the barbaric sport of fox-hunting flourished. This was not because of any anti-blood-sport sentiment, but they explained that as they would not be able to afford to hunt they thought it better to keep away altogether. At that point they both went on holiday to Biarritz, where Arthur fell in love and married an English girl. At nearly fifty, he must by that time have

almost given up thoughts of marriage though he was some years from emulating Robert's achievement. He had two sons one of whom followed him into the same regiment, The Queen's. In after years whenever Gerald went to stay with him the two brothers paced the lawn interminably, quarter-deck fashion, and deep in conversation, but what they talked about no one ever knew.

Of the two sisters Edith married Henry Howard Batten, a civil servant who became the first clerk to the trustees of the newly created Charity Commissioners. They had no children but were comfortably off and lived first at Lelant in Cornwall and latterly at Acorn Bank, Temple Sowerby in Westmorland. Almost predictably the other sister, Jessie, stayed with her parents and never married. After her mother died she was cared for to the end of her days by a devoted maid. The superficiality of these recollections suggests the uncommunicative nature of the whole family.

On the whole Ney's brothers passed their active lives in the civilized fashion of the day. They were all intelligent and well-read, but with the exception perhaps of Robert, they were never deeply engaged about anything and in their later years tended merely to potter. In general their lives were thus in strongly marked contrast to Ney's own, though of course there were a few characteristics which they all shared. None of them had any aptitude for business. Another was a pawky sense of humour, with a keen sense of the ridiculous. They also shared an unassuming modesty and a strong dislike for any form of ostentation. Finally, they were considerate of others and all these characteristics made them genuinely liked by all classes of society; in a word they had the common touch. No doubt because of their stern and unsympathetic upbringing they never wore their hearts on their sleeves. Because their childhood lacked warmth they shared an unwillingness, even an inability, to express any deep feelings.

As Ney, rather than his eldest brother, received his father's name it is a fair inference that from the time he was born it was intended that he should become the business man of the family and in that case it would be natural that he should join the family firm. But this kind of early grooming by parents for a role of their choosing instead of helping the child to find his natural bent very often does not work, and a sensitive boy, such as Ney obviously was, is liable to feel he is being given altogether too much to live up to. However, in 1866 at the age of twenty-one, he duly and dutifully went to Shanghai to join the firm, in whose own ship, the *John Grant*, he may have sailed out. But before he went he took a course in surveying and astronomy at the Royal Geographical Society, and these were scarcely subjects likely to be needed by a firm of Far Eastern merchants. Here was the first outward

sign of rebellion, though he was to spend five years with Barnet's before he finally broke away.

At this point a chronological jump is instructive, for by luck an enlightening piece of youthful self-revelation by Elias has been recorded. When he died in 1897, Professor E. H. Parker wrote to *The Times*:

'. . . the Press generally calls attention to one of the most remarkable features of his character – his almost morbid shyness and sensitiveness. . . . . On April 19, 1872, he called upon me at Tientsin and we sat up talking till two in the morning. . . . In the course of our conversation he said: "I have definitely cut myself off from a business career. I hate business and have no aptitude for it. But I feel I have the capacity to do something worth doing and if I cannot get a big job in the engineering line I am thinking of striking across Mongolia and hunting up the mysterious city of Karakorum. I would give anything to be able to face company as you do. I am not a bit timid and have complete confidence in myself: but I am cursed with the most extraordinary constitutional shyness and the moment I walk into a room I feel as though my tongue were glued to my mouth. I have tried to conquer it in every way, but it is perfectly hopeless. I shall never be able to do anything in the social line, but I am not going to give in, I will do something." '

Parker, who was a language student in the Chinese Consular Service at the time, continues: 'Shortly after that Mr Elias started from Peking almost alone and performed successfully the wonderful journey for which he received the Royal Geographical Society's Gold Medal.'

One can picture these two young men like undergraduates in their digs drinking much coffee, when in a sudden burst of youthful intimacy one of them lays bare his fears and hopes; and Elias must have made a considerable impact on his companion for Parker to recall their conversation so accurately twenty-five years later. Here thus early was his own view of his problem and its solution. To escape his social shortcomings he had to do something big, even Sisyphean. It is a self-portrait of an uneasy misfit with a drive as yet unaimed but just the sort of drive many men have who make a mark in the world.

To those familiar with his work who have sought for clues to his elusive character the outlines are now becoming clear. The effect of a Jewish background can be seen as one potent factor. Another was the probability of his mother's undue influence, all the more likely since Ney was one of the sons who never married. Not only was he not married but he never allowed women to enter into his emotional life. For many years and till the end he had one persistent and devoted admirer who

kept a book of his writings. She was Miss Annie Rosa White who lived at Holmwood Park, Wimborne, in Dorset. From between the pages of this book there emerged on research a little bunch of pressed flowers. On one of the papers there is the simple note, 'Miss A. R. White with very kind regards, N. E.' Hers must have been an unrewarding as well as an unrequited love.

On the whole, then, it is more than likely that Elias was one of those unlucky men who, because of strongly dominating mothers, so often remain bachelors. Perhaps they do not risk marriage because in their early years they have tried so hard and hopelessly to please the first woman they know that the hopelessness remains. Another aspect of his dilemma is that by leaving his mother's firm he was bound to feel he was letting her down, which would be all the more reason for wanting to do something really big in life as a way of compensating her. This could explain not only why he achieved what he did but also why he nearly always deprecated his best work; it was as if his performance had fallen short of an impossible standard, not truly his own but his mother's. Looked at from yet another angle, if normal human relationships are rejected something has to fill the vacuum. What took their place in his case was the dedicated, ascetic life which the present work tries to record.

In appearance, he was a lean, active man, just the right build for a mountaineer; neat, well dressed and good looking, his portrait reveals an air of quiet determination. His handwriting was clear, firm and accurate, and an indication of an obsessional nature. His meticulousness showed itself in his somewhat pedantic style of writing, and also in his careful preservation of copies of all his expedition log books, many of his official reports and memoranda, as well as his route surveys and meteorological observations. Naturally he kept cutting books containing his considerable contributions to the press. But all personal feeling was rigidly excluded, a characteristic which had already shown itself in his Dresden diary.

Although Elias spent the major part of his career beyond the confines of China proper he began his exploration there and his early experience and knowledge of the country coloured all his later work when he came to deal with countries which historically looked upon China as their suzerain. Some consideration of the features which concerned him most in the China of those days will therefore help us now. A hundred years ago, when he began his career, the interior was little enough known except to missionaries, whilst the countries surrounding her borders over which she claimed suzerainty such as Mongolia, Turkestan and Tibet were still virtually unexplored. From the west Britain led the way

nearly everywhere in the urge to expand and find new markets. China was the great prize, but for all that was then known there might be great markets too in Central Asia and in this part of the world Russia by reason of her geographical advantages looked like taking the lead. It was economic expansion which gave the edge to geographical exploration.

By the middle of the nineteenth century China had changed less in the previous 600 years since the Mongol conqueror Kubilai Khan had rebuilt Peking than in the first sixty years of the present century. Such changes as were slowly evolving were in her attitude to the Western nations. The West, eager to expand, was frustrated by China's refusal to trade. The nations concerned were not too considerate and exploitation was unchecked. The Opium Trade was a black spot, and enslavement not unknown. To the foreigners China's reluctance to open up their country was exasperating, and her custom of regarding all nations beyond her borders as vassals and their inhabitants as barbarians was regarded as intolerable. In the past China had been conquered and ruled by Mongol barbarians and later by the barbarian Manchus, and although ailing lamentably the Manchu dynasty was still ruling in the nineteenth century. The Emperor and his advisers were clinging to outdated beliefs; they did not realize how unpopular they were in the Empire nor that their conservatism and isolationism were leading to their own destruction.

Five years before Elias reached China there had been the Taiping Rebellion which could have brought down the Manchus. They were saved by the provincial armies raised and armed locally and led by landlord-scholar-bureaucrats. Helped by General Gordon and the American Commander Ward, these armies successfully quelled the rebellion. By the time Elias arrived two more rebellions were in progress, both of which were factors in his earlier journeys. One was the Nien Fei, which laid waste the north-eastern provinces, and the other was a fanatical and far more widespread Moslem outbreak in the western provinces. It took eighteen years to quell the Moslems and the dynasty was saved as before by provincial armies whose commanders were the precursors of the twentieth century warlords.

The effective breakthrough of the western nations towards acceptance of their objects came with the capture of Canton in 1858 and the consequent Treaty of Tientsin. This resulted in the appointment of Ministers in Peking, London and Paris, the opening of Treaty Ports where foreigners could live and trade in some security, the appointment of Consuls to watch their interests, and the introduction of tariffs. It also introduced extra-territoriality, which meant that foreigners could be tried according to the laws of their own country instead of submitting to Chinese justice; finally, passports were to be granted to foreigners

travelling in the interior. The Chinese, exercising their notable ability to procrastinate, did not in fact ratify the Treaty until the Anglo-French expedition of 1860 had seized the Taku Forts at the mouth of the Pei Ho, captured Tientsin and for unnecessarily good measure razed and looted the Emperor's fabulous Summer Palace outside Peking. This resulted in the Treaty of Peking which secured the objects of the earlier treaty and at the same time dealt the Manchu façade of overlordship towards the West an overwhelming blow. If this culmination has left China with a lasting dislike of the West it could hardly be otherwise.

From the point of view of exploration the granting of passports opened up a new vista, of which however foreigners were slow to take advantage. Hitherto almost the only men who risked travel in the interior of China had been the missionaries. China had been a field for evangelism since early days of the Jesuits, and oddly enough there was less official opposition to them and to later missionaries than was shown towards trading interests. Not that they could claim great successes but the Chinese were interested in other religions and there was always the remote possibility of converting the Emperor of the day; although the Jesuit Father Ricci got no nearer during ten years hopeful sojourn in Peking than mending the Emperor's clocks. Christianity was not even a new religion in the history of China, for the Nestorians had had a strong footing in the north in the seventh century and were still in existence under Mongol rule in the twelfth and thirteenth. There was the mysterious Nestorian Kingdom of Tenduc and remnants may well have survived long after. Elias himself met an old man at Kuei Hua Cheng to the north who said he was neither Chinese, Mongol nor Moslem but lived on ground allotted to his ancestors by the Emperor with whom he claimed kinship. He believed this man might have been a descendant of the Nestorian King, but he could not follow up his enquiries for fear of being taken as a spy.

Two full human generations later it was demonstrated that Elias had made an extremely intelligent and accurate guess. In his *Ordosica* (Peking, 1934), the Belgian missionary Father Antoine Mostaert, the greatest living Mongolist, published an article on '*Les Erkut, descendants des Chrétiens mediévaux, chez les Mongols Ordos*'. Here he described a small group of what might be called crypto-Nestorians, living among the Mongols of the Ordos, speaking only Mongol, and indistinguishable from other Mongols except for their semi-secret (and much degenerated) religion.

These descendants of the Nestorians, however, live to the west of Kuei Hua, and the man who spoke to Elias came from a place to the north of the city. He therefore probably came from the vicinity of the Nestorian relics described by Owen Lattimore in his article, 'A ruined

Nestorian city in Inner Mongolia' (*The Geographical Journal*, London December 1934). 'Erkut', the Mongol name for the Nestorians, is widely distributed as a clan name in Mongolia. The survival of Nestorian remnants interested Elias and he found further signs later in Central Asia but he never had the time to follow them up.

In the early years of the Manchu dynasty, Jesuits directed vast surveying expeditions which provided the Manchus with maps of their empire. On the whole, however, missionaries were too busy preaching the Word to add much to our own geographical knowledge of China. Later the Abbé Huc, although no geographer, was an accurate as well as a fascinating reporter of his travels in the first half of the nineteenth century. He carried his Bibles and tracts through the length and breadth of China even reaching Lhasa in the hope of converting the Dalai Lama, surely an extreme example of pious hope. The Abbé's writings remained one of the best guides available to foreign travellers in those days. It was he who put on record the probability that the Yellow River would one day burst its banks, which it did fifteen years later at the precise spot he forecast. The geographical investigation of this disaster was chosen by Elias twelve years afterwards for his first important work.

It is scarcely surprising that when the advantage of passports was conferred on them foreigners did not make much use of the privilege. They were in the country to make money and the Treaty of Tientsin gave them so many other exceptional privileges that for the most part they had no need to move beyond their concessions in the ports and towns covered by the treaty. There they led an extremely comfortable and relatively secure life. The very fact that they were in an alien land tended to inhibit adventure. It was not as though passports made travel any easier and, although travellers were now less subject to the whims of provincial governors than formerly, there were still many risks. The Chinese disliked foreigners on principle even though the vast majority had never seen any. Nor did it help that foreigners themselves were so ignorant of Chinese customs. Flouting these, unexpected and peculiar as they were, was always to court blank and uncompromising non-co-operation at the least and open hostility at the worst, and if this hostility went as far as touching off mass emotion, ugly incidents could occur. Those foreigners succeeded best who took the trouble to observe Chinese customs and manners. Chinese suspicion was quickly aroused if a European seemed to be up to something unusual, such as asking too many questions, writing in mysterious characters or worse still drawing a map. That was a complex which dogged travellers from Elias down to Owen Lattimore in recent times and these two in particular have made rueful comment on the difficulty as it affected their work and indeed their safety. But it is not really strange that, in a

country in which rebellion and banditry were endemic, any unusual activity was thought to be sinister.

Then there were the physical difficulties of travel. A European needed considerable natural resistance to avoid the diseases endemic and often epidemic in China. There was no recognized treatment in those days for malaria, typhus, typhoid, or even the insidious forms of dysentery. One traveller boasted that he only took two medicines with him, a 'starter' and a 'stopper'. Dr Cockle provided the remedy for the first and Dr Collis Browne for the second, whilst for a fever the specific was Dr Dover's powder. It was not easy to keep healthy even living in the foreign concessions with doctors available. As for the modes of travel, these were primitive, laborious and liable to be affected by local famine, flood or banditry. The best means was by junk or sampan wherever rivers and canals made it possible. Otherwise the choice lay between country carts, pack animals, or chairs carried by coolies. Even the wheelbarrow could be employed on occasion as a last resort. But whatever the method the pace was slow, and on land a daily stage of twenty miles would be the maximum. Flies, smells, great heat and severe cold were just minor discomforts to be ignored and the unexpected was merely normal. Lastly there was the exceptional language problem. With so many dialects no single one was enough to see a traveller through; thus Cantonese would not be understood in Shanghai or Peking. This drawback was enough to discourage most foreigners from learning any form of Chinese and meant that they relied on interpreters.

All these difficulties applied in even greater degree to the countries bordering China over whom she claimed suzerainty. Theoretically the passport system applied to all of them, but as will be seen it did not always work. China has had a longer history as an imperial power than any other nation, but her political control varied with her ability to apply it. If she had internal troubles as at the time of Elias's career, her control was relaxed and the countries concerned were left largely to their own devices. The two countries which she always regarded most specifically as colonies were Chinese or Eastern Turkestan, and Tibet. But at this time Eastern Turkestan (the province of Sinkiang) was in the hands of Moslem rebels, whilst attempts by travellers to obtain passports for Tibet had always failed. Unlike Britain with her Indian Feudatory States, China had no written treaties with her vassals; there was merely a list of them kept in Peking, showing the dues expected. The system was extremely flexible and for the most part she was content that the vassal rulers should send letters of loyalty and presents of tribute to the Emperor every five or ten years, accompanied by an envoy with an imposing retinue. Naturally the suzerainty system was little understood by the West and it was only men like Elias who, seeing it,

gradually brought enlightenment. But it was responsible for more than one small war and at one time a possibility of a major war with China. Throughout the period, however, Britain was always at pains not to challenge Chinese suzerainty, which it was believed implied more political control than was actually the case.

There was in the West an immense interest in China, and not solely because of the commercial possibilities, but there was also immense ignorance. To most people China was still a strange land of Gilbertian customs, peculiar food and willow pattern landscapes: a land where the men wore pigtails and skirts and the women wore trousers. Travel writers tended to play up the whimsy and ignore the facts. The urgently needed scientific study of China had just been begun by Baron von Richthofen whose geographical surveys of certain provinces of China undertaken for the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce greatly impressed Elias. They were of the high standard he intended to set for himself and he commented on them with approval. The Baron's work subsequently earned him the Royal Geographical Society's Gold Medal. At the same time interest in Central Asia, dormant so far as the British were concerned for thirty years, had re-awakened, and men like the former tea-planter Robert Shaw and R. G. Hayward were pioneers, followed soon after by the Forsyth Mission with the surveyors Trotter and Gordon. But here the interest was not entirely geographical or even commercial. Russia was on the move eastwards.

It is obvious from the outset that Elias had little intention of following a business career in Shanghai. But with his own personal difficulties he must have quickly found it impossible to fit in with the social life of the community either. Because of their insecurity in a strange land the British have always tended to be even more British than at home, hence the clubs and games, the celebrations, the social gatherings and the like. The result in China tended to be a closely knit and narrow-minded community from which the foreign element of their adopted land had to be rigidly excluded. Whether the story of the placard in the park of the International Settlement in Shanghai: 'Dogs and Chinese forbidden' is true or not, it certainly reflected the prevailing attitude of mind. This closed mind was anathema to Elias. On the other hand here was a vast China, beyond which lay Central Asia, all still virgin land in the geographical sense and all crying out for scientific exploration. The granting of passports for travel was the clue to his dilemma. Geographical exploration offered him not only a heaven-sent means of escape from society but also a challenge.

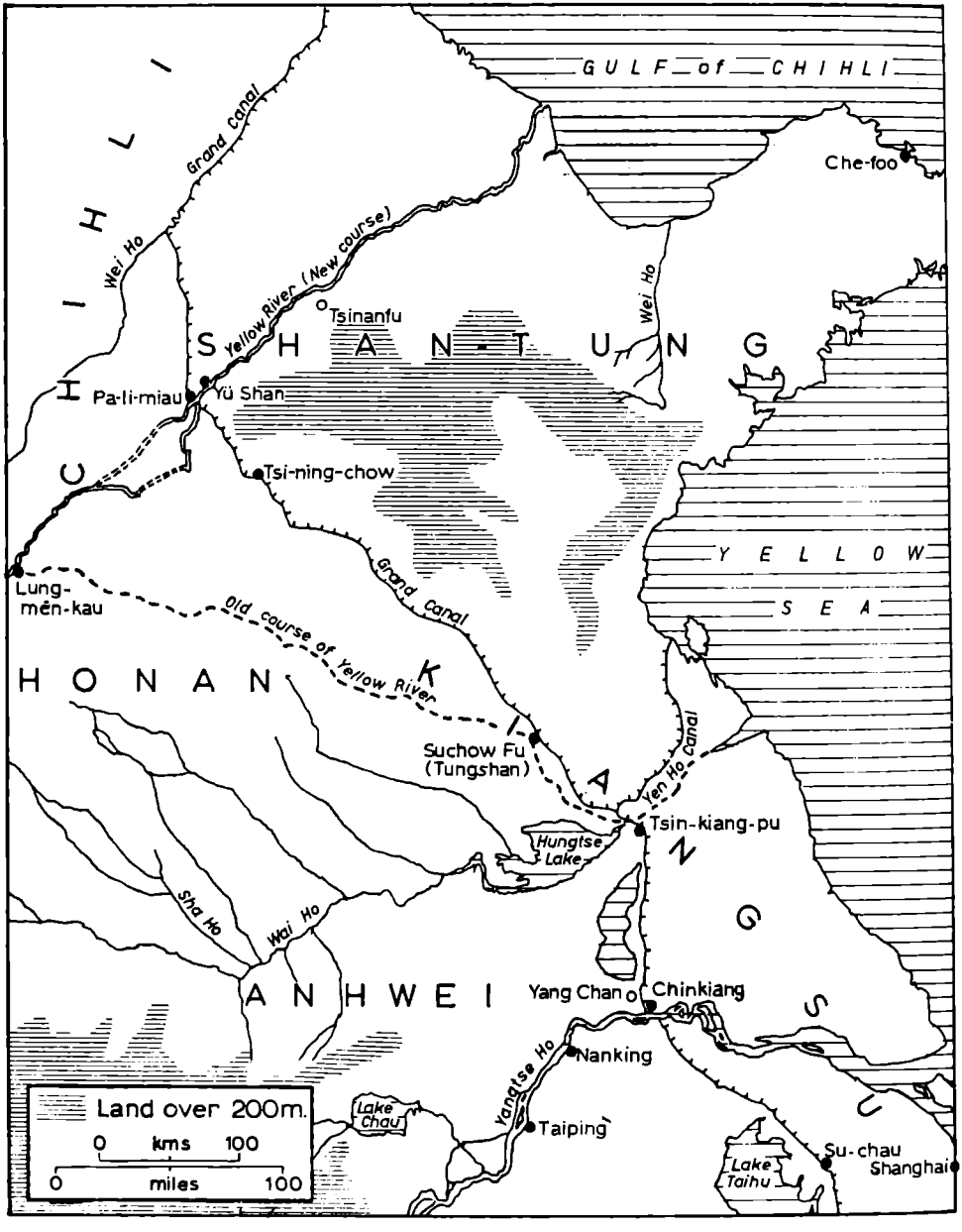
Chapter II

THE FIRST EXPEDITION

The Yellow River Survey

Until Elias's arrival in China the only attempts at scientific exploration apart from the Jesuits and Von Richthofen, had been purely local. As a pioneer, such a vast field confronted Elias that he could have had difficulty in deciding where to make a start. If he was to make a name for himself he had to choose something important, but he could not afford to go far afield at this stage. There was already in being a North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society which he quickly joined. For the most part the members would belong to the commercial houses, but doubtless others were Consular and Maritime Customs Officials who would have contacts with the Chinese administration. It was through the Society's meetings that he decided on his first major venture. This was an exploration of the New Course of the Yellow River or Huang Ho. It would be a considerable undertaking, but if it was successful it would certainly help to make him known in the geographical world, for there was no up-to-date knowledge of the river above its present mouth except that a phenomenal change of course had taken place some fifteen years earlier.

The Huang Ho is one of the great rivers of China and surely one of the world's most tortuous. It is about 2,700 miles long and therefore some 800 miles longer than the Danube. It rises in the Koko Nor region of Tibet, flowing first eastwards and then north, skirting the Ordos Desert. Thereafter, following a southern course, it acquires the reason for its name by traversing through the loess region which lies between the Provinces of Shensi and Shansi and is believed to be the cradle of the Chinese civilization. The loess which is responsible for its exceptional fertility is a yellow, powdery earth which is normally compacted in solid masses hundreds of feet deep until undermined by wind and water causing deep ravines. It is this eroded and wind borne soil which is carried down the Yellow River. Through the mountainous loess country it flows rapidly and picks up silt. When it turns east and crosses the North China Plain, it slows down and deposits the silt. Deviations occur in the last stretch of five hundred miles. The siltage is so heavy that the river banks are liable to rise above the



2. North China: the Yellow River and Grand Canal

surrounding countryside, which hereabouts in the Province of Shantung is mainly flat. The siltage also prevents navigation by any but small vessels thus greatly reducing the value of the river as a trade route. From long experience the Chinese had usually been able to keep the river in bounds by ingenious revetment systems, but it must always have been a struggle against nature; in difficult times co-ordination was lacking and unscrupulous mandarins pocketed funds set aside for the purpose. At any rate, no fewer than twenty-six times in three thousand years of China's recorded history the river has breached its banks and changed its course. These changes have always caused extensive flooding with great loss of life and even greater loss of livelihood. So it is not for nothing that the river has been called 'China's Sorrow'.

The last change was not an abrupt one and the event does not seem to have been noticed by foreigners until several years later, partly at least because the river did not so much carve out a new bed as flow into and widen a river hitherto much smaller. But what everyone would have noticed in time was the drying up of the former bed. It would then have been realized that instead of flowing east and discharging into the Yellow Sea at about lat: 34°N it was now flowing north-east and discharging into the Gulf of Chihli at lat: 39½°N. The distance as the crow flies between the new mouth and the former one is about 350 miles. The breach causing the disaster had occurred in 1852 or, as Elias thought, possibly in 1853, and when the Chinese found it impossible to close it they blocked the old channel below the breach. But it was a considerable time before the flood water which had already escaped found its way into other rivers, and it left in its wake a devastated countryside. The changed course also had an important effect on the Grand Canal. This remarkable waterway runs south from Peking across the Yellow River and reaches the Yangtze River above Shanghai. Its builder was Kubilai Khan, the Mongol conqueror of China and grandson of Chingis Khan; he completed it in 1279 as a means of controlling the country. The breach had cost the canal so much of its water supply that it had been reported largely unnavigable south of the Old Bed until replenished lower down mainly by the Hungtze Lake and by smaller rivers.

Before tackling the Yellow River and only a year after Elias had reached China he undertook a preliminary canter, making two journeys up the Tsien-Tang (Fu-Ch'un Chiang) river which flows north-east through Chekiang, reaching the sea at Hangchow south of the Yangtze. This river boasts an immense tidal bore, compared with which our own Severn Bore is a mere ripple. The practical Chinese use it as a swift means of conveyance upstream for their boats. He took a number of soundings and observations, but he was reluctant to submit a paper to

the Geographical Society because he knew the river had already been explored and he was not sure he had brought back enough original material. Cautiously he sent his notes to London for a fellow member to make enquiries and put them in if they were thought useful enough. He did not want to prejudice his future by an outright refusal. Probably he was not very disappointed when his friend failed to interest the Society in them. It had been valuable practice for the major task ahead, as well as a test of his own confidence.

His survey of the Yellow River's new course necessitated three separate journeys. On the first in 1867 he investigated the condition of part of the former bed and of the Grand Canal where they ran close to each other and sometimes merged. This venture was entirely independent and he was accompanied only by a Chinese interpreter. It was less of a survey than a detailed reconnaissance and he does not say how long it took but the most important results are recorded in the proceedings of the Royal Asiatic Society in the form of extracts from his daily journal. He made the trip in May, when it would not have been too hot, travelling north by boat up the Grand Canal, but on reaching the dry bed of the Yellow River he had to travel mostly on land. The countryside is flat, the dust was intolerable and he noted with interest the various means of locomotion in use which helped to stir it up. Donkeys, mules and ponies were used for riding and as pack animals as well as for drawing carts. Wheelbarrows were common; these had a platform on either side of the squeaking wheel and besides the handles the pusher had a supporting strap round his neck. It was not uncommon to see a pig in a basket cage one on side and the farmer's wife with her market produce in approximate balance on the other. Another local form of transport was a cumbersome three-wheeled wagon drawn by oxen, buffaloes and donkeys harnessed together promiscuously and generally four abreast.

He also noted the Chinese system of locks. Centuries older than the western type, they were not locks as we know them but buttresses projecting in pairs into the canal which helped to confine the water and deepen it. Junks were hauled through them by windlasses, making use of the eddies and counter currents under the banks. This system enabled vessels to pass through rapids, but in the flood season it was also possible to shut the water off by dropping sluice gates between a pair of buttresses. The late G. R. G. Worcester describes a somewhat different or perhaps complementary system by which the canal is dammed to a width of fifteen feet, with a removable centre part of wooden beams. As many of these as necessary are removed and the boat is then levered over. Elias's boat was of very shallow draught and may not have needed this treatment.

This trip also gave him his first taste of 'troubles' for he was traversing the heart of the Nien Fei rebel district. The Nien Fei, or Twisted Turbans, had risen about five years earlier and had devastated much of Shantung and southwards towards the Yangtze. They were not Moslems and had nothing in common with the Moslem rebellion in the Western provinces, and indeed up till then neither the Chinese nor foreigners seem to have looked for the real cause of the rising; to the hard-pressed Manchu Government it was just another burden to be borne.

In fact, Elias did not meet with the rebels, only troops and gunboats hastening to deal with them, though these would be almost as daunting. Many a European in China between the two World Wars who ventured beyond the security of the Treaty Ports for a weekend of duck shooting will recall the cold feeling of apprehension which meeting with Chinese troops in a hurry was liable to induce. They tended to be trigger-happy and if they saw a foreigner whilst on a foray after bandits 'shoot first' was the rule, though luckily shooting straight was the exception.

Elias concentrated most of his investigations in the area between Hungtze Lake and the town of Tsinkiang which lie about 150 miles north of the point where the Grand Canal joins the Yangzte River. Hereabouts the Canal crossed the former bed of the Yellow River which was completely dry, though the Canal was itself still navigable. Another river, the Yeu Ho, though not navigable throughout the year for large junks, replaced the old Yellow River as a link between this district and the sea coast, which it reached not far from the former mouth of the Yellow River. He called on the Mandarin of Tsingkiang, a literary old gentleman who received him with great politeness and directed a 'writer' to take him anywhere he wished to go and give him all possible information. Here was an example of Elias's customary tact and caution. Had he tried to carry on his work without paying such a courtesy he could easily have been arrested as a spy. Politeness and respect for customs have always been the best means of establishing good relations with Chinese. Not only did he gain the services of a writer but this man also simplified his work by procuring a native chart of the district containing all the local names. From local knowledge he learned that the Yellow River had been growing more and more shallow for five years before it finally dried up in 1853. Here his investigations ended and he returned south by the Canal to Chinkiang, having covered over 300 miles on the round trip. He could claim two valuable discoveries, the first that the Yellow River existed no more in its former bed and the second that the Grand Canal still remained navigable, for the latter, besides drawing water from the Hungtze Lake, was also receiving flood water from the Shantung mountains

to the north. Apart from that he had added a great deal to the little that had hitherto been known of the waterways of the region and to the adaptations in its economy which had taken place during the years since the Yellow River had failed both as a highway and as a source of irrigation. On the personal side he must have felt quietly pleased with the success of his venture and considerably encouraged at the reception of his first paper by the Royal Asiatic Society.

The interest aroused by the first survey led in 1868 to the decision of the North China Branch of the Society to send an exploring party to examine and lay down the course of the new Yellow River. In the preamble to his subsequent report Elias says: ' . . . in accordance with this decision I had the honour of being requested to undertake the task and my plan for carrying it out being approved by the Society's Council a small party was formed for the purpose consisting of Mr H. A. Hollingsworth, two Chinese and myself.' The plan was to go to Chinkiang by steamer, thence by boat up the Grand Canal till they reached the Yellow River, to follow the river down to near its mouth on the Chihli Gulf, then up again to the point of divergence from its old course. The return would be by the same route as the outward journey. Since most of the rivers would be in flood during the summer months and those in the north would be frozen over by the middle of December, autumn was the most favourable season and the party set out on September 24th. He and Hollingsworth both kept a daily journal of the trip. Almost the latter's first entry was: 'The sight of an encampment of soldiers just beyond Chinkiang was not encouraging.' It was a reminder and a caution that, as on his previous year's trip, they were entering a region in the wake of the Nien Fei rebellion, and though the rebels had been cleared from the southern part they did not know what the situation might be on reaching the Yellow River.

The very next entry gives a good example of the suspicion and spying already mentioned as one of the great bugbears for travellers. Hollingsworth records that a local official asked them if they would give a lift to a friend who was described as a mandarin, i.e. an official. They quickly discovered that the 'mandarin' was really a spy and the lift was promptly refused. Two days later the man presented himself again and got the same answer. After this second discouragement and perhaps persuaded by a *douceur* he seems to have given up, but the party could not have felt too happy about their prospects. Furthermore, on the second day the Chinese writer gave trouble. We are not told what kind of trouble but it was serious enough for Elias to discharge him then and there in the middle of the night. After this inauspicious start it is

a relief to learn that they experienced no further annoyance and Hollingsworth told his father in a letter that the local inhabitants were very civil.

Having traversed and reported on the old bed and the Canal the previous year, Elias merely confirmed that the latter was still in good repair and the country thriving. But after crossing the old Yellow River they found that for the next 150 miles the country was arid, thinly populated and poverty stricken, though bearing few traces of rebel devastation. He was beginning to suspect that not only the poverty of the region but also the Nien Fei themselves were products of the want of irrigation since the river had changed its course.

Even the Grand Canal had been allowed to go to ruin and the only navigable portion ran through the string of shallow lagoons stretching from Suchow Fu northwards to Tsining. This normally important town he found to be 'not in a very flourishing state at present'. This was a piece of grim humour, for it had been a principal camp of the army dealing with the rebellion, and in China the soldiery were prone to devastate a countryside only a little less than the bandits. In fact the latter were sometimes preferred, as they were often local lads with family ties, whereas the soldiers generally came from other provinces and were liable to behave like locusts, especially if their pay was in arrears, as it usually was; not that either side ever paid for what they took. Fifty-five miles beyond Tsining the party reached the New Yellow River near Nanshan on October 17th. They had traversed nearly 400 miles of the Grand Canal in three weeks, which was good sailing in such restricted conditions. Depending upon a favourable wind, they usually set out each day at about 5 a.m. and tied up late in the afternoon when the wind dropped.

At Nanshan they found the river flowing over a belt of flat country ten to twelve miles wide and in a state of inundation. It had broken the banks of the Canal in a number of places, almost obliterating it. They described the scene as one of utter desolation and dreariness with everything at the mercy of the muddy dun-coloured water sweeping towards the sea. As a result of the breaches the Canal to the northwards was drained dry except for two months in the year, when flood water from the river made it navigable to the point where it connected with another river, the Wai Ho. The next stage was a detailed survey of the river north-eastwards towards the sea. This entailed the fixing of geographical positions by observation, and frequent soundings to take the depth and determine the channel. Throughout the journey landmarks and local crops were noted and Elias carefully plotted obstructions and marked those reaches where navigability could be improved. They worked hard and fast, for it was late in the year and they had to complete the

journey before ice closed the river. At Yushan, about twenty miles below the Grand Canal, the broad flood waters converged into a clear-cut bed which up to fifteen years previously had been another river, the Tatsing, whose course the Huang Ho had adopted and widened to about 250 yards. Thereafter the countryside became cultivated and prosperous. They noted the size and numbers of boats on the different stretches and also their cargoes, the main bulk cargoes being coal and salt from local sources. Some of the shallow draught junks trading in the river sailed as far as Taku, the port for Tientsin and Peking, which they could reach in two days and to Chefoo, which took four days. In a detailed description of the salterns and the process of extracting salt from the brine by evaporation, it was noted that in the most intense concentration there existed a Brine Shrimp or *Cancer Salinus* also found in salt pans in England. Local belief was that this shrimp cleared the brine of impurities and it was cultivated accordingly. At a hamlet called locally Lau Ye Miau, and the only habitable spot for miles, the party reached the up river limit of the Naval Survey of 1860. Four miles below this point they arrived at the bar, upon whose depth foreign opinion had hitherto believed depended the navigability of hundreds of miles of the Yellow River. However the survey had proved that in fact there were many greater obstructions up river. The party did not attempt to survey the bar but confined themselves to questioning junk masters and pilots as to channel depths and tides and found considerable agreement in their answers, which is not so remarkable, since the Chinese have always been outstanding sailors.

The down river survey between the Grand Canal and the sea was finished on October 28th. The party was now faced with an up-stream journey of some 550 miles, of which more than 400 miles were against a strong current and in a craft not well suited to such navigation. They arrived back at their first station on the Grand Canal, Palimiau, on November 10th. Resuming their survey up river, they found that for the next seventy-five miles the river had no defined bed but swept across a broad belt of countryside, just as they had found it where river and canal intersected. Although their boat drew only fifteen inches of water it was often difficult to find a passage. Even in the high water season it was said that junks had to spend whole days kedging over shoals formed by the river silting up against obstacles like clumps of trees. All this ruined and devastated region showed signs of former prosperity and they came upon traces of another canal said to have joined the Grand Canal at Palimiau. It was a further seventy-five miles up-stream before thay again found the river flowing in a defined channel, but even here it was rather that the bed had been built up by the river's own deposit of loess than that it had carved one out of the soil.

Thus in general the river was little if at all below the general level of the countryside. Old trees were actually growing on mud banks flush with the waterline and houses, even villages, were seen to be buried in the deposit. Elias deduced from this that the Yellow River could hardly be described as having a permanent course. It took them a tedious journey of a fortnight to reach Lungmenkau on November 24th. This was the point of divergence of the old and new courses of the Yellow River and the upper limit fixed for the survey.

He had been wise in choosing a boat of such shallow draught for his work, for the whole river from the Grand Union Canal up to the breach was totally unnavigable for commercial purposes. Boats bringing cargoes down from Kaifeng, the capital of Honan, discharged their cargoes at Lungmenkau, whence they were carried by road. The breach itself was found to be a mile in width and the old dry bed below it was in places above the level of the surrounding countryside. This proved that deposit had so reduced the capacity of the bed and raised the water level that the weak upper parts of the embankment had been unable to withstand the pressure. Had the local authorities appreciated this weakness and taken steps to strengthen the upper parts, the river could perhaps have been confined to its former bed for at least some years. As it was, the region on either side of the dry bed, lacking irrigation, was now almost uninhabitable whilst the region over which the new course poured its flood waters was being devastated for the opposite reason.

The main survey was now over and the party retraced their steps, reaching Nanshan on the Grand Canal on December 1st. It was well timed for there had been a considerable fall in the water level since October and ice had already begun to form in the shallow waters. They reached Chinkiang on the Yangtze on December 15th and Hollingsworth triumphantly ran up the Blue Ensign as they passed the military post. It must have been an arduous and tiring journey for the party had travelled 1,300 miles in just under three months and, after the point of intersection of the old River and the Grand Canal, had been continuously occupied with taking observations and soundings. The resulting map shows how thorough and accurate their work had been.

Elias's first intention had been to make a purely factual survey, but an exciting idea had formed in his mind as he worked. What immense economic and political advantages China would reap if the flood waters they had encountered could be controlled either along the river course, thus making the river navigable up to Kaifeng or else back into the former course which would restore prosperity to a formerly fertile area. He did not know whether the Chinese Government had such a project in mind and in any case he doubted their ability to carry it

through. But what a job for a foreigner; what a job, indeed, for himself!

Meanwhile he was not satisfied that he had yet solved all the problems. His curiosity had been fired by a meeting just below the breach at Lungmenkau with half a dozen shallow draught boats heading for the Hungtze Lake. The boatmen had said that west of Kaifeng there was another and smaller breach whose flood water flowed into a small river, the Sha, which was a tributary of the Wai. The latter is a quite considerable river flowing from the west into the Hungtze. He had already heard a rumour of such an outlet and if true it meant that water from the Yellow River was actually flowing into the Yangtze via the Hungtze Lake and the Grand Canal. He wanted to verify this story and at the same time examine the old bed of the river from the point where it had formerly intersected the Grand Canal north-westwards to the main breach. So four months later, in the spring of 1869, he set off again on his third trip. Barnet & Co must have been very easy going in the matter of leave, or else they had found him hopeless at commerce.

He gave as the objects of this journey, firstly to settle the question of the new breaches in the banks and the communication they might have opened between the Yellow River and the Yangtze, and secondly to explore the possibility of excavating a channel so as to turn the flood water beds again into the Old Course. Lastly, he wanted if possible to visit some anthracite mines previously unknown to foreigners. He found the boatmen's story of a breach higher up had been true, but that it had recently been dammed. Thus his first object was quickly attained, for the old bed was now quite dry and there was no longer a water connexion between the Yellow River and the Yangtze. So he abandoned his boat and proceeded by road, closely following the old bed through a flat and desiccated countryside as far as Suchow Foo. Thence he travelled onwards to Kaifeng, the provincial capital of Honan which lay some miles south of the river. Its trade was mainly with Tientsin to the north, by way of the Grand Canal and the Wei Ho, but also with Hankow to the south.

From the Kaifeng authorities he learned of plans both there and in Peking to divide the river in two by diverting some water into the old bed, but he could see that this would not have the effect of draining the flood water area. The authority he relied on was a German water engineer who had proved that, whilst division of a river reduces the velocity, it does not reduce the volume; moreover a reduction in velocity would here mean an increase in siltage; in any case the engineering problem would be very great. At this stage he had two plans in mind, the first being to use the new course exclusively, though it would mean raising and maintaining 147 miles of new embankment, an undertaking only a little less formidable than the Chinese plan. It

would, however, make the river navigable for steamers. He believed a more practical and beneficial plan would be to divert the river back to its old course, for the banks were already there and he had just seen for himself that they were still in good repair. He was thinking not only of the technical aspect but of the economic benefits which the river would restore to a formerly fertile but now poverty-stricken countryside. And there was the equally important corollary that the drainage of the land then lying under flood water, which was about equal to the area of Kent, Surrey and Middlesex put together, would also restore this huge tract to cultivation. He thought Peking would need little urging if the right strings were pulled, but he doubted the trustworthiness of local officials to handle the task and especially the big sums involved, and thought it was a job for British engineers.

During his trips Elias had passed six times through the heart of the Nien Fei rebel area. While the effects of the rebellion were plain to all, the causes were less obvious. Elias believed there was only one original cause and that was the Yellow River disaster itself. For the flooding along the new course and the drying up of the old course had robbed the agricultural classes of their livelihood and he had observed that the rebels were mainly local men from Kiangsu, Anhwei and Honan. He found no signs of organized rebellion, only extreme poverty, and he was almost certainly right in believing that they had taken to banditry as the sole alternative to starvation. Hence the Nien Fei would fade away when the river was diverted to its old channel and prosperity gradually returned, probably even earlier for large numbers would find work on the restoration itself.

One other aspect of the rebellion aroused his interest and it is significant because he had plenty of chance to follow it up on his later travels. He noted that a large proportion of the inhabitants of Kaifeng and surrounding districts were Moslems, and that they were open sympathizers with the Moslem rebellion which had broken out in the Western Provinces and Chinese Turkestan some five years before. These rebels had already driven the Chinese from Khotan and Yarkand and from all the military posts between Kashgar and Hami, their last footholds in Central Asia. Any further successes, he thought, would bring out all the Moslems in the Yellow River area in common cause. This would be far more serious for the Chinese Government than the Nien Fei for, as he observed, the Moslems had that fanatical element in their religion which was lacking in the Chinese, and throughout their history Moslems have always risen against their oppressors especially when, as in China, their religion has been treated with contempt.

He compiled a paper on the results of his three journeys, which he

submitted to the Royal Geographical and the Royal Asiatic Societies. Regarding the last journey he said he had been delayed by illness and so could not visit the anthracite mines which had now been reported on by Von Richthofen. He wrote that 'it would be a great work to turn the Yellow River back to its former course but that in the present state of political affairs in China it would be useless to canvass it – all such things are discouraged even more by our own authorities than by the Chinese'. The referee to whom the Royal Geographical Society sent the paper for report wrote that the account of the journeys of this intelligent traveller and his successful tracing of the New Course was certainly original and a valuable contribution to the geography of China When it was read it attracted all the attention he could have hoped for. The President of the RGS, Sir Roderick Murchison, said that these investigations by one of their younger members, carried out at his own expense during holidays from commercial pursuits, through pure love of geographical exploration and with no reference to the hardships and danger involved, did him the highest credit and his observations had resulted in an exceedingly good map. Elias was only twenty-seven. Except for his ominous reference to illness it was a good start.

During the next three years he spent much time working on his project in the hope of persuading the Chinese authorities to accept it and give him the task of carrying it out. After further study he had to abandon the idea of diverting the river back to its former course on the grounds of expense and he finally evolved one for deepening a narrow channel, as straight as possible along the new course; the 'scour', as he called it, would then be carried straight out to sea. Thus not only would the channel not silt up but it would tend to deepen itself. Realizing he would get nowhere with the local authorities, he succeeded in getting an interview with Li Hung Chang, the Viceroy and Governor-General of Chihli. That redoubtable old warrior showed interest, but as Elias was not sufficiently fluent in Chinese to make himself clear, he asked him to call again with an interpreter. At this point Elias sought the help of our Minister in Peking, Thomas Wade, who gave him the services of E. H. Parker. Wade warned Parker that Li Hung Chang was known to be anti-foreign, rude and in his opinion capable of any treachery, and he told Elias not to expect much, although Elias wanted an advance of only £20,000 for preliminary measures. The Viceroy listened to the plan for a while but kept reiterating that there was no money available. Thereafter his interest waned and Parker seems to have indulged in genial conversation on topics of mutual interest. Wade duly reported the failure of the interview to Lord Granville, the Foreign Secretary, and added that he had privately reprimanded Parker for indulging in a flippant conversation with such an august

personage. The episode seems to have preyed on Wade, for three weeks later in another dispatch he reported that Li Hung Chang had had correspondence with Elias for three weeks about his project and had in fact offered him a job of sorts, though at a ridiculous salary. Elias considered he had had very fair play and that shortage of money was the genuine reason. Finally Wade added that perhaps he had been less than fair in his description of the Viceroy who might not be such a rascal after all.

Wade was an outstanding Minister to China and as he was to have considerable influence on Elias's projects for the next few years, a picture of the man as he appears from his frequent voluminous despatches will be useful. Although naturally a Sinophile, he never failed to uphold British dignity and policy. Indeed, on one notable occasion which will be described, he successfully dictated major policy of his own devising at a crucial moment. He had constant difficulties to contend with, one of the worst being the perennial opium question. He had also to cope with many tiresome minor problems. Thus if a British ship sank a junk fishing at night, probably without lights, the value of the junk and compensation for the drowned and their relatives were argued back and forth for months, even when it was suspected that no one had actually been drowned and the number of dependants was quite mythical. His complaints to the Foreign Office that he was out of pocket in settling such matters always went unheeded.

A major difficulty was the interpretation of British diplomatic procedure to the Chinese and vice versa. Both countries usually found the other's views equally illogical and impossible. But even the Foreign Office often found Wade's despatches obscure. In the archives there is a plaintive letter from Lady Wade to Lord Tenterden, the Permanent Under Secretary, asking if he would do her the favour of telegraphing to ask her husband if he seriously wants her to join him in Peking; because if so it would be difficult at such short notice as she had nowhere to leave the children. Lord Tenterden minuted, 'We had better do as she asks. No doubt he has been tormenting the poor woman with the same ambiguous utterances with which he aggravates us.'

Wade had frequent cause to complain of shortage of staff. In one year two went off their heads and two more had to escort them home. At the same time he reported his fears for the sanity of a third. Describing in detail his very peculiar symptoms he wrote gloomily: 'At any rate he doesn't seem to be suffering from just ordinary D.T.s.' He had a strong tendency towards holding all the reins himself; he disliked missions and expeditions unless they were his own idea and unless they were in the hands of his own men. With some reason he especially distrusted any proposed by the Indian Government. This

tendency more than once had unfortunate effects on Elias's own projects, even though he knew and trusted him personally.

It may be wondered why Elias did not approach the foreign business houses. A navigable Yellow River would have been greatly in their commercial interest and £20,000 was little enough to put up. But he had already said that he was not cut out for business and most likely felt that his severance from the family firm must be complete. Besides, exploration was his overriding interest, not engineering, and an ambitious project of geographical exploration was now in his mind, so perhaps after all he was not very disappointed.

Ten years later another independent survey of the Yellow River had no better luck and in 1891 a consortium of Dutch hydrostatic engineers submitted an even more elaborate report and plans which failed to extract a contract from the conservative Chinese Government. When Shantung became a German sphere of influence Professor Parker thought Germany should undertake the work. In retrospect one wonders whether the Chinese Maritime Customs, internationally staffed and trusted by the Chinese, might not have been the best sponsors of this enormous task.

There have been more disasters since Elias's day. Before the Dutch survey a million or more lives were lost in 1887 by flood and famine and another half million may have been lost when the dykes were deliberately cut as a defence against Japan in 1938. On the latter occasion its waters once again reached the Yangtze via the Grand Canal. Today the river is still unnavigable, its banks are again many feet above the surrounding plain and the time-honoured system of revetment is still in use. The story of the Yellow River is never-ending and yet another disaster may befall it one day through unwonted flood or sheer neglect although the latest news is of a vast twenty-year damming project begun by the present Government in 1957.

The achievement of having his papers read by learned societies and the praise showered on him must have been greatly encouraging for Elias at this time when he was formulating plans for escaping from commerce. He had been keenly study studying aspects of Chinese history and geography in hopes of further chances of exploration, based on the scientific approach which he envisaged. In 1869 he developed his ideas in a criticism in the *North China Daily News* of a report by a recent traveller. He began his contribution: 'The Arabs express themselves no less truly than metaphorically when they say that the best description is that by which the ear is converted into an eye.' After this unusual observation he continued:

'In former times travelling in the interior of China was confined almost

entirely to Jesuit missionaries who, however worthy in other respects, found it necessary in publishing their experiences to flatter the vanity of the barbarous rulers of the land in which they were scarcely tolerated; or to that class of traveller whose object in every age has been to put before the wondering public of his native country a narrative teeming with accounts of his own exploits, of the marvels he has witnessed and of the grandeur of the distant land which it has been his lot to visit and describe. Hence the modern reader is not surprised at the exaggeration and inaccuracies of the older writers on China, and in consulting them seeks principally for elements of information on broad subjects rather than to acquire accurate knowledge. . . . Of later years however since the country has been penetrated by men whose pursuits and modes of thought are of a more practical nature than formerly it has been thought that more exact and reliable information would be forthcoming to supplement if not to supersede the ruder accounts of earlier times.'

The rest of the article was devoted to sharp criticism of the traveller concerned who seems to have fallen short of this standard by some considerable margin. Pontifically expressed though it may be, he was laying down here the standard he intended to set himself in his own work. Fully to his taste, however, was the work of Von Richthofen and in the next year he wrote two articles praising his reports for their accurate information.

Five more Press contributions appeared between 1870 and 1871 during the period between the Huang Ho and the Mongolian journeys when he was still hoping that the former exploit might lead to a job. They show that even then his thoughts and studies were extending beyond the confines of China and turning to the momentous events taking place round her western borders. He considered foreigners in China were taking too little note of how profoundly these events might affect China and in a series of articles, of which the first was entitled 'Recent Exploration in Central Asia', he set out to open their eyes. His theme was the interest Russia was showing in Central Asia and the signs that she was endeavouring to steal a march on both China and India; for instance she had already annexed the greater part of Khokand and Bokhara without protest from China. Since both these regions lay in what was loosely called Western Turkestan, beyond the Tien Shan range and the Pamirs, it might be that China felt it was not worth claiming what was too far off for her to hold. But more significantly the Russians had also sent explorers to the Pamirs which, with the Hindu Kush, comprises the Roof of the World. We ourselves still knew little of this area which had not been visited by an Englishman since Lieutenant Wood of the Royal Indian Navy in 1837. Soon after a visit to

Kashgar in 1868, G. W. Hayward, an army officer, had set out for the Pamirs but was murdered on the way.

Of more immediate interest to Elias was Eastern or Chinese Turkestan, comprising a region loosely divided into Kashgaria in the south-west and Dzungaria to the north-east, roughly divided by the Tien Shan and both almost unknown to Europeans. He dealt with it in three articles, the first of which was entitled 'Civilization Encircled by Deserts', whilst the second and third traced the course of events following the mounting success of the Moslem revolutionary leader Yakub Beg from 1864 and referred to the recent visits to Kashgar of Robert Shaw, Hayward and Forsyth. Elias was clearly fascinated by this region and it was obvious that he longed to visit it himself.

Meanwhile his interest in the Nestorians was stimulated by the visit of a missionary, Mr Williamson, to Sian, the capital of Shensi. Williamson was seeking a famous Nestorian tablet which bore on it the earliest Christian inscription, an abstract of Christian doctrine, yet found in Asia and was reputedly dated between AD 750 and AD 850. He safely traversed a whole province recently devastated by the Moslems and was duly rewarded for his risk. He found the tablet amongst a number of Moslem mosques, but well cared for, and brought back a tracing of the inscription. In his *Memoirs, 1889–1939*, Sir Maurice Bowra describes how many years later his father prevented the removal of this stone to America.

Chapter III

THE SECOND EXPEDITION

The Journey Across Western Mongolia

St Petersburg
Jan. 25, 1873

'Telegraphic advices from Omsk contain an account given by an Englishman, Mr Elias, who has just come from Pekin having passed through Uliassutai and Kobdo and arrived at Biisk. He says that 300 mountaineers [? mutineers] attacked the town of Kobdo on the 6th–8th November killing 200 of the inhabitants. The Chinese garrison of 1500 men shut themselves up in the fortress, the Russian merchants fled to Suok.'

Thus briefly did *The Times* report what it subsequently described as one of the most wonderful feats of modern travel, although just what it amounted to did not become apparent until Elias gave his sober unglossed account to the Royal Geographical Society three months later. Preferring to prove his complete independence he had sought no backing even from the Society. He could not have chosen a more exacting or hazardous adventure.

From the enormous field open to a traveller based in China he chose well. Not that Central Asia was *terra incognita*. From the East the Silk Road had been traversed by the Chinese themselves carrying goods to the Roman Empire and there were Buddhist monks such as Hsuan Tsang who in the seventh century had journeyed to India and left an account of his fifteen years of travel and religious learning. So, too, after the conquests of Chingis Khan in the thirteenth century, envoys from the Emperor of North China had travelled westward to his court. But most of the records are of travels in the opposite direction from west to east. Nestorian Christianity established itself across Central Asia between the seventh and fourteenth centuries. The Manichaian cult reached Mongolia in the sixth century and survived even longer than the Nestorians. More importantly for the future of China, Moslem encroachment began in the same century, reaching western China through what became Chinese Turkestan, and by the seventeenth century a sizeable proportion of the population of Yunnan and

Szechuan were Moslems. From Europe the earliest traveller may have been Plano Carpini, the Papal Legate sent after the second Mongol invasion of Europe to exhort the 'King of the Tartars' to abstain from attacking the Christians. He reached Karakorum in 1246. Others followed and in 1260 the Polo brothers, Venetian traders, reached Khanbalik, the Mongol name for Peking. After their return they set out again with Nicolo's son Marco and this time were accepted by Kubilai himself, the first and greatest Mongol Emperor of China. For the next twenty years they stayed attached to his court as honoured advisers and it was Marco's book of his travels and experiences that became the standard work on the vast Mongol Empire which ruled four-fifths of Asia, and remained so almost until the last century. During the next hundred years the Popes sent many missionaries to China and by the eighteenth century the Jesuits had travelled painstakingly over most of China and Central Asia. But, as Elias pointed out, truthful and laborious though they were they had not the means for obtaining accurate information:

'Thus the ranges of the Tienshan and the countries to the north and south of them, formerly Chinese colonies, the great southern desert, the Gobi with its buried cities and ancient roads and also a great part of what Europeans then called Dzungaria, might all be looked upon as regions unexplored in the geographical sense.'

During the eighteenth century and up to almost the middle of the nineteenth century little had been added to what was already known of Central Asia. The chief reason for this was the steady ebb and flow of conflict between China in the East and the Moslem tribes of the West, with China wishing to pacify her Western borders and prevent the Moslem tribes from stirring up their co-religionists inside the Great Wall, and with the fanatical Moslems outside ready to go to their help if China became too tough with them. Moslems have always had the religious fervour which the Chinese lacked; moreover, the further west that China extended her influence the harder it was for her to retain it in such alien surroundings. This ebb and flow certainly deterred independent foreign exploration by making it too risky; nevertheless by the 1850s the Russians had made a start and three expeditions, backed by the Imperial Geographical Society, had visited Chinese Turkestan. Unlike our own typical one-man performances by adventurous individualists, these expeditions tended to be large-scale affairs with Cossack guards. By this time Russian expansion in Central Asia was well under way and India was beginning to look to her defences. With Englishmen from India beginning to penetrate into

Chinese Turkestan, the Russians no doubt feared our intentions there and wanted to be first in establishing their influence. This rivalry at first affected Elias only as an explorer, but later he was to become deeply involved as a reluctant participant in its deadly serious strategic aspects.

In Mongolia several Russians had penetrated from north to south, which it was of course relatively easy for them to do from Siberia. In an appendix to the paper on his own journey Elias noted three journeys by Russian travellers through portions of the region he traversed, all of which were undertaken under Russian Government auspices. The first of these was by Prinz in 1863, though he undertook no geographical work and failed to negotiate a trade treaty at Kobdo, for which purpose he had been sent. The second expedition was by Shishmaroff in 1868. He followed the Chinese official road to Uliassutai, covering 750 miles in thirteen days on ponies provided by the Chinese Government; needless to say, the geographical results of this rapid tartar ride were nil. But he had partial success with a commercial treaty, and in order to ratify it the Russians in 1870 sent Pavlinoff, accompanied by a topographer, Matusowski, and a party of Cossacks. They travelled from the border post of Suok through Kobdo to Uliassutai and returned north-westwards by a Mongol track leading to the upper waters of the Yenissei. When he reached Omsk Elias met Matusowski, who showed him his manuscript notes as one geographer to another. Elias thought his methods somewhat elementary; for instance, he had no means of fixing his position astronomically, so that the results were some rather eccentric geography.

Contemporaneously with Elias, a fourth Russian was at work in Mongolia and Tibet, the only one whose name became internationally known. This was Captain (later Colonel) Prejevalski who was far ahead of his fellow Russians in scientific exploration and therefore had much in common with Elias. In 1877 he too received the Gold Medal of the Royal Geographical Society. The Society prided itself that the science of geography was above mere politics and waged a private war of its own on behalf of internationalism. In particular it clashed frequently with the India Office for maintaining too much secrecy about new geographical discoveries in Central Asia by their Surveyors and Political Agents. This was in direct contrast with the Russians, who generally published the maps made by their travellers and Elias and others made full use of them. The fact that they were often inaccurate was quickly pounced on by meticulous geographers like him; it was all part of the rivalry.

Turning from Russian to British travellers in the region, the first known was a Scot, Dr John Bell, who in 1721 accompanied a Russian

Embassage to Peking and back and forty years later published a book, *Travels from St Petersburg in Russia to Divers Parts of Asia*, a reprint of which appeared in 1966. In the nineteenth century an English architect called Atkinson, working in Russia, claimed to have made a number of journeys into Mongolia between 1846 and 1853 for the purpose of sketching the country and its inhabitants. His subsequent book was entitled *Oriental and Western Siberia*, and in it he described his wanderings. The Russians doubted the truth of the book. When he got home Elias studied it and even he could not make up his mind. He thought the journeys could have been done, but the book was so full of blunders and inaccuracies as to make proof impossible.

There seemed, too, to be some uncertainty at the time about the next English traveller, Charles Mitchell Grant, though in his case the doubts were certainly undeserved. He travelled from Peking to St Petersburg in 1861 or 1862, passing through Urga and Kiakhta, and read a paper on his journey to the Royal Geographical Society, of which he was a Fellow. His description of Chinese caravan routine alone, which was exactly as described sixty years later by Lattimore, would confirm his reliability. He was present when Elias read his paper to the Society and showed a certain justifiable rancour when the President, following the Press, described Elias as the first Englishman to accomplish the journey. He pointed out, moreover, that altogether he had crossed Mongolia eight times, though he conceded that Elias was the first to visit Uliassutai and Kobdo. It is inexplicable why Elias did not name him in his list of previous travellers through Mongolia for he must have heard of him. He himself was far too modest ever to claim a 'first' on his own behalf, and jealousy can be ruled out, for he was always helpful to later travellers in the region. Perhaps he omitted Grant because, though he had views on the lost city of Karakorum, he made no scientific contribution, which was the only standard by which Elias judged himself and others. It is much more strange that the President of the Society also persistently ignored Grant's claim for, just a fortnight after the latter's intervention, in presenting the Gold Medal to Elias he still described him as 'the only Englishman who ever traversed the Asiatic Continent from end to end upon this line'. It looks like an intended smack in the eye for poor Grant.

Grant had set out only just after the signing of the Treaty of Tientsin, which permitted foreigners to travel on passports in the interior and must have been one of the first travellers to take advantage of it.

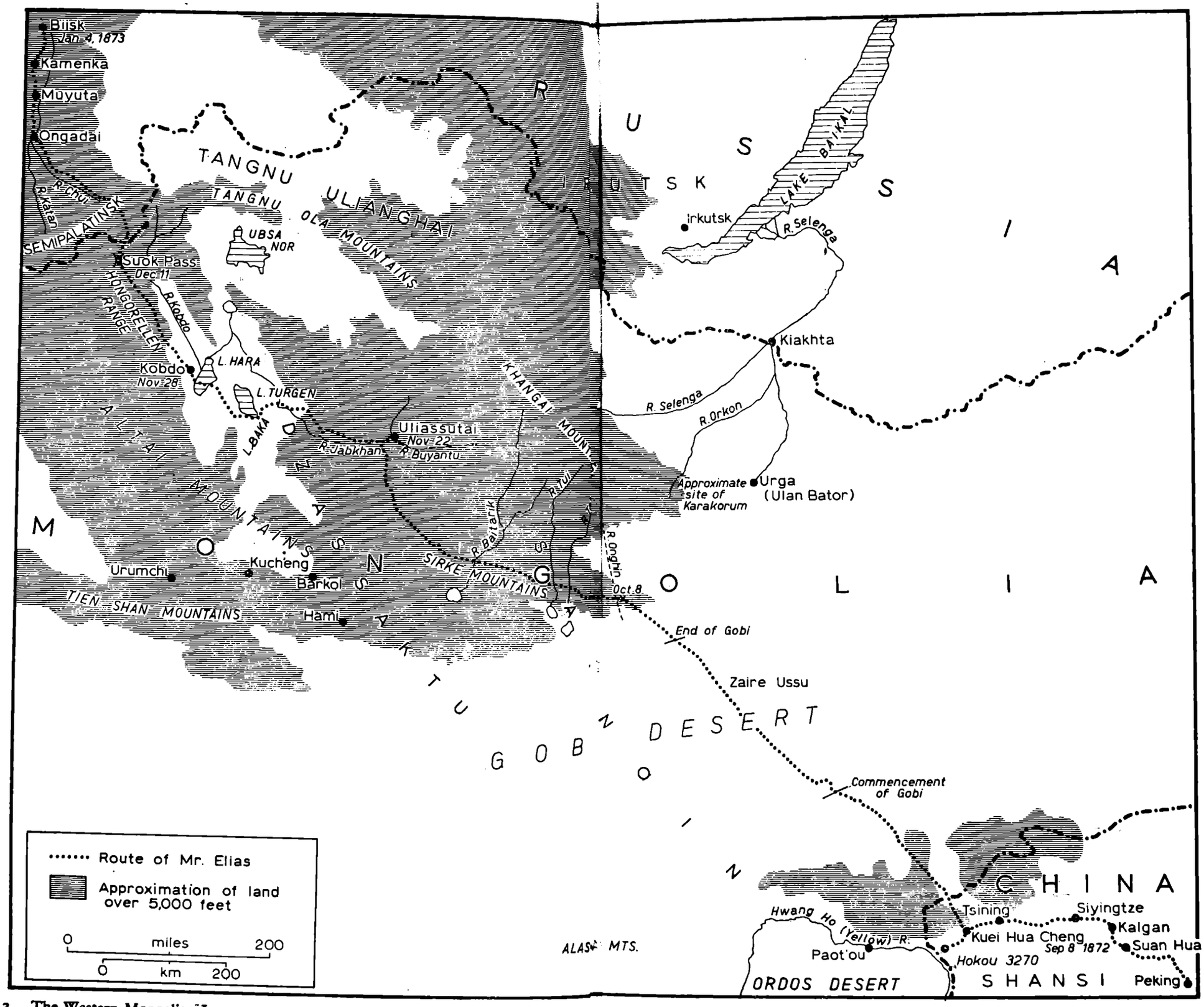
The wide field open to Elias to choose from might have been wider still, but for one severely limiting factor. This was the Moslem rebellion, the latest swing of that cyclical ebb and flow already referred

to, which in 1862 broke out in the provinces of Kansu and Shensi, only two years after the lifting of the ban on foreign travel. As he said, the question in 1872 was which portions of China were then under Chinese rule and therefore possible for a solitary traveller to visit? As it subsequently turned out, these portions were extremely limited. Not that he had originally meant to travel alone, for according to the Russian *Journal de St Petersbourg* he had been expecting to make the journey with the Comte de Rochechouart, lately 'Envoy' of France to Peking, who became ill. Elias only says that he spent several weeks of the summer, the best season for travel, waiting for a companion who eventually disappointed him and that in consequence it was his misfortune to have to start entirely alone with only a Chinese servant. To travel alone added greatly to the dangers and he had therefore to avoid passing through rebel held positions as well as try to dodge roving bands. It meant keeping to Chinese-held areas and trusting to his passport and, as he put it, to such cajolery and traveller's diplomacy as the occasion might call forth, in dealing with the Mongols.

He finally decided on two chief objects for his journey. The first would be an attempt to find the ruins of Karakorum, the ancient Tartar capital of Chingis Khan's son, Ugedei; if he found these were accessible from his line of march. Although flourishing in Marco Polo's days, even the site was then no longer known and its whereabouts was a romantic mystery. His second object was to reach, by one route or another, the former Chinese colony of Ili, on the famed Silk Road, which had recently been occupied by a Russian force.

If his first choice was temptingly romantic as well as archaeological his second though primarily geographical had a political motive as well. Ultimately his intention was to reach India but the Foreign Office were perturbed at the latest Russian move and had recently asked Wade in Peking for his views. This was just at the time Wade was discussing with Elias his abortive project for controlling the Yellow River; almost certainly the latter would have mentioned his alternative plan for crossing Mongolia, which he could not undertake without the Minister's official approval. It is more than likely therefore that Wade suggested Ili as a second objective where Elias might pick up valuable information about what was going on.

The best-known route to the west was the Imperial Highway which led past Sian across the province of Shensi and through the Jade Gate on the Great Wall to Nganhsi, where it divided into several routes with the main one crossing the desert and continuing to Hami, Barkol and Kulja. This was the road used by officials and soldiers and by merchants with small carvans. The average time of travel was one hundred and thirteen days out from Peking.



3. The Western Mongolian Journey

Elias noted two other routes, one called the Alashan route, which started from Kuei Hua Cheng and was used by heavy caravans. It led due west to Barkol and caravans took about fifty-five days. This may have been the road which Owen Lattimore calls the Coal Mine road and it ran south of the Tien Shan. A third road, which perhaps is the one Lattimore calls the Great Mongolian Road, passed north of the Tien Shan, but again led to Barkol. All these three routes were however barred to Elias by the Tungan rebellion which by 1866 had already expelled the Chinese from most of what was then known as Chinese Turkestan. This left only one route for officials and merchants wishing to reach Barkol and Hami, almost the only settlements remaining in Chinese hands. It led across the Gobi desert and the Kangai ranges to Uliassutai, thence recrossing the Gobi to reach Barkol. The ordinary time by this route for loaded caravans was eighty-three days, and as it was the only one which avoided the revolution in Shansi it was a case of Hobson's choice for Elias. Even so, with all Chinese Central Asia seething in sympathy, it was problematical what conditions he might find at the far end. He had heard on trustworthy authority in Peking that a Russian caravan with a military escort was to proceed from Kulja to Urumchi during the summer and try to open up trade with the Tungans there and he hoped that the presence of a formidable armed body might enable a solitary traveller to reach Kulja in some degree of safety. If not at Kuei Hua Cheng, at least at Uliassutai, he expected to get further news of this caravan which he would then try to join.

Before he started he had another disappointment. He had applied to the Chinese Government for transport, but this was refused on the grounds that he was not an official traveller; consequently he would be forced to buy or hire his own. Leaving Peking on July 22, 1872, he travelled to Kalgan on the Great Wall, where he tried with the help of the Belgian Mission there to obtain camels and a driver. Failing in this he left on August 1st for Siying Sze where he had another fruitless search for camels. No Mongols wanted to go with him; they pleaded ignorance of the route, but more likely they feared to go with the foreigner and such a small caravan. This indeed was a basic trouble for all foreign travellers, as a small caravan was far more likely to be attacked by bandits. Not only that, but the best caravan masters with the best camels were always in demand by the Chinese trading houses and what were left were likely to be highly unreliable. It was always safer, as Grant before him found out – and Lattimore many years later – to travel with a big caravan, many of which amounted to a thousand camels or more. Having failed thus far he set out for Kuei Hua Cheng, 150 miles further to the west. This was an important border

town because it was a terminus for all the caravans leading west to Uliassutai and the Tien Shan as well as linking with Paot'ou, the *entrepôt* for the Yellow River trade southwards.

It was at Kueihua that his troubles really started. During the three weeks he spent trying to collect camels and men he had a constant struggle against the spies, trickery and obstructionism instigated by Chinese officials who suspected he had a secret understanding with the Moslems. Their suspicions were aroused partly by reason of his unusual baggage, but also because, to avoid drawing attention to his map-making, he had to work at night. Younghusband and Lattimore faced precisely the same potential hostility, so it was no temporary phenomenon due to the rebellion, but rather something endemic in a border town of mixed tribes, races and religions. In such circumstances the explorer always came off badly compared with the missionary. Besides his strange foreign dress and inability to talk the language, the former had his suspicious packages, queer writing and the habit of asking questions. The missionary on the other hand usually adopted native dress, he learned the language and what was more he could often heal the sick where native methods failed. Also, he was a holy man who spoke about a new religion and holy men of any persuasion always commanded respect in the East. Perhaps explorers would have done better to travel in this guise.

Whilst in Kueihua Elias remarked on its noticeably Western Asiatic air, the result of centuries of trade with the West, and he also noticed that the largely Moslem population were on good terms with the Chinese, although a war of extermination was supposed to be raging in the next province. Though Chinese in culture and language they often showed the physical characteristics of Western Asiatic races such as the Tungans, and even the town's architecture showed Western origins. During his stay he was able to pay a flying visit to the Yellow River at Hokou, only fifty miles south-west from Kueihua, which here, 800 miles above the highest point reached in his survey of 1868, presented an aspect very different from the uncontrolled waters he had then seen. By careful measurements he found that at Hokou the river was 3,270 feet above sea level, which gave a fall per mile of over four feet and indicated a considerable velocity. There is no need to wonder therefore at the calamities recorded in Chinese history when this torrent had to pass through artificially embanked channels. It was interesting to note, too, that flat-bottomed boats were used to drift down as far as Tsinanfu and the Grand Canal. Here they were broken up as the current was too strong to navigate them back up stream. After a fortnight's complicated negotiating, Elias at last succeeded in hiring six camels, three of which were inferior cows. The owner came

from Kuch'eng and was responsible for the contract. In addition to the camels he had two ponies which he exchanged for others with Mongols *en route* as they became knocked up. Besides the owner he had his Chinese servant, a native of Shanghai, and an interpreter from Shansi who was said to have lived in Kobdo and to have crossed the desert eight times. Here it should be mentioned that all the caravan trade was traditionally in the hands of the Chinese. The Mongols being nomads and pastoralists were not concerned with trade either as merchants or carriers; their wealth was in their camels, ponies and sheep, and they lived by barter.

When all preparations had been made the party had still to wait for a lucky day, which fell on the Sixth of the Eighth Moon. Two routes led to Uliassutai. One was the 'official' or postal track used by Government officials and soldiers and which consisted of Mongol villages subsidized as staging stations by the Chinese Government; in return the station holders had to keep on hand a certain number of camels and ponies. The other was an ill-defined caravan track which led through the best grazing grounds and wells and the easiest passes, and Elias chose this latter because it crossed the desert considerably further west than the official track and so might be safer from rebel attention. The lucky day of departure was September 8th; this may have encouraged his men but it is doubtful if Elias can have felt very cheerful; that familiar sinking feeling was much more likely. He had said it was his misfortune to have to travel alone, added to this he now considered it was already too late in the year. But by comparison, Lattimore began his journey from Kueihua less than three weeks earlier after experiencing similar delays and it was often the custom for Chinese caravans to travel through the winter months, for the camels thereby had the summer at pasture so that they could recover their condition. Lattimore's caravan consisted of nine camels against Elias's six and two ponies, but he was immensely luckier in one respect. He had his Chinese family retainer, Moses, wise in the ways of Chinese if not in desert travel and more friend than servant. Elias says nothing about his own man, but he certainly stuck to him throughout in the right tradition. They can hardly have had much in common; Elias was not yet fluent in Chinese and the Shanghai dialect would be almost a foreign language in those parts. At the best, therefore, he faced a lonely and uncertain prospect, with only his meteorological observations to occupy him and keep him from brooding too much on the hazards ahead.

All Chinese caravans followed the same routine, probably unchanged for a thousand years or more. Camp was broken at eleven in the morning and with an hour for loading a start was made at noon. The

march was then continued at a rate of about two and half miles an hour until ten at night. Allowing a short halt for water, a day's march averaged twenty miles, more or less, according to the going and the weather. Elias averaged only eighteen miles to begin with. The poor condition of his camels was a cause of this, and after a few weeks he was only achieving fifteen. The reason for the late start each day was to turn the camels loose to feed in the daylight when they could be watched and rounded up if they strayed. It took two men to load and unload a camel; when camp was pitched the loads were parked in two straight lines and a tent erected. With an often uncertain track to be picked out by the leader, marching at night must have been an eerie experience, sometimes under brilliant starlit heavens, but at other times through dust and snow storms and a howling bitter wind. The track passed by Mongolian encampments which were never permanent but moved according to the state of the grazing for their sheep, goats and camels. Frequently the party met large flocks of sheep numbering six or seven thousand or a herd of five or six hundred ponies on their way from Kobdo and Uliassutai to Kueihua. It took sheep six or seven months and the ponies up to four months to make the journey.

It is unfortunate that Elias's daily journal has not come to light. He would not have laid bare his personal thoughts and feelings, though there might have been hints, but it would have been interesting even to know what he ate, what clothes he wore, or how he dealt with the inevitable lice before the days of Keatings and D.D.T. In his paper he merely said it would be tedious and uninteresting to give a daily account of his journey through a country of so little variety of scene and geographical features as the Mongolian steppes present, and he confined himself to quoting a few extracts from the journal. Francis Younghusband, crossing the same steppes in 1887, gave us a graphic picture when he wrote of 'trudging along beside a string of heavy silent slow-going camels for hour after hour through the night with monotonous regularity'. But that was in summer and even then he noted the great variations in temperature and the bitter winds.

In less than a fortnight Elias was in the true desert of Gobi. The scenery was that of low hills with valleys and plains intervening and mainly rocky or stony, though with patches of sand. The sparse vegetation consisted of weeds, scrub and heath with scarcely any grass and only here and there a stunted tree. The scrub was adequate fodder for camels but his ponies fared badly. Occasionally he saw hares and herds of small gazelle. He found the Mongol encampments changed site so frequently that he soon gave up recording them by dead reckoning. Moreover, the names differed according to the informant; for one Mongol encampment he was given two Chinese and three Mongolian

names. The so-called wells were little better than pools and if he was unlucky enough to arrive at one just after a flock of sheep or a herd of ponies had drunk it dry he had either to camp till the pool refilled or make a forced march to the next.

Of all the caravans he met returning from Kobdo or Uliassutai he enquired for news of the Russian caravan, but without success. Meanwhile his route survey continued satisfactorily by traverse or dead reckoning, which he checked every few days by an observation for latitude. Before starting he had carefully fixed his base for absolute latitude and longitude by astronomical readings. All his courses, heights, times and bearings on objects were noted in a log book, but he drew nothing for fear of incurring suspicion and the ill-will of authorities. He carried two aneroids and at each camp he took from two to forty readings in addition to boiling-point readings. Unfortunately he could not buy in Shanghai a thermometer which registered low enough for the cold encountered. The two he carried only registered down to 12° F which, as he remarked, was useless on the latter part of the journey even at the warmest hour of the day. All this reading and recording must have been laborious in the extreme, especially as he had to do most of it at the end of each day of increasingly exhausting travel. Only those who have experienced extreme cold can appreciate the difficulty and the pain of manipulating metal instruments and writing with bare numbed hands. Stein describes how, when the temperature in his tent fell to 26° F, he could work no more but would crawl into his bed with all his clothes on and with his coat arranged over his head so that he could breathe through the sleeve and prevent icicles forming on his moustache. That would be routine for weeks at a time. Not that Elias even referred to such a personal triviality and besides more serious troubles began to crop up. At the end of September he noted:

'Neither of my men knows the country and we have great trouble finding grass and water, also at night if there is no moon the guide coolly requests me to keep the track for the camels. The camel driver is not supposed to know the road but the other joined as a guide and is more or less an imposter.'

His journal entry for October 10th is interesting. He quoted from it as follows:

'*Thursday, 10 October:* On the morning of the 8th we arrived at the river Onghin, and remained there over the whole of yesterday in order to obtain an observation for the longitude, which I was able to do

pretty successfully by a set of lunar distances east and west. This will be an improvement on the dead-reckoning longitude, though it would have been preferable to have waited for an occulation at so important a position, but none can take place for several days, and the season is so far advanced that every week's delay makes an important difference, for in the most favourable case we cannot even now expect to reach Kul'ja until late in December.

'Some 10 miles before arriving at the river our road joined the "tai-lu" or official track, from China to Uliassutai, via Zaire Ussu, and my observation point on the river is scarcely half a mile above, or to the north-west of, the crossing. The direction of the Onghin for the 7 or 8 miles that I have been able to see is from north-west to south-east, and the natives assert that it continues to flow in the latter direction for a distance equal to about 80 miles. It there loses itself in the desert near a lamasery called Ulansomo, but it does not form a lake. The source, they say, is towards the north-west, but I cannot arrive at any satisfactory estimate of its distance. All the Mongols I caused to be questioned on the subject of the river declared that in no part of its course does it reach to anywhere near Zaire Ussu (as shown in some modern maps), which is, indeed, manifest from our having passed to the westward of that place and never nearer to it than about 200 li (60 miles), and yet have never come upon the river until now.

'The altitude of the Onghin at this point is 4740 feet above the sea; it winds through a flat valley in several branches or loops, and with a current at this season of 3 to 4 miles an hour . . . Thus far all my inquiries regarding Karakorum, and they had been made at every opportunity and in every imaginable form, had proved fruitless – nobody had any idea of ruins existing either on the Onghin or the Orkhon, though I was told of an ancient city on the banks of the Tui, distant only a few days' journey towards the west, and which I determined to visit on the way to Uliassutai, though had I then known the impossibility of its being the remains of Karakorum, I should certainly have made an effort to visit the Upper Orkhon instead. With respect to the position of the latter but little could be elicited here; from my camp in lat. 45° 54′ 29″ and long. 103° 29′, the hills forming the eastern continuation of the Kangais, and which I believe constitute the watershed between the two rivers, were distinctly visible at a distance of about 16 to 20 geographical miles, extending from about NW to NNE; and the direction of the Orkhon, pointed out by the natives, was approximately NNW; but the distance was a subject of the usual vague statements, such as "not far", "two or three days' ride", "a few marches", etc.'

This was the end of his search for the remains of Ugedei's capital. He was not far out in supposing the site to be north of his route on the Orkhon and he plotted it on his map with reasonable accuracy. Many years were to elapse before they were finally rediscovered on that river now called the Orhon and west of Urga; his route had carried him a matter of eighty miles too far to the south.

The next day he had his first serious misfortune. His so-called guide and interpreter slipped away during the night without being heard, taking with him the best and freshest camel and one and a half hundredweights of flour and millet. This was bad enough, but he counted it more serious that it left him dependent for language on his Chinese camel driver from Kuch'eng, who spoke only a few words of Mongol. His strange looking party of four had from the first aroused suspicion among the Mongols, but at least the guide had been able to give an explanation which satisfied them that they were not bandits or escaped criminals. But reduced to three and with camels in such poor condition they looked such vagabonds that the Mongols refused to have anything to do with them, much less offer themselves as guides.

Thus Elias had to find his own way to Uliassutai, still nearly 400 miles ahead. Occasionally he got information from a homeward bound Chinese caravan, such as where to find water and grazing, but, as he remarked, travel under such conditions was an uncertain and anxious pursuit and he never erred on the side of over-statement. In some places the ill-will of the Mongols was shown, as he put it, 'in so decided a manner that it was only by a constant parade of arms and the most careful vigilance by day and night that a collision with them was avoided'. Comparing this experience with those of later travellers, even Peter Fleming might have wished he had something that at least made more noise than his rook rifle. Although, like all Victorian travellers, Elias carried weapons he never had recourse to them except for shooting game. Experience and his intuition warned him when caution was needed. Whilst more than one of his contemporaries was murdered, he himself was never molested and only once was his life in immediate danger, which is a fine record for the solitary traveller he nearly always was.

His route now took him in a westerly direction and crossed in succession three rivers named locally the Tatz, the Tui and the Baitarik. These rivers flowed south from the range of mountains he calls the Kangai, but which in modern Mongol are called the Hangayn Nuruu. It was rugged barren country, the chief habitat of the wild horses and asses. He does not say if he actually saw the former; the latter were the more rare and were extremely wild, but he was able to

observe them from 300 yards and noted that they were dun-coloured, standing about 14·2 hands and larger than the horses. They ran in herds of about thirty and were too fast for the Mongols on their ponies who had to shoot or trap them. He made no mention of wild camels, which at first sight is surprising, for he was in their habitat. Twenty years later came indirect proof that if he did not see them at least he heard of them. In a note in 1895, concerning a description of these animals by the sixteenth-century historian Mirza Muhammad Haidar in the *Tarikh-i-Rashidi*, he wrote: 'In modern times their existence was first reported by an English explorer in 1873 and he was duly laughed to scorn by the naturalists. A few years afterwards they were seen in the Lob region by Prejevalski.' The English explorer can only have been Elias himself. It was not till the 1890's that St G. Littledale shot some specimens.

The next two rivers crossed were the Jabkhan and the Buyantu, and he now entered the mass of mountains which was the source of all these rivers. Before descending into the Uliassutai velley he had to cross a snow-covered pass of 8,000 feet. On November 2nd he entered Uliassutai, fifty-five days of continuous travelling out from Kwei Hua Cheng. He had taken only twenty-two days to cover the 400 odd miles since losing his guide which, considering the condition of his camels and lacking any local help, was a remarkable achievement, since it was little longer than a regular caravan would have taken.

For some days he had heard reports from Mongols of Moslem rebels in the vicinity but these he dismissed as being unreliable. However, the day before reaching the town he perceived a great muster of troops which turned out to be the whole loyal Chinese garrison of Uliassutai, consisting of Amur Tartar or Solon cavalry and Chinese infantry, about 2,000 in all. It must have been a relative relief to be able to talk to the Chinese officers whom he found very polite. This force had gone out to find the rebels, who were expected to attack the town. They returned a week later having failed to find them, owing either to reluctance or to unreliable Mongol information. In fact, the rebels had gone to attack Kobdo, but with determination or better intelligence they could have been forestalled.

To arrive as a stranger in a town which is expecting to be sacked and pillaged at any moment is about as inopportune a time as could befall any traveller. Elias remarked that the alarm created by the departure of the troops had had the effect of disturbing matters very considerably; all the Mongol owners of camels and ponies had fled with their livestock into the hills, so he could not hope to change his own broken-down string. Whenever he mentioned continuing his journey to the south to Kulja, by way of Barkol and Hami, it was

received either with ridicule at his rashness or with suspicion that he had a secret understanding with the Moslems. They had already sacked the town in 1870 and the inhabitants who had survived on that occasion knew only too well what to expect. He was lucky to find in the town eight Russian traders from Biisk, though their friendliness was limited by the language difficulty. They spoke only Mongol and disliked the Chinese heartily, so he found it difficult to pick up information, especially as no subjects could be discussed except those which did not matter if the whole town heard about them. In these chaotic and ominous conditions it was fortunate that the Civil Governor was a Mandarin who had been to Europe with the Burlingame Mission in 1868 and had visited the Queen at Windsor Castle. He was polite enough to ask after Her Majesty, which in such surroundings must have fallen strangely on an English traveller's ears.

Elias stayed a week in Uliassutai and at this point it is interesting to refer to an interview he gave to the *Journal de St Petersbourg* when he reached Russia. It was this *Journal* that first broke the news of his journey. According to the interview Elias was still hoping to join up with the armed Russian caravan of which he had heard in Peking and from which he would get the much needed protection. But the caravan, under the leadership of Morozow, had started, not from Kulja as he had been told in Peking, but from Semipalatinsk, much further west. It had sold some of its goods at Uliassutai but had been refused permission to trade at Barkol and also at Hami; it had therefore travelled to Urumchi and Elias never heard of the change of plan. According to the article the Governor of Uliassutai instructed the relay posts southwards not to supply Elias with ponies or camels. This would have effectively blocked his plan, but in any case, as the rebels had withdrawn southwards, it would have been too risky to follow in their wake. He personally thought the Governor had treated him very well in giving him a Mongol pass and a guide to Kobdo, but this was often a tactful oriental dodge to speed an embarrassing guest safely out of the way. In fact, the only road open was to Kobdo, and his remaining camels were such skeletons that this would be the limit of their endurance.

The article erred in one respect. It said that, owing to damage to his instruments and in order not to upset the Chinese authorities, he took no further observations after Uliassutai. This was not correct, for he continued them right up to the frontier and well beyond it.

He set out again on November 10th, following the Jabkan river for eight days. The guide proved so troublesome that he abandoned him in the desert and so for the second time he was left to find his own way. Disquieting rumours now reached him that the Moslem rebels had

been seen marching towards Kobdo and he began to meet Mongol families fleeing from the south-west with all their flocks, herds and yourts towards the hills north of the river. Skirting the Baka and Turgen lakes he entered a range of shifting sandhills dangerous for camels, devoid of pasture and through which it was difficult to find the way. Even the best caravans expected to lose camels in these hills and he must have done well to get his starved animals through without loss.

Passing the south-west end of the Turgen he received the alarming news that the rebels had sacked Kobdo three days previously and were now camped not far off. He spent an anxious night, for his position would have been hopeless if they had caught him in the open and it was a relief to learn the next day that they had withdrawn southwards. Two days later he crossed the frozen Kara lake and late on November 28th, eighteen days out from Uliassutai, he reached Kobdo. That night he camped outside without fodder or fuel. Next morning a glance was enough to confirm the reports of the plunder and slaughter. The Chinese had buried their dead, but Mongol bodies, charred yourts and clothing lay everywhere; many of the bodies had been beheaded and mutilated, which was the customary Moslem way of treating unbelievers. He could see soldiers suspiciously observing his party from the fortress walls, but no one came near him. So desperate was his plight that he was preparing to send his servant up to the city gate with his passport when an old Mongol woman, herself starving, offered for the consideration of a meal to act as go-between and soon some soldiers arrived with a few armfuls of fodder. He was instructed to camp inside the settlement where he was promised all the grass, fuel and water he needed. Ignoring safety, his first thought was of the difficulty of carrying on his geographical work under the eyes of the authorities. He visited the Secretary, a Pekingese, who would not allow him to see the Amban, as the old gentleman's nerves had been somewhat severely shaken by recent events and he had an understandable fear of strangers. However, he was promised the necessities of life and camels to take him to the border which, now that all hope of travelling south was ended, was just what he desired. He would have liked to stay longer to continue his observations, but all his reasoning was of no avail. He was told he had come well recommended and the Amban felt it his duty to send him on as quickly as possible to the border, for if anything happened to him the Amban would be held responsible; so for the second time he was to be speeded out of the way.

Kobdo was of course looted, burnt and almost entirely deserted. The Chinese soldiery had evidently not felt it was worth risking their lives for the sake of a few traders and Mongols, so they had shut

themselves safely up in the fortress and the Amban had planted his pieces of artillery in a semi-circle right in front of his Yamen. The return of the rebels was always possible and there was near panic among the remaining inhabitants. Consequently, executions for trivial offences were taking place daily; everyone who could not give a good reason for being there was suspected of being in league with the rebels. Altogether, Kobdo was an unhealthy spot and no one but Elias would have wanted to stay an hour longer than was necessary. The Russians had maintained a trading post and all but two traders had left the night before the rebels arrived. From these two who had remained in the fortress he learned the details of the sacking. The Moslems had consisted of at most 200 armed men, whilst the Chinese had 750 infantry and nearly 1,000 cavalry. But the rebels had panicked the Chinese into believing them to be much stronger by driving a thousand camels before them, a most effective exploitation of the Birnam Wood technique. The Chinese infantry let off one volley and then withdrew hastily into a joss-house. The Tatar cavalry started to charge yelling vociferously and then, wheeling across the enemy's front, continued their wheel until it took them not altogether fortuitously straight back into the fortress, where they remained. The rebels did not lose a single man, but having no guns they left the fortress alone and set to work to burn the rest of the town, including women and children, whilst the Chinese garrison lined the fortress walls for a grandstand view of the proceedings.

After three days living under the close scrutiny of customs officials, but apparently able to work without upsetting them, he was told that guides and animals would be ready next day. As his camels were incapable of going a stage further and he was at the end of his supplies, he was at the mercy of the Amban for both animals and the necessities of life, so there was no alternative but to depart, which he did on December 3rd, heading across the Altai range for Suok, a Chinese border post 180 miles to the north-west. For three days he was crossing a confused mass of mountains, over passes of 7,000 to 8,000 feet. From the last pass, which he called the Hongorellen, snow-clad peaks stretched north and south for as far as the eye could see. After this there was a gradual descent till he reached the Kobdo river and on December 11th he arrived at Suok, seventy-nine stages out from Kueihua. On this last leg he had averaged twenty-three miles a day which, allowing for the three days crossing the Altai, can be accounted very fast travelling. At Suok China maintained a military post of a Chinese officer and ten Mongol soldiers. Its authority was nil, for it dared not oppose the comings and goings of the Kazak, Kalmak and Mongol tribesmen living on either side of the border, who were a

constant source of trouble to China and Russia alike, and professional sheep stealers and camel lifters.

The nearest Russian settlement was on the Chui, nearly fifty miles due north of Suok and it took him another four days to reach it, crossing the natural boundary of the western Altai on the way. He does not, of course, disclose his feelings on leaving the Chinese Empire behind; the reader may perhaps reflect what his own would be after such a journey. At the settlement on the Chui he fell in with the Russian traders who had left Kobdo before the attack on December 19th. Too late now for the protection of their caravan, but surely none too soon for some companionship, he travelled with them down the Chui and Katune valleys. The party reached Biisk, the terminus of the post road, on January 4, 1873. He had carried on his observations right up to this point almost 300 miles inside Russian territory, apparently without incurring any displeasure; the Russians must have been more tolerant towards explorers in those days than subsequently. At Biisk he ended his narrative, but it was no no means the end of his journey. Still before him was a matter of another 2,300 miles, by post road, to Nijni Novgorod (Gorky), where the railway began. This was nearly as far again as from Peking to Suok, though he said nothing about it at the time except that with his usual forethought he had obtained a Russian visa which entitled him to use the troika-drawn sleighs, the primitive official post service. Captain Burnaby, who rode to Khiva that same winter, has given a vivid description of the hardships he encountered. Twenty years later Elias happened to mention that he had had to camp out during the whole journey. This was in Siberia . . . and in mid-winter when losing the way in a blizzard could well result in the passengers freezing to death.

It may seem almost a betrayal to guess at what might have flooded through his mind when at last he sat in a warm Russian train, the sort of train described for us by Tolstoy, but after such a journey as his there must have been a considerable reaction. Travellers react in different ways according to their temperaments. Lattimore, for example, at the end of his own journey across Mongolia, was nostalgic: 'I have been a traveller' was how he put it. But more than one writer has noted how often Elias spoke disparagingly of his own work and if that denotes a masochistic tendency the probability is his feelings were of failure rather than success. So perhaps he would have begun by recalling that he had failed to find the capital of Ugedei and failed to reach Ili which had been his two stated objectives. But then he could refer to his journal and his log books and even he could not deny the facts they contained. He had crossed a territory as large as Western Europe and since leaving Peking the previous July he had travelled

almost 2,500 miles from the Great Wall to the Russian frontier as well as the further 2,300 miles to Nijni Novgorod. He had recorded 231 astronomical observations for latitude and longitude and 106 altitudes between Kalgan and Biisk, either by boiling point or aneroid observation, giving a section of the whole route of nearly 2,000 miles. He had carried out a continuous traverse between Kuei Hua Cheng and Suok, a distance of about 1,340 miles, without intermission. Reference to his published tables shows that he took an average of two readings on every day of his journey, in addition to recording the height, the wind and (except when it fell below 12° F) the temperature. Even at Kobdo, Uliassutai and Biisk he had contrived to keep up his daily routine. When he reached England he took all his instruments and readings to Kew Observatory for correction and calculation. Some of the instruments proved faulty and the readings had to be recalculated but the resulting corrected map was a beautiful example of accurate draughtsmanship. In addition to the meteorological data he also brought back a quantity of geological specimens, which were duly identified by an expert on his return.

Today the work he undertook would have been carried out by a team of specialists with all the benefits of modern instruments, tents and clothing. For one man to have achieved what he did in the face not only of all the usual risks but the added dangers arising from the rebellion, was a feat such as could only have been carried through by very great personal resolve, and it must be added, a good measure of luck.

In May 1873 Ney Elias should have stood with Henry Morton Stanley before the Royal Geographical Society to receive their awards, but Stanley was absent so Elias had to face the ordeal alone. The President, Sir Henry Rawlinson, addressed him as one of the Society's most accomplished and successful travellers. He referred to his indefatigable industry, not only on his recent journey but on his Yellow River survey, and said he had 'performed one of the most extraordinary journeys of modern times and which would live in the memory of geographers after travels which were the mere record of personal adventure have been long forgotten'. He over-estimated the memory of geographers, but otherwise it was a fair appraisal. Even Elias, perfectionist that he was (true to form he referred in his reply to his failure to carry out the journey as originally planned), must have felt elated that his achievement was recognized, that at that moment he was on a pinnacle he might never stand on again. The newspapers too hailed the exploit in similar glowing terms, indeed they gave him as much space as Stanley, and this was at a time when the furore over the latter's discovery of Livingstone was still at its height. There was

something about this shy retiring man and his lonely exploit which captured the imagination.

Less than three months after his return to England he wrote three long letters to the *Manchester Guardian* under the heading 'The Closed Markets of the East'. In form they were complete articles, for each occupied a full column, but the method enabled him to sign them. No doubt it was important just then to draw discreet attention to himself, for he had no idea what he was going to do next and the subject might lead to an offer of employment. The first letter dealt with the possibilities of trade with Korea and Tibet. Remarkably little was known in Europe about the former, not even the precise relationship with China. The Korean Government was said to be tributary, but Elias believed that the triennial deputation of tribute bearers to Peking was merely an embassy for political purposes and that in reality the Government of Korea was entirely independent, as there was a neutral zone of about thirty miles between the two countries and Chinese merchants were never allowed to pass beyond it. He was probably right. We in the West had never understood the relationship between China and the countries on her borders; a protocol of a kind existed and there was in Peking an official list of tributaries and what was expected of them, but there never seem to have been anything like written treaties. As far as possibilities of trade were concerned he thought that we were in a favourable position to benefit by the mistakes of a French failure in 1866 and one by the Americans in 1871, and he did not see why we should allow ourselves to be forestalled by Russia everywhere in Asia despite her geographical advantages.

Tibet was a country even more firmly sealed against the foreigner, but it was then generally believed that China exercised something like colonial rule over her, as in Chinese Turkestan, and that it was the policy of Peking rather than of Lhasa to keep the foreigner out. How much of the control was bluff and how much real power was far from clear, for there was only a handful of Chinese troops in Lhasa, little more than a guard for the Chinese Resident, who was his Government's representative in the capital. It was believed, however, that the Chinese were not popular either with the Lamas or with the people and Elias thought that like the Moslems in Eastern Turkestan the Tibetans might one day call China's bluff. He did not see much chance of developing profitable trade relations with Tibet under existing conditions; at this stage he felt it was a country for the explorer rather than the merchant and he had strong hopes of exploring there himself. The Abbé Huc and his companion Gabet were still the only Europeans

to have reached Lhasa in the nineteenth century, but they were concerned only with matters spiritual and not at all with politics or trade, and the need to learn more about this country lying between India and China was very great.

His next letter dealt with Mongolia and he could therefore write with first-hand knowledge. Wherever he travelled he had a keen eye for the possibilities of trade development, the one aptitude he had acquired from his spell with the family firm. But even he could see little opportunity for trade with Mongolia. The Mongols were nomads and pastoralists who produced all they wanted by way of food and clothing, and they needed little else. Drill cloths were imported through China and Russia, but they had little to offer in return except camel wool and hides. Moreover, English merchants would be exasperated by the long and complicated barter process, for all Mongol wealth was in livestock, and a bale of cloth would be valued at so many horses or sheep, changing hands many times before it reached its destination by caravan.

His last letter dealt with Dzungaria, a region of particular interest to him because in it lay the district of Ili, with its capital Kulja, which he had been unable to reach. China had by now lost practically the whole of Dzungaria either to the Russians, who occupied Ili in 1871, or to the Moslems under Yakub Beg, who for the past two years had dominated almost all the rest. It looked as though something of a carve-up was taking place in Chinese Turkestan between the Russians and Yakub Beg, but as a result there was a fair measure of peace and after years of disorder trade was returning. Elias saw the lion's, or rather the bear's, share of trade and influence going to Russia, but he also saw the possibilities of developing trade with India through Kashgaria which had now been under Yakub Beg's control for seven years. Tea was the commodity which he thought India should offer, being easily transportable by caravan and likely to prove cheaper on delivery than the traditional tea in 'bricks' imported from China, which was poor in quality and expensive after its long journey.

Shortly afterwards he translated an article in the German *Russische Revue* by the well-known Russian Orientalist W. Radlov who had twice been to Ili. This threw some light on events there and tended to confirm Wade's earlier view that Russian occupation of the province was not part of the expansionist plans. The population in the fertile Ili valley was a mixed one of many tribes and China had thought it worth while to maintain as many as 25,000 troops there to keep the peace which she contrived on the principle of *divide et impera.* But in 1863 the successful Moslem rebellion in Shensi followed by Kansu, Szechuan and Yunnan had brought the Ili tribes out in sympathy. Cut off from

China, the occupation army appealed to Russia for help, but when this was not forthcoming they lost heart and shut themselves up in their forts. Kulja fell with fearful massacre and thereafter became a shuttlecock between rival Tungan and Taranchi tribesmen. Russia tolerated this for six years until, exasperated by the comings and goings of refugees and lawless bands across her borders, she told China in effect, 'either you pacify Ili or we will', and this was how the Russian occupation of 1872 came about. Wade was finally proved right when China recovered control of Dzungaria in 1877 and Russia yielded up most of Ili by the Treaty of Livadia.

By the end of 1873 there was still no work in sight for Elias. He had shown his ability as a geographer and also as a student of the politics of China and Central Asia but without backing neither of these could provide a livelihood, even with the help of his small private means. His training in commerce had been useful but his breakaway was final, and to go back to it would be unthinkable. However, in 1874 his problem resolved itself. On the recommendation of Sir Henry Rawlinson, who was a member of the India Council and President of the Geographical Society, he was accepted as an Extra Attaché by the Foreign Department of the Government of India. Setting out for Calcutta, he must have had many misgivings, for he realized he might never again be a free lance to follow up the exploring projects he had in mind.

Chapter IV

THE THIRD EXPEDITION

The Burma-Yunnan Mission

Elias had not been many months in Calcutta before he began to feel restless. The post of Extra Attaché might lead to anything or nothing and for the first time he was no longer his own master. He wrote with evident anxiety about himself: 'I am being gradually boiled down to a shred in this detestable climate and rendered unfit for work.' This was his first serious reference to his health, which was to trouble him throughout his career. It may be significant that now, as later, it especially affected him during a period of frustration.

One task at least was congenial to him; this was translating from the German, articles in the *Russische Revue* on Central Asian affairs. In a paper for the Royal Geographical Society on Prejevalski's expedition of 1871–3 to Koko Nor in Northern Tibet, Lob Nor and across the Ordos desert, Elias criticized Prejevalski's geographical accuracy and considered the Abbé Huc had plotted his route more accurately. In an article in the *Russische Revue*, Prejevalski stuck to his findings and disagreed with Elias's vindication of Huc. His translation of this article was printed by the Foreign Department as an official publication, as were several others.

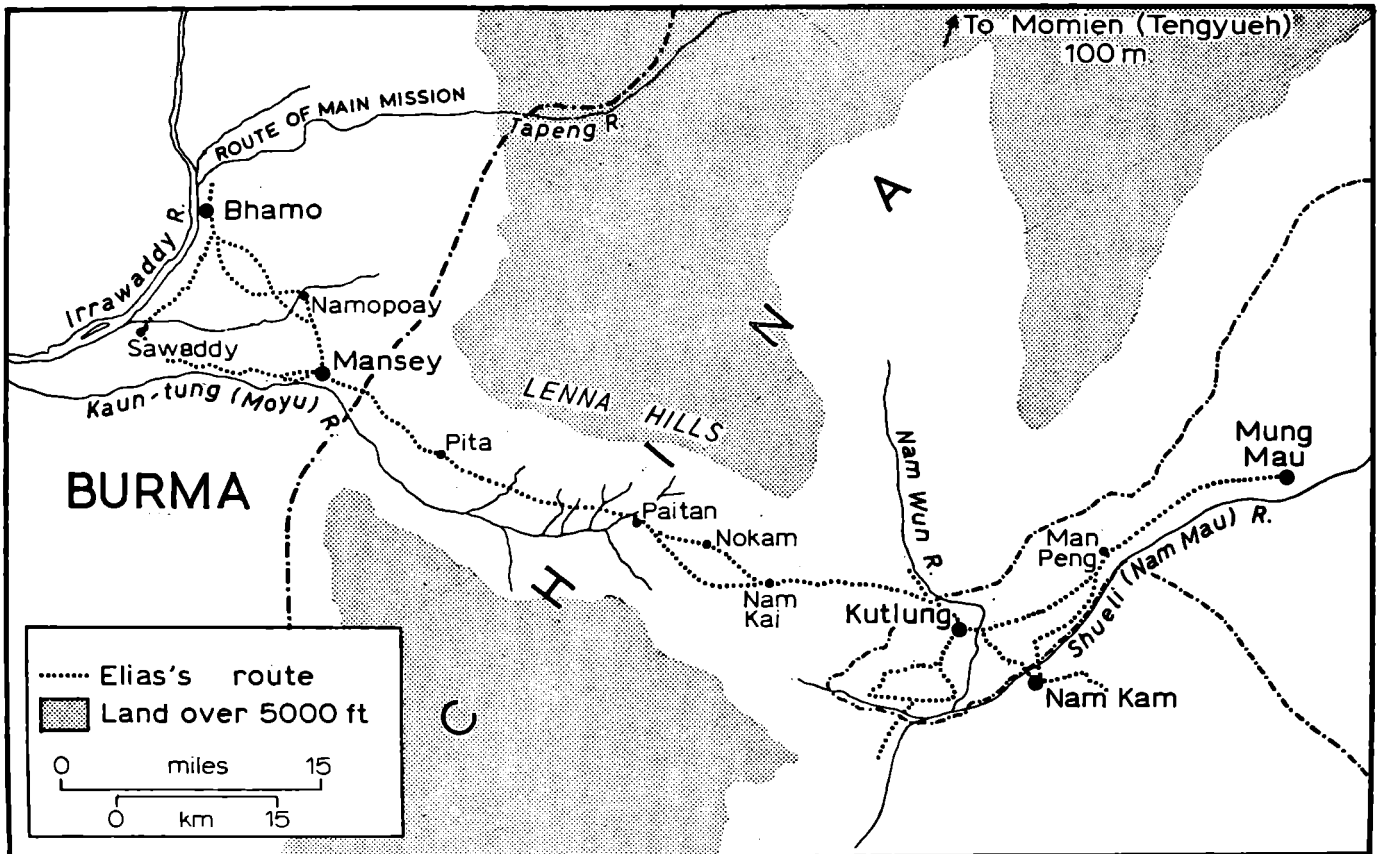
Foremost in his thoughts at this time was his own project for an extensive geographical exploration of Tibet. Before he left England he had outlined his plan to the Royal Geographical Society, but it was more than he could afford and the Society's own funds were fully committed. He was encouraged, therefore, to read in an Indian newspaper that 'provided he receives the countenance of the Government he was about to enter Tibet, and that should such a measure of success attend this as his former effort there appears little doubt but that material advantages will accrue to British enterprise and trade'. He wrote hastily to the Society to ask what this might mean and gave his proposals in more detail. He said as regards the Indian side nothing could be done. The only way in was from Mongolia and even then one could not hope to reach Lhasa in any satisfactory position. The really interesting country, was the great *terra incognita* to the north. The sources of the Yellow River and the Yangtze, Lake Lob, the

much-disputed Kunlun mountains, the buried cities of the Gobi, the routes of the Buddhist pilgrims and of Marco Polo, were all matters that could be investigated by exploring either side of a line from Sining in West China to Rudok near the Pangong Lake. He advocated a naturalist to accompany him who should be a doctor if possible, for western medicine was a splendid passport among Asiatics. Peking would be the starting point and he particularly asked that the newspapers should not be told anything till he was well under way. 'For all such things are copied in Russia and noted in China, in fact there is hardly a savage in the world who can boast half a yard of calico or sheepskin who does not get at the contents of newspapers by some means.'

His plans were ambitious but carefully thought out. Just how the Indian newspaper got its inkling is not apparent, but it was obviously not due to any leakage by Elias. What he could not have known was that at about this time Lord Salisbury had conceived a plan to send a trade mission to Tibet. Wade in Peking, whose views were sought, replied that it was a good idea in principle but that the times were not propitious. He reminded the Foreign Secretary that the traveller T. T. Cooper had been turned back three times by the Chinese when trying to enter Tibet from Szechuan, Yunnan and also from India, and he thought his only chance was to bring the subject up casually with the Chinese. He did not mention Elias though he must have known of his plan; instead he recommended E. C. Baber, one of his own consular officers, if and when an expedition should be sent. This was the end of the matter and of Elias's hopes for the time being. In any case it was geographical exploration and not a trade mission that was in his mind.

Meanwhile he suffered a second disappointment. He had heard that the Foreign Secretary had sanctioned a survey or exploration of the routes from Burma into Western China. He had reason to believe he would be in charge of the party which would be a small one; but at the last moment for various minor reasons Lord Northbrook changed his mind. With another hope thus dashed he was left still waiting for something to turn up and meanwhile living on an attaché's allowance which was much too small an inducement for him to hold on *ad infinitum*. His state of mind can be imagined when he wrote: 'Life is too short nowadays and too uncertain when passed in flea and mosquito haunted hotels in Calcutta.' As it turned out he did not have long to wait before things began to happen, though they were not the kind of geographical exploration he had set his heart on.

In September of that year he was posted to Mandalay in Upper Burma as Assistant Resident. Here he soon had further news of an expedition to Western China and learned that he would be asked to



4. Burma: The Shueli River Survey

join it. The expedition was going to be much larger than he had envisaged and he had grave misgivings about accepting. He wrote:

'I could not undertake to serve under some consular fellow. I might make the sacrifice on such a point, but geographically speaking it is not an interesting expedition, nearly all the ground having been covered by the Jesuits in the last century and the French expedition of 1868. When one has been accustomed always to being one's own master in matters of this kind it is difficult to reconcile oneself to serving under two or three masters who are seen for the first time a fortnight perhaps before the expedition starts.'

As an experienced lone traveller he had learned to trust his own judgment rather than others and he was not the kind of man to fit happily into a team. He finally accepted the offer to join as second in command and geographer, and as matters turned out he must have bitterly regretted it. He did however bring off one satisfactory private arrangement. All the Foreign Office correspondence for years past on the subject of opening up trade with Western China had lately passed through his hands and he was, as he said, pretty well up on it. On the strength of his knowledge and his reputation for reliability *The Times* agreed to his suggestion made through the Geographical Society that he should act as its correspondent on the expedition. Unfortunately the first article was published too late to influence the planning; it was very realistic and if it had only reached London earlier it might have prompted some searching questions in Parliament.

To go back no further than 1853 the second Anglo-Burmese war and the accession of Mindon as King of Burma in the same year had resulted in the British annexation of the province of Pegu and this, added to earlier annexations, effectively divided the country into British and Upper Burma with the King now only fully independent in the latter. The added territory was of considerable benefit to British business interests, but with the need to expand their markets still further these interests naturally continued to press the Government at home to give still greater opportunity for increasing trade in Burma, hoping ultimately to reach the rich untapped markets of Western China. In 1860 several Chambers of Commerce had combined to urge the venture of opening up overland communications and their representations resulted in 1862 in a Trade Treaty with Burma which, had it operated, would have given all the necessary facilities for trade with China through Upper Burma on terms which should have benefited both countries. During the next dozen years, however, it became increasingly obvious that none of the hoped-for benefits were accruing

and that the King himself and the Burmese and Chinese traders in Upper Burma were determined to maintain their own rich monopolies. Mindon was an astute monarch, as he had to be to maintain his rule as long as he did in the face of so many opposing interests, but the Burmese are charming people and the King himself must in many ways have been a likeable and certainly a colourful man, sitting on a throne of oriental splendour with his peacocks and his white elephants. One of his closest British advisers married a Burmese lady, and there were those among the British in Burma who believed implicitly in his frequent protestations of friendship with Britain. But under pressure he had already ceded half his country and must have foreseen he might lose the rest, so it is hard to see how his friendship could be deeply sincere. Naturally he practised the Eastern art of procrastination in the hope that time would be on his side and naturally the British traders loudly complained. He had not only Britain to deal with but China as well. The ties between Burma as a tributary state and China as suzerain were not historically very strong, and he was now seeking the opportunity to strengthen them. Round his own borders he had always to deal with Kachin and Shan tribes in constantly varying stages of friendship, unrest and open hostility. Finally, he had more than one rebellion to put down during his reign including one led by his own son. In short it can be said that he had plenty of practice in diplomacy.

There were several recognized trade routes from Upper Burma into Western China. The least known led from Mandalay north-eastwards across the Salween, entering Yunnan at Kunlong. The others all started from or near Bhamo on the Irrawaddy, hence this town had become an important *entrepôt* for the Burma–Yunnan trade. Here were gathered the principal Burmese and Chinese traders who were men of considerable influence, and doubtless since the King derived valuable revenues from them they had an efficient grapevine leading to the Court at Mandalay. It had been an important aim of the British to establish an Agent at Bhamo to develop trade, just as we maintained a Resident at Mandalay; for long the King opposed it on the grounds that steamers could not navigate the river and only when that pretence could no longer be maintained did he reluctantly give in and sanction the appointment of a British Agent. From their point of view the King and the traders can hardly be blamed for obstructing the process of infiltration.

With the British pressing him the King became the more anxious to make some demonstration of his loyalty to China. But China had her own troubles at this time. Chief of these was the Moslem rising already mentioned, which had began in 1855 in Yunnan, the province contiguous with the whole of Burma's north-eastern border. Just as

in Eastern Turkestan these Moslems, who were locally called Panthays, were not indigenous Chinese but were of Turki and perhaps also of Arab stock. They were not popular with the native Chinese, being better and more active merchants and, as befitted their religion, more militant. When they became too powerful the Peking Government employed its own harsh means of cutting them down to size. This was what had provoked the present rebellion but the Manchus were now too weak to stamp it out and at the time of these events about three-quarters of Yunnan, including the capital of Talifu, was in Panthay hands and remained in their hands for eighteen years. Neither in London nor in Calcutta was there any realization of the effects on the province of these years of devastation and massacre, quite apart from the complete disruption of normal trade. Peking is a long way from Talifu and perhaps this is why even Wade never seems to have appreciated conditions in the province. British commercial interests neither knew them, nor, if they had known them would they have cared; they continued to clamour for opportunities to trade through Burma into Western China until their voices were heard in Whitehall.

The first practical result was that in 1866 Lord Cranborne (later Lord Salisbury), the then Secretary of State for India, authorized a survey for a railway to lead direct from Rangoon to the Chinese border. Before it was finished a change of Government and a new Secretary of State, the cautious Lord Ripon, led to the cancellation of the survey and a generally more cautious approach towards seeking for trade outlets in China. Nevertheless in 1868, with relations with the King of Burma leading supposedly towards his better appreciation of the importance of improving trade, a new effort was made. Some urgency was now added to it by the fear that the French in Cambodia might reach Yunnanese markets before ourselves.

The effort this time took the form of a trade mission led by Major Sladen, who was our Resident at Mandalay, to try to reach Talifu. The King professed his support of the enterprise but it was not thought necessary to apply for Chinese passports. British members of the party were only three in number, with Dr Anderson as medical officer and naturalist; even so it needed over a hundred baggage mules besides Kachin bearers, and the King insisted on providing an armed escort of fifty Burmese police to escort the party through the tribal area. Setting out from Bhamo the mission met with repeated difficulties with its transport and the hostility of the local tribes was so consistent that it became obvious there was intentional obstruction. Not only was it attacked by tribesmen but once across the border it had to beat off an attack by Chinese led by one Li Hsi Tai, of whom we hear much more later. Sladen then found he was only able to make further progress

by appealing to the Panthay rebels themselves. These were only too delighted to help the expedition since they saw the prospects of trade which would help to sustain their hold on the province. Nevertheless, after waiting a month at Momien (now Tengyueh), 140 miles from Bhamo and only half way to Talifu, and still fearing attack from the tribes in his rear Sladen decided it was wise to withdraw, which he did in safety. British traders, of course, blamed him for being over-cautious, and significantly the King had him removed from his post of Resident at Mandalay, because, he said, although he liked him his people did not. Dr Anderson subsequently described the journey in a book, *From Mandalay to Momien*, in which he brought out very clearly the lessons to be learned, but unfortunately he did not publish it till 1875. Nevertheless, the lessons were fully drawn in Sladen's official reports and, although this expedition can hardly be blamed for its lack of current intelligence, there could be no excuses for any future expedition being despatched without a careful assessment of the local situation by experts. Meanwhile, Sladen's eclipse was certainly a success for the King and his merchants at Bhamo.

It was believed at the time that the success of the Panthays was likely to be complete and permanent and that in their willingness to co-operate lay the best prospects for the promotion of trade. To this end Captain Strover, the new Resident at Mandalay, established friendly relations with the leaders. As events turned out, the rebellion was at its zenith at the time of the Sladen mission and the relatively sudden eclipse of the fortunes of the Panthays only proves the ephemeral nature of so many rebellions in the East. A new commander assumed control, who was an influential Yunnanese landlord, fortunately uninhibited by any military training whatever in the historic art of Chinese warfare. Furthermore, he had the assistance of some European officers. The consequence was that by May 1873 he had fully reconquered the whole of Yunnan. But just as the authorities in India and at home had ignored the political situation in 1868 so they quite failed to comprehend the new situation. Another change of Government had brought Lord Salisbury back to his former office; he decided to carry on where he had left off and Mr (by now Sir Thomas) Wade was asked for his views on the feasibility of a new mission. Wade had not yet reported the recovery of Yunnan (he did not do so till August 1873 following an announcement in the Chinese *Imperial Gazette*). He showed therefore a lack of comprehension which was unusual for him when he replied that he saw no harm in such a mission provided too much was not expected of it. He only remarked that it might meet with some local obstruction.

As time went on there were increasing signs of conflict between the

Indian and British Governments and the India Office at home. Although India was keen enough on sending a mission it seems likely that only a small exploring party was envisaged, and possibly it was at this stage that the Viceroy had Elias in mind to lead it. But the Foreign Office at home had more ambitious plans in hand for a full-scale expedition, and very likely this was the rock on which Elias's hopes foundered. It would also explain why the Indian Government, at no time very sanguine as to possible results, noticeably dragged its feet during the preparations. So much so that as late as November there is a peevish side-note by Lord Salisbury on a despatch from Calcutta: 'This is the first time we have been told anything. At last we have been told what are the objects of this expedition.'

By August 1874 the plans had begun to take shape. Sir Thomas Wade had obtained passports for the mission and only then was the King of Burma informed of the proposal. This subterfuge gave him no open chance to oppose it as he would doubtless have preferred. Also in August Wade sent a long memorandum to the Viceroy; in it he recommended that a Chinese speaking Consular Officer, Augustus Margary, should travel overland across China to meet the mission at the border and accompany it thereafter. He warned that the mission should confine itself to exploring the possible trade routes and not enter into any trade negotiations with Provincial Governors which would compromise them with their own Government. He deprecated the attachment of a Burmese Agent as it would arouse Chinese suspicion, and for the same reason he was strongly against any topographical survey operations. Finally, he thought that the proposed date of departure in November was too soon to allow adequate briefing of the Chinese authorities, especially in the provinces concerned.

Time was short indeed. To reach the border in time, Margary would have to leave at the beginning of September bringing with him the duplicate passports for the party. Yet it was only in August that the Government of India had notified Wade that the hitherto unexplored Theinnee route from Mandalay would be followed and that the members would be Colonel Horace Browne in command, with Ney Elias as second in command, Anderson probably as medical officer, and Margary as interpreter.

In spite of the short notice, Margary departed on time from Shanghai. He had been gone a week before it occurred to someone in India that he might be delayed or even fail to make the rendezvous, and that without him the mission could not start. An urgent attempt was then made to recall him and send him by sea to Rangoon, but it was too late. Another interpreter, Mr Allen, was sent post haste by sea from Shanghai to join the mission. A more serious trouble arose

when the King objected to the proposed Theinnee route on the grounds that dacoity was rife in the area and that he could not vouch for the Mission's safety. An objection of some kind on his part might have been anticipated but no one thought to check the grounds. However, in deference to his wishes this route was dropped but the choice of another presented all kinds of difficulties.

At the same time the King played another card the significance of which was completely overlooked. As Yunnan was now safely in Imperialist hands he announced that in accordance with his tributary obligations he was about to dispatch an Ambassador to Peking with the customary train of officials carrying presents to the Emperor. By tradition this dignitary would set out from Bhamo along the route known as the Embassy Road, which was one of the only three choices left for our own mission. Just what hints the Ambassador would drop about our own mission following so closely on his heels might well have been guessed. At the very least it would have little prestige in Chinese eyes. To make more certain, the King intimated his wish that it should follow the same road and said that in so doing he would give it all possible help. Once again the Indian Government complied. The only man who saw through the King's manoeuvre was Elias, who seems to have summed up his duplicity very early in the proceedings. So suspicious was he that, had he been put in command, he would have stipulated that the mission should start from Mandalay, whence it could follow the trade route to Kunlong, passing through tribal areas actually hostile to the King and thus ensuring immunity from his interference. But the Government of India rejected this route at the outset in favour of the Theinnee route and on grounds precisely the opposite of those which Elias would have put forward in its favour if he had been consulted.

By this time Elias had met Colonel Browne at Calcutta. He must have wondered why a man who had spent the past twenty years in Burma and had never before undertaken an expedition should have been chosen to lead one into and quite possibly across China; for his instructions left it open to him either to return to Burma or to continue the expedition to Shanghai as he thought fit. However, it was in his favour that he said he would leave it to Elias not only to collect the necessary transport but to choose the most suitable of the remaining routes for the expedition.

Passing through Mandalay en route for Bhamo, Elias posted his first despatch to *The Times* on November 26th. In it he wrote, perhaps with his tongue in his cheek:

'The party will consist of four officers and a somewhat numerous

native following designed less for any materially useful object than for the purpose of adding to the prestige of the Envoy and of maintaining the traditional splendour of Indian Missions.'

He continued:

'The start from Bhamo will, it is thought, be made towards the end of December and though everything so far looks auspicious for the movements of the mission in both countries it can scarcely be anticipated that no difficulties will arise. Native rumour, sufficiently absurd in itself, has been aroused, and unfounded though it may be it carries all the force of fact in the Asiatic mind and will lose none of its weight by being spread beforehand along the path of the expedition by the influential Burmese officials composing the King's Embassy to Peking just now on the point of departing from Bhamo. I have no wish to anticipate obstacles but the circumstances of the Burmese Embassy immediately preceding the British Mission is a matter seriously to be taken to account. For slight as may be the influence exerted by Burma upon the Chinese Government under ordinary circumstances yet when added to the natural wariness of the local officials and heightened by the promptings of the provincial merchants who have vested interests in the overland trade, it would require little to convert any reasonably friendly attitude into one of cold unconcern if not of passive resistance.'

He ended his despatch with a warning 'against too sanguine expectations of a sudden opening up of new markets but that viewed as an exploratory mission to collect trustworthy information a fair measure of success might be confidently predicted.' In an earlier part he had clearly hinted that he did not trust the King's motives in vetoing the Theinnee route and in recommending instead that the mission should be dispatched from Bhamo, thus to follow immediately on the heels of his own royal Embassy, elephants and all. Altogether his article showed a realism entirely lacking in the official plans, in none of which is there any sign of an attempt to assess the political situation or to weigh the risks against the possible advantages. It was not only *The Times* which sounded the warning of possible trouble ahead. On January 1, 1875, the influential *Times of India* carried a report on the objects and composition of the mission. It appears in Elias's cutting book and, though that is not proof that he actually wrote it, it reads as though he must have provided all the information. Referring to the King it said:

'The Mandalay autocrat has promised that he will afford the mission every assistance in his power, but double dealing is recognized as a high-class political virtue north of the boundary line which separates

British from independent Burma. Fortunately however the King's influence for evil, should it have been secretly employed against the Mission, is of little consequence. The only obstacles he could throw in the way would be to issue private instructions to the Woon of Bhamo forbidding him to furnish the party with carriage and otherwise to make himself passively obstructive.'

This was a blunt and as it turned out prescient statement.

When Elias reached Bhamo he found his freedom of choice of route withdrawn by a telegraphic instruction that the Embassy route, as it was known, had been decided upon. But when he and Captain Cooke, the Agent at Bhamo, called on the local Burmese and Kachin tribal authorities for help they met with a blank refusal to co-operate on the grounds that, having only just passed the King's Embassy through their territory, they could not possibly deal with another large party. It was just as Elias had foreseen and no doubt what the King intended, hoping thereby to stop the Mission altogether. It would have been better if he had, but there was no thought at the time of possible treachery in the minds of the authorities.

There were now only two alternative routes left. The first was called the Northern road. It followed the Tapeng River, reaching Momien just beyond the Chinese border, where it merged with the Embassy route and led thence to Talifu. This route had been the one taken by Colonel Sladen, but his unpleasant experiences ruled it out of consideration this time and, besides, it had already been fairly fully surveyed. This left only the unknown Southern or Sawaddy road, so called because it started from a village on the Irrawaddy a few miles south of Bhamo. It was really a loop road, for it, too, merged with the others at Momien. In Elias's eyes it had the advantage that it passed through the territory of the Lennas, a sub-tribe of the Kachins, who were hostile to the Burmese. Thus he hoped not only to avoid taking along the 300 Burmese irregulars which the King was insisting he must provide as a guard, but also to circumvent any more attempts by the King to influence the choice of route for his own nefarious reasons. Accordingly, he set off for Mansey, a small town on the border, on December 9th and once he had assured the Lenna tribe that the mission was English and that no Burmese would accompany it he was able without difficulty to complete his contract for 150 bullocks and twenty ponies to be at Sawaddy before January 15, 1875. They duly arrived on January 13, 1875, and on January 15th the commander arrived at Bhamo.

His preparations had gone well so far, but he was now in for a series of disappointments. Browne at once began to show his short-

comings as a leader by throwing all the preliminary plans into chaos. Though he approved of starting from Sawaddy, he now wanted to follow a minor track which had been previously reconnoitred by a native member of the Sladen mission, and not the main route chosen by Elias, even though it was explained to him by the Agent of Bhamo, Captain Cooke, that the transport had been hired on the specific understanding that this route would be followed. He then said the Kachin officials must be brought to Bhamo so that he could consult them about baggage loadings. In vain Cooke protested that this course would wreck the plans because these Kachins were hostile to the Burmese. When the headmen declined, as expected, to go by the minor track, Browne forced them to sign an undertaking to hold their animals at Sawaddy. He said they must wait there whilst he repacked the baggage, again ignoring Cooke's warnings that they were already fed up with waiting twelve days at their own expense and that he expected they would depart.

As if he had not already caused enough confusion and ill-will, Browne now made an even bigger mistake. Having previously agreed to dispense with the enormous Burmese guard, he changed his mind and decided he must take them after all, in order to show the importance of the mission. The headmen had been assured the mission would be purely English, with only a small Sikh body guard and no Burmese; if the Burmese guard were taken, not only would they be afraid of the strange country but the Kachin officials would at the very least refuse to co-operate. This was the last straw. Just as Cooke had foreseen, the Kachin chiefs first raised their demands and then, when these were refused, they made off, but not before pilfering the baggage to recompense themselves and complaining they could no longer trust the English. On January 3, 1875, a disgruntled Browne returned to Bhamo complaining in his turn of having to deal with such disgusting savages. This was his first expedition, yet he was ignoring the two experienced travellers, Elias and Anderson, appointed to help and advise him. What Elias thought at seeing his plans wrecked and his forebodings about big expeditions and inexperienced commanders coming true he does not say, but it can be inferred from his report. What Anderson thought at having his own previous experience totally ignored is made pretty clear in his own book. It is typical of the confused planning that Captain Strover, the British Resident at Mandalay and the man who conducted all the negotiations with the King, had telegraphed on January 25th that the expedition would depart next day, 'Everything most satisfactory'. For whom? Well, perhaps for the King.

Indeed the only satisfactory event so far had been the safe arrival of Augustus Margary at Bhamo on January 17th after three and a half

months travelling across a part of China untraversed by any foreigners since the days of the Jesuits. It was certainly a great achievement, and in his second despatch to *The Times*, which was sent off from Bhamo on January 21st, Elias devoted a good deal of space to his experiences. He drew particular attention to the devastation which Margary reported was still apparent in Yunnan. He also noted that except in Hunan province Margary had been welcomed everywhere, and not least at Momien by Li Hsi Tai, the Chinese ex-bandit who was believed to have attacked the Sladen expedition. He was still commanding the local frontier guards, and knowing his reputation Margary had treated him cautiously.

With the arrival of Margary the expedition now numbered six British members and, as Elias put it, 'a formidable array of hangers-on which to describe them in detail would be to enumerate half the races of Eastern Asia!' Such a large party was anathema to a man like Elias, but it gave him an idea and he put it to Browne that it would be a pity to waste all the fruits of his previous reconnaissance of the Sawaddy route. The local Kachin chief had promised him a welcome and complete safety on the security of his head even if he travelled alone. So he suggested that as Browne's instructions permitted individuals to be detached if their safety was not endangered he should take the Sawaddy route and rejoin the expedition at Momien. It is more than likely there was some tension between the gallant colonel and the cautious civilian by this time, in which case the proposal had particular appeal to both of them; at any rate, after thinking about it for two days Browne gave his written assent.

At this point we may leave Elias and turn to the adventures of the main mission. Although the advice given by the British Chief Commissioner in Burma had been to avoid the northern Tapeng route if possible, with all the other routes now barred there was no option but to take it. This time the Burmese were left to make the transport arrangements as the route passed through the country of Kachins who were friendly towards them. But it was February 17th before the mission were able to set out and even then the huge Burmese guard was not fully assembled.

The need for an organized system of intelligence is continually apparent, but it seems to have been no one's responsibility. Thus shortly after Margary's departure from Shanghai Wade interviewed in Peking a Panthay general who, following a time-honoured Chinese military custom, had deserted to the winning side. The general had said that the present Governor of Yunnan would almost certainly obstruct any intercourse with Burma; he was anti-foreign and treacherous. Wade took the information seriously enough to report it to the

Foreign Office. There is no evidence that he sent a copy of his despatch to the Viceroy which, with its bearing on the expedition, he could have done: nor that the India Office ever received it from the Foreign Office; at all events, if they did it certainly went no further. Not that it would have any effect on Browne even if it had reached him; all the less likely, indeed, because Margary had just been welcomed by Chinese officials at Talifu.

On the very day the mission set out rumours were received of opposition in preparation on the other side of the Kachin hills. Armed with the Emperor's passports and obviously with Margary's friendly reception in mind, Browne chose not to listen to the rumours. The next day it was further reported that the opposition consisted of Chinese dacoits. With a touch of melodrama Browne judged, 'that they could give them a good thrashing if they were bold enough to attack'; bold words but bad politics at the start of a peaceful trade mission. The head of the Burmese guard, who almost certainly knew something was afoot, counselled caution and refused to advance any further. This time Browne took advice and sent Margary ahead with two Chinese and two Indian servants to see what was up. One of the Chinese attendants was actually a nephew of Li Hsi Tai and Browne had found him the most assiduous and reliable of his native retinue. The party was never seen again. With the commander of the Burmese guard obviously ill at ease, the mission made only one short march on February 22nd when about 400 armed Chinese were observed approaching the camp, and at the same time information was received that Margary had been murdered at Manwaing. What became of his servants was not then known. It was said at the time that Li's nephew was murdered too, though it seemed then far more likely that he was part of the plot.

The rest of the sorry tale is soon told. The attacking Chinese were reported to be the advance party of about 3,000 troops. The mission was on high ground but not in a very defensible position. The Sikh body-guard of fifteen men were the mainstay of the defence, though the Burmese guard at least let off their weapons in the required direction, and from a safe distance shouted abusive epithets at the Chinese. Matters would have been serious if someone had not hit on the idea of firing the jungle. This was so effective that to avoid being cut off the Chinese withdrew with some casualties. So did Browne's party, with only three wounded and as much transport as could be rounded up (it had naturally made itself scarce). Luckily the Chinese did not attack again. The mission, except for poor Margary, had escaped from the trap, but only just. Even the baggage turned up in the end, though Browne complained he had lost his uniform, doubtless (as he put it) 'adorning the back of some filthy savage chief at this moment'.

It was rumoured that the commander of the Chinese force was another nephew of Li Hsi Tai, so once again this sinister figure is linked with events. Back at the mission's base and again at Bhamo the Chinese merchants who had professed friendliness on their departure showed open disgust and disappointment at its return and there is no doubt but that they had known what was going to happen. One of them had even told our Agent before the mission started that 4,000 Chinese were waiting to attack it, but because of Margary's friendly reception he ignored the warning and did not even report it. At the King's Palace at Mandalay the concentration of Chinese forces was also known four days beforehand; it even reached Strover's ears and he sent a warning to Browne which by misfortune or perhaps by design failed to reach him. Strover and Cooke cannot escape a share of the blame for what went wrong, for it was their responsibility to collect and report local intelligence; although whether anyone at Calcutta would have taken any local intelligence into account in the planning is another matter, it was never asked for and the chances are it would have been ignored. There was no Intelligence Department in the Indian Government until Lord Dufferin formed one twelve years later. If Elias had been with the main body he would certainly have got warning of the trap. He had already formed his suspicions and he was adept at picking up information and sifting it, but he had only been in Burma a few months and was in no position to forward intelligence reports independently to higher authority. The bombastic Browne would have been the last man to alter his plans because of mere rumours. With twenty years experience of Burma he was still scornful of all savages; he even called the King himself 'half-civilized' and earlier, when received in audience, had been as perfunctory in his manner as it was possible to be.

To return now to Elias. Following the high ground over-looking the Shueli River, which is very near the Burma Road, he set off on February 10th, a week before the departure of the main expedition. Captain Cooke decided to accompany him as far as Maingmo in order to make the better acquaintance of the tribes in the area. No expedition was worth while in Elias's eyes unless it brought back new geographical knowledge; only second came the prospects of improving trade. Hence he began a route survey from the moment he left Sawaddy, thus disregarding Wade's caution against topographical work. But after his first reconnaissance there was no reason to expect trouble, nor as far as the Lenna tribe was concerned did he meet any. But he quickly found a change in attitude amongst the others. The Kachin headmen were distinctly offhand and one produced an invitation from the King to visit Mandalay, which proved that His Majesty's agents had been

active. However, they reached Maingmo, the first town across the border, which is a tongue-like projection into Burma, in five days. Here most unexpectedly they found that *éminence grise* of the frontier, Li Hsi Tai, in residence. Elias, of course, knew of his alleged attack on the Sladen Mission, but on his first encounter with the man he found him frank, just as had Margary a few days earlier. Li was half Burmese and had spent his life on the frontier, where no doubt he had got his pickings by his adaptability and local knowledge. He claimed a command of about 300 men and stood well with the provincial governor for helping the Imperial troops against the Panthays, though when the latter were in power he had probably been on their side. Elias duly presented his Imperial passport, but instead of offering safe passage to Talifu Li courteously but persistently raised objections on the grounds, first that the road was unsafe, then that there was a feud between two rival tribes and again that he had no men to spare for a guard.

A fruitless discussion proceeded on these lines for the next two days. When Cooke decided to return to Bhamo he found the main gates of the town shut and he only got away by leaving his men behind and walking out by an unexpected exit. This looked ominous, but Elias kept up the pressure; normally cautious, he persisted on this occasion beyond the bounds of safety. For the first time in his life he was under orders and it may have affected his jugment; perhaps he was influenced by the much earlier period of his life when it was impressed on him that he must not let the family down, but now it was Browne *in loco parentis*. At the last four of their meetings Li pressed him to try a different route from a village on the Burmese side of the border. Accepting the suggestion as the last resort, Elias withdrew there only to meet with more non-cooperation, this time from the Burmese. He was constantly spied on by two of Li's men and also by Burmese agents, and some of his belongings, including significantly his survey note book and a map, were stolen. Two friendly Kachin headmen told him that Li was the instigator and that he was determined not to let him into China. Elias could not be certain, but he suspected a link between Li and the King. At this point as he wrote in his report: 'it had become evident that matters had taken an unfavourable course and that my position was more or less critical'. Even so, instead of giving up, he sent a message to Browne asking what he should do, but before he got the answer he received a message from Browne telling him of the mission's disaster and ordering him to return at once. With the help of the friendly Lennas and by taking a minor track he got back to Bhamo in two days of forced marching, shadowed part of the way by a Burmese agent. As he himself said in his report, any

further efforts to get forward would have ended in another disaster and he was lucky to escape trouble. As to Li's own part, it was then only guesswork, but he told Elias he had expected the mission to go by the Tapeng route as Margary had just previously reached Burma by it. When he heard the mission was going by the Sawaddy route, Li must then have gone to Maingmo, which is less than 100 miles from Manwaing, in order to organize the opposition there. Uncertain which route would be used, but with his trap prepared for either, he had remained at Maingmo. He must have been an unusually intelligent man, for he and Elias had much talk about less immediate matters, such as foreign customs, trade and politics and the accord which they struck up may have saved Elias's life.

He wrote his report on the steamer which took him back to Mandalay, interrupting it at one point to record disgustedly that 'my clerk has just allowed several pages of my draft to blow overboard'.

The only positive results of this ill-fated expedition were those produced by Elias himself. The most important one consisted of an accurate survey of the Shueli river route from Sawaddy to Maingmo which, together with a paper, he duly submitted to the Royal Geographical Society. In addition he laid the ground work for a history of the Shans of Upper Burma and Western Yunnan which he later worked up into a pamphlet to be published by the Foreign Department of the Indian Government. It was an especially painstaking work for a man who was neither primarily an ethnologist nor a Burmese scholar.

On his return to Mandalay he sent off his last despatch to *The Times* on March 12th. In it he underlined the gravity of the murder of one of Her Majesty's consular officers travelling under the protection of the Imperial Government, and the first incident of its kind since the signing of the Treaty of Tientsin. The major part of the article was a first-hand report, obviously by Anderson, describing the events leading up to the disaster. From subsequent accounts it was believed that 3,000 Chinese troops had been assembled under Li Hsi Tai to deal with the party by whichever route they travelled, though Elias's own later investigations put the figure more reliably at 300. It was thought that local mandarins were the instigators and certainly not the Imperial Government. Elias made no comment; he had his suspicions but he was holding his fire, and indeed his opinion was never officially sought. Everyone was too busy airing his own views and prejudices to ask a mere attaché. He expressed them in his official report to Colonel Browne, but they were ignored.

The repercussions of this blow to British prestige were widespread and prolonged, and scapegoats abounded. Browne at first blamed the King of Burma, but when pressed for his reasons he withdrew the

charge, saying he had no real evidence. Two years later a memorandum prepared by Elias caused him to renew the charge. Meanwhile the British Commission in Burma still blamed the Chinese and not the King. On the other hand the first thought of a horrified Wade was to blame the Burmese and he never relinquished his belief that the King had connived at the outrage. The Indian Government, asked for its views by the Secretary of State, Lord Salisbury, replied with a despatch couched in remarkably defensive terms. After recalling that no sanguine hopes of important results had ever been entertained either by the Government or by Wade in Peking, the despatch tried to show how, in preparing the expedition, everything possible had been done to meet the wishes of the Secretary of State no less than the King of Burma. It reported the Chief Commissioner of Burma as saying the attack was ordered by the Governor of Momien, but said: 'We are unable to suggest any reason for it,' and it ended ingenuously: 'We cannot but regard the attack as bearing the appearance of a deliberate and treacherous attempt to entrap the officers of the expedition and to ensure their destruction.'

Naturally, questions were asked in the House of Commons but no one had enough local knowledge to question the political grounds on which the expedition had been despatched, its timing or its leadership. The only point at issue was who instigated the attack and the official answer pointed to the Chinese. It was only *The Times* in a leading article which drew attention to Elias's published despatches and put the blame on the King, making the point totally ignored in all the official documents that the King's Embassy had been despatched immediately after Margary's friendly reception, in all probability with the sole object of encouraging the local Chinese to liquidate the mission as soon as it crossed the border. In this *The Times* was accepting the considered view of Elias, and on all the evidence it looks as though he was right.

The expedition had been a deplorable example of bad timing and planning in London and Calcutta and bad execution in the field. Elias alone had correctly foreseen the risks ahead. No wonder *The Athenaeum* commented:

'It is much to be regretted that Mr Ney Elias was not placed in command instead of being relegated to second place. If his knowledge and other qualifications were indispensable they would clearly have been more useful had he been placed in a position to use them to the best advantage, but jobbery seems to be the inevitable accompaniment of any enterprise by a government department.'

Strong words these even for *The Athenaeum* of those days, which some-

times thundered, and one is left wondering just what inspired them. But it was probably lucky for Elias that he was not in command. Knowing the dangers, he would most likely have withdrawn the expedition before entering China, in which case like Sladen he would have been blamed for being over-cautious. As it was he kept his reputation intact and even enhanced it.

In spite of his doubts about the extent of Chinese complicity in the affair, the man who reacted most strongly was Sir Thomas Wade in Peking. Instructed by the Foreign Secretary, Lord Derby, to protest, he sought an immediate audience with the Regent, Prince Kung, and thereupon vastly exceeded his instructions. On his own responsibility he demanded fresh passports for a new expedition, an indemnity of 150,000 Taels (£50,000) for Margary's family, to be levied locally in Yunnan, a full enquiry by the Chinese Government to establish responsibility and to be attended by a British Officer, and lastly he demanded better trade relations. He threatened to leave Peking at once if these demands were not met, and to reinforce them he requested the Naval C-in-C of the Far East Fleet to despatch a squadron to Northern Chinese waters. By this *démarche* Wade took a considerable risk, but he knew only too well how Chinese diplomacy would react to a mere protest and he had to strike hard and quickly. Most fortunately, and to his great credit, Lord Derby backed him to the full. The terms amounted to a virtual ultimatum and for a time it looked as if there would be yet another war with China. But with Prince Kung accepting most of the demands and with the room for diplomatic manoeuvre which Wade had left himself, talks got under way and the Prince soon found it easy to practise the customary procrastination.

Meanwhile Elias continued his attack on the King in a further article in *The Times*. This summarized the attempts of the past fifteen years to open up trade with south-west China through Burma and showed how consistently the King had avoided implementing the Treaties which we concluded with him to that end in 1862 and 1867, and how he had then managed to retain his own royal monopolies. Not only that, but he had also been trying to negotiate treaties with France and Italy in the hope of playing them off against the British. It is, of course, understandable that the King would tend to prefer the monopolies in his hand to the promise of a great increase in trade. No doubt he detested the British pressure which contrasted very unfavourably with China's gentlemanly suzerainty. In this last despatch Elias repeated his opinion that the King had cited the Chinese frontier officials to attack the mission. The charge was never officially laid but from its prominence in *The Times* it may have had a long-term effect in reducing our trust in the King ultimately to the point of a war which

cost him his throne and Burma her independence for the next eighty years.

In July Browne and Elias were sent to Shanghai to prepare for the new mission. Wade, who met them there, reported that Elias was ill and he did not think he should leave on another arduous venture. He did not say what Elias was suffering from, although later we learn that it was some form of dysentery and insomnia. The latter would not have been improved by serving under Browne, who was not the kind of man to bring out the best in a conscientious subordinate. Nor was Browne destined to lead another expedition into Yunnan. When he received the first report of the attack, Wade had openly questioned Browne's leadership and doubted whether he could even recognize Chinese troops. It looks as though their meeting reinforced his views and that he may have been quietly responsible for Browne's somewhat surprising decision to take a holiday in Tokio, thus effectively removing himself from the scene.

No second Burma–Yunnan expedition was ever launched; instead, three Chinese Consular Officers, the Hon. T. Grosvenor, Baber and Davenport, travelled to the Yunnan border following Margary's route, to attend the Chinese Government enquiry. With every prospect of further treachery, it says much for their skill and caution that they went and got back safely. At the protracted enquiry the Chinese tried to pin the blame on innocent scapegoats, some of whom had not even been in the province at the time. Ultimately the Governor of Yunnan was forced to resign but negotiations between Wade and the Imperial Government continued till the end of 1876 and their outcome was the Convention of Chefoo.

Before Elias went to Shanghai in July he spent a few weeks at Bhamo in relief of Captain Cooke who went on leave. Whilst there he was mainly occupied with trying to get news of the two Indian members of Colonel Browne's party who had gone forward with Margary, and at the same time piecing together more evidence of the plot and its instigators. He was very good at making contacts with people who might be of use to him; this time he made the acquaintance of no less a person than the mother of Li Hsi Tai, a formidable but forthcoming old lady with whom he got on extremely well. However, nothing more was heard of the two missing Indians who were probably put to death because they knew too much.

Two years later his investigations proved of some value when Li's nephew, who had accompanied the mission, turned up in Burma. He said he had been imprisoned by the Chinese authorities and under torture, by which both his arms had been dislocated, he had been forced to confess to Margary's murder which he now denied. Grosvenor

had in fact seen him in prison and did not believe his confession. Although it did not fit in with Margary's notably friendly reception on his way down, he stated firmly that the Governor of Yunnan had engineered the murder. This does, however, find support in the warning by the ex-Panthay general to Wade, which was never passed on by the Foreign Office. He said his uncle, Li, too, was held for a short time, in spite of his alibi that he had been with Elias at the time.

When it was learned that Li had headed a deputation sent by the Chinese to the King who was said to have decorated him, Elias, who was then in Calcutta, was asked for his views as to why he should have been sent and why the King should want to receive him. In his memorandum Elias was able to trace the whole of Li's career on the frontier, where he had achieved a unique authority greatly valued by the Chinese and respected by the King. Elias said he was satisfied that Li had played only a subordinate part in the Margary affair. He had received his orders, one of them having been to cut Elias's throat, but out of civility he had not done so. Like his nephew he had been made a scapegoat by the Chinese authorities in attempts to satisfy the Grosvenor mission. He, too, had been imprisoned and tortured, whilst those in authority who were responsible for the attack had got off free. Nevertheless, he appeared to bear no ill-will against the British and Elias believed there was nothing sinister in his present deputation to the King. This calmed the suspicions of the Indian Government. The memorandum throws further interesting light on Elias's interviews with Li two years before. He seems to have so greatly impressed this unusually well-informed Chinese that he deliberately disobeyed the order to liquidate him and instead went out of his way to urge him to withdraw. It was only Elias's ability to converse with him in Chinese, to find topics for general discussion and to return civility for civility in the dignified manner demanded by Chinese etiquette, that saved his life, Now he was able to do something towards establishing his saviour's status in British eyes. Never again in his career was Elias so near to a violent death.

Chapter V

YEARS OF FRUSTRATION

Burma and Tibet

On his return to Mandalay from Shanghai there occurred one of those unpleasantnesses which a man like Elias would regard as a deliberate affront. Probably it was only sheer bureaucratic carelessness, but it is just the kind of thing which occurs in life to the sort of man he was, and it happened more than once. On this occasion the post of Resident at Mandalay was upgraded and a 'Bengal civilian' was appointed as Assistant. Hitherto Elias had been acting as Assistant but he was not told of the change nor was he recalled. From this invidious situation he extricated himself by immediately packing up and returning to the Foreign Department at Calcutta. He intended to ask to be appointed to the Bhamo Agency when the post became vacant and meanwhile to be allowed to do some exploration in the Eastern and Northern Shan States. 'If these very moderate requests are not met,' he wrote to a friend, 'I shall go straight home'. The interlude at least gave him the chance to visit Benares about whose architecture he wrote with enthusiasm, and during the winter months at Calcutta his health improved; it was always the hot weather he found trying and the cause of his bouts of insomnia and dysentery.

The letters he wrote home at this time were all to Bates, Secretary of the Royal Geographical Society, whom he regarded as a confidant and to whom he disclosed all his troubles and anxiety about his future. Whether he ever wrote to his parents in a similar strain is not known, but in view of the family's inhibited relations with each other it is very unlikely. There is just one mention of his father, who appears to have been friendly with Macdonald, the Manager of *The Times*. Through his father Macdonald indicated that *The Times* would welcome anything of interest from his pen, and this continued what was to be a long and fruitful association. His first despatch, which was on Burmese affairs, was vetoed by the Foreign Department, perhaps because he was too critical of the Government's lenient treatment of the King. As an employee of the Indian Government presumably he had to submit contributions with a political content to the Department, but this is the only mention of permission to publish being refused, and he

showed skill in putting controversial matters in a form which would not upset his masters. He was careful to cultivate good relations with the Press, with whom he shared, rightly or wrongly, the deepest suspicions of jobbery and favouritism in high places. Particularly at that time he considered that he was being treated less than fairly by the Indian bureaucrats. The Press always thought the same and invariably came out in his support, but the bureaucrats can scarcely have appreciated some of its more outspoken comments on his behalf.

At the end of 1875 he wrote again to the Royal Geographical Society:

'The Prince of Wales arrived here yesterday and had a very enthusiastic reception from the Bengalis. The place will be in a continuous state of fête till he goes. Tonight there is an evening party at Government House where I may see Sir Bartle Frere,[1] though there won't be the opportunity to talk much. I have not been able to hear a word about my future arrangements.'

Shy though he was Elias was a great believer in tackling the top man. He always saw himself first and foremost as an explorer and not a civil servant and like most individualists he abhorred the usual channels, which particularly in those days were exceptionally sluggish. However, the end of 1875 left him still in a state of gloom and suspense.

At the beginning of 1876 his paper on the Shueli Valley was read to the R.G.S. He had carried out some more survey work at Bhamo during his short stay and he said he was not at all satisfied with its present fixing, but that it would have to stand till some more observations could be obtained. With exploration ever in his mind, he noted the success of another lone traveller, Captain Cameron, on reaching St Paul de Loando in West Africa. He remarked, no doubt with feeling, that single travellers always seemed to get on better than expeditions and that Cameron deserved every honour.

In March he contributed an article to the *Times of India* on Bhamo, obviously based on the supposition that he was to be appointed Agent there. In this article he allowed free rein to his sarcastic wit, even describing himself as 'the daring traverser of the wilds of Mongolia'. Summarizing recent events, he gave more space to his reconnaissance of the Shueli valley than to the main body of the recent expedition, but most of the article was devoted to a fanciful description of daily life at Bhamo: 'To a man who does not object to a solitary eremitic sort of life, residence at Bhamo is by no means an unpleasant state of existence . . . though society cannot be said to exist', and continued,

[1] The Governor of Bengal and a veteran of the Indian Mutiny, Frere never left India throughout his life.

'But the population both fiixed and migratory offers many points of interest to a man of an enquiring turn of mind.' There followed a description of life at the Residency:

'an elevated wooden structure of large dimensions standing close to the river bank and surrounded by a lofty fence of bamboo netting. The country to the North and East is hilly and covered with dense jungle affording shelter to numerous wild beasts – the tiger, panther, bear, and wild boar amongst them. The roar of the tiger is frequently heard close to the Residency wall and the monotony of Residential existence is occasionally relieved by the excitement attendant on one of these animals leaping the compound wall in search of prey. Wild duck and snipe are plentiful, hence the sportsman seldom need find time hanging heavy on his hands. Pleasant excursions by boat may be made up the Irrawaddy. Rowers are never wanting: from the armed guard at the Residency such of the men not immediately on duty are always available for temporary conversion into boatmen.

'Communication with the outside world is maintained by the monthly arrival of a steamer belonging to the Irrawaddy Steam Flotilla Company and the smoke of the expected messenger of civilization with its accompanying budget of news is anxiously looked for at the distant southern bend in the river. If the Agent at Bhamo is never waited on by European neighbours yet he is not altogether left in undisturbed enjoyment of his ample reception rooms, with their complement of musical boxes.[1] He is subjected to ever-recurring visits inflicted on him by chiefs arriving from the interior – brutal savages most of them, devoured with the idea that the greatest happiness and chief end of man consists in getting perpetually drunk. These wild men of the mountains are not particularly agreeable visotors nor are they specially suited for a lady's drawing-room but in the great empty halls of the Bhamo Agency they constitute a not unpleasing subject of ethnological study.'

The flippant tone of the article barely conceals his disgust at the idea of being banished to Burma when his heart and hopes were in Central Asia. Apparently, he had actually gone to take up the appointment, but it was never confirmed and for the second time in a year he walked out and returned to Calcutta. It was a lucky escape for not only would he have been wasting his talents but his health would never have stood up to the conditions. Sir Charles Crosthwaite, the High Commissioner, described Bhamo in very different terms twelve years later. He said

[1] Presumably these were for entertaining native chiefs and not the Resident.

it was a disappointing place, a very dirty miserable village with no conservancy and a sickening stench.

Very shortly afterwards there appeared a paragraph in the Bombay *Times of India* and repeated in *The Times* which said:

'We hear on good authority that the celebrated traveller Ney Elias is about to return to England. The information which he acquired on his famous tour through the most unfrequented parts of China would doubtless be most valuable should any warlike complications arise out of the present Mission. . . . He has lately been doing good work in the Foreign Department and it is a pity that the Indian Government should at this time lose the services of one of the few men who could give sound information about a country of which little is known and which in the future is likely to be hostile rather than friendly.'

The Mission referred to was, of course, the Grosvenor Mission which had not yet returned. If anything had gone wrong with that it would have meant war, a contingency for which our Far East Fleet was standing by. In the context it is not hard to guess who the 'good authority' was.

However, he did not go home, for he was far from abandoning his project for an exploration of Tibet. In August he wrote again to his hoped-for sponsors, the R.G.S. He reminded them that he had been turned down twice, once by the Society for lack of funds and two years later by Lord Northbrook, the Viceroy, who whilst not opposed to pure exploration preferred, because of the known use Russians made of newspaper articles by British travellers, to leave the secret work entirely to professional secret agents. (These were the Indian Surveyors known collectively as Pandits and individually by pseudonyms or merely by initials, who worked under the Survey Department.) He was now, he wrote, going to try for a third time. His plan was as before, namely to start from Peking, thence travel to Sining and the Lob region and try for Rudok. He asked for no pay, only for expenses not exceeding the pay for his temporary work in the Foreign Department. He wished to go as a private individual and not as a Government official. He wanted the Society to know he had done his best from India and he asked particularly for absolute secrecy. The letter strongly reflected the period of frustration he was passing through, for he ended:

'In one sense going exploring rather cuts one's life to waste but as mine seems fated to be cut to waste anyhow the only thing to be done

is to utilize the waste to the best advantage. I do not see the slightest prospect of any appointment or permanent employment worth having out here.'

This *cri de coeur* brought no response from the Society, but Elias had another iron in the fire.

Lord Lytton, who had succeeded Lord Northbrook, was more favourably inclined towards geographical exploration than his predecessor, so he promptly submitted his proposals to the new Viceroy. It was his third attempt. Apart from his own keenness to explore the region, there was now an added sense of urgency because he had heard that Colonel Prejevalski was again about to set out for Lob Nor and perhaps also for Lhasa, and, as he had often said before, he did not see why the Russians should have it all their own way. He is almost sure too to have had an inkling that the Foreign Office was once again actively considering sending a mission to Lhasa, for there is no doubt that the Foreign Office, already concerned enough about the activity of Russia in Central Asia, wanted to forestall her in Tibet. Thus there were two plans under consideration by the two governments at the same time. The one was an individual exploration and the other a full-scale official affair with Her Majesty's representative in full panoply and pomp intent on opening another trade route.

Elias has left no personal record of the negotiations and it has not been easy to determine from the official archives just what went on behind the scenes whilst his plans were being considered. But the Foreign Office records give the essential clues and the whole story is filled in by an article in *The Pioneer* dated June 1877. Allowing for a certain amount of journalistic embellishment it bears the Elias stamp of authority.

The great advantage to the Indian Government of sending him alone was that he would go as a private individual carrying only the necessary Chinese passport. Thus, if anything befell him, if he were imprisoned or murdered, the Indian Government would not be obliged to take any official notice, such as protesting to China. To Elias the chosen point of entry was of great importance. It was as far as possible from Peking as well as from Lhasa. Locally in that rugged country political frontiers counted for little and tribes traditionally crossed and recrossed them according to grazing conditions for their flocks. Although there would be customs or military posts on the main passes, if he travelled quickly he could hope to be over the frontier before word of his movements reached the posts from official sources. Hence, therefore, his insistence on secrecy. Moreover, a little greasing of palms was likely to be very effective in these remote parts. Elias believed firmly that both Prejevalski

on his earlier attempt, and T. T. Cooper would have got into Tibet if only they had had enough roubles and rupees.[1]

A full-scale expedition, on the other hand, would be an excellent means of showing the might of India. (This was the year in which the Queen was proclaimed Empress of India.) It would impress the Asian countries, especially those on India's immediate borders, it might lead to opening up trade of some kind with Tibet and it would be a strong check to Russian aspirations. But it would have to be successful, for another disaster like the Burma–Yunnan affair would do untold harm to our prestige as well as to our relations with China. Could it be risked when there was so much uncertainty about the ability of China to persuade Tibet to admit foreigners?

It appears that the final choice was left to the Governor General in Council. No doubt it was no easy decision that had to be made. The Viceroy wanted to send Elias but at least three members of the Council (they were the military ones) disagreed. However, the Viceroy had his way and in August 1876 a telegram was dispatched to Wade which read:

'Viceroy of India proposes sending Ney Elias to Peking whence to start an expedition to explore country between Western China and Eastern Turkestan proceeding thence to Tibet and India. His journey will be quite unofficial, Her Majesty's Government undertaking no responsibility on his behalf. Ask Chinese Government for passport for him unless you have very strong objections. If you object telegraph your reasons.'

From the firm tone of the telegram it looks as though the Indian Government were as aware as the Foreign Office of Sir Thomas Wade's tendency to stall, and stall he did, saying he had that day put Tibet on his list of subjects to discuss with the Grand Secretary Li Hung Chang, and advising a few days delay. He did not state his objections at first and evidently Elias continued to make his preparations with the full co-operation of the Indian Government.

The reasons for Wade's prevarication are interesting. It will be

[1] The present writer can testify to the efficacy of palm oil in a delicate situation. Many years later in China, when he was travelling innocently along a canal by motor boat, he was fired on and seized by excited Chinese soldiery and put under guard for the night. The guard was one young man armed with an executioner's sword. When the tension had subsided the guard was asked whether he was hungry and would like some money to buy himself a meal. Naturally his answer was 'Yes', and in due course he shambled slowly off clutching one silver dollar, whereupon the writer moved off in the opposite direction but faster.

recalled that following Margary's murder he made a series of demands on the Chinese Government of his own devising which were only subsequently endorsed by Lord Derby, the Foreign Secretary. Of these demands one concerned the issue of passports for British subjects travelling in the interior, and another concerned the improvement of trade relations between India and western China. A third, which he appears to have put forward at a later stage, was the proposed despatch of an Indian Mission to Tibet. All these demands, together with the indemnity for Margary's family and a clause on the regulation of Opium Traffic, were embodied in the draft of what came to be the Chefoo Convention, which thus was really Wade's own brain child. Presumably, he hoped thereby to improve our relations with China but it is an example of his somewhat autocratic methods. The issue of passports was already covered by the Treaty of Tientsin and the Convention here broke no new ground, nor could it have any practical effect on trade relations, which had similarly been provided for. As for the clause on the Tibet mission, this was sheer disaster for Elias's personal project because it named three possible routes including the very one from Peking through Kansu or Szechuan and Koko Nor which he had chosen for reasons of secrecy. It is highly unlikely that Wade himself would have thought of this route and the obvious inference is that he lifted it from Elias, whose plan must have been known to him ever since 1872, when he first proposed it. His specific mention of it meant that its secrecy, coupled with its other advantages, was now no more; the Chinese Government had been warned. In any event the clause was virtually valueless because it required the Tsungli Yamen (the Chinese Foreign Office) to issue passports 'having regard to the circumstances'. These five words had been inserted in the Convention in respect of Tibet at the request of the Chinese Government and were enough to provide a most convenient excuse which it could always turn to advantage, as some years later it did.

Wade meanwhile further based his advice to delay Elias on the fact that a Chinese delegation was about to depart for England to ratify his Convention and he did not want anything to go wrong at the last minute. The Indian Government evidently did not think much of the objection and, as plans were being continued, Wade sent another telegram in September. This, too, seems to have been ignored, so in October he cabled again saying emphatically that Elias had better not start. This time the Government replied that the Viceroy had been advised and that Elias would be stopped if possible, though it was feared that he had already started. But Elias was stopped and Wade, though by the narrowest of margins, had won again. Looking back, it certainly does not appear that ratification of the Convention would

have been in any danger since the clause about a Tibet expedition had already been accepted by China. Wade had put forward a totally different objection when an official expedition had been proposed two years earlier and all the evidence shows once again how clearly he disliked any enterprise concerning China which he had not devised himself and which was not being undertaken by this own staff.

The cancellation of the Elias plan left the alternative of the full-scale mission holding the field, with the advantage that it had now been accepted in principle by the Chinese, so that the matter of secrecy was no longer important. Elias was still the man with the best of claims to lead it as an authorized envoy to Lhasa. But again the chance was missed; this time it was the Government of India which held back. There is no need to examine all their reasons, of which the chief one was fear of failure; but another now given was that by the spring of 1877 the Chefoo Convention was still unratified.

It was the end of plans for an official mission and the two best opportunities for years of entering Tibet had been lost. The article in *The Pioneer* drove this home in no uncertain fashion, blaming both the Indian Government for lacking courage, and Anglo-Chinese officials for wanting to keep the enterprise to their own credit, the latter remark being obviously aimed at Wade. As for poor Elias, it was the bitterly disappointing end of a four-year dream. Of the two plans his own modest one would have been far more likely to succeed than the vast unwieldy official mission always deemed essential in those days.

For Wade, on the other hand, there was a triumphant sequel. He personally accompanied the Chinese delegation to England and he saw installed at the Court of St James's the first Chinese Minister. There is no suggestion that he felt any personal malice towards Elias, indeed it will be recalled that he had gone out of his way to help him in his Yellow River project, but if Elias felt that Wade had been an *éminence grise* ever since, he could hardly be blamed.

For a long time his Tibetan plan had been an open secret, showing that at least the Government of India now recognized his potential talent, which so far it had largely wasted. In the autumn of 1877 he was appointed Officiating Joint Commissioner for Ladakh, a dependency of Kashmir and the nearest point on the Indian side of the Karakoram to Eastern Turkestan. In November he arrived at Leh, the capital, to relieve Shaw, the previous incumbent. The appointment marked the virtual end of the exploring phase of his career and the beginning of the political phase. He could not have foreseen that, but he must have been glad to leave the steamy heat of Calcutta with its social round no less irksome than the one he had abandoned in Shanghai, and in some ways worse because of its Viceregal and official precedences and

cliques. It was barely fifteen years since the East India Company had handed over the administration of India to a Civil Service, and the latter was not yet attracting the best brains from our universities. As a man with wide-ranging intellectual interests it is unlikely that he found much in common with his colleagues. No doubt the Establishment thought him a 'queer fish', whilst he would have felt that only by proving exceptionally competent could he counter the handicap of not belonging to it either socially or professionally. There could scarcely have been a better solution than an independent if solitary life in this primitive mountain country on the fringe of Central Asia, whose turbulent history was already a fascination.

Chapter VI

JOINT COMMISSIONER IN LADAKH

The appointment which thus ended five years of frustration and uncertainty about his future ought to have pleased Elias, but he was not a man to count his blessings. Instead, he sounded very lukewarm when he wrote that he did not think he would find much to do at Leh. He was obviously still thinking in terms of pure geographical exploration when he said that most of the work in Eastern Turkestan had already been done by Shaw and Hayward. Nevertheless, he should have recognized that there were plenty of possibilities, though the work might be more political than geographical. Very likely he had become so obsessed by his dreams of entering Tibet that at the time nothing could compensate him for his bitter disappointment. Nor would he be feeling particularly gratified on learning just then that Colonel Prejevalski, whom he had hoped to forestall, had successfully led his large expedition to the Koko Nor Lake, though he might have felt better about it later when it was learned that Prejevalski, who was a better naturalist then navigator, had failed to locate the Koko Nor with any accuracy. But meanwhile, so far as Elias was concerned, the Russians geographically speaking had done it again.

It had always been easier for Russian than for British explorers to work in Central Asia. Pushing eastwards they had not the same mountain ranges to contend with and they were therefore able to mount expeditions with a bigger train of transport, and with the protection of a Cossack guard virtually able to live off the country. This applied not only to Turkestan but also to the Pamir region north of the Muztagh and Hindu Kush to which they were now turning their attention. On the other hand, no Englishman had visited this region for forty years, and there was therefore much geographical work still to be done by British geographers. But the time was not yet ripe; and when it was ripe, the strategic defence of India and not pure geographical knowledge was the spur. In due course the chance came and Elias seized it. Meanwhile he had a part to play in the never-ending political drama always being enacted in Central Asia which appeared to be building up to one of its periodical climaxes.

The principal players were the Three Empires and the stage was their meeting point in High Asia. Much went on backstage in London,

and in Calcutta, Peking and St Petersburg. The players and chorus on the stage were the Moslem tribes and little border states with their ever-changing allegiances; and then there were the commentators, men now forgotten, like Biddulph in Gilgit and Henvey in Kashmir, as well as Elias himself and Younghusband, who sometimes described what was happening and sometimes took a part in manipulating the players. Their role was unusually important, for it was on their reports and their judgment that those behind the scenes largely relied; indeed, they had the power to shape policy and often did so.

From the points of view of each of the Three Empires, taking Britain first, our main object was clear enough to us, even if not always obvious to the other two. It was quite simply the defence of India. Second to this came the expansion of trade, with China as the chief potential market. But if our main object was clear the policies adopted to fulfil it were often confused and liable to change. This is not surprising when there were so many policy makers involved. Thus the Viceroy and the Government of India were responsible for the defence of India and for her trade, and the India Office in Whitehall was the co-ordinator. But the Foreign Office was the British Government department responsible for Central Asian affairs, for it was also responsible for our relations with the other two Empires, and it had its expert advisers, Morier in St Petersburg and Wade in Peking. Ultimately, of course, Parliament was responsible, but Governments change and with them Foreign Ministers, whilst Viceroys had a fixed four-year term of office. Add to these permutations the always possible clash of personalities and it is easy enough to see why policies fluctuated. It is also possible to sympathize with men on the spot like Elias, who often had more than the usual reasons to complain when their urgent recommendations were shelved or ignored, and fleeting opportunities were missed.

The landward defence of India to the north was based primarily on the mountain masses of the Himalayas, Karakoram, and Hindu Kush, which, hitherto at least, had been regarded as impenetrable for modern armies. It was a matter of prime importance to us that nowhere should the Indian and Russian borders become contiguous. But alarm had been increasing at the manner in which Russia was extending her borders eastwards and southwards ever closer to India. She had absorbed Western Turkestan, we have seen how she took over Ili, and she was now showing great interest in the Pamirs and the little border states. If she decided to occupy Eastern Turkestan neither China nor Britain could stop her. Were the Pamirs and the mountain masses as impregnable as we had always believed or could Russia pass an army across them and maintain it? And was Russia really entertaining

serious designs on India? Opinions differed, Calcutta being more apprehensive because nearer the scene than London. Most soldiers did not think an invasion feasible from that direction and Elias shared their view, but there was much ignorance about the routes and the possibility could not simply be ignored.

For the future our reliance could not be solely on natural obstacles. To reinforce them a system of buffer states was gradually being developed. The underlying plan was that if we could be sure of the support of the independent native states distributed along India's frontier, these could, by holding the passes, so delay an invading army as to give the British Army in India and the Indian Army time to reach the threatened areas. Cultivating relations with these states was a political task of the first magnitude and the methods adopted varied from subsidies to the rulers, to guarantees of protection, supplies of weapons and the encouragement of trade. At all costs they had to be prevented from defecting to Russia, who was beginning to cultivate them assiduously. Afghanistan to the north-west was our greatest problem as the country, being less mountainous, lay athwart the traditional and most likely invasion route. Indeed all India's north-western frontier presented a grave problem and our policy varied between pressing forward to include more states and holding back to avoid being over-committed. There were many small wars before the frontier system was ultimately stabilized early in the present century. However, at this point we are mainly concerned with India's northern frontier and the particular problem which Eastern Turkestan or Kashgar, lying beyond the Karakoram, represented.

Kashgar or Kashgaria was important for three reasons. First it lay between all three Empires, being the only state which did so. Secondly, under the Moslem rebel Yakub Beg it had been independent of China since 1862, and it was considered to be in our interests that it should remain so. More than that, we saw it as a buffer state and to this end we actively supported Yakub. Lastly, if Russia were to occupy the country she would then have a valuable base on the flank of any invasion planned to take place through Afghanistan and across the Hindu Kush. Difficulties arose because Kashgar, being beyond the Karakoram, could not be actively strengthened by a British Army; and besides, too much open support might precipitate Russian occupation instead of preventing it. It was a difficult problem and in consequence our policy varied greatly under successive Viceroys.

Turning to Russia, it had been relatively easy so far for her to expand her empire eastwards taking advantage of the backward and warring tribes along her frontiers. Whether she had any determined expansionist policy in Central Asia, apart from increasing her trade

with China, is from today's viewpoint very doubtful. It must be recognized that Russia, no more than any other country, relished the constant tribal conflicts which were apt to cross and recross her frontiers, for they upset trade and needed troops to restore order. Her occupation and pacification of troublesome areas was therefore fully understandable on practical grounds. Nevertheless, by the middle of the nineteenth century she had extended her frontier far enough to cause alarm not only in India but also in China. The new territory thus acquired was left in the hands of military governors who did not always bother to tell St Petersburg when they added a few more square miles to their command and they were known to flout orders from the Russian Foreign Office, which at that distance was not too difficult; the consequence was that a permanent feud existed between the diplomatists and the soldiers. The occupation of Ili may have been one such example. Again, when Russia decided to send a military expedition to Khiva in 1873 the Tzar sent Count Schouvalov as his special envoy to London to reassure our Foreign Minister, Lord Granville, who was anxious about the future of Afghanistan, that the expedition was purely punitive and no permanent occupation was intended. Only the Russian State archives could reveal whether this was diplomatic finessing or whether the subsequent annexation was hastened by the army declining to withdraw. As for India, Captain Burnaby in 1872 found officers on the Russian border eager for action and promotion and confidently looking forward to invading that country.

Besides occupying China on the Manchurian frontier during her drive to the Pacific, Russia had another very good reason of strategy for keeping up the pressure in Central Asia. That was to distract attention away from the Near East. In 1876 the Balkans were in ferment against decadent Turkish rule and were looking to Russia to liberate them. That would have been a first step towards Russian entry into the Mediterranean, which was strongly opposed by Britain. It was this situation which gave rise to the popular song:

'We don't want to fight but by jingo if we do
We've got the ships, we've got the men, we've got the money too!
We've fought the Bears before, and while we're British too
The Russians shall not have Constantinople.'

Most of China's western border problem has been described in earlier chapters. She wanted to hold what of Central Asia she was able to, but at this period she had already abandoned certain territories which were too far off to defend. In her present greatly weakened condition

she viewed with increasing fear Russia's continued encroachment, which was not only on her western borders but on her far northern Manchurian border as well. Through incompetent governors and the mis-handling of her Moslem population, she had now lost Eastern Turkestan to the rebels, although so far, except in the case of Ili, the Russians had stayed out. The fact that they later returned most of Ili suggests that they never had any designs on the rest of Eastern Turkestan, but that was not how it appeared at the time. It could be that like Britain, Russia saw the advantages of Eastern Turkestan as an independent buffer state separating the three Empires. Unfortunately for this point of view China, freed of the encumbrances of the Nien Fei and Panthay rebellions, was able in 1874 to make a start towards recovering her lost Dzungar and Kashgar territories. Remembering what Viceroy Li Hung Chang had said so recently about Chinese Turkestan being not worth the recovery, we did not take the effort seriously till it was almost a *fait accompli.*

The task of reconquest took four years. Beginning with the defeat of the Moslem rebellion in Kansu and Szechuan with the usual Chinese ruthlessness, the Chinese army led by General Tso Tsung-T'ang traversed the intervening desert and re-entered Dzungaria. Commissariat problems on the way must have been formidable, but once in this fertile province they were ended. Matters were eased also by disaffected Chinese Moslem soldiers of Yakub Beg joining the victorious army. In Dzungaria massacres were on the grand scale, but it is interesting to note they were not repeated later in Kashgar. This was typical of Chinese *divide et impera* policy. A prosperous Kashgar would be unlikely to combine with a scorched earth Dzungaria against China. 'Haves' do not commonly combine with 'have nots'. By the time Elias arrived at Leh Yakub Beg's position was already considerably weakened, although neither the Government of India nor Wade in Peking had any inkling of it.

That, in very broad terms, was the strategic aspect of the drama in the mid-seventies and eighties. Some general points about trade in Central Asia for which both Russia and Britain were in competition may be noticed before concentrating on current events in Kashgar. Here again Russia enjoyed certain natural advantages such as easier trade routes, but she had followed these up by a commercial policy which was always more aggressive than that of India. Before China lost Eastern Turkestan, Russia had acquired certain trading facilities in the country. These were not enjoyed by Britain, who was still bound by the Treaty of Tientsin, which merely permitted travellers to travel on passports in the interior of China proper. The Chefoo Convention did not envisage the return of China to Eastern Turkestan

and so did not lay down any commercial agreement for the lost provinces. By the Treaty of Livadia Russia obtained special facilities, including the establishment of Consular posts, which were ratified in 1881 by the Treaty of St Petersburg. It was many years before China would agree to our claim for similar treatment. During the rule of Yakub Beg we had obtained a temporary commercial ascendancy over Russia, largely through the energies and enthusiasm of Robert Shaw, with the strong support of the Viceroy, Lord Northbrook. Shaw had described the possibilities of trade in glowing terms only equalled by his description of the Kashgaris themselves, who he said 'would be just like Englishmen if they were not such liars'. As a result Sir Douglas Forsyth had led two missions to Yakub's capital. The first was a relative failure, but the second in 1874 resulted in a trade treaty and the appointment of a British representative (naturally the ever-popular Shaw) at the capital. However, probably for fear of Russia, Yakub failed to ratify the treaty and so Shaw was withdrawn, to the dismay of Yakub who saw him as a likely intermediary between himself and China. After that our only commercial representation left in Kashgar was the Central Asia Trading Company, managed by Andrew Dalgleish from Yarkand.

This brings us to the point where Elias was sent to Ladakh by Lord Lytton, 'for the express purpose of watching events in Kashgar'. The little mountain capital of Leh was the best available listening post on the Indian side of the Karakoram, because all trade with India from Eastern and Russian Turkestan as well as from Lhasa passed through it after crossing the Karakoram pass. Its market was a meeting place for all the races fringing India's northern frontier, Afghans, Chitralis, Tibetans, Turkis and many others. An ability to pick the brains of the heterogeneous collection of traders and tribesmen and to sift fact from rumour was essential for the job and Elias had just this ability. The post fitted him better than he would have allowed, and most importantly he had the confidence of the Viceroy by whom he had been specially chosen.

It was at about the same time that the Viceroy decided to reappoint Shaw as Resident at Kashgar. It was a reluctant decision, for as he saw it our commercial relations were insignificant and our political relations 'not free from embarrassment'. On the whole he thought the least risky means of support lay in encouraging trade under our treaty obligation with Yakub Beg which could not be ignored. But before Shaw could start an entirely new situation arose. About the middle of 1877 Yakub died, either from a stroke or, as local opinion naturally preferred to believe, by poison. With the Chinese already in re-occupation of Dzungaria, the future independence of Kashgar was in the

balance. Fearing civil disturbances certain Kashgar dignitaries were said to have invited the Chinese to take over the country, which had been accomplished apparently without any of the dreaded bloodshed. Finding to their great relief that no heads were rolling, these leading Kashgaris welcomed the return of Chinese rule and the prospect of settled times. They were quite used to such sudden changes in their fortunes and well knew how to adapt themselves to new rulers.

But the news of all these events had taken a long time to reach Leh, and it was not till the end of 1877, when he had already been there some weeks, that Elias heard of Yakub's death. This is not at all surprising, for the time taken by a caravan travelling from Yarkand was two months. Moreover, we had no agent in Kashgar able to send authoritative news. The lack of an experienced British representative and of a reliable intelligence system was a severe disadvantage, as can be seen from the conflicting rumours Elias had perforce to include in his earliest reports. His immediate action was to make a short journey towards the Karakoram pass. Here he may have met Dalgleish on his way from Yarkand to Leh, for he reported that the new Amir had asked Dalgleish to intercede on his behalf with the Chinese, but that hearing of some official opposition to the proposal he had advised Dalgleish not to go. Thus by the end of 1877 all that was known for certain was that Kashgar was in a state of unrest. The extent of Chinese re-occupation of the province was still unknown, but Yakub's eldest son and heir Beg Kuli Beg clearly wanted to come to terms with China, and all Kashgar was said to be regretting Shaw's absence. If only he had stayed, they said, thus signifying British support, none of their troubles would have occurred. As for Russia's intentions, rumours were rife but facts hard to come by.

In December a letter from Beg Kuli Beg to the Viceroy reached Elias. In it he asked for advice and help in making peace with China. Not yet knowing that the Chinese had occupied Kashgar, Elias forwarded the letter, giving his opinion that Beg Kuli Beg appeared to be firmly installed, and with Shaw's agreement he suggested a plan. From the information available he did not think the Chinese were in any great strength and he did not believe they were prepared to go to great lengths to recover the country. He thought a demonstration of British support would enable Beg Kuli Beg to make peace with China in return for his independence. He suggested that he should go to Kashgar, ostensibly to see if it were safe for Shaw to go there, but actually to seize the opportunity, without committing the Indian Government, of advising the Amir to make peace.

Lord Lytton had now been Viceroy for two years, but he still had not formed a firm opinion on how to deal with Kashgar. He did not

like extending trans-frontier relations to a state permanently under the menace of two great powers, especially when we were unable to furnish any material assistance. However, as the British Government had determined on a policy of good relations with Kashgar to prevent absorption by China or Russia, he thought the risk of following the advice of Elias was infinitesimal, provided he was cautioned not to make any promise of intervention. The plan was very acceptable to the Foreign Office because Wade in Peking had for some time been urging on China the advantages of recognizing the independence of Kashgar. However, the Karakoram Pass was blocked by exceptional winter snow throughout January and February and Elias could not set out. Even Dalgleish, who had left Yarkand the previous November en route for India, was still marooned at Leh and was unable to reach Srinagar in Kashmir. In the light of events the plan was abandoned and after fruitless weeks of waiting Shaw was posted to Mandalay as Resident, an appointment which appears singularly maladroit in the circumstances. No doubt Elias gave him a few hints before he went. Burma would have been as unattractive to the one as to the other, but within three weeks of taking up his post Shaw died of a fever. His loss was great, for his knowledge of Turkestan was unique and it fell later to Elias to take over the role of historian which Shaw had only just begun.

Throughout 1878 Elias was coping with rumours which too often were out of date before they reached him, and with the trade returns between India and Turkestan for 1876 and 1877. The trade hardly came up to Shaw's enthusiastic promises. India exported about five million rupees worth of goods against imports from Turkestan and China worth ten million rupees; a mere fleabite for India's economy. Some of the items are interesting: from Turkestan came wool (the beautiful soft under wool, combed from goats, which we call cashmere), silks, gold and silver dust, and a big item was a drug called charass. This was the modern Indian hemp or cannabis, which was said by the doctors in those days to account for the very high rate of lunacy in the Punjab at the time! Naturally, few commodities were listed as coming from China except tea bricks, which were expensive and of low quality. Elias had hopes that Indian tea might supplant the traditional brick tea and become the major Indian export, but his hopes were never realized. The biggest exports at the time were significantly gunpowder and percussion caps, the most convenient form of material assistance we could offer. Every item had to be carried on the backs of coolies, ponies, yaks and camels and took months to deliver. To compile these tedious returns Elias had to utilize the services of all his small Indian staff, even the Dispensary Orderly, one of whose normal jobs was to vaccinate the Ladakhis.

As to the rumours, he sifted them as well as he could but he had had little time to test the credibility of the merchants who brought them. Whatever elements of truth there might be, the Eastern habit of embroidery to suit the hearer had to be allowed for. It was not till the spring that a Kashgari on pilgrimage to Mecca reported a clash between Beg Kuli Beg and a usurper, Hakim Khan, whom he defeated. And it was this pilgrim who brought the first report that the Chinese had actually entered the capital of Kashgar in December 1877. It was probably as a result of that report that Elias finally decided not to set out for Kashgar. No doubt it surprised him for it was only a few months since he had said he did not believe the Chinese were in earnest. This was one of Elias's rare misjudgments, although understandable in the circumstances. It must have been just as great a surprise to Wade, who believed the Chinese were heeding his arguments in support of Kashgar's independence as a buffer state.

But Central Asia had been apt to confound western prophets, who in those days did not know enough of its history or that of China to undersand the cyclical tribal swings on her borders, or her method of dealing with them. If Lattimore's explanation of Inner and Outer Border regions had been recognized then, Sir Thomas Wade would not have been wasting his time urging the western notion of a buffer state on a disinterested Peking. Lattimore has shown that on China's western frontier the Inner Region was the Moslem province of Kansu, which was a permanently garrisoned territory whether held by China proper or the governing barbarian dynasty of the day, at this period the Manchus. Chinese Turkestan was the Outer Region and comprised merely a loose grouping of native protectorates. Any invasion from this region was improbable because normally the diverse tribes were unlikely to combine against her. If they did it was really Kansu which would be the buffer in our sense. In the Outer Region Chinese imperialism (and no country has had longer experience of it) was based on keeping the tribes separate, in acting as arbitrators between them and maintaining a nominal overlordship by prestige rather than by force.

Meanwhile facts in Kashgar were still hard to come by. Towards the end of 1878 Elias interviewed a Turkish officer who had been loaned to Yakub by the Sultan of Turkey. According to him, the Chinese had departed and the Russians were now masters of the province. This disconcerting report was countered by one from the ruler of the neighbouring state of Hunza, who had better grounds than we then knew for saying the Chinese were fairly settled in and had appointed their own Ambans, or Residents. But the Indian Government Political Journals for December 1878 and January 1879 were still

recording reports that Russia had occupied Kashgar, and in the light of Russian current activity in the Pamirs they could not simply be ignored. Other reports from Kashgar said there were about 8,000 badly armed Chinese troops in occupation and Elias still believed they were in control only by force of prestige and of name. Beg Kuli Beg was said to have fled to Russia and the country was being ruled through a Kashgar intermediary, Hakim Niaz Beg, who it was believed would like a British representative in the country if the Chinese would consent.

In the meantime, at the end of 1878 it was learned that the Yarkand road had been closed to trade and the British Joint Commissioner in Kashmir sent a letter to the Kashgar authorities asking for it to be reopened.

How secure was the Chinese occupation, and what were Russia's intentions in the light of the new situation? Elias's most important task was to find the answers to these urgent questions. It took him two years to piece together the facts of the reoccupation of Chinese Turkestan and put them in proper perspective. He told the full story in a despatch to *The Times*, which he sent from Kashgar during his visit there in July 1880, will be described in the next chapter. It was not published till October 27th, which shows how long news from Central Asia, and indeed official reports as well, took to reach home. Apologetically he said he did not suppose anyone in Great Britain would be much concerned with recent events in Kashgar, a poor half-populated land. It might seem of little political or strategic consequence whether it was ruled over by a Chinese Resident or a Moslem Khan, in either case holding sway by means of a small undisciplined mob dubbed an army, the one misgoverning according to the exigencies of an empty exchequer in Peking, the other in conformity with the Shariat of Islam. Having belittled his subject in that fashion, *The Times* could have been misled into throwing away the whole despatch, instead of which it was accorded a leading article nearly half as long as the despatch itself.

The rule of Yakub Beg, the Moslem soldier of fortune from Khokand in Ferghana, fell somewhere midway between the eulogies of Robert Shaw who first visited him and the Chinese viewpoint which considered him merely a harsh barbarian. He was certainly a lesser man than Timur and Babur who had hailed from the same region. He had forced his way to power at a time when the Manchu rulers of Eastern Turkestan, themselves erstwhile barbarians, had become corrupt and negligent. The Turkis may not have liked him, but if he was strict he was certainly just and that was a pleasant change. Moreover, he encouraged trade which they greatly appreciated. For twelve years the country was reasonably settled and that was a long time by Central

Asian standards of the day. His army of about 17,000 was comparatively well-armed and well-led, and until he died the Chinese did not dare attack him. Having recovered Dzungaria the Chinese army had remained inactive on the borders of Kashgar for a whole year, and until his death there might have been some prospects that China would recognize his independence.

But with his death, which was kept secret for two months, the long-sighted Chinese saw their chance to return. Yakub's younger son, Hak Kuli Beg, set out to wrest the capital from Beg Kuli Beg, and Hak Kuli Beg was in turn pursued by one of his army commanders who had had the foresight to seize the treasury. Beg Kuli Beg first disposed of his younger brother in the traditional way, by having him murdered, and he then defeated the mutinous army commander. But after that his army was in no condition for any more fighting and it had begun to disintegrate and desert to the Chinese. Beg Kuli Beg thereupon set out with his family and retainers to seek asylum in Russia. Some got there, some were captured by the Chinese and beheaded and others were banished to the Amur.

The Chinese reoccupation of Kashgar had been effected by the sounding of trumpets, without firing an arrow, and with their firearms still safely locked up in their armouries in Kansu. By the Chinese Book of Warfare this was the hallmark of a victorious campaign. The whole episode lent strength to the point which Elias always made about the Chinese army, which was that against disciplined troops they would be useless and for that reason he himself never believed that their troops on the Kashgar border should be taken as a serious threat to Russia. Conversely, of course, if Russia really wanted to occupy Eastern Turkestan she would not find it difficult.

Chapter VII

THE FOURTH EXPEDITION

First Mission to Turkestan

Meanwhile a whole year had passed since the Chinese had captured or, more accurately, reoccupied Kashgar, yet there was still no reliable information about the state of the country. Elias's informants, being quite untrained as observers, had not been of much help. Even after Kashgar itself was reoccupied they still told him the country was peaceful under Yakub's son. Faulty information apart, his own wrong conclusion was based on too little knowledge of the history of Chinese imperial rule. He had made no allowance for the internal dissidence which, as nowadays, we have reason to know, always succeeds a dictator's rule and which the Chinese well knew how to exploit; and he had taken too little account of his own early observation that the Chinese ruled by prestige and not by physical strength. Just as nebulous, and perhaps even more important to India, was reliable news about Russian activity. In the present circumstances Leh was not such a good listening post after all, for it was on the wrong side of the mountains. The sooner someone responsible went to Kashgar to see and learn for himself the better.

As soon as the fact of Chinese occupation was established Wade began negotiations in Peking for the appointment of a British Consul, citing Russia as a precedent. With his mistrust of the Indian Government he probably had visions of establishing one of his own men there but if so the vision faded because the Chinese refused to consider the proposal. None realized the need for active contact with Kashgar better than Elias, chafing at the unreliability of the reports he was receiving at Leh. He had been biding his time and waiting for a suitable opportunity. It came the next year in a most unexpected way and coincided with an equally unexpected piece of official recognition. The two episodes together marked a further change for the better in his recent fortunes.

One man in particular was responsible for this change and that was the Viceroy, Lord Lytton. His predecessor, Lord Northbrook, though a forceful exponent of trans-frontier policy in Central Asia had opposed exploration by British travellers on the grounds of security. Now his

successor, though more cautious about getting India too deeply involved beyond the Karakoram, was strongly in favour of exploratory missions and he was evidently impressed by the quiet persistence of Elias as a man who weighed the odds and whose discretion could be relied on. For the past five years Elias had had only the status of an Extra Attaché, but he had now acquired a champion. The Viceroy's support of his plans for a Tibet expedition was the first sign and its abandonment was certainly not his fault. Some consolation and encouragement had come with the appointment to Ladakh, which the Lytton Papers in the India Office show was a personal choice. Lord Lytton now demonstrated even more clearly his recognition of Elias's ability. In March 1879 he took the unprecedented step of writing to Lord Cranbrook, the Secretary of State for India, recommending him for a permanent appointment as Political Assistant. Apparently, no individual had ever before entered the Political Department except 'through the usual channels', and Lord Lytton's letter therefore went into considerable detail in support of his recommendations. It said that:

'he had given complete satisfaction since the previous Viceroy had appointed him an Extra Attaché in 1874, in which year he was made second in command of the Yunnan Expedition. Since then his geographical attainments and acquaintance with north-eastern India, and his knowledge of Chinese customs, had been most valuable. In 1878, if it had not been cancelled, he would have gone as second in command of a mission to Kashgar to ascertain events there. He had been sent to Leh the previous year to make preparations and collect information. He had thus been twice selected as second in command of two hazardous missions, when without a permanent political appointment.'

This was exceptional recognition and praise for those days. It would be nice to think Elias was sent a copy of the letter, but he was already a long way from Calcutta and he had travelled a long way further before he had news of the appointment, so he probably never saw it. The result of Lytton's recommendation was that Elias became a covenanted (i.e. pensionable) member of the Indian Civil Service, and as a further gesture the Government even exempted him from sitting for the examination for officers of the Political Department.

After eighteen months of inactivity Elias could tolerate it no longer and on June 14th, without any specific instructions he set off on what he called a road inspection, the 'road' being the Karakoram route to Turkestan. Writing in the 'twenties of this century Sir Clarmont Skrine believed the Karakoram route to be the highest and most difficult trade route in the world. It crosses glaciers which are greater than any out-

side polar regions. Only thirteen years had elapsed since Shaw and Hayward had been the first Englishmen to pioneer it, followed by the two Forsyth missions, whilst Andrew Dalgleish was the only other Briton to make a recent crossing. In every sense the journey was still a risky adventure made more so at the time by raiders from Hunza, who frequently robbed the caravans, but it was no longer pioneering in the geographical sense, which no doubt is why Elias is quite inarticulate on the route itself.

Many travellers have given us vivid descriptions of the route and a few of its salient features may be mentioned here. Nearly every caravan loses some animals en route; this is partly due to over-loading of trade goods and carrying too little fodder, but mainly to sudden storms. Writing in 1946, Shipton says the trail of skeletons and bones built up over decades is so continuous that for hundreds of miles the route can hardly be lost. All the same it was rare for experienced travellers like Elias to lose any animals (exceptionally, Prejevalski lost thirty-two camels on his Koko Nor journey) and besides he had been long enough at Leh to be able to pick the best men and animals to be had. Nor was he so likely to be cheated as he had been seven years earlier, and even in Mongolia he had not lost a single animal, bad as they were. The route crosses three of the greatest ranges of mountains in the world. First the Himalayas, then the Karakoram, and lastly the Kunlun in Turkestan itself. The tribes in the two latter are Kirghiz nomads of Central Asian Turkish stock, who are found also in the Pamirs and the Tien Shan (the Heavenly Mountains) whilst the Ladakhis in the Himalayas are of Tibetan stock. There are five major passes all over 15,000 feet above sea level. The highest of them, though not the most formidable, is the Karakoram Pass itself, at 18,550 feet. Some of the gorges are so narrow that animals can only just squeeze through them without their packs. Contemplating from below one of these almost indistinguishable clefts, Shipton wondered at the hardihood of the original pioneers who gradually found their way farther and farther through the labyrinth of gorges and across the awful solitude of the ranges to the El Dorado they had heard about. For a companion Elias had a freelance traveller, Captain Bridges, who had just reached Leh and had an unofficial assignment to report on the route as a possible invasion approach.

Elias gave as one reason for his journey that he wanted to find out why communications and trade with Kashgar had been stopped during the past three months. The first place at which he expected to get reliable news was the village of Kilian. This was well beyond the Karakoram which today is the accepted frontier; it was also beyond Shahidullah to which the Maharajah of Kashmir laid a shadowy claim

at the time. At Kilian he expected to find, if not a Chinese post, at least a Turki official or Beg. Cautiously he sent a messenger ahead to announce his impending arrival, so that the authorities could have plenty of time to find excuses for turning him back if he was unwelcome. Travelling light he made very fast time and reached Kilian on about July 6th. On his arrival he found no Chinese but he was greeted by a Turki official and he saw several caravans preparing to set out for Leh. The only real reasons he could find for the cessation of traffic were a trade depression and the high cost of transport; and the only actual embargo imposed by the Chinese was on the import of tea.

Two days later, to his profound astonishment, he received from the Chinese Amban of Kashgar an invitation to meet him as his guest at Yarkand. The Amban was the virtual ruler of Kashgar, though day to day government was in the hands of a Turki Governor. The invitation was therefore as important as it was unexpected, for he saw at last the chance of finding out what really was happening in Kashgar and in particular to learn something of current Chinese and Russian policy. He had to take a quick and difficult decision as to whether or not to report the invitation and ask for instructions. A reply, even by the fastest dak runner service, would take at least a month, by which time the good-will behind the invitation would probably have evaporated. Besides, it was more than likely that the Government would instruct him to refuse. So as the man in the best position to weigh the risks against the possible results he decided simply to report that he had accepted it and that he was leaving for Yarkand.

Four days later he set out and at Khargalik he saw the first signs of Chinese occupation, but there he heard with misgivings that the Amban had left Yarkand to return to Kashgar. He reached Yarkand on July 14th, just a month out from Leh. It was remarkable that he had got so far without being asked for his credentials and he had been lucky too, for he carried none. To the Amban of Yarkand he had to say that he did not need them because he was a border employee at the most advanced British post and that he had only come on to Yarkand at the invitation of the Amban of Kashgar. The Chinese tend to be impressed by 'papers' and the lack of any to indicate his status probably disappointed them. However, the Amban of Yarkand politely said that as the Chinese and the British were friendly, British officers were welcome at all times either with or without credentials, and Elias thereupon improved his position by saying how glad he was to extend this friendship. Seizing his chance, he said he would like to arrange a trade agreement between Kashgar and Ladakh and to exchange news about frontier movements near their respective countries especially about Russia. Unfortunately discussion on this last and most

intriguing subject came to a full stop when he found the Amban claimed or feigned never to have heard of India nor even of Ladakh or Gilgit, and suggested he should defer it till he met the Amban of Kashgar. His ignorance if genuine was surprising, for he was a Peking man and a Roman Catholic and Elias suspected the suggestion might have been made to test the motives for his visit. Although to go on to Kashgar was exactly what he wanted he feigned reluctance saying he would only go if the Amban really wished to meet him. When dealing with Chinese he was always careful to remain dignified, he had found it never paid to exceed the normal civilities required by Chinese custom and that on the contrary it paid to assert himself. Thus he complained strongly about unruly soldiers who invaded the house which he had been allocated outside the city gates and gave him no peace. Neither their officers nor the Turki Governor the Hakim Beg himself were able to control them, but the complaint was effective, for eventually he was moved to a very dirty house inside the city, where at least he was left in peace. In his report he played down this episode, but the soldiers were from Hunan, a province with a reputation for truculence, and a serious collision was only just avoided.

He spent the next week waiting for a further bidding to Kashgar and used it well in discussions with the Amban's intelligent Chinese deputy, who explained the Chinese enmity towards Russia by the latter's retention of Ili. He claimed too that they had encouraged the Tungan rebels and permitted raids by Andijan and Kirghiz tribes from across the border. The Russians, he said, were pressing on their frontier and had an official post on the Khokand road only four marches from Kashgar. Seeing that the Chinese were clearly worried about this post, Elias stressed the point that the British and Chinese were on common ground against Russian encroachment.

Throughout his stay in Yarkand no restraint was put on his movements, and being the sort of Englishman who feels the need for exercise he was able to take his daily ride into the country without hindrance. For a time Elias was puzzled as to why the Hakim Beg habitually wore such a troubled downcast countenance, but this demeanour was easy to account for when it turned out that he had been a traitor who had deserted to the Andijans and was now being spied on by the same Chinese whom he had introduced to Elias as his guests.

On July 22nd he paid an official call on the commander of the Chinese troops and was received with a guard of honour, as usual not too well drilled in its role although there were no casualties. The General boasted about the recent brilliant campaign, but otherwise he had a quiet and polite manner and apologized for the disturbance to Elias which his troops had caused. They were, of course, only behaving

as Chinese troops were wont to behave in countries they occupied. Fifty years later Lattimore noted this same behaviour, even the highest Turki official being addressed as an inferior by an ordinary illiterate Chinese soldier who would be a coolie in his own country.

The one disappointment on this remarkably fruitful visit was that there was no renewal of the original invitation to meet the Amban of Kashgar. He was now told only that he could go on if he wished. Elias treated this suggestion with aloof indifference and remained at Yarkand. Through his contacts with the Chinese and Turki officials he had acquired far more reliable information than any of his agents. He considered that the possibility of a Russian invasion had been greatly exaggerated by Russian and British newspapers. He heard strong rumours of Andijan raids across the Kashgar border, but these the Chinese would not talk about. He thought that the Chinese troops, who numbered about 12,000, were strong enough to cope with ordinary tribal and border raids. They were certainly able to control the province for, although they were only a rabble army and were armed with muzzle loaders, spears and tridents, they had the moral advantage that they were the traditional ruling race, and the Turkis and other Kashgar tribes were not united enough to combine against them. He believed, however, that the Chinese were quite seriously worried about their frontier with Badakshan, the Afghan-claimed province, which lay between Aghanistan and Russia. Before he left he arranged for a Peshawari trader living in Yarkand to send him information about border raids and about events in Badakshan.

As for the trade with Ladakh and India, he found there was a good deal of 'squeeze' over passports as well as on goods, which caused delays and added to costs, and he presented the Hakim Beg with a draft set of regulations designed to reduce the bottlenecks. His hopes that the embargo on tea might be lifted or at any rate circumvented were not fulfilled, but he was successful in lifting the embargo on pilgrimages to Mecca through India.

In preparation for his return he asked the Chinese for facilities to travel by the Sanju pass, to avoid the rivers swollen by summer melting of snow in the mountains. For reasons unapparent this request was refused. They said they had destroyed the pass, so he returned perforce by his outward route. He left Yarkand on July 26th and reached Leh on August 17th. There is no mention in his report of Captain Bridges and we do not know whether or not he went all the way to Yarkand. All we know is that he reported on his return that the Karakoram pass was obviously no invasion route.

It would have been entirely contrary to the Elias character to write a report with any vestige of self-congratulation in it. His preference

was to stress the points of failure and barely to mention the successes. In this report he did not even suggest how unexpectedly satisfactory this first visit to Eastern Turkestan had been. That had to be read between the lines, as his superiors learned to do in the course of time. Even if he did not reach Kashgar, he had achieved much more than he could have hoped for when he started. He had had a friendly welcome and established excellent contacts; he had also obtained first-class information at last and cleared up a great deal of confusion. He reiterated his conviction of the need for a permanent representative in Kashgar, which was a far better post for keeping an eye on Russian intrigues and approaches in the direction of the Pamirs and Badakshan than behind the passes of Kashmir and Gilgit. Meanwhile he believed he ought to pay another visit, armed next time with full credentials to present to the Amban. Forwarding his report nearly three months later to the Secretary of State, Lord Cranbrook, the Viceroy said he had expressed his approval of Elias's action, thus endorsing his judgment of a few months earlier.

Elias made this journey just ten years after he had written about Chinese Turkestan as 'A Civilization encircled by Deserts'. The country has a turbulent and savage history. Invasions have swept across it many times both from eastwards and westwards. Skrine records that China has occupied the country five times and lost it four times and there have been many more or less temporary occupants from the Huns to the Mongols under Chingis Khan, and then the Dzungars, not to mention mere civil wars within the territory. This land is farther from the sea than any in the world and it was five months travel by caravan from Peking, yet China has always returned to occupy it even after a lapse of a thousand years. Throughout its vicissitudes the indigenous Turki farmer, himself descended from Uighurs who were originally Indo-Europeans and thus Aryans, from the West, continued to cultivate the rich series of oases which Eastern Turkestan comprises. It was rich enough for the Emperor to have its products sent to him in Peking including, as some claim, the finest melons in the world. The Turki survived because he was a trader and a tiller of the soil and not a nomad. But he was not the only inhabitant. Other races represented were the T'ung-Kan who were Moslem Chinese and who also farmed and traded, as well as immigrant Chinese, often from Tientsin. Besides these were Buddhist Mongols who were true nomads, and Moslem Kazaks who included nomads of mixed Kirghiz, Tatar, Turki and Mongol blood. All these races and tribes were to be found as well in Russian Turkestan. Small wonder that there was little peace in the land for long. Kashgar had to survive invasions and occupations, even slavery. In such times neglected oases were abandoned and irrigation

systems dried up, so that many former villages and towns now lie deep below desert sands. That is how the land became an archaeological paradise for men like Sir Aurel Stein.

Perhaps it was because his job tied him to politics and left him too little chance for historical study and exploration of the past of this strange isolated region, but at any rate Elias's feelings, in a letter to the Royal Geographical Society which he wrote only three months after his return, were far from romantic. He said, 'Everything here in Ladakh is dead against geographical enterprise but I am obliged to remain here by way of getting bread and butter. I have given up all hope of ever carrying a sextant in the wilderness. Meanwhile the field of exploration narrows year by year and the Russians reap all the laurels.' He had heard, he said, that the Russians were appointing a consul at Kashgar, an excellent base for exploring both eastwards and westwards. The British could claim the same rights but were unlikely to do so because nobody seemed to care enough about it. The disastrous Yunnan and bungled Tibetan expeditions evidently still rankled in his mind. The way these were handled, he said, shows how such things are regarded in India. 'With influence, favouritism and jobbery on the side of the explorer something might be done, but without these aids certainly nothing.' His visit to Yarkand he said was devoid of geographical interest. Its geography had already been excellently done by Shaw, Hayward and Trotter. The chief value of his visit had been to further intercourse, but it would be wasted as the Government declined to take advantage of it.

It is disappointing to find Elias writing in such terms immediately after a notably successful mission. Besides he surely must have learnt by then something of the high opinion Lord Lytton had of him, but his mood was evidently one of deep depression. It was his bad luck that he had struck a bad period for exploration. No doubt official reasons were that our political relations with China and Russia were too uncertain to risk incidents over explorers, especially if they were as well known as he was, and with the added factor that he was now an official. On the other hand, the Russians were risking their men successfully and Lord Lytton, in contrast to his predecessor, had shown that he personally favoured exploration. But opposition there was, and we have seen something of where it originated in the bureaucratic climate of the day. As for the accusations of jobbery, unless the newspapers were just writing baseless scandal there is likely to have been some truth in these too. As an explorer Elias had good reason to be disappointed, but his reaction goes beyond the bounds of normality. Another man would have shrugged off his disappointment and found compensation in this new diplomatic role. We may conclude that he

was creating scapegoats on whom to blame his frustrations, which were far deeper than he could know and it is in this light that we have to study all his later work and achievements.

In that mood, with more than a hint of masochism about it, he would allow himself no satisfaction from the eulogistic reports from Kashgar which followed his visit and which in the most sober terms he forwarded to India. The Yarkandi and Kashgari traders were said to be highly pleased to find that trade facilities had promptly improved; whereas before his visit obstructions had been leading towards a complete closing of the trade route to India. They said no other envoy had been received with such honours as Elias and that the Chinese in particular were pleased that the English had been the first to congratulate them on their re-occupation of the province. This was a diplomatic bonus for us, seeing that he was no envoy and had no papers, and it was of course a bull point scored against the Russians. Here, too, was the obvious line towards improving our relations with China. It was also pointed out that the news of his visit and his reception would spread through all the neighbouring countries, especially to Badakshan, where, as he had noted, the Chinese were openly anxious about their western frontier. Two Russian spies enquiring about his reception were told with gusto by Elias's agent that he had been accorded 'the highest honours'. Lastly, by September the Chinese had annulled their order prohibiting pilgrimages to Mecca, and he was told they had done so entirely owing to his representations about the need for freedom of traffic and keeping the road open. As a result a thousand pilgrims were said to be on their way. It is always safe to strike off a nought in eastern numeration, but some hundreds did pass through India before the passes were closed for that winter.

The ability of pilgrims to Mecca to travel through India was of great importance to the devout Moslems of Central Asia. In their faith they faced a journey fraught with danger, crossing the passes of the Karakoram and the Himalayas, liable to be mulcted in India and risking death in pestilential pilgrim ships. Many failed to return but those who got back perhaps two years later, dyed their beards red and became Hadjis, venerated by all in their native villages. Elias's success in persuading the Chinese to lift the travel ban was therefore in itself a useful piece of diplomacy.

China's anxiety about her frontier with Badakshan has been mentioned, but at that particular moment her interest was of less concern to us than our own, for Badakshan was a crucial district in the diplomatic struggle between Russia and India, and since more will appear about it later it is convenient at this point to shift the focus westwards from Kashgar. Its importance to India was that together with its

sometime feudatories, Roshan, Shighnan and Wakhan, it lay between India's north-western frontier and Russia's expansion southwards. If Russia seriously intended to expand as far south as the Hindu Kush she would have to occupy Badakshan and Wakhan and thus would have a frontier contiguous with India. From there, even if she never intended to invade India, she could without difficulty create diversions sufficient to lock up a great deal of the Indian army by causing unrest amongst all the tribes in the area. The Russian war with Turkey had only recently ended and had greatly embarrassed Britain. At the very least she could use the threat to India as a means to divert attention from further activity in the Near East.

Two factors qualified the menace. The first was geographical, for the immense Hindu Kush range lay between Badakshan and India. The second was political for Afghanistan claimed Badakshan and her feudatories, though the strength of their allegiance was an unknown quantity at this time. It was the primary object of British strategy throughout most of the nineteenth century to build up Afghanistan, including Badakshan, as a unified and allied buffer state, since this was the most effective barrier possible against what was for Russia the easiest invasion route. It had to be done in the face of considerable subversive Russian influence and it entailed two Afghan wars. In the end it was done, but Elias's years in Central Asia spanned the period of greatest diplomatic activity, when success or failure were in the balance. The part he himself played had already begun. His reasons for urging a permanent resident in Kashgar are now even more obvious. It was the only accessible point north of the encircling mountain ranges where information about Russia's movements could be gathered, for it was only at Kashgar, where traders came in eastwards from Russian Turkestan; and from Afghanistan, Badakshan, and so many other smaller states lying along the vulnerable Roof of the World. After the fall of Yakub Beg, to cultivate good relations with China was just as strategically important because her newly reoccupied territory was still essential as a buffer, and still had to be denied to Russia as a base. The promotion of trade between Kashgar and India, though of little economic importance, was seen by Elias as an adjunct to our strategy and that was why he applied so much time and energy to it. Unfortunately, his latest recommendation coincided with China's refusal of Wade's proposals for a representative at Kashgar. As official opinion in India was still generally against getting too involved in Chinese Turkestan, there was too little firm backing of the Wade and Elias policy either in London or Calcutta to give the former any real chance of overcoming Chinese resistance.

Chapter VIII

THE FIFTH EXPEDITION

Second Mission to Turkestan

At the beginning of 1880 Elias put forward his plan to revisit Chinese Turkestan, this time to be equipped with full credentials from Peking as an official of the Indian Government. He told the Government that he did not anticipate any difficulty or personal risk, but believed he would be able to collect valuable information about commercial possibilities as well as observing the activities of the Russians towards Kashgar. He also suggested he should travel on to Badakshan to glean information about their recent increased activity there and along the Upper Oxus river. Lord Lytton informed the Secretary of State for India that the Government had approved his plan but, always concerned about possible political complications, had warned him not to go into Badakshan, which could involve too much risk, nor indeed to venture beyond Kashgar territory. He had been instructed to discuss with the Chinese arrangements for the encouragement of trade and he would carry a letter of authority to do so, but had been told he was to avoid entering into any written agreement. The approval of the British Government was asked for to ensure that he was recognized as a British Officer and accorded proper treatment. As it stood, that request meant nothing; what really was needed was the Peking Government's recognition, and the British Government should have been asked in specific terms to request it. If this procedure had been followed, besides being diplomatically correct the request might well have been dealt with in Peking with more urgency than one coming from the Viceroy, Lord Lytton being after all only another barbarian 'head man' in Chinese eyes.

The note added that he would be accompanied by H. H. Godwin-Austen, 'who had some knowledge of surveying and would be useful'. This did Godwin-Austen less than justice, for he was a member of the Indian Survey Department and had an unrivalled knowledge of the Himalayas and the Karakoram. He was the surveyor and first explorer, though not the discoverer (this was T. G. Montgomerie), of the mountain K.2, and he had also taken an important part in the first survey of Kashmir. The technique of climbing was then in its infancy, but lacking any knowledge he climbed many peaks above 20,000 feet merely in the

course of his work. His other main interest was in the geology of the region. Like Elias and many mountaineers he was a small spare man. As a seasoned traveller and with their common interests he would be the ideal companion. A third member of the party and one whom Elias always considered valuable for creating good relations was an Indian doctor.

Considering the ample warning that had been given about his new mission, it is sad to relate that once again the documentary arrangements to give Elias the official status on which he set so much store went wrong. On July 22nd, Wade telegraphed the Viceroy from Peking that he had obtained passports for two Assistant Commissioners to visit Yarkand and Kashgar with the option to return via China proper. He asked that Elias should be told to use his discretion about returning that way and added astonishingly 'or even through Tibet'. This was an unusually optimistic suggestion on Wade's part, but it was wasted for two reasons. One was that no credentials were sent from Peking to the Amban of Kashgar, which was the only means of ensuring that the Chinese would accord him official recognition, and the other was that he had already departed three months earlier. He could not have left any later because the Indian Government had limited his journey to six months, so he had to be back before the passes became blocked for the winter. As the passports had not arrived a message was sent after him from Simla warning him that he might be in trouble if he tried to go to China without them and that he should await their arrival. As a result of this mismanagement all Elias carried with him in the way of letters was a semi-official one to the Amban of Kashgar from Lyall, the Secretary to the Indian Government's Foreign Department, an important official in India but not likely to impress a Chinese mandarin in Central Asia.

Leaving Leh on May 1st, the two geographers carried out en route what was for both of them a most congenial exercise. This was an examination of two blockages of the Shyok River, which rises in the Karakoram and is a main feeder of the Indus. It was very liable to blockages and when these burst the result was floods and severe damage in the Punjab as far as 800 miles down from the Indus. Such floods had occurred in 1841 and 1858 and Shipton records another in 1929, and there were others in between. On this occasion the first block was caused by a landslide at Shardok, where the Shyok and Indus converge above Leh, and this they did not visit. The second is always caused by the movement of a certain glacier on the Upper Shyok, beyond the Sasser pass. Elias, with his experience of the Yellow River, could count himself an expert on inundations, whilst Godwin-Austen probably knew as much about glaciers as any man of his day. (Godwin-

Austen was invalided home at the age of fifty. He died in 1923 at the age of eighty-seven and in that year wrote to *The Times*, which had just reported another block on the river, vividly recalling his visit to it with Elias forty-three years earlier.) It would have been fascinating to hear the two experts pooling their knowledge in that vast mountain setting. Both Godwin-Austen and later Shipton, who visited it in 1946, explain the glacier dam as coming in from the side of the valley and impinging against the cliffs on the opposite side of the main river bed. The glacier is liable to advance and retreat; the burst occurs when it is weakened by a retreat and allows the river to pour through. Shipton gives an eerie description of the valley, which he says is devoid of vegetation and like the landscape of a dead planet.

They made very good time, travelling light compared with trading caravans. The party reached Kilian on May 27th, where on being offered a camping site in the garden reserved for traders Elias took possession of the more dignified house belonging to his interpreter. On June 7th he reached Yarkand and here his reception was a considerable improvement on that of the previous year. Everything he asked for in advance had been arranged, including a good house and a ban on the soldiery invading his quarters. He was met six miles outside the town by the Hakim Beg of the previous year and escorted into it with due honours. The next day he was received by the Amban of Yarkand, who must have done some homework since his previous visit, for Elias found him much better informed about England and India. This time, too, he found all preparations had been made for his journey on to Kashgar. Of his cordial reception by the Amban his agent in Yarkand sent back a separate report in glowing terms describing how the Sahib had presented his gifts from the Viceroy. As a trader the agent naturally had a strong personal interest in the outcome of their meeting.

The prospects for the mission's reception in Kashgar seemed reasonably good when he set out again on June 14th, reaching Yangi Hissar two days later. The escort for this part of the journey consisted of four spearmen and two more with rusty swords. As soldiers always took what they wanted without troubling to pay, they were mounted on very good ponies. They also took a cup from Godwin-Austen's saddle-bag but this was discreetly recovered during the night.

His arrival at Kashgar on June 18th was less auspicious. No escort was sent out to bring him in in the proper style, he was allotted poor quarters and was subjected to the usual 'baiting' by the soldiery. This time it was too much to be tolerated and he put on a show of extremely bad temper which had considerable effect. On the following day he called on the Chinese Amban and was received, as he was fond of putting it, 'very civilly' when he presented his meagre demi-official letter.

Their talk lasted two and a half hours and Elias began on the less delicate subject of trade with India. The Amban affected not to know there was any, though as the two countries were friendly he thought it was doubtless a good idea. It dawned on Elias that in Chinese official eyes the trade existed only on sufferance and was illegal, and that the Amban was merely keeping up the pretence of ignorance. It became very clear, however, that if the Treaty of Livadia was ratified or a new agreement reached between China and Russia, China would immediately raise her tariffs against India. This gloomy forecast was duly confirmed two years later after the Treaty of St Petersburg had been signed and had begun to have its effect.

Elias then turned to the trickier subject of politics and here was demonstrated the value of a man of his calibre who was able to talk direct with the Amban. He learned more in this short visit than a native agent, however quick witted and intelligent, could pick up in a year from bazaar gossip. A rumour from Afghanistan that there had been hostilities between Russia and China on the Khokand frontier was quickly disposed of. In discussing Ili the Amban showed great bitterness against the Russians. Elias took his cue and said that as our own frontier was not far from Russia, England and China ought to assist each other and he would be glad to receive news in Leh about important Russian movements. He explained that the war in Afghanistan (i.e. the Second Afghan war of 1879 in which his brother Robert was serving) was entirely due to Russian intrigue against India. He also seized the chance to discuss Hunza, partly in the hope that the means might be found to curb the Kanjuti tribe which robbed the caravans. The Mir of Hunza was a tributary of China, who might be expected to have some means of controlling him, especially as her own caravans suffered. But for reasons which will appear later this preliminary discussion about Hunza achieved nothing beyond what is nowadays euphemistically called an exchange of views.

Next day the Amban returned his call and invited Elias and Godwin-Austen to breakfast, both of them rather pointedly being given a step in rank on their invitations. At its best the Elias stomach was not up to coping with heavy repasts of unusual composition, but perhaps Godwin-Austen was able to maintain the 'face' of the mission through this gastronomic ordeal whilst Elias did his best in what he preferred to call his 'bad Chinese'. One reason for the Amban's politeness now came to light. He wanted to buy arms in India for possible use against Russia. This was obviously important for he said he would go down in person to buy them; he explained that it would be quicker than getting them from China. Behind this lay a typically Chinese reason. The army of the West had been supplied with quantities of reasonably

modern arms by Peking for the reconquest of Chinese Turkestan. But as Tso Tsung T'ang had been cautioned almost on pain of death against losing any of them he had locked them carefully away in armouries and in his campaign had relied on bows and arrows and broad swords. The Amban had been Tso Tsung T'ang's lieutenant and he was no more desirous of incurring the displeasure of Peking than his general.

The strength of Chinese feeling against Russia was most marked. Elias could find no one who had recently been in Russian territory, which showed how little trade was being allowed. The nearest Chinese post to the Terek pass, where it was being said that the Russians had suffered a recent defeat, was Olugchat, but it was manned by only about 100 soldiers and they had seen no Russians in this wild uninhabited region. The report of the clash was clearly a fiction. He put the strength of the Chinese army in Eastern Turkestan at this time at about 20,000. As usual, he rated their standard very low. He described them as a contemptible rabble, ill-armed, ill-led and quite without discipline.

On June 25th he set out on the return journey. He had hoped to stay a few weeks longer but he found his position becoming untenable. Despite the politeness of the Amban and top officials, he had been pestered by lower officials almost from the day of his arrival, asking when he intended to depart. They made it very obvious that he was unwelcome and that he was regarded only as a barbarian underling. He was refused permission to visit Khotan where he might have got more information about Russian movements, and they again refused to let him return by the Sanju pass. The Amban himself remained polite to the last and gave him presents for the Viceroy which included brick tea, a fur cloak, two jade rings and rolls of silk. He and Godwin-Austen both received purses and fan cases which they said they must also by custom give to the Viceroy. This was probably a gaffe, no mandarin would believe that a barbarian could refuse a present, or if he did it must only be because it was not good enough and the refusal therefore an insult. Elias carefully calculated the value of the presents as about 900 rupees or £90, so the Viceroy was evidently rated a long way below the Mir of Hunza, whose annual *pourboire* from the Emperor of China was reputed to be about the equivalent of 110 ounces of gold dust.

As usual he deprecated the political results of his mission. He had hoped to pave the way towards improving relations by regular visits, but he considered that a third visit under the same adverse conditions would accomplish nothing and might even be unwelcome. He thought he detected a hint of this in the message he received from the Hakim Beg only a few weeks after his return, saying that as he had now visited

Kashgar twice it was the Hakim's turn to come to India next. On the other hand, a letter from the Amban to the Viceroy was distinctly friendly. Not only did he express the hope that friendship between India and Chinese Turkestan might be permanent and increasing but he apologized for the inconvenience and discomfort to which Elias had been put on his journey from Yarkand to Kashgar (he said nothing about his difficulties in Kashgar) and he promised every assistance in the future. He promised too that the lives and property of British Indian subjects who came to trade or settle in Yarkand and Kashgar would be protected. The most likely explanation is that the Chinese Amban, or Resident, which Elias considered was the more accurate rendering from the Chinese, meant what he said and that the Hakim, a Turki, was at the bottom of the trouble. Indeed, a year later the latter sent a message apologising for his 'treacherous behaviour' and asking that it should be forgotten, a message which Elias treated with scorn. That he did not achieve more was due in Elias's opinion to his lack of credentials as well as Peking's failure, by design or neglect, to inform Kashgar. For future intercourse between the two countries he insisted that the officer must be regularly accredited to Kashgar by the Peking Government and be accompanied by a proper Chinese staff. He left it to be inferred that the failure to get him passports in time and to have his credentials forwarded to Kashgar from Peking had prejudiced his mission. Nevertheless, events showed once again how much more successful he had been than he claimed.

The visit to Yarkand the previous year had gone unreported in the British press, but the latest one received a fair amount of publicity. His departure was not announced till three weeks after he had left, but it was then reported both in the Indian and the home papers. It was also quickly noticed in the Russian press. One Russian paper reported erroneously that four Englishmen were at work in Kashgar organizing the Chinese troops there. Another rumour from St Petersburg, at the same time, was to the effect that 20,000 Chinese troops had crossed the frontier in the Amur province of Manchuria and that 40,000 were in readiness to invade Russian territory on the Kashgar and Kulja frontiers. The latter figure was a gross exaggeration. Elias put it at half that number in the whole of Chinese Turkestan and that included garrisons throughout the province. The English papers reported that Elias had only gone to Kashgar to see how far the Chinese were inclined to facilitate trade between Kashgar and India, although one paper remarked that China was now our neighbour on three sides of the Indian peninsula, and that the land trade routes together with the increasing importance of friendship with China must not be neglected.

The *Pall Mall Budget*, commenting that Elias seemed to be well

received, said the Chinese appeared to have discriminated between Mr Elias and Colonel Prejevalski very much to the disadvantage of the latter who was now a prisoner in their hands. Elias probably did not know till later that this was the dénouement to his rival's latest attempt to enter Tibet. He had the greatest respect for his Russian fellow professional, so his feelings would have been a mixture of sympathy for Prejevalski and satisfaction that for once the Russians had not 'done it again'.

The plans for the Kashgar mission had been amongst the last approved by Lord Lytton during his Viceroyalty. We have seen that towards Turkestan he was a somewhat reluctant advocate of what in respect of India's frontier was called the forward policy, nevertheless he had most effectively supported Elias. Confining comment to the sphere which concerned Elias, Lytton's policy may not have influenced Russia against the occupation of Kashgar, but at least it had the result that relations with China had been maintained and even improved, and the same applied to our relations with Chinese Turkestan. Altogether it is remarkable how good these relations were considering that China had every reason to mistrust us on account of our attitude to the Moslem rebellion. Twice we had supported the rebels by our official recognition, once in Yunnan and again in Kashgar. In less than three years we had seen both causes lost through our failure to recognize China's historical powers of recovery. Later we missed an important chance to make amends at no cost to us by omitting to congratulate her on her re-conquests. This was because we entirely failed to recognize how important these were to her in terms of prestige. In the meantime, whilst relations between China and Russia were so bitter, it should have been obvious that India's course ought to be to exploit the situation to her own advantage. It was through no fault of Elias, just as it was no fault of Wade in Peking, that the chance was missed by the next Viceroy.

Chapter IX

THE RIPON RÉGIME OF LOST OPPORTUNITIES

It would have been interesting to learn what members of the Indian Government's Foreign Department thought as a Viceroy bowed himself out at the end of his four-year term of office. Were they relieved or disappointed, and did they wait in hope or in fear that the next incumbent would stand his predecessor's policy on its head? The Marquess of Ripon who succeeded Lord Lytton had already given a clue to his likely foreign policy. Earlier, as Secretary of State for India, he had vetoed plans for a railway through Upper Burma as far as the Chinese border, so he was unlikely to be expansionist. Now as Viceroy he was soon to confirm that his policy was to be one of non-involvement either on the Indian frontier or beyond. There was sense in leaving the cold war with Russia to be waged by diplomatists in London and St Petersburg and keeping Calcutta clear of it; but unfortunately Ripon left the third Empire, China, completely out of his reckoning and to any student of those days this was a grievous error. It was obvious at the time to Elias and also to Wade, whose last days in Peking before he retired in 1883 to academic fields in Cambridge were marred by opportunities missed. Russia, so far at least, had no boundary co-terminous with India, but China had, and it generally pays to cultivate good relations with a neighbour especially when that neighbour makes repeated overtures of friendship.

Ripon's Central Asian policy was less noticeable at first because by the end of the 1880 affairs in Chinese Turkestan began to decrease in importance, strategically as well as politically. There was still some dissidence within the country, but China was firmly enough in the saddle to be able to deal with it in her own way. Externally there appeared to have been no serious Russian threat to the Kashgar frontier since 1878, when a Russian force from Ferghana had been diverted towards it before withdrawing. The Chinese continued to claim that the border was threatened, but Elias was never able to confirm the rumours of a build-up of Russian troops. It probably suited the Chinese to keep the rumours going, for the Russians were cordially hated by the local inhabitants and they would have been infinitely less welcome

as rulers. For the same reason the Chinese were relaxing some of their stringencies and a feeling of security was returning.

But China still had cause for alarm on the Pamir sector of her frontier, which was where Russian activities threatened India and China alike. Russia had the immense advantage in classical strategic terms of operating on interior lines of communication whilst China and India had to operate on vastly extended exterior lines. Any move by Russia could appear as a threat to both countries and she made the most of it. This same geographical situation gave Russia a similar advantage over India in the commercial exploitation of Central Asia.

Yet if the Russians had ever seriously considered the occupation of Eastern Turkestan there was the less point now, for they stood to gain by treaty negotiation most of what they required, not only in Ili but by way of consular representation and favourable terms of trade, without having to govern the country. On the other hand, till a treaty was signed they took care to keep up the pressure against China both in the Pacific and on the northern Amur frontier and at one time observers had thought a war between the two countries was likely. Treaty negotiations with the new Chinese Ambassador to St Petersburg, Chung Hao, had begun in 1878. This official's diplomatic methods were well below the usual Chinese standard, perhaps because the Russians took good care to fête and decorate him liberally. To brief himself on the situation in Turkestan he ought to have travelled overland and obtained the views of its conqueror, General Tso Tsung T'ang, on the way. Perhaps he felt he was too old for the hardships of a five months journey by caravan. At any rate he chose to go by sea. In the ensuing protracted negotiations he gave the Russians almost all they asked for in the way of trade privileges and consular representation. When the Chinese Government learned what he had agreed to in the Treaty of Livadia there was great consternation and Tso Tsung T'ang laid twenty-two counts against him before the Emperor. Not surprisingly the Ambassador took a slow boat back to China, and an even slower one from Shanghai to Peking; he went by barge by the classic Grand Canal route so as to avoid meeting Viceroy Li Hung Chang in Tientsin. At his trial influential friends managed to save his head but he forfeited his considerable possessions and was banished to the Amur province. If China did not actually repudiate the treaty she certainly ignored it. Her reaction did nothing to reduce the ill-feeling between the two countries which for the time being was strongly reflected in trade relations in Chinese Turkestan. Russian traders continued to suffer severe restrictions; so difficult indeed were conditions made for them that two horse dealers returned from Kashgar in disgust with their consignment of horses unsold. And if horse copers anywhere

in the world give up the ordinary trader will have despaired long before.

Temporarily this ill-feeling worked to the advantage of Indian trade with Kashgar and to our prestige in the province. But the advantage was short-lived for in 1881 China and Russia negotiated a new agreement by the Treaty of St Petersburg which, whilst it reduced the general tension, still confirmed Russia's commercial privileges and consular representation. Meanwhile in the middle of 1881 Dalgleish set out for Yarkand with a caravan of thirty ponies and merchandise. This was the first visit of an English trader since the Chinese re-occupation. By way of a passport Elias gave him letters of introduction to the Chinese and Turki authorities, and so good was his name that they sufficed. Dalgleish was remarkably well received, he was given a house and invited to go anywhere in the province to dispose of his goods. These were probably of good quality, whereas a failing of the Indian traders was trying to sell shabby goods; it was a failing which may have counted against us in later competition with Russia. It was noteworthy that on orders from Peking the Chinese, as a mark of friendship towards the English, declined to levy any duty on the goods Dalgleish brought. He himself believed that he was reaping the benefit of Elias's credentials, which had arrived from Peking three months after the latter's departure. He remained happily for fifteen months in Yarkand, sold all his goods and made the excellent profit of 33 per cent. He returned to India in September 1882 just before the arrival of Petrovski, the Russian Consul whose advent all Kashgar was dreading. The Chinese were still nervous of Russian encroachments and Britain was still held in high regard. It is interesting in the light of subsequent border disputes that they called Shahidullah the British border, for this village lay well north of Karakoram.

Dalgleish had certainly benefited from the goodwill Elias had established, which greatly discounted the tone of the latter's reports, in which he allowed himself to magnify the irritations and difficulties he had experienced. Meanwhile the Amban of Yarkand sent him, through Dalgleish, an invitation to pay another visit. This would have been a propitious moment to raise again with China the matter of regularizing India's trade relations with Chinese Turkestan. It should have been obvious to the government that China was badly in need of British support to offset the Russian threat to Kashgar heralded by the new treaty. She was going out of her way to invite our friendship and this would have been the right moment to negotiate a trade agreement giving us the same facilities as Russia. Elias, as has been seen, had been pressing these views on the Indian Government no less than on the Kashgar authorities ever since he arrived at Leh, but he was not allowed

to accept the Amban's invitation. Lord Ripon was greatly to blame for not seizing such a favourable opportunity; perhaps he only looked at the trade figures and saw how relatively small they were in terms of India's total economy, but chiefly he was always in fear of political complications. Once Petrovski, who was the first Russian Consul to be installed at Kashgar, arrived in 1882, he very soon began to exert his authority under the Treaty of St Petersburg and from then on, lacking the support of a treaty, Indian traders had no chance. Moreover, Russia quickly put up the customs dues on imports across the Oxus and into Western Turkestan, which effected an almost total embargo not only on Indian trade but on all neighbouring countries including Afghanistan. At the same time she began to flood Chinese Turkestan with goods which were on the whole of better quality than those from India. In the long run the prognostications of Elias were only too well borne out.

With his political representations persistently ignored Elias was thus perforce more pre-occupied with trade than with politics. Part of his duties at Leh were to ensure that the Maharajah of Kashmir did not extort more in taxes than he was entitled to under his treaty with India; a task which demanded considerable ingenuity on his part. During the five years after Chinese re-occupation from 1878 to 1882 the total trade turnover (imports and exports being added together) to Leh through Yarkand increased from Rs. 2,129,500 to Rs. 3,847,180. Purely in terms of India's economy it was a small enough contribution, but only Elias's persistence made the increase possible.

There was never a lack of interesting intelligence; thus he noted that the Rajah of Ladakh was dispatching an envoy to Lhasa with a considerable consignment of goods and gifts. This was apparently a triennial event denoting Ladakh's status as a tributary to Tibet, another example of the anomaly wherein so many native states saw nothing unusual in concluding treaties with Britain and at the same time continuing their traditional relations with other states. If Elias ever entertained the idea of accompanying the envoy to Tibet he restrained himself. In any case the Chinese Government had told Wade that although they agreed they were now under treaty obligation to provide passports for British subjects entering Chinese Turkestan, they could not guarantee the acceptance of passports by Lhasa for travellers wanting to enter Tibet. This strong indication of China's limited control over Lhasa appears to have been overlooked when talk of a mission to Tibet was renewed four years later.

About this time the Mir of Hunza sent a deputation to Kashgar saying he was afraid of being annexed by Kashmir and asking to be taken under Chinese rule. It is hard to see what the Mir expected to gain.

He had always been under Chinese suzerainty, but at the time and for some years to come he was unpopular in Peking because of his inability or unwillingness to restrain his Kanjuti robber subjects. From now on the little state of Hunza was to become a focal point of considerable strategic importance to all three Empires.

About this time the ruler of Badakshan, too, sent a deputation to Kashgar. Fearing Russia's intentions from the north, disliking the Afghan régime and unable to get any material support from Britain, who strongly supported Afghan claims to sovereignty over him, the ruler occupied a very hot seat indeed. Besides these troubles his dependencies of Shighnan and Roshan were showing signs of unrest against him, partly as the result of Russian subversive activities in the region. Perhaps he saw submission to China as a way out of his difficulties. But China was too anxious about maintaining her present borders to accept any more responsibility for unruly tribes in the direction of the Pamirs, nor did she want a boundary directly contiguous with Afghanistan, and too far off to defend.

Kashmir had been the first of the states on this sector of India's frontier to conclude a treaty with India and was the key state in our northern frontier policy, just as was Afghanistan to the west. Kashmir's relations with India were important not only because of the passes into Eastern Turkestan but because of her relations with the other states on her borders such as Hunza and Chitral, whilst Gilgit like Ladakh was another dependency. Between them these states controlled all the passes giving access to the Pamirs. In the light of Russian activities their control by India was of the utmost importance. Fortunately for Elias, he was not concerned with the confused internal politics of Kashmir nor directly with any of the other states, except in the case of Hunza's relations with Kashgar. On one occasion when there was unrest in Ladakh he resolutely refused to be drawn in. This happened at a time when the other Joint Commissioner in Ladakh, W. H. Johnson (an Englishman formerly in the Indian Survey Department), who was the Maharajah of Kashmir's own representative, was away in India and his place had been taken by an Indian Wazir. The Maharajah ordered the arrest of the three ringleaders responsible for a disturbance at Leh. These three promptly barricaded themselves inside their compounds and defied the Maharajah's troops, who numbered only about twenty-five in all. Faced with this awkward situation the unfortunate temporary Wazir, a peaceable man, became utterly distraught and went to Elias for help. Very properly Elias refused to take charge since any action on his part as the Viceroy's representative would have been misinterpreted, and he confined himself to restoring the Wazir's morale. After three weeks the ringleaders were persuaded to give them-

selves up, whereupon they formed a triumphal procession of their families and adherents and marched off to captivity in style, with trumpets braying and their guards following sheepishly at a discreet distance behind them. After this episode the Maharajah doubled his troops at Leh and decided to install a telegraph line.

The intelligence Elias received from his many callers hailing from all parts of Central Asia continued to confirm increasing Russian interest in the Pamirs region. They had sent spies to Badakshan, Hunza and Chitral and even possibly to Tibet. All this intelligence was collated with other reports from Gilgit and Kabul so that the Indian Government should by then have possessed a fairly complete picture. It must have been partly through his visitors that Elias began to be so widely known among the tribes of Central Asia.

Bored with physical inactivity and generally frustrated, he turned his attention to writing. Early in 1881 there was a long article by him in the *Pioneer*, describing his visit to Kashgar the previous year. It was more descriptive than most of his writing, but he was careful not to give away any of his confidential talks with the Amban. In this he was more discreet than some other official travellers both before and after him. He was able to show why the absence of any trade agreement with Chinese Turkestan would result in prohibitive tariffs as soon as the Russians had installed their representatives. But he denied himself the opportunity to berate the Government for their refusal to press for a trade agreement, nor did he mention his vain recommendations for a British representative in Kashgar.

There is a mystery about one piece of his writing published about the same time. It is so out of keeping with anything else he published that it could never have been attributed to him but for the fact that he preserved it and moreover made corrections in his own handwriting. It is a story in the style of Saki called *A Reptile Tragedy* and is signed Kooch Purwanee ('It doesn't matter'). To make it more mysterious still, it was printed in Adelaide in a paper called the *Australian Star*. The story, which he had probably jotted down in his Calcutta days, concerns the efforts of a subaltern in India to tame a crocodile. It ended in a tragedy, because in due course the crocodile ate the subaltern's butler. The subaltern was little put out by this, nor by having to compensate his butler's family for their bereavement. What saddened him was that it put an end to his experiment, for his Colonel banished the crocodile just when in a few more weeks he believed he would have tamed it. As for the story's appearance in Australia the only possible explanation is that, having a reputation for serious writing, he was too shy to let it appear in an Indian paper and that he sent it to his brother George who was sheep farming there, to do what he could with it, and

perhaps, as George was nearly always in debt, to pocket any payment.

Another story which he wrote about this time concerned an imaginary overheard conversation between two Afghans, one of whom had grown fat and rich after many years in the British service and was giving his advice to a young man about to follow suit. So long as the Sahibs carried out his own ideas he always let them think they were theirs. They could easily be persuaded they were wrong if their ideas did not suit him. In this way he allowed his masters to acquire much *izzat* or importance, whilst he grew rich for his retirement. Let the young man follow his advice and from time to time drop words of wisdom about the great Sahibs like 'Gladistone' and he would never regret his chosen career. This story Elias called 'Masters of the Situation'; but it remained unpublished and is perhaps now unpublishable. Indirectly, of course, it was a dig at the Establishment. It was a pity he did not develop this bent for the humorous short story; as a form of release it would have done him good when more serious things were going wrong.

From these examples of the lighter vein in his nature we return to more serious topics. In a draft written in 1882, which he may not have actually despatched, he noted that all the territory to the south and south-east of the Chinese district of Sarikol was a sort of no man's land which might well be claimed by Russia. Although an attempt at a boundary demarcation was then being made by Russia and China, it would still leave Shighnan, Wakhan and Badakshan entirely open to the Russians and would give them the chance to advance their frontier as far as Kashmir 'if it suited their convenience or ambition. Thus in spite of the efforts of our statesmen to stave it off, the time when the British red line and the Russian green one shall meet on the map of Central Asia seems within measurable distance.' Elias was no alarmist and never expected Russia to invade India, but he saw more clearly than most just how much she might achieve by infiltration, in default of positive diplomacy on our part to forestall her. On the subject of the demarcation itself he was right in thinking it would not get very far, though it did in fact define Russia's border with Kashgar. At the time he remarked that the Russians had sent a General, but the Chinese team was of a calibre low enough for Peking to disown its authority if the results did not please the Government. And he added 'a Celestial Corporal in the army of the Elder Brother of the Sun would be considered of suitable rank to be associated with a general in the service of any outside barbarian prince'.

In 1882 Wade achieved the unexpected. He telegraphed the Foreign Office that the Tsungli Yamen (the Chinese department for external affairs) had cordially agreed to the appointment of a permanent British

representative in Kashgar and to discussions on trade relations between India and the New Dominion, as China now called it. Here was a wonderful opportunity. On the evidence of a pencilled draft it looks as though Elias may have dropped a discreet hint to the *Pioneer*, for that paper reported that the Secretary of State for India, Lord Hartington, had recommended it to the attention of the Viceroy. Developing its theme the *Pioneer* pointed out that while Russia now had a footing in the country we had none and that our present policy of total isolation was not a creditable state of things. It said there were now no difficulties in the way of putting our relations on a recognized basis. The people of Kashgar were apprehensive about the Russians. They were friendly towards us and the Chinese themselves were well-disposed towards us. The *Pioneer* continued: 'We have a diplomatic Agent in Ladakh, Mr Ney Elias, whose qualifications for carrying out the ideas said to be afloat are undeniable. His exploits as a traveller are familiar to everyone . . . and withal he is a trustworthy agent of the Foreign Office.' Having started the ball rolling, it followed up by printing two articles contributed anonymously by Elias. In the first of these he showed that, militarily weak though China was, she now had a firm and undisputed footing on India's northern frontier and formed a potential buffer between that frontier and the eastern end of Russia's Central Asian possessions. As a result of Russia's conquests on the north and north-west of Chinese Turkestan the Chinese no longer had to fear their old frontier enemies the Khokandis, Kirghiz etc., whilst they were strong enough to hold their own against the Badakshis and Wakhis. Another new condition which had arisen was that with China as a neighbour India now had to deal with a country with whom Britain had full diplomatic relations, and China was in need of Britain's support to ensure that the balance of power in the Far East was not disturbed. He did not think the Chinese were likely again to lose their new province. He considered its natives had no national spirit, were servile, false and cowardly and that a revolt against their leaders was not to be looked for. (It will be recalled that the enthusiastic Shaw had described them as being 'just like Englishmen'.) The third new condition was of course the Russian footing in the country, with the corollary that if we did not take steps to put ourselves on similar terms our prestige in the Asiatic mind would quickly decline. There was the less point in holding back now when it was recalled that we had gone to great lengths to conclude a treaty with the rebel Yakub Beg who had lasted only eleven years. Lastly, he asked why the lives and property of British subjects in the province should be unprotected, why traders should pay heavy duties fixed at the whim of local officials, and above all why the British Government was not represented at Kashgar where the British were well

esteemed. The situation, he said, was not of a kind to enhance our prestige in the Native States either within or beyond the red line.

The second article went into rather more detail in tracing the vagaries of the Indian Government's attitude towards trade with Central Asia, and showed how effective had been the liberal commercial policy initiated by the former Viceroy, Lord Mayo. The fruits of this policy were still to be picked if the present Government would only continue where Lord Mayo's had left off. Otherwise he was convinced the Russians would quickly ensure strong discrimination against us. His last paragraph was significant; it said,

'These are matters the Government of India should look to as much in the interests of their own prestige as for the welfare of their subjects beyond the frontier; and in taking measures to improve the situation they should above all things not leave out of sight that the only British interests in Chinese Turkestan are *Indian* interests and are therefore best dealt with by themselves and not by Ministers or Consuls in China proper.'

As his official representations were consistently ignored, he was evidently using the Press to do some lobbying on his behalf. The impression received is that if he were given the authority he believed he could conclude a satisfactory agreement with the Kashgar authorities without reference back to London and Peking. Given his knowledge of the workings of Chinese authority in Kashgar and his personal standing there, it would have been well worth trying.

But the combined efforts of Wade, Hartington and Elias, supported by the *Pioneer* and at home by the well-informed *Pall Mall Budget*, were of no avail. Lord Ripon was not to be moved and Russia held the commercial field.

Two years later, in 1884, Sir Henry Parkes, Wade's successor, tried once again, this time through London instead of direct with Calcutta. The Secretary of State for India asked the Government of India for their views on the mode by which passports should be furnished for British subjects travelling to Kashgar, and also with regard to the expediency of appointing a Consul at Kashgar. The Government's reply showed that Lord Ripon was as unmindful and unrealistic as he had been in 1882. It said the subject had been considered more than once in recent years, in 1880 when Elias went to Yarkand and Kashgar and in 1882 when Petrovski was appointed Consul. On the second occasion the Government felt that as there was little trade it would be likely to add political complications without any material advantage, and they

still thought so. Therefore they had no objection to the present Chinese system whereby passports for British subjects should be obtained in Peking. Furthermore, Peking having raised objections to visits of British subjects to Kashgar, India would in future permit no entry without a formal passport from Peking. This would also apply to Dalgleish the next time he went. The Government avoided giving an opinion about the appointment of a Consul, merely saying that if one was appointed passports would conveniently be obtained through his agency. Thus another opportunity was lost and it was to be the last for years. It is almost unbelievable that Lord Ripon should have failed to see the importance of developing and strengthening relations with China by whatever means which might lead to the containment of Russia and so safeguard at least one sector of India's frontier.

For the next year Elias had no longer to worry about the vagaries of Viceroys and about opportunities lost. He had been in India for ten years without leave of any kind; two of them in unhealthy Upper Burma followed now by nearly six years spent at Leh. He had been on three expeditions, all of them hazardous to health as well as to life. Apart from the two missions just described, he had undertaken a number of lesser journeys, including one to Baltistan to investigate an insurrection, and twice he had left Leh for official discussions at Simla. Even a journey to India was no light undertaking; it entailed crossing the Himalayas and took about a month in each direction. At its best life at Leh can have been only semi-civilized and, however much a man may shun society, to be completely cut off from his own kind for so long cannot fail to have bad effects. Elias had already suffered frequent illness and not unexpectedly we learn that he was now a very sick man. What is surprising is that he had lasted as long as he did and it says much for his courage. Early in 1884 he returned to India and went before a medical board which diagnosed a variety of more or less serious ailments. He was suffering from an enlarged liver and dyspepsia, both of which he had also had in Burma. For the past three years in Ladakh he had had the same symptoms, to which were now added insomnia and rheumatic lumbago. The Board said he was pale and anaemic and 'decidedly below par' and it recommended a year's home furlough to enable him to recruit his strength. These may have been the days before annual medical inspections, but it is surprising that the Government of India did not exercise more medical supervision over its servants, especially those serving in unhealthy posts. It was perhaps a relic of the old East India Company's days when its servants never left India except to retire, if they lived long enough. To show how ponderous the machinery of government was, the recommendation for a year's leave had to be for-

warded to the Secretary of State for India and it was signed by the Viceroy and all the Members of Council.

His physical condition goes a long way towards explaining the gloomy reports he wrote of his last two successful missions. It was an unlucky coincidence that Elias, with his natural tendency to depresssion, should be afflicted physically in just that part of him which contributes towards depression. There may have been a psycho-somatic element at work too for the same symptoms appeared during the two periods of his service, first in Burma and now at Leh, when he was most frustrated in his work. It was his misfortune that he had no adequate alternative form of release when things were going badly; everything was sublimated in his work.

Throughout his years at Leh Elias had only once misjudged the political situation and that was before he had had time to get his bearings. His judgment was far more reliable than that of most of his contemporaries on India's northern frontier. For instance, Henvey, the Resident in Kashmir, and Biddulph, the Political Agent in Gilgit, were often in trouble for their wild guesses and they made matters more difficult by antagonizing the rulers with whom they dealt. The Government of India suffered at the time from a severe shortage of specialists and Elias had had more practical experience in China and the Far East than anyone else. Perhaps it preferred not to consider the risk of overtaxing him, simply because it could not replace him. But if the Government drove him he undoubtedly drove himself too.

When he got home he could not forget Central Asia. In an official paper to the India Office he wrote that he did not hold the view of many officers of the Indian Government that there could be trade of any magnitude with Kashgar. The Chinese Legation in London had just told him they would welcome a British Agent in Kashgar, having felt slighted because we had sent one to Yakub Beg and not, so far, to them. They said they needed our help to counter Russia. But he commented that they would certainly ask for a Consul in Hongkong and possibly in Australia as well by way of return. There was an added urgency in China's need for friendship just then for she was at war with France on her southern frontier. It is almost superfluous to say that nothing came of his paper; perhaps Hartington saw that it was useless to press the Viceroy and was biding his time till Ripon retired.

There is no record as to where he lived during his furlough, but he belonged to the Oriental Club and very likely lived in bachelor chambers in Pall Mall or Jermyn Street, as was usual for men in his position. For serious occupation he studied the history of Asia at the British Museum. For lighter interest he reviewed for the *Field* a book on big game shooting in India, and he also contributed to the same journal an

article on 'The Game of Tibet', based on Colonel Prejevalski's book on his third exploration in Central Asia, in 1879–80. Prejevalski was a good and observant zoologist; it was on this journey across the Altyn Tagh and Kumtagh Deserts that he shot specimens of the wild camel and the wild horse as well as making detailed studies of them, and the latter was named after him.[1] Elias always followed his rival's movements with intense interest, but they never met in the field as later Younghusband met and dined with his opposite numbers, Grombtchevski and Yonov.

His major piece of writing during his furlough in England consisted of a series of four articles commissioned by *The Times* on 'The Native States of India'. Their theme was our responsibility towards the country, the need for justice and the possibility of external danger from Russia. Excluding the Frontier States, there were ninety-three Native States and in the nineteenth century nearly all their rulers maintained private armies. Putting the population of Feudatory India at 49,000,000 in all, he calculated that between them they maintained practically 350,000 troops and 4,327 guns on a total revenue of just over £17 millions. Yet the Indian Army maintained by us numbered only 100,000 troops for the dual role of external defence and the prevention of internecine wars. He argued that the economy of India could not afford these private armies, and that they should be cut by half, which would also free much more of the Indian Army for its primary role of defence. He concluded:

'We defend India for the benefit of all its inhabitants and moreover we defend it in Europe quite as efficiently as we do in Asia. We garrison it not merely against external aggression but in order to put an end to Mahommedan insolence, Mahratta oppression and Pindari turbulence. We are there on behalf of the toiling ryot, of the thrifty trader, of the millions who are sick of the law of violence and of the endless appeals to arms that characterized every rule before our own.'

He believed that the size of the native armies of these Feudatory States had been attained through the apathy of the British Government and concluded: 'We are responsible for the consequences of our acts as well as for the acts themselves.' His arguments were unassailable even though years ahead of their time; they disclose his breadth of thought as well as his deep humanity.

[1] See the reference to the wild camel in Chapter III. Having had his own earlier report disbelieved by zoologists, Elias evidently preferred to concede his lesser claim in silence.

He continued to keep abreast of affairs in Central Asia. He noted a letter from Dalgleish to the *Civil and Military Gazette* in India dated from Yarkand, where he said he had again settled down in peace and comfort. It was mid-summer and Dalgleish depicted the country as in full splendour, with waving fields of corn, luxuriant vines and heavily weighted fruit trees; a contrast after leaving behind him the howling waste of the mountains. Everywhere he had been greeted warmly as an old friend. The Chinese Amban had received him most kindly and had ordered him to be treated as a guest, and he had spent the whole evening with him after a dinner, discussing England and India. 'The sun shines brightly,' he wrote 'on the only Briton in Turkestan.' But he thought British trade would not long survive the blow inflicted by the Sino-Russian treaty. Pretrovski was doing his best to protect and develop Russian trade. There were many British Indian subjects trading in the provinces but they wandered friendless and alone. Unless something was done by the Indian Government it was the end of native Indian trade. The powers of the British Joint Commissioner at Leh extended no further than the Karakoram or Shahidullah at furthest, because we had no treaty with China in Turkestan. The *Civil and Military Gazette* added that Dalgleish's occasional letters should surely convince the home and Indian Governments of the advisability of appointing a British Consul in Kashgar. 'Moreover,' it hinted, 'other important ends than those of commerce would be served by the presence of an intelligent British Officer there.'

Before the end of the year Elias drafted a memorandum to the Royal Geographical Society on 'Desirable Exploration in Tibet and Eastern Turkestan'. Within the sealed area controlled by Lhasa and beyond the reach of European agents lay the unsolved problem of the Tsang Po and the sources of some of the Indo-Chinese rivers, as well as the peaks north of Nepal. More accessible for Europeans were the Tsaidam marshes and the Altyn Tagh and Kunlun ranges, which might be reached from a Chinese base by a traveller holding Chinese documents. Another exploration would be a complete round of Turkestan with the object of collecting general information. A third would be Western China and Eastern Tibet, for instance from Ta Chien Lu to Koko Nor, a journey which E. C. Baber considered feasible and was actually accomplished in 1891 by the American W. W. Rockhill starting from Peking. This was the region where the Tibetan climate became influenced by the monsoon and where types of animals having their centres of distribution in China, Indo-China, Tibet and Mongolia all converge. But Elias never submitted this memorandum, knowing no doubt that under Ripon all exploration was taboo. Instead he developed the first part of his theme in less scientific terms in a letter to the *National Review* which he

chose to sign with the *nom de plume* of 'Piling';[1] in it he expounded his views on the independence of Tibet. He was determined that public interest in the country should not lapse.

[1] Professor Lattimore explains that this is the Tibetan equivalent of the Hindustani word '*Feringhi*' deriving from the Arabic pronounciation of '*Frank*' meaning European and hence Englishman.

Chapter X

THE SIXTH EXPEDITION

Third Mission to Turkestan and Start of the Pamir Journey

In December 1884 Elias was passed fit by a medical board, whereupon he got permission to return to India two months before his year's sick leave was up. All his brothers were abroad, and it may be guessed that he did not relish living in London. It was a waste of time when there was work for him to do in India.

His first request on his return was to ask to go back to the Leh Agency. It might have been thought that he wanted a change, but if not a mountaineer he was a man for mountains. Although he would have been the last man to admit it there are signs that this solitary existence in the greatest mountain masses in the world, with their rarefied atmosphere and often brilliant night skies, had developed in him a mystical sense. Indeed, without it his life would have been insupportable, especially during the long winter snows when his books would be his sole civilized solace. More than once he referred to the peace of mind which he evidently found there and feared to lose. On a more mundane level he dreaded service in Calcutta not only because of its bureaucratic and social shackles but also because of its effect on his precarious health. Leh also suited him well as a centre for the study of the ethnology of Central Asia. It was not that he had become identified with the east as happens to some dedicated men; he remained as objective as ever and cynical of eastern ways of thinking and doing. This was most noticeable in respect of the Chinese. He once wrote to H. M. Durand, the Foreign Secretary in Calcutta: 'I know you think I'm prejudiced against them but it's only that I know the way they do things.' This was at a time when he was still the only expert on China in the Indian Government. Later, when the Government recruited some experts from the Chinese Consular Service, they were usually accused of being pro-Chinese.

Beyond doubt the most important reason for his keenness to return was a change in the political climate. Ripon had departed unlamented, at least by the Foreign Department, and in 1884 was succeeded as Viceroy by the Marquess of Dufferin who was to follow the forward

and positive policy towards frontier problems initiated by Lytton. Under Dufferin Elias saw new hope for some of his long urged policies. It was high time for a change of attitude on frontier problems, which had become increasingly urgent. Russia had by now advanced her territory to Merv and parties of soldiers and surveyors were constantly infiltrating into disputed Afghan territory. They were reported in Badakshan, Balkh, Chitral and Hunza as well as in the Pamirs. They were certainly intriguing with the ex-Mir of the first named and were suspected of doing so with our ally, Abd-ar-Rahman, the Amir of Afghanistan. All the signs were of increasing pressure southwards. By contrast no English traveller, official or otherwise, had visited any of these territories since Moorcroft, Burnes and Wood early in the century.

To defend India against Russian pressure three forms of action were needed. The first was a definition of Afghanistan's northern and eastern boundaries. It had been agreed with Russia in 1873 that her eastern boundary lay along the Upper Oxus, but there was an unresolved confusion about what was meant by the Upper Oxus, added to which the Amir claimed territory on the further side whilst Russian Bokhara laid claim on ethnical grounds to territory on the hither side. The second line of action was to increase our authority over the states on India's northern border so as to control the passes leading into India. Russia's expansion had to be halted beyond these vital passes. Thirdly, some kind of understanding, perhaps even an alliance, was needed with China to contain Russia on her eastern flank. Some action on these lines had begun before Elias got back to India.

Meanwhile, there was work for him as soon as he arrived; he was given the task of drafting a new form of administration for Ladakh. Preparations for the closer control of Kashmir by India, to be applied as soon as the weak and ailing Maharajah died, had already been made and it was appropriate to deal with Ladakh, a dependency of Kashmir, at the same time. After his years of experience on the spot Elias had formed very definite, if original, ideas of what was required. He was insistent that the more Ladakh's purely national institutions and customs were retained the better for its primitive people. No foreign institutions should be adopted unless absolutely necessary for the majority, but all restrictions now placed on Moslem and Christian worship should be removed. He was concerned to ensure justice and the fair collection of revenue, and recommended that both the medical establishment and education should be left to the Moravian missionaries who had already applied to set up a mission there. In general his proposed form of administration was to be as conservative as possible and tending towards self-government. It can be said that his proposals

were more far-seeing and paradoxically more liberal than most British colonial reforms of the day and even later.

Of the three forms of action decided upon by Dufferin the first was already under way. This was the despatch of a Boundary Commission, at first under Major General Lumsden but later under Colonel Ridgeway, to demarcate the Afghan frontier from the Persian border eastwards along the River Oxus and at the same time to carry out an extensive survey of Herat, the north-western province of Afghanistan. The demarcation was a joint Anglo-Russian affair. Another decision already taken was the despatch of a mission under Colonel Lockhart to conclude a military agreement with the Mehtar of Chitral, Aman-ul-Mulk; this mission was also to carry out a complete survey of Chitral, including the passes over the Hindu Kush. Plans to implement Dufferin's third decision were still under discussion when Elias reached India and he was in time to take part in them. The project was to send a small mission to Kashgar, firstly to negotiate a trade agreement and subsequently to survey the Pamirs, the Upper Oxus and the states athwart the river, and finally to link up with the Afghan Boundary Commission. Thus the plan recommended by Elias five years ago in 1880 was at last about to be implemented. It was lucky he arrived back in India in time to be chosen to carry it out, for he was the obvious man for the job, and otherwise the choice might have fallen on an inexperienced soldier. But preparations were lengthy and complicated because the way had to be cleared in Peking through the Foreign Office at home, and also with the Amir of Afghanistan.

It was not till April that the Viceroy telegraphed O'Conor, the Chargé d'Affaires in Peking since the death of the Minister, Sir Harry Parkes, requesting passports for two Europeans to travel in Chinese territory and to cross the frontier to and from the friendly Afghan states of Wakhan, Badakshan, Shighnan and Roshan. He asked that Kashgar be advised directly by the Tsungli Yamen and to appoint a Chinese representative to meet him equal to the Consular rank of Elias. These requirements were just what Elias had always recommended, as was also the small size of the mission.

O'Conor's brief, no doubt drafted by Elias, was adequate. He was reminded that the Indian trade was not recognized by China whilst that of Russia had been put on a favourable footing by the Treaty of St Petersburg. China had shown friendship in freeing our traders from duty when the treaty was first concluded; we would now like to have the present restrictions removed and Indian trade accorded the same treatment. He was also to ask for a British Resident at Yarkand to supervise the thousand or so British Indian traders in the province. Apart from commerce, the Viceroy considered our political relations in

Central Asia needed an officer in Chinese Turkestan and that he should remain there to furnish intelligence of affairs beyond the Chinese border. That the second purpose of the Agency was to watch the Russians from a more suitable vantage point than Leh was not of course explicitly mentioned.

The Amir of Afghanistan had also been asked to approve the visit of Elias to his country and to the states bordering the Upper Oxus over which he claimed suzerainty. He gave his approval readily in an official document and said his officials would be instructed to give the Mission all honours and facilities.

On May 26th Elias received the Viceroy's appointment and noted in his journal: 'The Mission begins today.' O'Conor had been asked for passports for two Europeans and Elias had envisaged a doctor as the second man on the expedition, but apparently there was a hitch and none was appointed. In his last reception by the Viceroy the latter, thinking perhaps of Elias's doubtful health, had said he thought there should be a doctor, but he left it to Elias who, with an eye to crossing the Pamirs before winter set in and a very full programme to fulfil, decided it was then too late to follow up the Viceroy's suggestion. By the time he left Simla on May 29th no word had been received from O'Conor, and so his final instructions had not been approved; but he could not wait and they were to be sent after him by dak. (This was the postal service operated by relays and thus much faster than a caravan.)

Included in his small party were an Indian medical assistant, a Turki interpreter and a Chinese writer. The last-named, Tseng Laisun, was a young man recruited from the British service in Shanghai. Born in Singapore, he claimed British as well as Chinese nationality and had been educated at Harvard. He only caught up with the mission at Leh, where Elias was waiting impatiently for him and chafing at the delay. After leaving Srinagar Elias had himself been delayed partly by snow on the passes and more ominously by illness, which he called 'an attack' without being more specific, and it was mid-July before he reached Leh. Here another setback awaited him. Dalgleish arrived from Yarkand saying he had been turned out of the country under orders from Kashgar for which he believed Petrovski was responsible. He had been trading with Yarkand on and off for eleven years without a passport, and the lack of it which was the reason now given, had never troubled him hitherto. This was bad news as foretelling a change in the political climate, but worse was to come.

When his passport arrived from Peking it described Elias only as a traveller 'for pleasure and instruction' and omitted the vital description that he was an official of the Government of India. Without this description he knew he would have no status in official Chinese eyes from which

to negotiate. He protested strongly at this omission but O'Conor replied to the Viceroy that the Chinese were now adamant that officially there was no Indian trade with Chinese Turkestan, that Turkestan was not a Treaty Port as defined in the Treaty of Tientsin, and that therefore there was nothing to negotiate about. He had reminded them of their offer to Wade in 1882 but without avail and said he had accepted the passport as offered in the hope that Elias might be able to negotiate something better when he reached Kashgar. Making O'Conor the scapegoat, Elias was furious with him for not trying hard enough. He wrote to his chief, Durand, that he suspected both O'Conor and the Tsungli Yamen wanted an official from the Chinese Consular service in Peking to be appointed and not one from the Indian Government .There may have been something in this, but it was by no means all the story. O'Conor was only the Chargé awaiting a new Minister. He already had an acute controversy over opium on his hands and he would not want to saddle the Minister with another complication immediately on his arrival. But the real difficulty lay in the change of political climate. When the Chinese had begun their overtures of friendship more than three years earlier they were still smarting under the terms of the Treaty of St Petersburg and wanted British representation in Kashgar to offset the prospect of Russian pressure. They also wanted our support on account of their war with France in the south. But the end of that war eased the pressure there and once a Russian Consul was established in Kashgar he soon made his presence felt. Disliked though Petrovski was, the Chinese feared to offend him and no doubt he applied pressure from the beginning against the acceptance of a British Agent. Possibly, though it has never been stated, the Chinese were afraid that if Russia was opposed too strongly she would occupy Chinese Turkestan, and China knew she would be too weak to resist. Lastly, pressure was being put on China at this time to admit a mission to Tibet from India under Macaulay. China had consistently pointed out the difference between her relations with Tibet and those of the New Dominion, but if she gave way to us over Kashgar she could expect India to use this as a crack in the door to Tibet.

As a sop to India, O'Conor asked for a copy of the proposed trade regulations which Elias had drafted. He said he had discussed the matter with the Viceroy, Li Hung Chang, who was in favour of an agreement and he thought he might therefore get consent to an *ad valorem* rate or else a tariff equal to the Russian rate. The Chinese Central Government unfortunately did not always listen to Li, who was at this time also in favour of an alliance between Britain and China. He said that though she could not help in Afghanistan, China could make a diversion against Russia in the north on the Amur river. The Indian Government

replied that they could not endorse O'Conor's proposal until they had heard Elias's views on the suggested tariff. It was October by this time and Elias was already somewhere in the Pamirs, but the request only caught up with him in the following January when he was in Afghanistan. He returned an amended draft with the terse comment that unfortunately he was away from his office and that being without his records he had done his best from memory. It need only be added that the whole exercise was a waste of time and nothing came of it in Peking.

The full instructions for the Mission arrived at Leh whilst Elias was handing over his former post to his successor and they were admirably drawn up (again it is more than likely that he prepared the draft himself). In brief, the principal objects of the mission were to improve political relations with the Chinese provincial government by establishing a Political Agency in Kashgar, to remove restrictions in trade or at least to arrange a low tariff, to watch Russian movements and lastly to explore the Afghan districts of the Upper Oxus. The use of the word 'explore' must have given him the greatest satisfaction; it was something he had never hoped to do again, and it was five years since he had first suggested he should be sent to Badakshan. But he must have wished he was thirty-one instead of forty-one and that his health was more reliable. The instructions concerning the second stage of his mission went into considerable detail, but it is easier to follow his movements and the course of events by describing the Kashgar stage first.

Elias was unable to leave Leh till August 15th, which was really much too late in the year, but snow conditions, his illness, and waiting for Tseng Laisun to catch up with him had delayed him two months. At home and in India the secret of his mission was well kept and the only hint appeared in the *Standard*, which in May had printed a report from its Berlin correspondent saying that Elias was to act as Consul at Kashgar. After that there was complete silence about his movements for the next ten months; even the Russian press said nothing, though at least his arrival in Kashgar must have been reported to St Petersburg by the Russian Consulate.

He reached Yarkand just a month out from Leh, which was up to his usual average time for this arduous journey across the Karakoram. His initial reception there was not unpromising so far as customary honours went. He was received by the usual guard of honour of 250 men, all horribly dirty. They straggled or rather dribbled, as he put it, along both sides of the road, some with accoutrements, others without, eating fruit, laughing, talking and passing remarks freely on the foreign devil as he rode by. In some circles the possibility of a military alliance with China, or at least the employment of Chinese troops in the event of war

with Russia, was being seriously entertained at the time and Elias had been asked to send back his views, although he could have given them just as well without leaving Simla. Now in his journal he noted: 'These are the people we are asked to ally ourselves with against the Russians! Ye Gods!' In his report he disposed of the suggestion less caustically but no less finally. He said the army in Turkestan was of low morale, badly led and ill equipped, and that it would be useless against Russian troops. The possibility of putting it under British officers, as envisaged in some quarters in India in the event of war with Russia, was remote. General 'Chinese' Gordon was no precedent; he had only been employed to save the Manchu dynasty from dissolution and had quickly been got rid of subsequently.

Although the Turki officials in Yarkand were as friendly as before, he very quickly found that the Amban, the Chinese Resident, was quite the reverse and was obviously following the new Peking line. In consequence his talks with Chinese officials were entirely fruitless. To show how different were the lines of Chinese thinking from Western ideas he quoted a 'philosophical' discussion he had with a learned Chinese who had lived in various Treaty Ports and therefore had experience of foreigners. This man's theme was that Confucianism was the only reasonable religion. 'China was the centre of the earth and the greatest country. She was the yolk of the egg and the heavens the white. As there was more yolk than white in an egg no other country existed.' For reply, Elias quoted a Persian proverb: 'Every bear is a great philosopher on his own hillside.' The sage said he saw the point but that it was too sarcastic, and with that departed abruptly. This little dialogue showed aptly just how 3,000 years of a closed civilization prevented, and indeed still prevents, China from understanding, or even wanting to understand, any other viewpoint but her own.

Elias summarized the opposition to him as being partly due to the traditional hatred of Western barbarians coupled with the natural love of the Chinese for seclusion, and partly to the fear of offending Russia. He also believed that factions of Khokandi and Kashmiri *émigrés* whom he suspected of plotting against him in 1880 were doing so again, but more effectively this time because the polite Resident with whom he had got on so well before had been posted away, and his successor listened to any story. Finally there was Petrovski. He was away in Russian Turkestan at the time but all the officials agreed that he was officious, inquisitive and interfering, and the Chinese said they did not want another foreigner in Kashgar like him. Elias had been told to cultivate relations with him and it was a pity he did not have the chance, for Petrovski was a well-informed, intelligent man. He was reputed to have had a row with the Amban though he may also have gone away to

avoid meeting Elias. But they would have found common ground in a dislike of Chinese officialdom and, as Elias was good at gaining people's confidence, he might have gleaned something of Russian intentions just when Anglo-Russian relations were in one of their worst phases. At this time in 1885 war actually appeared very likely, hence the urgency for despatching him.

Whilst he was still at Yarkand he heard that Hunza, hitherto a recognized vassal of China, might shortly be annexed into the province of Kashgar. If so the principal Chinese motive would be to put a stop to the activities of the Kanjuti caravan robbers from Hunza. But annexation would be highly detrimental to Dufferin's forward policy which envisaged bringing Hunza into the British buffer zone. It would also make matters difficult for Lockhart's Mission, which Elias knew was about to pass through Hunza, and indeed he learned on good authority that the Mir intended to attack the mission. Either event could lead to serious repercussions from China. Elias judged the information reliable enough, both as to the possible annexation and the intended attack on Lockhart for him to send urgent warnings back to India but the Government took no action on either warning. It had no plans ready to forestall China and could have done no more than protest uselessly after the event, but it took an unwarrantable risk in not warning Lockhart to keep out of Hunza, especially as Elias always checked his sources of information and never reported a mere rumour.

It took Elias no more than a week to decide that the first part of his mission must be accepted as a failure. The Chinese had no intention of negotiating a trade agreement and it followed therefore that until Peking changed its policy they would not recognize an Agent in Kashgar. Although it was clearly no fault of his own he was deeply disappointed and downhearted. This was not because he had ever expected any impressive trading results to accrue from the agreement. His view, which he had first expressed four years earlier, was that we were entitled to demand of China parity with Russia. This was as much in China's interests as ours, if she would but see it, as a balance against Russia's growing power in Central Asia. He believed we were much too weak in our handling of China. At a time when we should have been putting that view forcibly and continuously all we had in mind was the unrealistic and futile notion of a purely military alliance, or of putting a rabble Chinese army under British leadership. No doubt he reflected on how different things might have been if he had been listened to five, even three, years earlier. There was nothing for it now but to pack up, set out for the Pamirs with all speed and hope to complete the next stage of his work in that inhospitable region before winter set in.

He had begun his daily journal as soon as he arrived at Yarkand. On all his other expeditions his journals were severely factual, so much so that they were often incorporated in his reports with little or no alteration. But this one was different; in it he expressed his feelings as he had never done hitherto, and indeed never did again. It is hard to tell for certain why he made this journal the exception. He no longer had to make a name for himself; for better or worse he was an established Political Agent and he knew very well that this must be his last journey of geographical exploration. It is always possible that he had a book in mind for the future if the mission was successful, but more likely was a fear that he might not survive. But whatever the reasons the journal, combined with his final report and a number of very outspoken demi-official letters, brings the whole journey unusually to life.

Getting away from Yarkand was not at all easy; he met with obstructionism, intentional or otherwise, at every turn and on the Chinese side the Resident made himself as unhelpful as possible. For his small caravan he needed only thirty-five ponies and ten men, but his Indian agent had the greatest difficulty in collecting them. Although the Turki officials were still friendly enough, the agent, who was also a trader, was afraid that he would be discriminated against if he helped the foreigner too openly, so Elias had to do most of the buying himself. In fact, being quite alone and finding his own men incapable of lending a hand, even refusing to make up baggage loads, he had to make nearly all the preparations himself. He notes in his journal: 'This contemptible idea of *Izzat* or "face" is one of the worst features of the Asiatics and one of the reasons that makes them disliked by Europeans.'

He had decided to leave Tseng Laisun behind because once out of Chinese territory he would not be needed, but the Resident said he could not remain as it was not on his passport and he would have to apply to Kashgar. He got round this last attempt at hindrance by taking Tseng along with him till they were clear of the city and then despatching him on the road to Kashgar, which he did with some relief. He had found Tseng utterly useless except to translate and indeed worse than useless because he expected to have everything done for him. The same applied to his medical assistant whom he came to dislike intensely, and for whom, whether he deserved it or not, the journey probably seemed like unending purgatory.

In sending Tseng to Kashgar it was in Elias's mind that if any progress was made in the negotiations between the Indian Government and Peking in the next few months, he would be able to return to Kashgar and follow them up. Meanwhile his instructions to Tseng were to act as his representative there, try to improve relations especially with the Chinese officials, find out what he could about Russian move-

ments and send him reports from time to time. This suited Tseng admirably; he had a great sense of his own importance and liked his independent role. How much effort went into his official duties and how much into improving his own social status in Kashgar is debatable. His first report in good fluent English was dated February of the following year and in it he said he had spent the 1,500 rupees he had been given for expenses and asked for more. He said that thanks to his efforts all the Chinese officials were now more favourable to Elias, but it was only because he had been lavish with his money in entertaining, which was the only thing they respected. He said the Russians were still putting out damaging stories against the British and that only a British Agent in Kashgar could counter them. He had called on the Russian Consulate, the establishment of which he described in detail, Petrovski being still absent. He also gave a complete breakdown of the Chinese army in Turkestan. Two battalions of Chinese troops had mutinied because their pay was in arrears and twenty-two heads adorned the city walls. He suggested to Elias that for a properly guaranteed salary he would like to visit Tibet and Lhasa which, as a Chinese, he thought would be easy for him and he would then return through Burma, or else go via Szechuan and Hupeh to Shanghai. This ambitious proposal fell on deaf ears so far as Elias was concerned, and thereafter Tseng apparently became somewhat lax in his duties.

His next communication was not written till April and was in terms of injured innocence, Elias having accused him of holding up his mail from India as well as not reporting often enough. He said he was still working hard in Elias's interests and now stood so well in Kashgar official circles that even the Taotai was consulting him on how to deal with the detested Russians. He said certain influences were still working against the mission and that Russian spies were watching both him and Elias, 'So be on your guard'. What obviously pleased him most was that he had been promoted by Li Hung Chang to the rank of Mandarin of the Third Class with Peacock's Feathers and Light Blue Button; only one more step and he would be a Taotai. But by this time Elias knew that he would not be returning to Kashgar so he ordered Tseng Laisun back to India, where he arrived in due course without any money, and had some difficulty in explaining to officials who he was. However, he was provided with an Indian servant as guide and eventually put on a boat for Shanghai.

To round off the Kashgar story, which altogether had occupied Elias for nearly seven years, it was not till 1896 that George Macartney was sent there as British representative, but he was not accepted as Agent nor recognized by the Chinese as Consul General until 1907. Petrovski continued to see to it that the Chinese should negotiate no

trade agreement with us and no doubt he was also the chief cause of the languishing Indian trade. Through all these years Macartney had to put up with Russian intrigue, and in general with conditions which Elias would never have tolerated. But Macartney was the son of Sir Halliday Macartney, who was the English Secretary at the Chinese Legation in London and Sir Halliday had married a Manchu princess. Thus his son had inherited a real sympathy for the Chinese and this asset saw him through all his adversities. As for Elias, he had traversed the Karakoram for the last time and he never visited Sinkiang again. It was in a bitter mood that he set out on the next phase of his mission.

Chapter XI

ACROSS THE PAMIRS TO AFGHANISTAN

The Pamirs, the so-called Roof of the World, are a series of broad glacial valleys, mostly east to west, all of them 11,000 feet or more in height and separated by lofty mountain ranges with few passes across them. Lord Curzon considered there were eight true Pamirs, most of them the source of rivers deriving from the considerable lakes and glaciers. Though the rain and snowfall is relatively light they afforded enough grazing in summer for a small population of nomad Kirghiz. The winter climate is extremely harsh, bitterly cold and with severe cutting winds.

The most easterly Pamir is the crescent-shaped Taghdumbash commanding the Kilik pass into Hunza. To the west they decrease in height and are bounded on the south and west by the Upper Oxus which is fed by several streams. Of these the most important to this narrative, starting from the south, are the Ab-i-Wakhan, the Ab-i-Panjah and the Little Pamir, all flowing into the Panjah or Upper Oxus. To the north is the Aksu, which rises only in the next Pamir but flows northwards before turning west to join the Panjah a hundred miles farther downstream. Before becoming the main Oxus, the Panjah itself turns west in a big loop, dividing Afghanistan from Russian territory.

South-east of the Pamirs lies the Muztagh Range, roughly China's western boundary, whilst to the south the passes over the great Hindu Kush range lead into Kashmir, Hunza, Chitral and Gilgit. Control of these passes was the key to the defence of India's northern boundary and access to them was either across the Pamirs or else through the Afghan-claimed provinces of Badakshan, Shighnan, Roshan and Wakhan. But only the Little Pamir had been visited by an English traveller.

Altogether our knowledge of the Pamirs was considerably less than that of the Russians who had sent several parties, of which Dr Regel's in 1881–1883 was the most recent as well as the most important. It was a very large combined military and geographical expedition including Kostenko and Benderski as topographers; it had covered

the length and breadth of the Pamirs and had contributed more accurate knowledge of the region than any other.

One strange traveller in the 'seventies was a Greek, Dr Potagos. He did not contribute much geographical knowledge but he reported seeing a four-handed troglodyte ape. This unusual ape seems to have escaped the due attention of the anthropologists; it may even have been the original Abominable Snow Man. He described it in these words:

'*Un troglodyte quadrimane, qui a le cri et l'apparence d'un singe; il vit en famille et reste autour de sa tanière; la plupart de temps il se tient sur ses mains de derrière. Il joue avec délicatesse et court trés vite. Dés qu'il voit des hommes il l'annonce par des cris à sa famille pour qu'elle se retire aussitôt dans la retraite commune. Je rencontra le même animal dans les plus hautes montagnes de Mongolie . . . Les Ouvakhaniens le nomment Sac-koui, chien de montagne; les Chinois, Ntar.*'

Of British travellers in the region the first in the nineteenth century was Moorcroft. In his extensive travels he visited eastern Afghanistan and Badakshan chiefly in search of remounts for the Indian Cavalry, but partly with an eye to trade. He was followed by Lieut. Wood, R.I.N., who reached the southern Pamirs via Wakhan in 1837. He discovered Lake Zorkul (which he named Lake Victoria) and carried out a survey of the region. He claimed this lake to be the source of the Oxus and plotted the course of the river flowing from it, then named variously the Pamir or the Ab-i-Panjah, till it joined the Panjah, and he ended his survey at Ishkashim in Badakshan. His map remained the only British one for the next fifty years and was thus of considerable political importance.

Gordon and Trotter from the second Forsyth Mission hoped to return across the Pamirs to India from Kashgar but had to give up the attempt, though two Indian surveyors from the mission penetrated into some parts. Of more significance were two of the Indian Survey's Pandits known pseudonymously as The Havildar and The Munshi who, travelling separately in 1872 and 1873, visited the Upper Oxus region in the guise of merchants. The Havildar further disguised himself as a dull-witted and uneducated member of his own party, whilst the Munshi, having some claims to be a holy man, became a mullah. Both reported that in their view the Aksu and not the Panjah was the main feeder of the Oxus, and the Havildar made a significant discovery which will be mentioned hereafter. It is not to their discredit that their surveys had not the accuracy of trained geographers, nor could they have been expected to glean more than a general picture of the tribes and tribal boundaries of the region. Excluding a French

expedition, they were the last visitors from India till Elias went there.

A résumé of the current political factors and events leading up to Elias's mission will be a help at this point. It has already been shown why Kashmir was the key state to India's northern defence problem. So too was Afghanistan further west, even more so because the country lay on the historical invasion route to India already followed successively by Alexander, Timur and Babur. From the mid-1850s the great danger was that Afghanistan would fall under the influence of Russia who would then be able to dominate the passes across the Hindu Kush. The obvious policy was to make Afghanistan a neutral zone, but Afghans were themselves an intriguing as well as a fighting race and had stirred up enough trouble with Chitral, Gilgit and Kashmir to necessitate two campaigns against her earlier in the century. After the second Afghan War in 1879, Abd-ar-Rahman was established in Kabul as a ruler acceptable to the British and we were able to negotiate a treaty by which, provided he accepted our advice on foreign relations, we undertook to defend the independence of Afghanistan and her possessions, to help the Amir to resist foreign aggression and to pay him a subsidy. Fortunately for us the Amir was a realist. He saw his country as 'lying between two millstones and already ground to a powder', and he knew that war between Britain and Russia would only spell certain destruction for Afghanistan. The treaty was negotiated during Ripon's Viceroyalty and Ripon also obtained Russia's agreement in 1884 to a joint demarcation of the Afghan frontier.

The next Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, was not altogether happy about the buffer state policy respecting Afghanistan. Although the treaty was not a full-blooded alliance, we had nevertheless undertaken obligations which he feared might still land us in the war with Russia which was precisely what it aimed to avoid. In practice we could give the Amir little military support if Russia attacked across his ill-defined northern frontier. There was another flaw in the treaty because we did not know at that time the full extent of the possessions claimed by the Amir. It was accepted that his eastern and northern boundary was the line of the River Oxus but no notice had been taken of the Havildar's disturbing disclosure that Badakshan, Roshan and Shighnan, all claimed by the Amir, lay partly on the farther side of the Oxus, and that his claim to that part of Darwaz lying on the Afghan side was disputed by Russian Bokhara.

Meanwhile Anglo-Russian relations were being exacerbated still more by continuing Russian expansion, and there was a growing fear that not stopping short at occupying Bokhara, followed in 1884 by Merv, Russia's next step would be an invasion of Afghanistan. As far back as 1869 the possibility of agreeing with Russia that Afghanistan

and its dependencies should be a neutral zone was put forward in London. This was before the Oxus as a boundary had ever been mentioned, and an agreement then on this general principle might have saved much aggravation later; but it was opposed by the Indian Government. However, it had been made clear to Russia that we regarded Afghanistan as lying within the British sphere of influence and in 1873 this was officially recognized in St Petersburg, although not apparently by the Russian military governors of their newly acquired territories. But from about 1870 onwards it was the difficulty of defining Afghanistan's northern and eastern frontier and the differing views held by Britain and Russia which caused recurrent crises, though it can be said that the Russian statesmen throughout the period still recognized the need for a clear agreement just as much as our own.

On both sides ignorance of the geography and ethnography of the region contributed greatly to the difficulty of reaching a solution. Thus Russia objected to Afghan claims to the possession of Badakshan and Wakhan, but until Dr Regel first travelled there in 1881 her knowledge of the precise situation was as scanty as our own. In 1872 a British formula to define the Afghan northern boundary was suggested to Russia which took, or was intended to take, the line of the Upper Oxus from Wood's Lake Victoria (Zorkul) to its junction with the Kokcha. This was the basis of the Anglo-Russian Agreement of that year. Unfortunately neither side realized that there was a deplorable clerical mistake in our wording of the draft which omitted the vital words 'line of the Upper Oxus'. This blunder added quite unnecessary complications. To make matters worse there was the opinion of the two Pandits that the Aksu or Murghab was the true Upper Oxus. Lastly the confusion was even more confounded when in due course the significance of the fact that some of the Amir's possessions lay beyond the Oxus came to be appreciated. The Havildar had made his report in 1873, just a year after the Agreement, but for several years this awkward discovery remained shelved in the pending trays in Calcutta and London, as is not unusual with intractable problems.

The Agreement did not assuage relations between the two countries for long and it was actually during Abd-ar-Rahman's state visit to India that Russian troops fought Afghans at Penjdeh, an incident which Russia may have staged to test Britain's firmness. To sum the matter up in a few words, Britain had guaranteed independence to Afghanistan and her possessions without realizing what the latter were, and we had reached an agreement with Russia defining the Afghan northern frontier in similar ignorance. It does not reflect great credit on either the British or the Indian Government. Ripon must shoulder much of the blame by having forbidden British explorers to

4. Kungur from Little Kara Kul (R.G.S.).

5. Muztagh Ata, from Little Kara Kul (R.G.S.).

visit the region; these could have brought back accurate information at a time when only the Russians were actively engaged in seeking it.

China's position in this issue of frontier problems was also of importance. So far as her frontier with Russia was concerned, we could only urge her through the Minister in Peking that it was in her interests to agree on a demarcation. But China also claimed territory which abutted on Afghan Badakshan. It was urgently necessary to see what the claim amounted to historically and in fact, for the frontier ran or should have run somewhere through the Pamirs where Russia was most active.

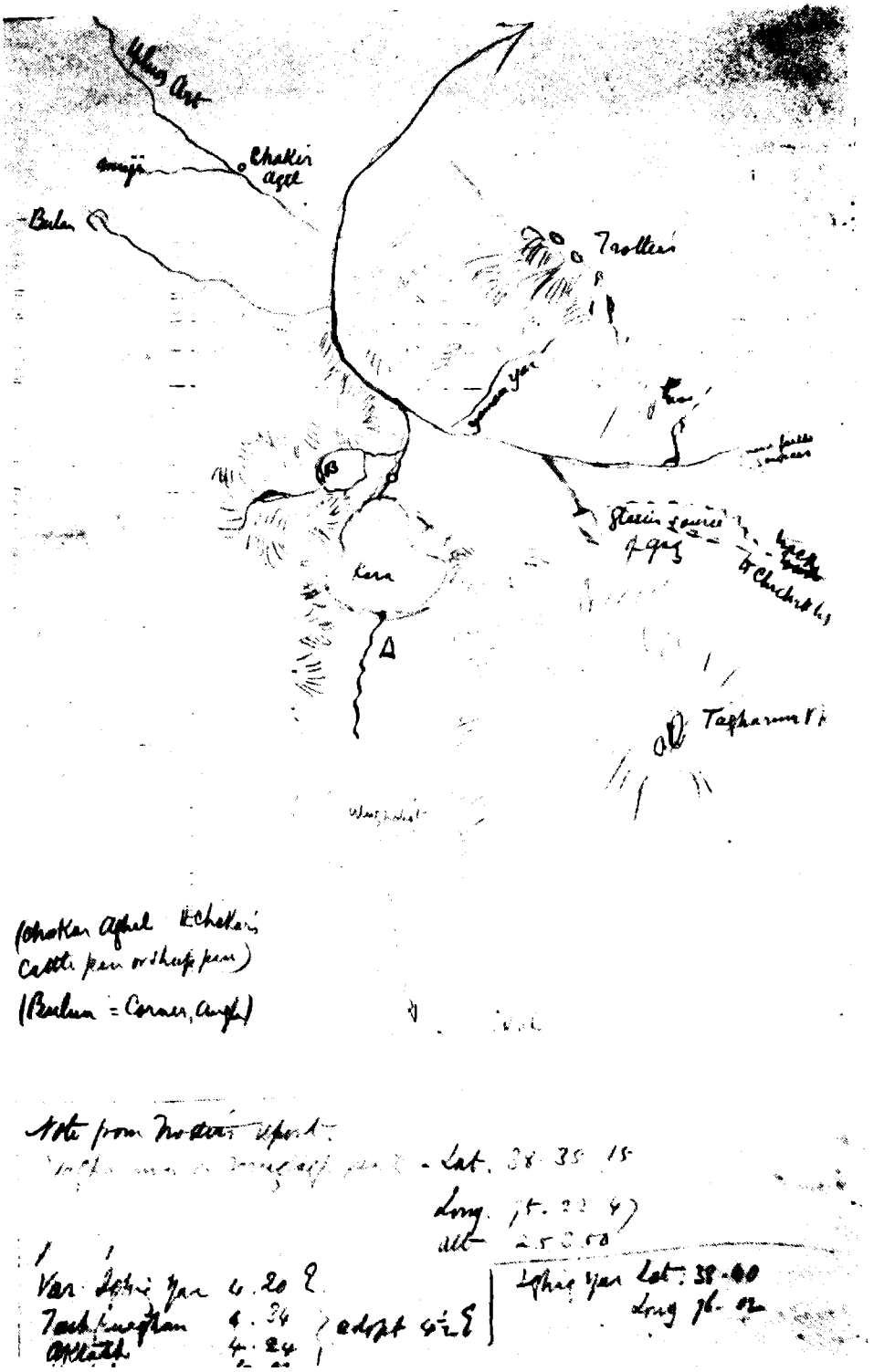
Into this geo-strategic framework we can now fit Elias's instructions for the second stage of his mission. He was to visit Wakhan, Shighnan and Badakshan with letters of introduction from the Amir of Afghanistan, and he was to try to ascertain the recognized boundaries between these districts and the Russian and Chinese possessions along the Upper Oxus. This would also entail a reconnaissance of the Panjah and the Murghab to decide which of the two, geographically speaking, was the main source of the Oxus. The more information he could collect and the more goodwill he could establish with the rulers and the people the better. The opportunity for exploration was covered by the sentence which said that he 'might find the chance to make interesting journeys and collect reliable information whilst waiting for instructions'. Rather unnecessarily in his case, he was told to proceed with extreme caution and not to excite jealousy. There was no mention of the Lockhart mission to Chitral, or of the Afghan Boundary Commission (which had already been in the field for a year). He was only told vaguely that the latter 'might delimit the frontier of Afghanistan in that direction' (i.e. the region designated in the instructions to Elias) during the coming year. Totally lacking in the instructions to all three missions was any clear definition of their respective roles in relation to each other. The confusion caused later on by this initial failure and its unfortunate effects on Elias's work in particular will become only too apparent. But it will already be obvious that the task set him was much more onerous, and that far more would depend on his geographical, political and strategic findings, than on either of the other two whose roles relatively speaking were limited in their scope.

On September 30th he left Yangi Hissar for the Pamirs, only two months before real winter would set in to make travel conditions impossible. Obstructed to the last he made a bad start with the worst set of ponies and gear he had ever had; at the outset loads were falling off every thirty yards or so and his little retinue from India were so helpless that he had to do all the work himself. His diary shows that for several days he was in a bad frame of mind. He had begun his

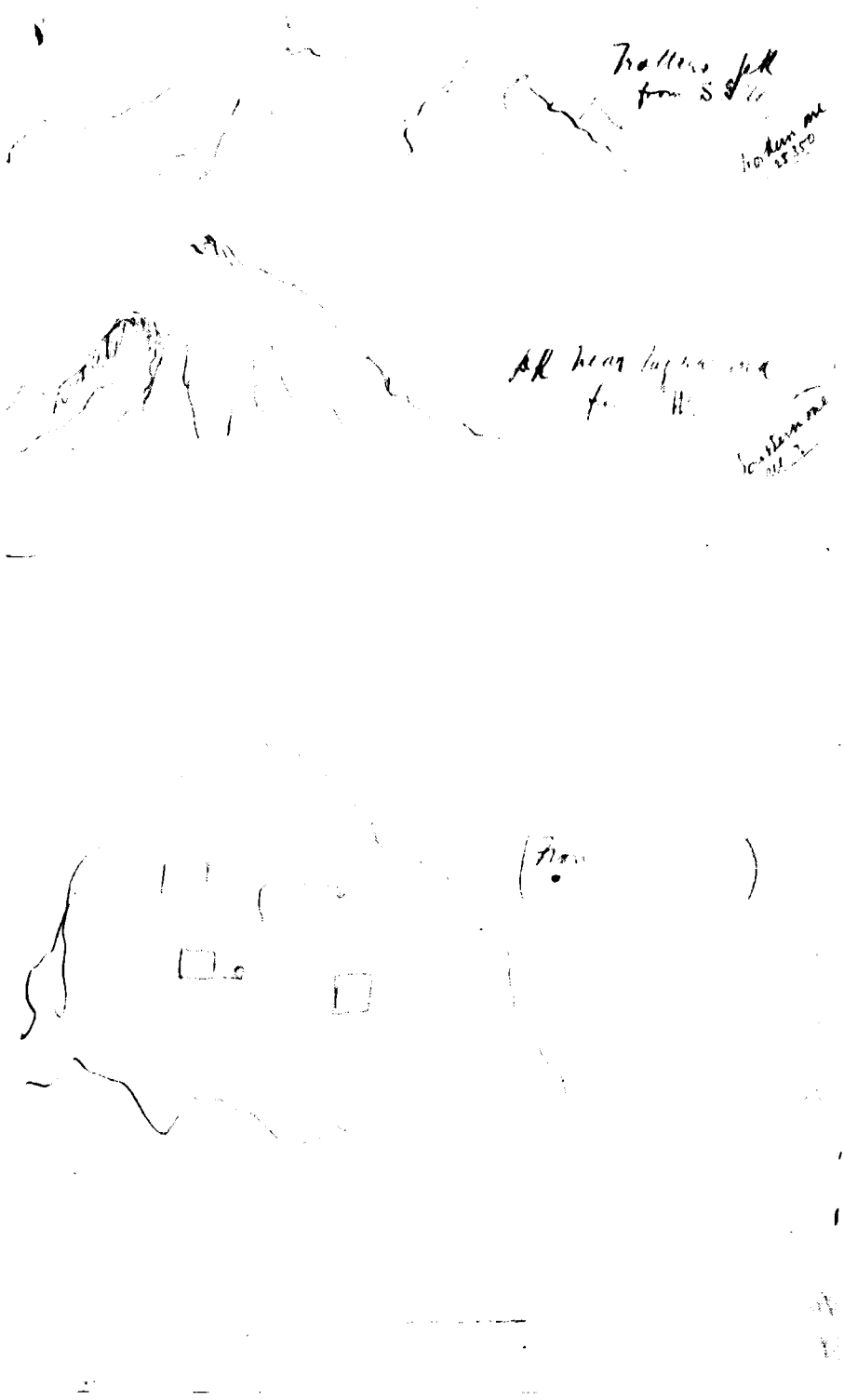
route survey, which he was to keep up for the next three months, and between this, interrogating people, and managing his baggage train he must have been very fully occupied.

The Amban had offered him an escort of fifty soldiers as far as the limit of Chinese influence at Rang Kul, obviously not out of kindness but simply in order to keep an eye on him. He had accepted the offer, expecting five at the most, of whom he hoped one might possibly be a local man who would know the route. He was not particularly disconcerted when none at all turned up, so that not for the first time he had to find his own way. He had with him the map compiled from the surveys of Trotter and Hayward and was at first following a route which Colonel Gordon of the Forsyth Mission had begun but had been forced to abandon. On the fifth day he crossed the snow-covered Kara Tash Pass, which he found easy by Ladakh standards. The Pamirs are essentially the domain of nomad Kirghiz and as he was now in their country he had to find out to whom they considered they chiefly owed allegiance. On such matters he always found the priests were well informed, and a local Pir told him that Kirghiz throughout the Pamirs, except in the Alai, regarded themselves as Chinese subjects and that even the headmen of the latter were recognized by the Chinese. He said they preferred them to the Afghans or the Russians, perhaps because they were able to sell them their grain in Kashgar. When the Afghans conquered Shighnan in 1873, the Chinese were in such fear of them that they called in all the Kirghiz tribes from beyond the Aksu in case they allied themselves with the Afghans. Thus the clear implication was that by China the Aksu was regarded as the frontier.

On reaching Little Kara Kul, which he was the first European to visit, he made a geographical discovery which greatly pleased him. His maps showed a peak called Tagharma with a height, calculated by Trotter, of 25,050 feet, which was visible from the Kashgar plain. From Kara Kul he saw to his astonishment not one but two great peaks, one twenty miles north-north-east of the lake and the other twenty miles south-east of it. The peak named Tagharma was thus forty miles north of the Tagharma Range and it was an entirely new one which rose in that range. He believed the mistake had arisen because the new peak was, as he described it, 'on with' the plotted one as seen from Kashgar and therefore invisible. He made sketches of both peaks but he could not measure the new one, although he believed it was not quite so high as the former, which he now calculated to be 25,350 feet; together, however, they were the highest peaks north of the Himalayas. Writing to Durand, the head of the Foreign Department, of his discovery he said he thought the new peak was the one seen by the Russian Kostenko in 1883 from the Kizil Art Pass and



6. Page from Elias's notes on mountains seen from Kara Kol, reduced approx. ½ (R.G.S.).



7. Page from Elias's notes: Trotter's Peak (Kungur) and Tagharma (Muztagh Ata) from Little Kara Kul

which he called the Father of Mountains (Ata Tagh). He suggested that Durand should ask the Viceroy if he would agree to the northern mountain being named Mount Dufferin. He said the Russians, especially Prejevalski, were scattering their own names freely beyond their frontier whilst we only had Lake Victoria and this suggestion would balance things up. Meanwhile, as he could find no clear local name, though some told him it was Muztagh Ata, he reassigned the name Tagharma on his survey.

Round about Kara Kul Elias carried out an ethnological investigation on the relationship between the Kirghiz and Kipchak tribes. He found four divisions of Kirghiz all living amicably together, Naiman, Tait, Karatait and Kasik, all of whom he believed came originally from Bokhara and Samarkand and were thus of Aryan stock. More excitingly he believed these tribes to have been formerly Nestorian Christians, which perhaps accounted for their original migration. He was always on the watch for evidence in Central Asia for survivals of this early form of Christianity, but once again was unable to follow his clues. It was in this area that he saw and shot his first Ovis Poli, those magnificent wild sheep with horns often exceeding five feet, first described by Marco Polo.

On the north shore of the lake he inspected a rock known locally as the Tamgha Tash. On it was an inscription alleged to be Chinese and supposed to describe the route taken by a Chinese army in 1759 pursuing a tribe called Khojas, who had rebelled in that year. The inscription however was certainly not Chinese and he was unable to identify it. His discovery had an interesting sequel which will be described later. Piecing together local stories, he learned that the Chinese had never conquered Badakshan as they claimed, nor had they ever had jurisdiction in any of the Oxus provinces, at any rate since the Mongol dynasty 600 years earlier. This was important as not conflicting with Afghanistan's current claims over Badakshan and its dependencies.

After crossing another pass he descended to the Rang Kul, which means the Lake of All Colours. It was in fact two lakes, the upper one swarming with geese and all manner of wild fowl. They were restless at night, flying round to avoid being frozen in, and were about to migrate to southern India, crossing en route the immense ranges which are such a formidable barrier to mere man. The lake was a vivid blue sheet ringed by peaks of impressive grandeur. This was one of the few occasions on which Elias commented aesthetically in an official report, but this time it was for a particular reason. The words he used were precisely those which the seventh century Chinese Buddhist traveller and chronicler Hsüan Tsang had employed to describe an unnamed

Pamir lake. It is true Hsüan Tsang had said the lake bottom was inhabited by an assortment of sea dogs, serpents, dragons, tortoises and crocodiles and Elias does not mention seeing any of these, but he agreed with this Buddhist traveller that its waters were limpid and clear as a mirror and the description tallied so closely that he believed it to be the same lake. As further corroboration, facing the lake was a distinctive rock face about a hundred feet high known locally as the Chiragh Tash or Lamp Rock. Near the top was a cave with an ever-burning light in it. Local legend held that it was a diamond set in the forehead of a dragon which guarded a vast treasure, and no Kirghiz dared enter the cave. This was an interesting example of Dragonology, variations of which occur throughout China and Central Asia. When Hsüan Tsang visited it, it was the holiest spot in the Buddhist cosmogony, and Elias was able to show that 1,200 years later the Dragon King still reigned supreme in the Pamirs. He described the light as a steady white flame, probably phosphorescent, but he had far too much respect for local feeling to climb up to it.

Not surprisingly, the headman of the Rang Kul district regarded Elias with some suspicion. He was in awe of China whose sovereignty he recognized, though he had only once been visited by a Chinese. This visitor had been a magistrate sent to watch Kostenko's party two years earlier, and which the Chinese had ejected claiming that it was in Chinese territory. The headman said mournfully that he knew all rulers plundered their subjects, but this magistrate went beyond all limits and took everything he could lay his hands on. Local inhabitants confirmed that neither the Great Kara Kul nor the Kizil Jik region were recognized as Russian territory. They knew China claimed them as subjects (although to be on the safe side they probably paid tribute to Shighnan as well) and they said they had felt more secure since Afghanistan had conquered Shighnan. They said the Kizil Art pass to the north of the Great Kara Kul was the Chinese boundary with Russia and that a pillar there marked the border. It was mid-October and time was too short to allow for more than a short détour towards the pass, so Elias accepted these views as correct. He had now reached the western limit of Chinese claimed territory. All that he had seen and learned satisfied him that historically Chinese claims to the region were justified, and it was a serious omission that she was doing nothing tangible to demonstrate and confirm them by the establishment of military posts; as usual she was relying entirely on her rarely challenged traditions of suzerainty. But in effect there was a void, if not actually a no-man's-land, from Rang Kul south through the Taghdumbash Pamir to Sarikol. China would be hard put to it to substantiate her claim if an already probing Russia moved in first,

and such a move would bring Russia right up to the Muztagh range with its passes into India.

Leaving Rang Kul, Elias had intended to follow the Murghab, called the Aksu in these upper regions, down to its confluence with the Panjah at Kala Wamar. China claimed that this river was her boundary with Afghan-held Shighnan and Roshan. He wanted to see for himself whether the claim was justified, and if so whether it made a satisfactory boundary acceptable to both countries. He also had to settle the question whether the Murghab or the Panjah was the main feeder of the Oxus, which it would be important to know if the terms of the Anglo-Russian Agreement had to be revised. However, he had to abandon this part of his plan because there was no practicable path for his ponies, and he decided to tackle it later by ascending the river from Kala Wamar. As there was no water en route, he had had to make a forced march of twenty-five miles in one day to reach the Aksu, which followed almost immediately after a march of thirty miles.

The change of plan brought him on October 16th to the Neza Tash pass in the Alichur Pamir. This pass marked Afghanistan's most easterly claim to Shighnan and he was disappointed to find no Afghan military post there to guard it. Once across the watershed he began to descend the Alichur river. He had to press on now, for it was winter and had been snowing hard for four nights, and he wanted to reconnoitre the Koitezak Pass of 13,950 feet on his way before it was too late. His map confirms that he reached it, but his next reference in both his journal and his report is to his arrival at the village of Sardim in the valley of the Gund (the lower part of the Aksu), the first inhabited village in Afghan territory. He had passed a deserted village on the way, remarking that no doubt the Mir of Shighnan, now deposed and imprisoned for his intrigues with Russia and his revolt against Afghanistan, had sold the unfortunate inhabitants to Yarkand and Andijan as slaves. He described descending the valley as like passing from winter to a Ladakh autumn, though it froze hard at night. The days were warm and sunny and he welcomed signs of increasing vegetation after the Pamir wastes; there were willow trees and brushwood, small poplars, thorns and tamarisks. In Sardim itself he saw Kirghiz harvesting; although they were aware of it they had chosen to ignore the Chinese order prohibiting them from crossing the border.

Elias was always very careful when entering a new region to give warning of his approach, since unheralded descents were liable to be regarded with suspicion; so he sent a man ahead of him to tell the nearest Afghan headquarters at Bar Panjah of his impending arrival. If the Amir's instructions had not reached the Afghan military post at Bar Panjah he might find himself in difficulties; it was therefore dis-

turbing when he heard that his man had been stopped and held. Later he learned there had been reports there of a large party of Chinese or Russians, and his messenger had not been believed till some higher authority had confirmed that Elias was expected and that he was to be treated as a guest and accorded the fullest honours. He had been expected from the direction of Wakhan and the warm welcome he received was probably tinged with relief that he was not another Russian out to make trouble. There was further relief that his party was small and therefore would be no drain on local resources or hospitality.

An Afghan escort of forty soldiers met him whilst he was still descending the Gund valley. He observed that they never seemed tired of talking of the friendship of their two governments, which at least was a good sign. This was his first real encounter with Afghans, other than traders in Ladakh, and he wrote, 'They *seem* to be sincere – we shall see. They are a rough and ready set of "wild Irishmen" but somehow I take to them more than the sneaking Chinese and Kashmiris. They make no pretensions of doing more than they actually perform.' Evidently the Amir's instructions were going to be carried out with a will for everything was being given him free. In practice this meant that to maintain the fiction he would have to give presents in return instead of money. Nevertheless, the escort was careful to keep all Shighnanis away from his camp, especially mullahs, which meant that he could not glean any historical or political information from these usually well-informed gentry. A few days later he received an effusive welcome from the Hakim or local governor at Bar Panjah, the confluence of the Gund and Panjah rivers. The Hakim gave him a good pony (which, ever-mindful of protocol, he accepted on behalf of the Indian Government), and sent him fruit at all hours of the day. There was further evidence of the Amir's goodwill when an Afghan arrived from Wakhan with supplies. The man had been sent there to meet him but had brought them back on hearing Elias had arrived by a different route.

Elias had so far been aided by relatively good weather, nevertheless to have crossed the Pamirs so late in the year had been a great feat especially in view of difficulties which will be described later. Now, taking advantage of an unusually fine late autumn, Elias set out again at the beginning of November along the right bank of the Panjah, following it down northwards to its junction with the Murghab, which at this point had a third name, the Bartang. Here he was able to make good use of his previous experience in a detailed investigation of the flow, velocity and depth of both rivers. He even went so far as to ford them, which must have been extremely cold and possibly perilous, but his findings might be crucial and he wanted to put the issue beyond

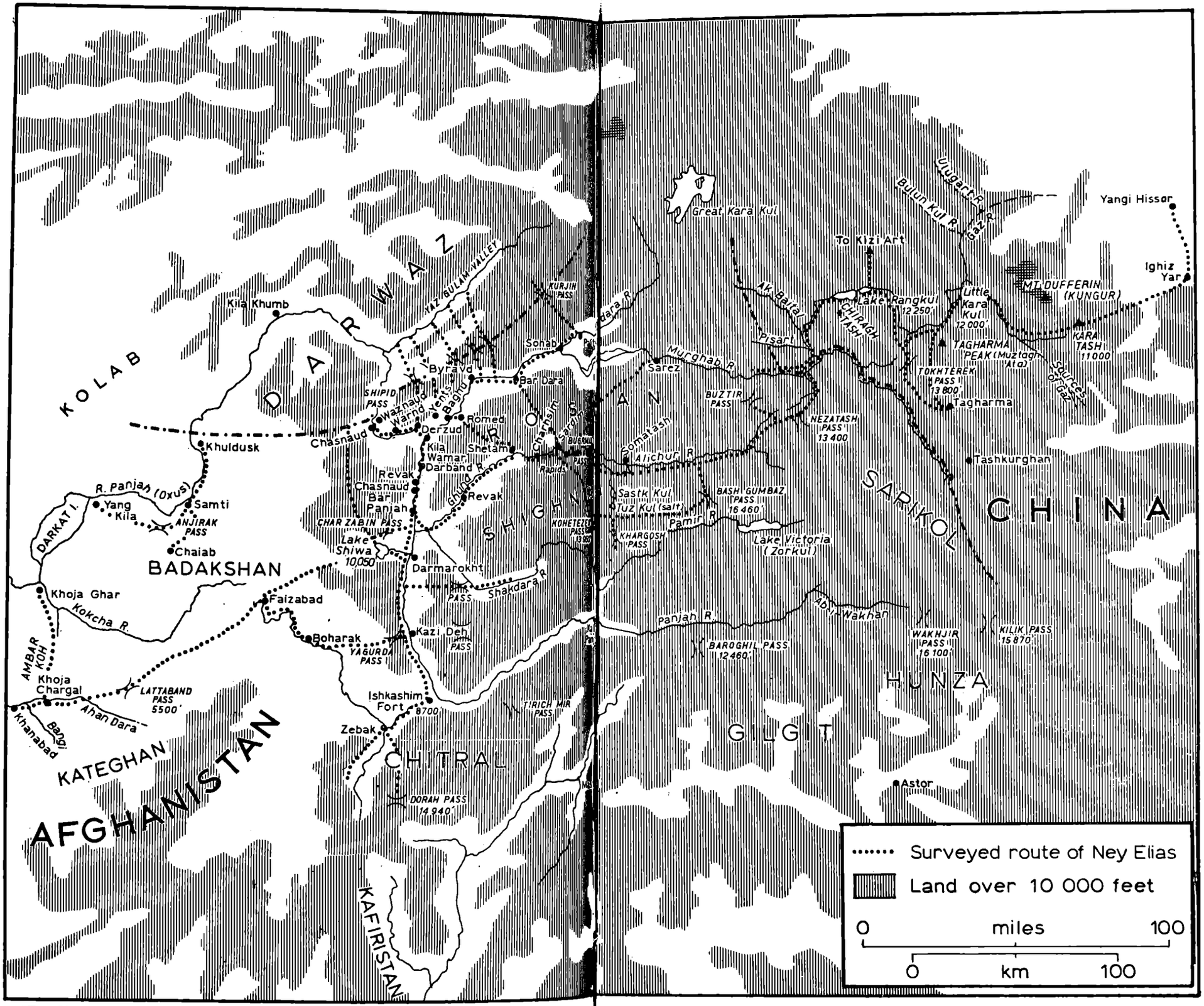
doubt. He was easily able to satisfy himself that, taken throughout the year, the Panjah carried the greater volume of water, thus confirming that it was the main feeder of the Oxus and hence disposing of the Murghab claim, supported by the Havildar and also by some Russians.

He had now left Shighnan, where he had seen and learned all he needed to confirm the Afghan claims, and was on the border between Roshan and Darwaz. The inhabitants of these parts were pure Aryan and noticeably handsome. Once again there was no question but that the Roshanis lived on both sides of the Oxus. As he noted, for people of this kind in Central Asia there is nothing unusual in paying tribute to two or even more powers whom they feared; it was their only way of propitiating possible enemies. It was greatly in favour of the Afghans that they had put down slavery. Nevertheless, he saw many villages deserted as a result of the inhabitants having been sold for slaves in Kashgar and Khokand by the deposed Mir and he thought it would be a generation before the people's prosperity was restored.

A drawback to travel in both Shighnan and Roshan was the squalor and filth of the buildings. This usually meant either camping in his tent or sleeping on a verandah, and the trouble with a tent was that it had to be pitched either on mud or snow, conditions which he could not stand for more than a night. Even for a man accustomed to hardship as Elias was such conditions must have been quite appalling, and inevitably their effects were telling upon him. Meanwhile he continued to enjoy most friendly relations not only with his escort and all the Afghan officials he met, but also now with the local inhabitants.

From Kala Wamar he carried out a survey of some sixty miles up the Bartang/Murghab as far as Sonab, where it is joined by the Kudara. On the way he reconnoitred six passes between the Bartang and Yaz Gulam Valleys to the north. Beyond the latter lay Russian-held Darwaz territory. He was fully satisfied that none of these passes was likely to be used by Russia as a possible invasion route into Badakshan. The roads were impassable for baggage animals or even riding ponies; so rough were they that he thought the term road might be a sour joke. Often they were mere pathways or ledges of rock built up with poles bound with twigs, and in places even woven twig ladders served. They were not, he said, always easy for a nervous traveller to pass over and keep up a show of indifference he did not feel, 'but Asiatics have no nerves to speak of'. He was putting it moderately. A Russian general lost every one of his ponies over precipices on this route, and photographs by the later traveller R. P. Cobbold show these ledges supported by birch twigs to be truly hazardous affairs.

Back again at Kala Wamar he turned westwards along the Oxus to



5. The Sixth Expedition: Across the Pamirs

Waznaud on the Darwaz-Roshan frontier. Dr Regel, whose map he was presumably following here, earned his rare commendation for having marked it accurately. He had visited nearly every village in trans-Oxus Shighnan and Roshan and he put the total population of the former at about four thousand and the latter at three thousand, with perhaps five thousand Kirghiz nomads. He could find no historical evidence that Bokhara had ever had claims to Roshan. All the inhabitants of Shighnan and Roshan were Shighni speaking Tajiks, and as Shiahs of the Ismaili sect were followers of the Aga Khan. He had prepared for the latter possibility, for he carried with him an imposingly ornate letter of introduction from the Aga which no doubt greatly eased his passage. For the time being he postponed visiting Darwaz, hoping to investigate this disputed territory when travelling conditions improved in the spring.

By the end of November he was back again at Bar Panjah, but because travel conditions were still possible at this height of about 7,000 feet, he stayed only a day before setting off south to follow the Panjah upstream. On the way he broke his journey to visit the Shiwa lake at an altitude of over 10,000 feet. He described it as a mountain tarn about $5\frac{3}{4}$ miles long and geologically interesting as bearing no resemblance to the flat-bottomed lakes of the Pamirs. It had an underground outlet and ultimately cascaded into the Panjah, falling about 2,000 feet in six miles. He reached Ishkashim on December 3rd and at this point his survey joined that of Wood, made in 1837 and starting from Lake Victoria. His own survey thus ended 380 miles from its starting point at Yangi Hissar, though the total distance surveyed was over 600 miles; not to be compared with his feat in Mongolia, but still an outstanding performance.

On the day he arrived he received a mail which had left Ladakh on October 1st, having probably been despatched from Simla at least a month earlier. It was the first to reach him since his arrival at Yarkand. His original instructions had indicated that he could expect them to be supplemented later, but there were none in this mail so not unnaturally he was becoming apprehensive. From here he wrote to Lockhart, who he believed was wintering in Chitral, but he got no reply and a month later he still had no up-to-date news or instructions from India.

The next few days of travel depressed him greatly, for it rained heavily most of the time. 'How sick and tired', he wrote, 'one gets of everlasting hills, brown, rocky, barren and snow topped, and of deep narrow valleys.' His next destination was Zebak, no more than a cluster of villages in a valley, but remarkable for the diversity of languages spoken there. He noted Persian, Shighni, Wakhi, Ishkashimi, Munjari

and Sanglichi all in current use, and all of them Aryan. This confluence of languages coincided with a similar geographical confluence of mountains and rivers; taken together they could occur nowhere else but in Central Asia.

Of Boharak, said to be the chief fruit garden of Badakshan, he remarked 'it might well be for there is mud and water enough to grow a mangrove swamp if anybody would take the trouble to bring a little seed'. His next destination was Faizabad, the capital of Badakshan, where he was met with great ceremony by an Afghan 'general' and conducted to his house. The general's standard of comfort was low for his alleged rank; his house had neither chairs nor carpets, and Faizabad itself offered no more consolation. It lay in an unhealthy narrow gorge and smallpox was decimating the children. In this ill-ventilated hollow of great heat in summer and severe cold in winter were crowded 4,000 inhabitants. There was no sanitation, so epidemics were frequent. Typhus occurred regularly every spring and his Indian medical assistant was kept busy treating a kind of low fever. Naturally enough, he found the citizens were a torpid unenterprising lot. The town had lately been rebuilt, so there were no remarkable buildings or relics, and Elias reflected on the lost opportunity of establishing it on the site of Boharak which being somewhat higher would have made a healthier site. A break in the weather cheered him for a few days and he was in a rare state of euphoria when he wrote in his journal:

'Happily a most engaging young moon floats past every night but without giving me a chance for the longitude. She will do nothing for me till December 20 when she will condescend to occult a star of the 6th magnitude, but she will be so bright then – only one day from the full – that she will probably put out the star altogether.'

It was not like him to write thus happily; soon his spirits fell and were not to rise again for a very long time.

As travel and serious investigation in the higher regions were now impossible till the weather improved, he considered himself off duty. All the same, he was fully occupied till the end of December, paying and returning visits and gleaning information from officials in Badakshan. The Hakim was slowly recovering from a low fever and Elias fed him on beef tea and jelly prepared by his cook. In gratitude the Hakim presented him with a pony, this time complete with saddle and bridle. For the last ten days of 1885 he was also busy writing his report. He was in the habit of sending in long interim reports, and his final reports normally varied little from them. It is therefore convenient to break off from the narrative of his journey at this point and summarize his findings and recommendations as far as he had come.

He was satisfied that China had every historical and traditional right to claim all territory westwards beyond Rang Kul up to the Aksu river, but it was essential she should prove her right by occupying it before the Russians decided to do so. His findings on Shighnan, which he had traversed from east to west, showed that such control as there was derived from Badakshan and hence ultimately from Afghanistan, and that neither historically nor ethnically had there ever been any affinity with Bokhara, but it was a fact that far more of Shighnan lay east of the Panjah than on the Afghan side. The same findings applied with even more force to Roshan, nearly all of which lay beyond the Oxus. In short, the Panjah had never been either an administrative or an ethnological boundary. The Amir was the *de facto* ruler of all the territory, although he was still somewhat vague about its precise limits. Elias considered he should be enlightened on this point, for in the interests of his own defence it would be to his advantage to continue to claim these districts. The same recommendation applied here as for China, namely that it was essential for the Amir to confirm his claim by military occupation right up to the Aksu. On the other hand, he was not at all sure how loyal the various tribes might be to the Amir and he intended to learn more about this important aspect by meeting their rulers in the spring.

His final recommendation was prefaced by a consideration of the effectiveness of rivers as frontiers. His opinion, which strategists would endorse, was that in general rivers made bad borders. But he considered an exception could be made in inaccessible mountain regions such as he had just traversed. In such a case a border following a river was likely to be just as effective as one following a mountain range. This was because demarcation was the primary object and defence of lesser importance. In either case nomad tribesmen could never be prevented from crossing and recrossing at will. In his opinion therefore, the Aksu, already recognized by both sides as the boundary, was an acceptable border.

On the other hand, he considered the Panjah or Upper Oxus made a thoroughly bad frontier, economically, strategically and ethnologically. On the first score it was to some extent a freeway for trade. It was bad strategically because rivers can only be defended from high ground on one side or the other, and here he observed that Afghan troops in Shighnan were already occupying the most obviously defensive mountain positions. Ethnologically it was plainly bad, because Shighnanis and Roshanis were living on both sides of it. With this last point in mind he said that the Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1873 had been based on a fundamental misunderstanding by both sides. It had never been observed, and he had now shown why, as matters

stood then, it never could be. He believed it would have to be abrogated and a new agreement concluded. In his journal, though not in his report, he wrote that 'if any kind of good will exists between Britain and Russia when the Boundary Commission has finished its work', one could not conceive of a refusal by the latter to cancel the Agreement unless prompted by a secret intention of hostility towards us or at any rate against our interests in Afghanistan.

In a report written some years earlier, which seems to have been no secret, the Russian officer Colonel Kostenko had written that the country between the most southern portion of Ferghana and the Baroghil Pass lay in the Pamir and belonged to no one. He said this belt of no-man's-land would probably sooner or later be included in the Russian dominions which would then be in immediate contact with the range forming the water-parting of the Indus. With Kostenko's report in mind Elias recommended that from the point of view of the defence of India, Afghanistan and China should be persuaded to close up to a common frontier. This would have the effect of cutting off Russia from any direct access to the Hindu Kush and hence to the passes into Chitral except through an act of war against one or both countries. It is fairly evident that the establishment of a common frontier between Afghanistan and China had been in Elias's mind for several years as the solution to India's northern defence problem, but such an important and far-reaching plan had had to await the investigations he had just completed before he could put it forward with the necessary force.

Chapter XII

LAST PHASE OF THE PAMIR JOURNEY

A Confusion of Missions

The work Elias intended to carry out in 1886 was to consist of a detailed survey of cis-Oxus Darwaz and an investigation into the historical and ethnical background of the tribes living in this disputed territory. After that he would make a more general examination of the political situation in Badakshan and Kateghan and the defensive potential of these two provinces against a possible Russian invasion. Lastly, he intended to tackle Wakhan likewise. If the work had gone through as planned he would have completed his mission by the autumn, but his programme was thrown out for reasons quite beyond his control.

The orbits of the three missions (the simile is Elias's own) were now approaching each other and a clash was inevitable. The Afghan Boundary Commission commanded by Sir West Ridgeway (he had been knighted in the field) had been in Afghanistan since 1884 and indeed was already there at the time of the Russian-Afghan incident at Panjdeh. Although administered by the Indian Government it was responsible politically to the Foreign Office in England. It had very full terms of reference, for not only was it to demarcate the Afghan frontier along the Oxus from the Persian border as far as its confluence with the Kokcha, but it was intended to survey comprehensively the whole of the Herat province of Afghanistan at the same time. The demarcation required the presence of Afghan as well as Russian delegates, whilst the comprehensive survey needed several teams of surveyors. The whole Commission was 1,300 strong and had about 2,000 animals for its transport. Not unexpectedly, it experienced difficulties, and by the winter of 1885 it had got no further east than Bala Murghab, which was under 200 miles from its starting point. The Russian army delegates did not really want a settlement, and with plenty of opportunity for obstructionism they made the best use of it by contesting every point of demarcation. The Amir, who had agreed willingly enough at the outset to the Commission's work, was now becoming restive at the time it was taking. This was partly because the Russians deliberately caused local political trouble whenever they

could; even hinting at a carve-up of his territory. A potent cause of ill-feeling was the size of the mission. Herat was a troublesome province for the Amir at the best of times. It was thinly populated and cultivated and the horde that had now descended upon it like locusts had greatly upset its economy. Elias had already seen the effect of a big mission on a sparse economy in Ladakh, which had taken four years to recover from supplying the Forsyth mission. The theory that big missions were good for our prestige had the reverse effect when it meant empty bellies for the local inhabitants, and the Amir's Agent had to be tough to requisition supplies enough to keep the Commission fed. Lastly, there was much sickness in the winter of 1885/86 whilst the summer brought malaria, and the morale of the commission's personnel had become distinctly low. All this further endorsed Elias's contention that in Central Asia the smaller the mission the better: and in any case far too much was being attempted.

Ridgeway was a soldier by profession but seconded to the Foreign Department, where he was normally Durand's assistant. It looks as though he was an impetuous and at times hot-tempered extrovert. For instance, at one point he wrote a furious letter to Durand complaining that his Commission was being neglected. Durand replied

'Why on earth do you attack me in that tone of voice? Of course I realise the importance of getting the Boundary demarcated during the Amir's lifetime, so I think does everyone else . . . but I don't see you have any reason for hitting me over the head!'

He apologized later for his outburst 'in sack cloth and ashes'. Elias must have known Ridgeway very well and cannot have been looking forward to their meeting; he may have reminded him of that other impetuous soldier, Colonel Horace Browne of the Burma-Yunnan mission.

Colonel Lockhart, who was in command of the mission to Chitral, was another regular soldier and was entirely without experience of political work. Broadly, his instructions were to establish good relations with the ruler of Chitral, to foster goodwill, assess the possibilities of invasion and reconnoitre all the passes leading into the country over the Hindu Kush. He was to endeavour to penetrate Kafiristan and explore it, but with the greatest caution, and the Afghan border was not to be touched, at any rate pending further instructions. There was no mention of either Hunza or Wakhan. Lastly he was to carry out a complete survey of the country. Like the instructions to Ridgeway's Commission, these also were far too ambitious. The economy of Chitral, a mountainous country only a little larger than Wales, was

also sparse, yet Lockhart took with him four officers and 300 men, as well as a load of 200 rifles as presents, requiring altogether a baggage train of more than 300 animals. If the survey had been left out and a political officer taken instead, Lockhart would have had fewer difficulties to contend with. As his diary shows his own political judgment was unbelievably naive. He was impressed by the Mehtar and fully accepted his assurance that he regarded his country as British territory, not realizing at all how little such oriental protestations usually meant. His notion of goodwill resulted in his adoption of a Chitrali boy. He was horrified when the Mehtar showed him a letter from the Afghan Sardar (i.e. Governor) of Badakshan asking him to send as many boys between the ages of seven and eight and girls between twelve and fourteen as the accompanying money would buy. His conclusion that they would be put to work as slaves was right in one sense, though a man of the world would have realized how much worse was in store for them. He showed more sense when he refused a request by the Mehtar that he should decide which of his seventeen sons should succeed him. The Mehtar's reason was that if he made the choice himself he would probably be murdered by one of his disappointed offspring. In the event his fears were groundless, because the old gentleman died of natural causes.

In September 1885 Lockhart visited Kafiristan, neither he nor the Government apparently having learned that Afghanistan claimed the country. The visit greatly annoyed the Amir and also alarmed the Mehtar, who feared the Amir would put the blame on him. Lockhart's main recommendation on Kafiristan was that we should send in a team of missionaries, preferably German. He said that by christianizing the natives they would do our job for us by ensuring their loyalty. By the end of October 1885 Colonel Woodthorpe, the chief surveyor, had completed a fairly thorough survey of Chitral, including even its flora and fauna. Lockhart had concluded that all the passes leading into the country were too difficult for any but small raiding parties, and he had recommended the conclusion of an agreement with the Mehtar that he should raise troops to guard the northern approaches. The Mehtar had advised him that Gilgit should be taken over as a military base. This too he recommended, not realizing its disadvantages.

The Mehtar now began to withhold supplies thus making it plain that Lockhart was outstaying his welcome. Lockhart thereupon withdrew to Gilgit for the winter which was probably why the letter Elias had sent him in December never reached him. Before he left he received a letter from the Amir saying he had heard he might again be visiting Kafiristan and asking what his intentions were. Lockhart replied categorically that he had no intention of paying another visit. But

he must have been loath to give up his little independent command, for whilst at Gilgit he decided to return in the spring and visit Wakhan, also in the Amir's territory (and which Elias had already been instructed to visit) and Hunza. Afterwards he intended to travel on to Kafiristan once again and finally to Badakshan, which had already been firmly assigned to Elias. Lockhart did not write to the Amir for permission but asked the Government to do so. Here were the beginnings of a desperate imbroglio. Not only would the Mehtar be antagonized but also, more importantly, the Amir, who with two missions on his hands was now to be saddled with a third. Yet the Government neither wrote to the Amir nor did anything to restrain Lockhart. The only possible excuse is that it was preoccupied with events in Burma, but at the very least he should have been told of the instructions already given to Elias.

It was May, and chronologically four months ahead of this narrative, when Lockhart reached Hunza. He had of course never received the warning sent by Elias that he should keep out because of its possible annexation by China. His description of the Mir of Hunza was that he had a merry eye, though from the photograph in his report a cunning one would have been more appropriate, and his political activities strongly confirmed it. The Mir expressed great friendship for India but said he owed allegiance only to the 'King of China'. Naturally he said nothing about his share of the booty from the caravans raided by his Kanjuti subjects. Nor did Lockhart learn about his intrigues with Kashmir, Gilgit, Chitral, Afghanistan . . . and Russia. Shortly afterwards he was murdered by his son. There was nothing unusual about that, but unfortunately the son held firmly to his father's policies and it was this political jugglery which ultimately brought about the latter's downfall.

It scarcely needs saying that Lockhart gleaned no inkling of the Mir's plot to attack his mission. It was some months later before Elias learned why the attack had not materialized. The Chinese had promised the Mir two guns and had duly despatched them from Kashgar, but they became stuck in deep snow on a pass and only the ammunition arrived. Without their support (although doubtless it would have been more moral than physical) the Mir feared to attack, and by the time the guns had been extricated Lockhart had crossed the Kilik Pass out of harm's way. Luckily, too, the Chinese must have had second thoughts about annexing Hunza; perhaps after all they had begun to think that direct control would bring more trouble than the country was worth, especially under such a wily customer as the Mir. At all events China's inaction, then and subsequently, ultimately gave India her chance to take the initiative.

At this point we may leave the big battalions and return to follow the fortunes, or misfortunes as they now became, of Elias. His spell off duty only amounted to a few days and on January 1, 1886, he set out westwards for Khanabad, where the Afghan Sardar had invited him to stay. Two days later a mail twenty-nine days out of Yarkand caught up with him, but still there were no fresh instructions from India. The messenger had reported no snow in the Pamirs and Elias began to regret 'for several reasons' that he had not turned back from Ishkashim. A week later he noted 'We have now left these feeble but bleak and dreary hills and have come into the plains of Kateghan. We are out of the snow though that would be preferable to the everlasting mud.' There was a change of attitude in the Afghan escort now assigned to him and he was being closely watched. Crossing the treeless Lattaband spurs he wrote: 'Where Babur [the conqueror and historian] could have seen the "beauties of Badakshan with its pine clad heights" I cannot think.' Of his Afghan attaché descended from Uzbeg chiefs and now fallen in degree he ruminated:

'Still my honest and civil friend, it is probably all the better you are not a leader of even a little tribe of Uzbeg Kateghanis. . . . I do not say you are bloodthirsty or a tyrant as your unhonoured grandfather was, but it is just as well you should not have the opportunity of trying your hand at "shutting the gates of mercy on mankind" for I have no doubt you would succeed admirably in a small way.'

Hereabouts he was particularly struck with the local breed of horses just as Moorcroft had been; everyone lived on horseback to keep out of the mud, even the bazaar traders. But the bazaars themselves contained only the shoddiest Indian and Russian goods, and he saw opportunities for improving the Indian trade.

Before he reached Khanabad he became too ill to travel for several days and at this point he sent off the first of a number of demi-official letters of which he kept copies. In this letter to Ridgeway he said he feared both his health and his one-man mission were about to give way. He asked if he could have a doctor detached from the Commission and enclosed a letter for the doctor to read. At the same time he wrote to Durand, saying that hitherto the Afghans had treated him with great hospitality. Then, referring with evident anxiety to his health, he said he had never been well since leaving Kashmir; now it was interfering with his movements and some one ought to come up and take charge. Before he left India the Viceroy had suggested taking a doctor and he asked if that suggestion could now be followed up. Alternatively, would the Viceroy allow him to go to the Boundary

Commission for treatment? He asked Durand to reply through Lockhart as he feared his own mail might be falling into the wrong hands. A few days later he wrote again to Durand, referring to a proposal of his which apparently had not reached India and which outlined his plan of investigation in the spring that did not touch the Russo-Afghan frontier and would not interfere with Ridgeway. Again he asked for a doctor, if Ridgeway could spare one, so that he could carry on the mission's work. Above all things, he wrote, he needed fresh instructions. Was he to return to Kashgar? He said the local people did not understand these ill-defined missions and were beginning to suspect their motives, and he did not think Ridgeway could reach the Murghab for many months. Added to the anxiety about his health it was beginning to emerge that he wanted to keep his work clear of Ridgeway's, and Durand's omission to send him any fresh instructions must have increased his apprehension that he might be about to lose his independence. Lastly he again expressed concern about the safety of his mail, though whether it was Afghan or Russian inspired interests which he feared were at work he did not say. Altogether he was in a predicament, which looked like getting worse rather than better.

In the middle of January he struggled into Khanabad. Here for the first time he was received with suspicion. He was probably getting the backlash of the Boundary Commission's unpopularity, although after a few days matters improved. In spite of his difficulties he had not ceased his investigation of local politics in Kateghan as well as Badakshan, and he had learned enough to make another interim report. As this marked the end of the second phase of his journey and like his others was embodied very fully in his final report it will simplify the narrative to describe his findings and recommendations up to this point.

In this region, he said, Afghanistan had a large tract of poor territory divided into a number of petty provinces with nothing in common except racial hatred for the Afghans as their recent conquerors. Oddly enough, many would have preferred Russian rule by 'real' foreigners to rule by co-religionists. But he believed the next generation would accept the situation and that Afghan policy should be to consolidate and wait. Meanwhile, although it was a disquieting sign that service in Badakshan was not popular with the Afghan Army, nevertheless the army and officials were behaving remarkably well towards the inhabitants. Slavery had been abolished and there were no executions or personal bullying as was the custom in Chinese Turkestan. Like his Afghan escort commander, he had formed a very low opinion of the tribesmen as fighting men. That the Kateghanis wore a coarse and sullen look was only to be expected, for much of their territory was

low-lying swamp. They lived in reed huts which leaked like sieves in snow and rain and were the worst habitations imaginable for such a cold wet climate. He had always thought the nomads of Tibet, living in tents of yak hair matting, attained the lowest degree of human endurance, but these Uzbegs of Kateghan had an even worse lot. They were as hardy as mountain goats and as brutal-looking as their shaggy sheepdogs. Despite the fact that there was no shortage of wool they wore chiefly cotton clothing and he wondered whether it might be because the dampness of the climate made wool unsuitable. Although they all thought only of themselves and would feel the loss of an only child less than that of a cow or a calf, yet on the whole the Kateghanis were less prejudiced against Afghanistan than the Tajiks of Shighnan and Badakshan.

In general terms, he thought the Amir would be well advised to define all his boundaries and to deal firmly with his disaffected minorities. None of these were warlike and therefore offered little danger to him and by the same token would be of no use to Russia except on the supply lines. One means of establishing Afghan prestige would be to erect imposing buildings just as the Chinese did. In particular however the Amir should make no claim to any doubtful territory. Elias had not yet visited Darwaz, but he had already learned enough at Waznaud to know that Bokharan claims to the part of Darwaz lying south of the Panjah were based on sound ethnical grounds, and the Amir would be unwise to resist them. His investigations were not as complete as he would have wished and he particularly wanted to meet the Mirs and Hakims of the various territories, whose total population he put at two hundred thousand, in order to learn something of their private views and loyalties. In the event of Russia violating the independence of Afghanistan, would they back the Amir or would they go over to Russia? He knew, for instance, that the Afghan Governor Abdullah Khan, who had authority over all the territories and whose guest he had just been at Khanabad, had recently considered calling a Jehad or Holy War against Russia, and that he had only called it off when he found the local levies would be more likely to revolt against Afghanistan than fight for her; so now, instead of fighting, the Governor was building forts. But he was expecting to learn more about local feelings when he began his spring travels.

In his long experience Elias had found native races in Central Asia differed greatly in their forms of suspicion of foreigners and he had acquired a knack of very quickly spotting warning signs when he was reaching a danger point in his work. Thus, in China, he had soon learned the risks of survey work and of enquiring too closely about topography and geology. On the other hand, the Chinese were always

free with information about administrative divisions and racial boundaries. Here in Afghanistan suspicion took the opposite form. Whilst map making was quite unobjectional all Afghan tribes maintained great secrecy about local administration and tribal divisions and this was most noticeable in Badakshan. But whatever more he might have learned about local political leanings would have had little bearing on the conclusions he had already reached on the strategic importance of these territories. He thought a Russian invasion of Badakshan would be a relatively minor operation and the prospects for Afghanistan would not be good. An invasion from the east would be most unlikely because a Russian force from Khokand would have to cross the Alai Mountains and eastern Shighnan. If they came by way of Wakhan they could only do so by first occupying Chinese Turkestan and then crossing the Chinese Pamirs. From there the most probable line of advance would be either across the low country west of Badakshan or through the northern part of Kateghan. He doubted if the Afghans could stop the Russians if their objectives were the passes leading from Zebak into Chitral, and he did not think the British could do much in the way of supporting an Afghan defence of Badakshan.

On the other hand, an advance through Badakshan would be greatly hampered by the scarcity of local supplies and by the severity of the climate. He did not consider that any large number of European troops (even seasoned Russians) could exist permanently in the Zebak valley, where the so-called towns were really only hamlets. Thus the nearest Russian garrison of any size would be a long way from the Chitral passes, where they certainly could not be maintained in winter and perhaps not even in summer. On balance therefore he thought a Russian invasion of Badakshan was unlikely. As a military appreciation this could hardly have been bettered even by a professional soldier though Younghusband later disagreed with him to the extent that he thought the Russians could maintain a force by droving their own flocks of sheep. But strategy was a subject which had always interested Elias; prejudiced though he may have been on minor matters his intelligence showed up at its best when a broad view was called for.

From these findings which he shortly despatched to India we must return to his growing personal misfortunes. Ridgeway's response to his appeal for medical attention was quite unhelpful; he replied that he had only one doctor and he could not spare him. He offered him stores instead, but stores were not the kind of things a traveller of Elias's experience was likely to lack. Indeed the only action Ridgeway took was to send a message back to India reporting the news from Elias and asking whether he should send a conveyance to bring him back to the Commission. As he could hardly expect a reply within a fortnight

one might well ask what kind of a man he is who, in response to an urgent appeal for help, avoids responsibility by asking for orders.

Luckily, for the time being Elias was feeling somewhat better and doggedly he set out again from Khanabad northwards till he struck the Panjah west of the loop at Khoja Ghar where it is joined by the Kokcha. This river was of importance as being the line of demarcation between Badakshan and Kateghan. He had begun a new route survey and his intention was to follow the Panjah upstream to as near the border of Darwaz as the season would allow. From there he was going to strike east across the loop of the river to meet it again at Waznaud where he had broken off his survey the previous autumn. He would then have covered most of the western and southern borders of Darwaz south of the river and could thus finally assess the rival Afghan and Bokharan claims to the region. He found it a great relief to leave Khanabad, which he described as like emerging from a damp cellar into fresh air. But the country still depressed his spirits and a cutting wind made him feel unwell again. At Kwaja Ghar a gale and heavy rain brought the worst cold spell of the winter; real Pamir weather was his description of it. It was the last straw and he decided to return to Khanabad and thence set out for the Boundary Commission. In his journal he wrote:

'Illness will not allow me to go any further without medical aid. I must try and reach there now or not at all. This is a sad end to all my labours, and upsets all my plans for the future. The expedition has been a bad business from the beginning, everything has gone wrong from the first and no doubt I was too old and too broken ever to have undertaken it.'

He must have been very close to breaking point just then.

Shortly before he left Khanabad the messenger he had sent to Ridgeway had returned with the latter's disappointing reply. This messenger had taken no more than seven days to reach Bala Murghab, over 300 miles away, where the Boundary Commission was in winter quarters, and only six days to return. Elias sent off a second letter to Ridgeway saying that in his present condition it would take him a month to reach Bala Murghab and he did not feel up to it. He said he had recommended to the Indian Government that the Afghans should be advised to mark off their eastern frontier up to Chinese territory first and to talk about the 1873 Agreement afterwards. If they did not do it soon, the Russians would be sure to step in and take the non-Chinese Pamirs up to the head of the Baroghil Pass.

Ridgeway had just asked him in a further letter for his advice about

what passes he should use and about the availability of supplies, if he should return to India through Chitral. Elias said Chitral might have enough supplies, because it was apparently able to support Lockhart's mission of 300 people and a large number of ponies. But he warned Ridgeway against taking a large party through Wakhan, as the country could not possibly supply it. Elias was still hoping to reconnoitre Wakhan in accordance with his original instructions and the thought that Ridgeway might intend passing that way cannot have pleased him. He ended his letter: 'I hope I have done nothing to offend you, but why address me C.I.E.? Unless Durand has been more unkind than I should like to think him during the two months I had no mail, I hope I have not been made the victim of any such damning mark of faint praise.' His concern about a possible decoration is interesting in the light of what was to follow.

Sardar Abdullah Khan had got over his initial suspicion and was greatly concerned about his guest's condition. Showing more practical consideration and anxiety to help than Ridgeway, he sent out a pony litter to bring him into Khanabad and to take him thence to Bala Murghab. Without it, Elias noted, he would never have been able to reach the Commission. 'To have broken down like this after all and have to leave the work unfinished and plans upset is a sad business. To be reduced to a litter I feel to be the beginning of the end!'

He had a last long and friendly interview with the Sardar before setting out on February 5th. The cold was still intense, with a few fine days marred by bitter winds, and he wrote very little during what must have been a most miserable journey. All the same he was able to make some useful observations to add to his report. Thus he noted that there were twenty-four villages in Darwaz south of the Panjah which ethnically belonged to Darwaz and hence to Bokhara north of it, and so could not properly be claimed by Afghanistan. In Kateghan he observed incidentally that among the Uzbegs the women did all the work of tent pitching. They also wove the coloured bands for holding the tents together. These bands were in very pretty aesthetic patterns and were an unexpected note of artistry in the country, the more unexpected because of the desperately low level of existence.

His route took him through Tashkurgan and shortly after he was met by an Indian official of the Boundary Commission at Mazar-i-Sharif. This was the largest trading centre between Yarkand and Herat, which apparently was not saying much. Here he called on the Sardar of Afghan Turkestan, who had once sought asylum in India. He was a cousin of the present Amir but, liking neither the British nor the Russians, Elias judged that faced with the choice, he would probably opt for the latter; only a few years later he was to lead a

revolt against Abd-ar-Rahman. Another week's travel brought him to Balkh, the Bactria of the Greeks, which like every other city in the region had been sacked by Chingis Khan. Though now a mass of ruins he thought it might have been a fair city in its day. One week later he overtook a survey party from the Commission returning from the Oxus and at last there was no doubt about being in touch with the Commission and relative civilization. At Maimena he had a thoroughly bad reception from the Afghan officials, who were insolent and obstructive, and the Amir's Agent was the only civil person he encountered. Just under three weeks after leaving Khanabad he reached the Boundary Commission and at this point he broke off his journal, so there is no direct means of telling what his feelings were to be amongst his own countrymen again for the first time since leaving Simla nine months earlier. Indirectly, however, we now get some enlightening glimpses.

At the beginning of March, Dr Owen, the Commission's medical officer, wrote to Durand giving him a medical report. Apart from an attack of gravel while passing through Kashmir, the only disease he could now put his finger on was that Elias was full of gout. Other than that he was suffering from hypochondria and was in a very debilitated state. He considered that the solitary life he had led for some years had rendered him unusually nervous, so that the slightest irritation was magnified to gigantic proportions. He had been dabbling in medical books much to the detriment of his peace of mind, and was full of fancies. Dr Owen wrote: 'He does not regard me with much respect as I have had to speak to him plainly. I found he was difficult and inclined to discontinue his medicines without cause. He has on several occasions said, "Why not give me a dose of prussic acid instead?" ' Owen learned that he had been treated by a London specialist for the gout and said he had been given a lot of medicines 'which of course I could not take'. This remark had suggested that the way to deal with his peculiarities was not to make too much of his ailments, which Elias doubtless attributed to want of appreciation of the gravity of his present condition. As for his future, Dr Owen considered he should be able to return to India via Badakshan, but he did not think much could be got out of him till he had taken a course of German waters and shaken off his gout and morbid tendencies. He had lived badly ever since leaving India, having been told to avoid certain articles of diet, and besides his anxiety about his physical health he was also worrying about his financial position and his future prospects. 'However,' concluded Dr Owen, 'my idea is that with a good turn at a water cure and pleasant society he would soon be himself again.'

Dr Owen was most unsympathetic towards Elias, and practically

suggests that he was a *malade imaginaire*. Even a fit man living and travelling alone in these harsh and primitive regions for months on end might incur some psychosomatic symptoms. Only Elias's inner resources and absorbing devotion to his work had seen him through, and even then not without severe mental sufferings with their physical counterparts. Of course he was a difficult patient, but that too was a symptom and a scornful approach was no way to deal with it. The very partial diagnosis said nothing about the condition of his liver, which had necessitated his sick leave in 1884. Enough in itself to cause depression, it was probably still doing so and it was to give him increasing trouble in the years ahead. Altogether Elias was a very sick man just then and deserving of much more sympathy and understanding than he got. Leaving aside the diagnosis, the tone of the doctor's letter to Durand, a layman, was prejudiced and cannot have done Elias any good in Simla, especially if the Viceroy saw it. Moreover, as he had written it at Ridgeway's request he must have discussed the contents with him, and it is therefore the less surprising that the latter treated Elias with such scant regard.

For the next six weeks Elias was recuperating, at least to some extent, with the Boundary Commission. A despatch based on his interim report was sent in March by the Viceroy to the Secretary of State for India, Lord Randolph Churchill. It gave Elias's findings about the actual situation along the Upper Oxus and his showing that in practice neither side was respecting the 1873 Agreement. This was the last mention of Elias's work in the Government's despatches to England; it looks as though the Viceroy did not wish to face the further disquieting issues which it raised. There had evidently been doubts about the future of the Boundary Commission, for, as if unaware of the realities, the Viceroy now wrote that if Russia agreed to act in the spirit of the Agreement, he did not think the Amir would resent his north-eastern boundary being laid down and in that case the work of demarcation ought to go on. But just at that point there was a change of Government in England. The new Secretary of State, Lord Kimberley, replied that both the Prime Minister, Lord Rosebery, and himself were against the suggestion. In view of Elias's findings they thought it useless to go on without first clearing up the existing difficulties over the 1873 Agreement. Thereupon the Viceroy promptly wrote accepting their view, which in the circumstances was obviously more sensible than his own suggestion, but he apparently omitted to instruct Ridgeway to stop work.

In spite of this decision, which appeared to confine the Boundary Commission to its current role of demarcating the north-west boundary, Ridgeway suddenly announced that he had decided to send out survey

parties not only into Badakshan but also to Darwaz, and to carry out an extensive survey of Shighnan and Roshan as far as the Neza Tash pass, and finally Wakhan. He did not consult Elias to whom the news came as a severe shock, for it cut right across his original instructions and his own plans which he intended to carry on with now that he was well enough. When he asked Ridgeway what he thought he could usefully do in these circumstances Ridgeway offered only to enrol him as a surveyor in the Commission. This offer to a man of Elias's experience was bordering on the insulting; as such he certainly took it, though in his final report he merely says he refused on the grounds that he was not a qualified surveyor. It seems impossible to believe that Ridgeway acted without reference to India, yet whilst still at Bala Murghab Elias had at last received fresh instructions from Durand, the first since he had left India. They said nothing about any new orders to Ridgeway but told him either to explore Darwaz or else to put himself under Ridgeway's supervision, thus leaving him with the choice.

By the middle of April, with or without Dr Owen's medicines, he had recovered enough to return to Khanabad with the former object in view. Hastily he wrote to Durand:

'At last I am able to return to Badakshan. With reference to your latest order Ridgeway tells he has arranged to complete the exploration with his officers and that I have been put under his orders. So, seeing he wishes to carry on there will be no necessity for me to refer to you for any further orders. This is quite right. I have no political duties left and the professionals will do the mapping better than me. But there was scarcely any necessity to place me under his orders. I had already promised to co-operate with him in every way. I had not heard of the arrangement before so I suppose he asked for it while I was away from the camp.'

Whether or not there was any private understanding between Ridgeway and the Viceroy, what stands out is the Government's dismal failure to co-ordinate the work of the two missions, indeed of all three. Meanwhile Elias had every reason to feel aggrieved and once more to suffer disappointment of which he had had so much during his service with the Indian Government.

He had evidently heard at last from Lockhart, for in the same letter to Durand he said the Chitral Mission was coming up with 300 people to Badakshan, and as the Boundary Commission was coming too with a small army, there would not be much of Badakshan left. He added that if he was well enough he intended to finish the

passes leading from the Chinese Pamirs to the south as mentioned in his original instructions and then find his way back to Ladakh or Gilgit. 'If not I will try to elbow my way through the crowd of commissioners and surveyors and get back by Kabul or Chitral (or wherever famine has not set in) and hand myself over to you for disposal.' He ended his letter on a last note of scorn: 'Ridgeway tells me he doesn't want me with him as he has enough already for exploring and political purposes. You may believe he *has* enough.'

To Ridgeway he wrote that, though he had been told by the Foreign Department to explore Darwaz, he would retire at once as he did not want to compete for exploration. He said the Lockhart Mission coming up to oppose the Boundary Commission would have a bad political effect. Because of this and the shortage of supplies he advised him against taking the Baroghil Pass but recommended the Dorah-Chitral route instead, and suggested as before that he should cut his party down and send the rest back to India by Kabul.

With his Darwaz visit ruled out, Elias was uncertain what to do next and the Government remained unhelpfully silent. He travelled slowly back through Kateghan but, with the Boundary Commission following, as he supposed, about three weeks behind, he could do no more political work there or in Badakshan. The word had already gone round that the Commission was coming up and although Elias was still personally welcomed it was obvious that a very different reception awaited the Commission. Contemplating a possible return to India through Chitral he wrote to the Mehtar announcing his intention and asked the Indian Government to do likewise. In the middle of May he wrote again to Durand. (He said he liked writing demi-official letters because he could be blunt, but he did not anticipate that some of them would be printed and circulated to the Government, where they must have caused some lifting of eyebrows.) Here he wrote that Ridgeway was still regarding him as being under his orders, which was not the Foreign Department's intention. He thought he had appeased him by giving up all his duties as he wished, and by clearing out of Afghanistan as quickly as possible, and asked if the order (if it was one) could be removed. 'Even the smallest asteroid is allowed to revolve in its own orbit. If I were to fall under the planets of the great men, Ridgeway and Lockhart, it would dislocate, if not my orbit, at any rate my peace of mind.' Referring to Lockhart, he said he was not expected in Badakshan and would not be welcome there, and that the Amir had not warned the Sardar. The trouble was that the feeding of another 300 foreigners and their ponies would be a severe strain.

The rest of his letter was devoted to the problem of Hunza, which was exercising his mind and was to exercise the Government's mind

too before long. He feared it was more or less coming under China which was the way China built up her claims of sovereignty, as in Burma. Some day questions might arise about Hunza and the Chinese would coolly claim sovereignty. From memory he recalled a despatch of Lord Lytton's about 1879, laying down the principle that British influence must be supreme everywhere within the water system of the Indus. 'How would it be to let China know that India declines to recognize any Chinese political right on the Indus side of the water parting?' This interpolation shows just how constantly Elias thought of India's defence problem which, having travelled further along her borders than any other 'political' of his day, he was able to see as one indivisible whole.

At the end of May he had reached Faizabad and, probably feeling the need to unburden himself, he wrote a long letter to the Secretary of the Royal Geographical Society. He said that ever since being delayed, first in Simla and then in Ladakh, the fates had been against his doing much work. Modestly, as usual, he said the country he had traversed contained little absolutely new except the bit from Ighiz Yar round the south of Trotter's Tagharma (he said nothing about his discovery of the two peaks), and over the Kara Tash Pass to the Gaz river and Little Kara Kul. He had corrected the lower course of the Murghab, which the native surveyors professed to have surveyed but could have done so only orally and not ocularly. He said that, according to the Boundary Commission's latest plans, all his work would be done again, but he doubted if they would do all they expected. Lockhart was up in Wakhan only a few marches away. From what the Afghans told him, the Amir thought he had commissioners and travellers enough in the country and had therefore stopped Lockhart.

'We are overdoing it. The Boundary Commission was not getting on very famously when I left. The members of it are thoroughly sick of the work, and the Afghans are thoroughly sick of the Commission. The Russians, who do not want a boundary, have it in their power to obstruct in all kinds of ways.'

With one menace behind him, which he had escaped only by sloughing off all his duties, another was looming up in front of him. It is time to return to Lockhart, whom we left at the point of crossing over from Hunza to Wakhan. It had taken him a long time to learn that Elias was in the field. Illustrating the general confusion and ignorance, at the end of December he had written in one of his many letters to the Government:

'Stray Badakshans who have come in just now from Badakshan report the arrival of an Englishman in Shighnan from Yarkand. They say he is going through Afghan Turkestan to Kabul and thence to India. A middle-sized man and clean shaven, with his following and baggage on ponies. Who is he, I wonder?'

Before he got any reply from India, if indeed he ever did, he had got his answer from Elias himself.

When the Amir heard of Lockhart's entry into Wakhan he sent a letter ordering him to withdraw. This was followed by a message from the Sardar of Badakshan, Abdullah Khan, saying the Mission could not be supplied because all available supplies were being collected for Ridgeway. Lockhart ignored both warnings and carried on. He asked the Indian Government to tell the Amir he needed supplies and even sent a message to Elias, who by then had returned to Khanabad, asking him to make sure the Sardar understood his needs. The Sardar wrote again to Lockhart telling him quite peremptorily to withdraw from the Amir's 'God-granted kingdom'. He said Elias carried full credentials and had the backing of the Amir's authority, and in consequence he had been accorded the fullest honours, but that Lockhart had no such status. Ignoring this second letter Lockhart still pressed on, so the Sardar applied sanctions in the obvious way by seeing to it that he got no supplies. The consequence was that in the middle of May Lockhart struggled into Langur in Wakhan with practically no food left. Almost worse, he had lost two men and two ponies in a blizzard crossing the Wakh-Jir Pass. In his report he said it had been a near thing. It may be added that it had also been very bad management.

At this point he received the first intimation from Ridgeway that he intended bringing his Commission up to Wakhan and would be returning to India through Chitral. Lockhart may have been naive in some ways, but as a professional soldier he was quick enough to see what was likely to happen to him. In haste he told the Indian Government in plainer terms than Elias had used that he had no intention of putting himself under Ridgeway's orders. He said he could not imagine what Ridgeway expected to do in Wakhan, but he hoped he would not be bringing any Russians to show them the passes. Besides that, he said the shortage of supplies made it a bad idea for the Commission to return through Chitral.

On June 8th he reached Ishkashim and wrote to Elias, now only forty miles away at Faizabad, to say he would meet him at Zebak 'whether the Afghans liked it or not'. In his final official report Elias said that every Afghan official was professing ignorance of the existence of the Mission and that Afghan relations with the English were daily

becoming worse, though he allowed himself to say that this did not apply to his own little party. It is sufficient proof of his own continued status in Afghanistan that he made the whole of his return journey without an escort; though evidently not without some risk, for in a letter to Durand describing the situation he ended, 'I hope there is no trouble brewing'. At the same time he said he had dropped his idea of travelling back to Ladakh through the Sarikol district (which would have enabled him to investigate China's southern border with Afghanistan) because the route was impracticable, and that he had decided to return to India through Chitral. In the middle of June Elias and Lockhart met at Zebak and here the latter received a belated letter from Ridgeway telling him brusquely that he was holding up the work of the Boundary Commission and that he should consider withdrawing. This letter had been intercepted by the Sardar who was now applying further sanctions, not only in the form of delaying the mail but also by fostering intrigue amongst Lockhart's locally hired followers.

At last, having roused the ire of the Amir, the misgivings of the Mehtar, and now the irritation of Ridgeway, the message got home to Lockhart that he was not wanted, and he wrote to the Amir saying he had decided to withdraw to Chitral. He had kept the Indian Government quite well informed of his intentions and why he was allowed to leave Chitral in the first place is inexplicable; just as is the Government's failure to inform the Amir. The result was that, though he had fully carried out his original instructions, by exceeding them he had dissipated all chances of good will with the Mehtar, and he had further strained the Government's relations with the Amir. It is no wonder the English were unpopular; even the Russians with their flair for fostering bad relations could not have done the job better, and they must have been delighted with the results.

One meeting with Lockhart was enough for Elias to decide that they had better go their separate ways back to Chitral if he wanted to preserve both his status in those parts and his peace of mind. Moreover, he wanted to examine the strategic possibilites of the Dorah Pass, which Lockhart had deemed more vulnerable than the Baroghil. He found it so difficult for his ponies that at one point he almost gave up in favour of going back across the Pamirs to Yarkand. He only decided against it because his return to Yarkand might be seen by the tribes of Central Asia as a failure on his part and our all-important prestige would suffer accordingly. Although in the warm weather his gout may have been better, he must have been very weak, for he was travelling very slowly.

On his arrival in Chitral he rejoined Lockhart and the two men

paid an official call on the Mehtar. His assessment of the latter's character was less complimentary than Lockhart's. He recalled that ten years earlier Major Biddulph, then the Agent in Gilgit, had described him as an irresponsible barbarian but a shrewd actor in the political game. Elias thought the description still applicable except that he was in his second childhood and no longer shrewd. He was evidently afraid of Afghanistan and wanted only to follow the same policy towards foreigners as the Amir. For that reason he was strongly opposed to the Boundary Commission entering his territory, and he made it very clear that he had had enough of missions. He asked why the Afghans had turned Lockhart out and naturally enough disbelieved Elias's explanation that he had withdrawn voluntarily after a dispute about supplies. Elias's own position in Chitral was difficult, since he was only passing through and not accredited, and a letter to the Mehtar from the Indian Government asking him to receive him had not arrived in time. Elias saw the Mehtar twice more after Lockhart had left. On the second visit the Mehtar was clad only in a shirt and a skull cap; he wanted to know about Afghanistan but fell asleep during the conversation. When his Prime Minister woke him up he asked for a letter declaring his independence to be inscribed on copper so that it should not be burnt, and would the Government also send him a chair as his own three were broken. Like the Dormouse in *Alice in Wonderland*, he then went to sleep again. Awakened once more, he asked for a subsidy, and then at a tangent enquired why Elias and Lockhart wore different buttons. He was again complaining about the Commission's impending arrival when melons were brought, and he was asleep when Elias took his departure.

This was the ruler who had just signed a solemn agreement with India. Elias believed he was more concerned not to offend the Amir than to implement friendship with India, and that his offer to help guard India against Russia was worthless. He was merely acting like any other Central Asian ruler, who customarily placated all his neighbours in turn and whose promises of co-operation were never worth much. In his final report Elias recommended that to make use of him against a possible Russian advance towards India we should move close up to his border in a military operation, so that the threat from behind would be greater than the one in front. For this purpose he did not consider Gilgit, as suggested by the Mehtar and recommended by Lockhart, was a suitable base. To be effective the operation would have to be mounted from the Punjab frontier. As a result of his reconnaisance of Badakshan he endorsed Lockhart's opinion that it was doubtful if a Russian army could be kept supplied in Chitral. Both men considered that, though the risk of invasion from this quarter was small, it was

still strongly in our strategic interests to integrate both Chitral and Hunza within Indian defence plans.

The Mehtar having made it clear by withholding supplies that he wanted to be rid of Elias, he departed without further delay lest his men and ponies should be starved out. By now he had firmly convinced himself that his whole mission had been a complete and utter failure. Having despatched all his reports and not foreseeing that they would be of any further interest, he saw no need to hurry back. After all his hardships he still preferred the wilderness. He did not even know if there would be any job awaiting him. Earlier he had asked Durand privately if there was any truth in the rumour of a revival of the Gilgit Agency. 'If so, how would it do for me . . . or I for it?'[1]

Travelling through Gilgit he crossed the Tirich-Mir Pass, which added yet another to the tally of all those he had reconnoitred for their defensive or offensive possibilities. Towards the end of July he wrote once more to Durand. He said he had had no instructions since leaving the Boundary Commission and if not wanted he would like to avoid the heat of the plains for a month. 'Even in the mountains the temperature is 103° F. and it is taking all the go out of men and mokes', and he would like to stay a few days in Gilgit and Astor. He felt 'very disappointed at the barren results of the mission but what with O'Conor cutting one field for action from under my feet and Ridgeway grabbing the other it is difficult to see what other end could come'.

This letter brought a reply from Durand that he was wanted straight back at Simla. From Lyall, who was apparently in charge of the Foreign Department for some time, he heard that he had been promoted for his work, which should have gone some way to relieving his fancied financial worries. Lyall also apologized, as well he might, for the delay in studying his reports because of the trouble in Burma. The fact was that in the early months of 1886 Durand had accompanied the Viceroy to Rangoon to receive the formal accession of Upper Burma, together with a formidable amount of what Dufferin himself described as loot. This accounts in part for the lack of response to Elias's frequent pleas for instructions; but it was a poor reflection on those left in charge and there will be more to say about it later.

It was some time after receiving Durand's last letter that Elias suffered his final and worst disappointment. All the way to Chitral and beyond he had believed that the Boundary Commission was only about a fortnight behind him on its way to Badakshan. Now he heard for the first time that it had never got there. The Amir had refused bluntly to let it demarcate his north-east frontier or go beyond Balkh. His view was that if the Russians still insisted on the letter of the 1873

[1] Algernon Durand, Mortimer's youngest brother, got the job.

Agreement he would lose all his trans-Oxus territory, of which after all he was in *de facto* possession, and he could see no need for a geographical survey because Elias had already been there. On the top of his growing difficulties in collecting supplies and increasing sickness amongst his personnel this obstructionism was too much for Ridgeway, and when he fell sick himself it was the last straw. He reported that he could make no further headway and asked for permission to withdraw his Commission to India. Consent was given with alacrity, which was understandable since to continue would have been contrary to the Viceroy's agreement with the Secretary of State, which up till then had been ignored.

It goes almost without saying that neither Ridgeway nor the Government thought of telling Elias, who was on his way out of Chitral and heading towards Gilgit at the time. It is unlikely he would have gone all the way back to Badakshan and Darwaz, about which he had already collected most of the essential information, but he would surely have gone to investigate Wakhan, for Lockhart had done no work there, whereas he alone still retained the Amir's goodwill and his original authority. This narrow strip of Wakhan was strategically vital, for in the hands of Afghanistan it would form part of the natural belt immediately north of the Hindu Kush and that was why Elias was so desperately anxious to reconnoitre it. In Central Asia, as we have seen, opportunities had to be seized when they offered for they tended not to recur and this was a case in point. When a survey was next mooted the Amir had other ideas.

Tired, despondent and travelling slowly, Elias reached Simla at the beginning of October, seventeen months after he had set out and having covered at least 3,000 miles. It had been a heroic feat of solitary travel, made far more laborious by his ill-health, by the complications which arose from the Government's incredible lack of co-ordination, its neglect to clarify his instructions, and not least its failure to give him any moral support.

Robert Shaw recalls that his claret froze solid and he had to break the bottle to drink it, but Elias was too practical and austere a traveller to carry such a luxury as wine. He practised self-discipline to the point of shaving daily. For most of the time he had lived on a sparse diet in cramped quarters in a tent, heating it with whatever fuel might be available, sometimes wood, but at others acrid smelling dung. The strain of winter travel across the inhospitable Roof of the World and Badakshan in bitter cold and relentless winds would have been severe enough in itself even for a fit man.

His route surveys show that he reconnoitred more than forty passes, some involving considerable détours. He had omitted none within

reach which might, however remotely, serve as an invasion route to India. He had investigated unceasingly the ethnology of the tribal territories he passed through, the local administrative and tribal allegiances and cleavages, and the morale and strength of the Afghan army. Besides all this he had made noteworthy additions to our geographical knowledge of the Pamirs. His final report, when completed in Simla amounted to a concise 130 pages. He evidently thought that no one would be interested enough to read it but the ultimate repercussions from his findings and recommendations were so important that they will be dealt with in the succeeding chapter.

Meanwhile, the results of Ridgeway's and Lockhart's work may be briefly summarized. No final report on the Boundary Commission's work was ever compiled. Scientifically it had added a good deal to our knowledge of western Afghanistan but politically it was a failure, for only 200 miles of the boundary had been demarcated and it had left our relations with the Amir much worse than before. In Dufferin's view, however, the settlement of this boundary was the most important issue in Anglo-Russian relations and he commended Ridgeway's work in more than one letter to the Secretary of State. Next year Ridgeway was sent to St Petersburg, where he negotiated a Protocol with Russia confirming the demarcation and agreeing on a delimitation (i.e. the first stage towards demarcation) of the Afghan frontier for a further 250 miles eastwards to a point on the Oxus. By this he achieved more success in a few weeks than in two years in the field. In due course he became Governor of Ceylon.

Lockhart produced a report on Chitral of over 600 pages which was published in full. Most of it, including the geology and the flora and fauna, was the work of Woodthorpe and his assistant surveyor Barrow (later to serve under Elias on the Burma–Siam frontier). Lockhart provided an introduction and the broad strategic conclusions, accompanied by a good deal of chatty travellers' comment. In general the report agreed with Elias that no major invasion could be staged or maintained through Chitral; in other respects it differed as has already been shown. In common with the Boundary Commission, Lockhart's mission did considerable harm to our relations with the Amir, though not to Lockhart, who immediately received a knighthood for his work and ultimately became Commander in Chief of India.

Although the Viceroy had received Elias and discussed his plans before his departure, strange to say he did not receive him on his return. The only acknowledgment of his achievement was a letter from Durand in formal terms which said that no responsibility attached to him for being unable to carry out his instructions for improving trade relations with Kashgar. But he had collected much valuable informa-

tion and his exploration was the more creditable because of his serious illness. He had brought to a successful issue an expedition involving considerable danger and hardship, quietly and without help from others. More could have been said, certainly not much less.

Why did not Dufferin at the very least sign the letter himself? It is Kipling who indirectly suggests an answer. As a journalist he was always very well-informed on what went on in the inner circles of Government, and although still in his early twenties he had an intuitive understanding of the personalities involved. The clues he offers are contained in the Departmental Ditty 'One Viceroy Retires', in which Dufferin, at the end of his term of office, soliloquizes in the silent presence of Lord Lansdowne his successor. Of the men serving under him in India Kipling makes Dufferin say:

> 'They look for nothing from the West but Death
> Or Bath or Bournemouth. Here's their ground.
> They fight . . .
> Or drop in harness. Legion of the Lost?
> Not altogether – earnest, narrow men,
> But chiefly earnest, and they'll do your work.
> They have their Reputations. . . .'

What Kipling suggests is that Dufferin saw them as no better than willing work-horses; yet he was not being merely cynical for, in a letter to the Secretary of State, Dufferin is found complaining of a shortage of good men at the top. On the available evidence we may believe he was right and that it was due to their inefficiency that Elias got no guidance towards the latter end of his journey. But that is no excuse for his attitude towards his subordinates and Kipling suggests another weakness in Dufferin, who at the time was a man in his sixties and at the end of a distinguished career. He makes the retiring Viceroy reflect:

> 'I *know* I win. Mine's work, good work that lives!
> A country twice the size of France – the North
> Safeguarded. That's my record; sink the rest
> And better if you can. . . .'

The overall impression Kipling gives us is of a man complacent with fulfilled ambition, caring in reality nothing for his subordinates, regarding them even with contempt, but satisfied that he himself has earned a place in history. It is not a flattering picture but it may partly explain why he neglected Elias on his return to Simla. Elias

had simply served his turn. It might also be added that his report offered Dufferin no hope of further laurels in the shape of a final settlement of the northern boundary problem before he retired.

Dufferin had one favourite amongst his staff and that was Mortimer Durand. Leaving aside his failure to support Elias in his time of need there is no doubt that Durand was an able man. Dufferin wrote of him in more than one letter to the Secretary of State in terms of high praise, once describing him as the most solid man in India. He went as far as making him a personal friend and confidant, and Kipling knew this well enough for in a thinly veiled reference in the same Ditty he writes:

> '. . . Look to one –
> I work with him – the smallest of them all,
> White-haired, red-faced, who sat the plunging horse
> Out in the garden. He's your right-hand man . . .
> He has his Reputation – wants the Lords . . .
> Hates cats and knows his business: *which is yours.*'

Durand duly made his mark in Asia although he never reached the Lords. His last post as Ambassador in Washington was his undoing, for there he incurred the Presidential displeasure and had to be recalled. Younger than Elias, he was still only in his early thirties when Dufferin made him Secretary of the Foreign Department, but he was enthusiastic and dedicated and did not spare himself. He was a fluent writer and found time to write long letters to the political officers who frequently besieged him with their views. Thus to H. Barnes in Kabul who put forward a complete solution to Afghanistan: 'It is a much more difficult game than anyone can realize who has never had to take up the crossing threads. You have no personal knowledge of the very different conditions and the number of other matters Government has to consider.' And Durand was often blatantly lobbied for posts, and complaints that the writers had been passed over for promotion, always of course unfairly. As extroverted as Elias was introverted, nevertheless they collaborated well, at any rate professionally; already they had worked together for some years and were to do so for several more. Durand knew the worth of the older man and though he never acknowledged it he always heeded his advice. They understood diplomacy as few others of the day in India. Moreover both men were very literate and they both knew how to use the Press. In this respect Durand was lucky in that his brother-in-law was editor of the *Pioneer*, which was always sound on foreign affairs and knew how to take a discreet hint. Thus on the occasion of one of the frequent Anglo-Russian crises, Durand wrote asking him to play it down in his paper.

As the Viceroy's confidant, Elias's chief and furthermore in his capacity as Secretary of the Order of the Indian Empire, Durand might have been expected to know what was in the Viceroy's mind. Yet writing to Elias in April of the following year he said:

'I write to tell you how very sorry I have been to find your name omitted from the Honours List. I did my best and believed it would certainly include you. How you came to be struck out I cannot understand. I can only say I am very sorry. In my opinion you deserved a decoration much more than many who got one. I hope you are enjoying yourself, *quand même!*'

It was a generous, if partial, *amende*; but although Elias professed to see his mission as a failure it was not his omission from the Honours List but Dufferin's own omission which really hurt.

He was in England when Durand wrote. As soon as he had completed his Report he was sent home to convalesce, for the second time in his career. By now he was surely the most widely travelled man in the Far East and Central Asia, but he was in his forties and the hardships were beginning to tell.

Chapter XIII

RESULTS OF THE PAMIR JOURNEY

Calcutta
Feb. 7, 1886

'Mr Ney Elias has made a successful journey of exploration across the Pamirs, down the Upper Oxus through Shighnan and Roshan to Badakshan. He was everywhere well received.'

This telegram in *The Times*, reminiscent of the equally brief one from Tashkent thirteen years earlier, was the first and almost the only intimation to the public concerning his second great journey. The *Quarterly Review* wondered why Elias, 'a gentleman of great experience' who had lately been sent to Kashgar, had been withdrawn and sent across the Pamirs to join the Afghan Boundary Commission and feared it might have been with the object of conciliating Russia. The well-informed *Athenaeum* put his mission in its correct perspective by saying that Lockhart's mission to Chitral with its limited objectives was supplementary to Elias's, thus recognizing the far greater scope of the latter's task.

There was much speculation, particularly in London and St Petersburg, and in political as well as geographical circles, about the objects of his journey, and what he had accomplished, but it remained unsatisfied. The Viceroy saw no point in making the Russians free of our knowledge, although against his expressed wishes to the India Office, Woodthorpe and Holdich, the chief surveyors of the other two Missions, and even Lockhart himself were all permitted to lecture in England. But neither Government issued any statement about Elias and he himself maintained a discreet silence. Besides being a sick man, naturally he had no wish to talk about what he regarded as a painful episode. The Royal Geographical Society, that august body, was especially irked that no information about his geographical discoveries or his revision of our existing maps of the Pamirs was made available, and it returned to the charge at intervals for the next two years. Meanwhile it had to be satisfied with the barest outline of his itinerary. Even purely topographical information was withheld by the Indian Government. Elias himself had wanted his survey worked up by the Society

because he did not trust the accuracy of the Indian Survey Department, but it was allowed only to accompany his Report although he was permitted to retain a personal copy.

Although Durand had summoned Elias to return to Simla without delay his Report was never studied at the time. This was chiefly because the crisis which had precipitated his journey had passed off and there was a temporary lull in Russian activity in the Pamirs. Moreover his findings did nothing to solve the Government's difficulties, in fact they added to them. They were so disturbing and would have been so politically explosive if divulged that the Government seems to have taken the line of least resistance by avoiding discussion of them. That would explain why only six copies of the Report were sent to the British Government with not even a covering despatch to accompany them. Comment might have aroused a call for action, which would have been most unwelcome, so the fewer copies there were in Whitehall the better. The subject was not raised again during Lord Dufferin's Viceroyalty and he was able to retire with the annexation of Upper Burma to his credit. It was to fall to his successor, Lord Lansdowne, to deal with the next phase.

Some of the copies of the Report had as chequered a career as their author. One was found amongst Lord Curzon's papers after he died; it is to be hoped he acquired it in later years in his official capacity, but in his thesis on the Pamirs and the Source of the Oxus, which was published in 1896 and will be referred to later, he certainly showed a remarkably detailed knowledge of Elias's journey. So, too, did the Russians and it is more than possible that they secretly acquired a copy. His successor, Younghusband, suggested as much when he wrote privately some years later that they had evidently obtained some of Elias's reports. He was in a good position to know, and it is on record that in 1890 and again in 1891 there had been serious leakages in Calcutta and London respectively involving secret telegrams and Cabinet papers concerning Central Asia, the contents of which duly reached St Petersburg. Thirteen years later, R. P. Cobbold was the next Englishman to visit Shighnan and Roshan. When he asked to see the Report he was told even then that its contents could not be disclosed without a special permit from the Secretary of State for India. Lastly, as if to maintain its almost legendary reputation, one of the known copies disappeared in recent years just before the research for the present work was begun.

The Oxus boundary problem is the best starting point from which to describe the results of his findings and recommendations. His depiction of the true situation focused attention on the disastrous effects of the Agreement of 1873, based as it was on imperfect geo-

graphical and political information. Meanwhile the Amir continued to oppose any further delimitation of his northern boundary which he claimed with some justification would be interference with the internal affairs of his kingdom. He quoted the Central Asian history, the *Tarikh-i-Rashidi* (which Elias was later to edit in an English edition), to show that all the disputed possessions were historically vassals of Afghanistan. And besides had he not recently asserted his claim by throwing out the Russian Dr Regel and his party in 1883 and putting down a revolt in Shighnan which they had instigated? The Russians on the other hand claimed that by the letter of the Agreement (erroneously worded as it was) Afghanistan was not entitled to any possesions at all beyond the Oxus. They had no historical grounds for claiming that any of this territory had ever been under Bokharan control, but they now offered to yield cis-Oxus Darwaz in order to claim the trans-Oxus provinces. Quite apart from breaking our treaty with Afghanistan, to give Russia what was not ours to give would result in bringing her frontier up to the Hindu Kush and the Indus water parting, which was precisely what we were at such pains to prevent. However, the crisis which had precipitated Elias's journey ended without war and it was the ensuing lull that allowed the Oxus problem to be left in abeyance again.

Elias's main recommendation to thwart Russian expansion was, as has already been shown, to close up Afghan and Chinese territory in the Pamirs to a common frontier which would leave Russia only the possibility of violating it by an open act of aggression or war. Two years elapsed before any action was taken on the recommendation. By 1889 Russian activity in the Pamirs and towards Afghanistan had again increased to an extent which could no longer be ignored, and the Elias Report was resurrected. In that year this most important recommendation was adopted by the Indian Government, although, strangely enough, it did not inform the British Government.

With Elias *hors de combat* (and in any case he was in Burma at the time) a successor had to be found to follow the policy up and his mantle fell appropriately and worthily on a young cavalryman, Francis Younghusband. Twenty years younger, he was a more resilient character than Elias and for the next few years he had need to be. He was a nephew of Robert Shaw, who was obviously the hero of his youth and his inspiration, and in a measure Elias came to fulfil the same role, for Younghusband admired him greatly and often consulted him. They had met in a train not long after Younghusband's successful journey from Peking to India, the journey from which Elias had had to turn aside. He was then looking for fresh fields to conquer and Elias suggested Tibet, his own long-standing interest. But once again the project was

turned down and he became available to the Government at the right moment.

During the next few years Younghusband became so identified with Elias's recommendations that to follow his activities is the simplest way of showing what resulted from them. Younghusband's first mission in his new role as Political Agent was in 1890 to Hunza, following a previous short visit there by Durand. It cannot be said for a certainty that his mission was a direct outcome of Elias's warnings and suggestions but they must have had some influence. More recently the Mir had been extending his intrigues to Russia. Younghusband's mission was partly to treat with the Mir, partly to examine those passes east of the Baroghil which had not been reconnoitred by Lockhart in 1886, and partly to outwit the suspected agent Grombtchevski who was then in the country and intending to visit Ladakh. The two men met then and again later, with Younghusband always regarding Grombtchevski as a friendly rival rather as Elias looked on Prejevalski. This time he successfully ousted Grombtchevski from Hunza by a ruse which cut him off from his supplies so that he nearly starved, and he also reconnoitred the passes. On this mission, as well as on his next, Younghusband took only a small party and in so doing he was following Elias's successful precept. He saw correctly that a military operation would be needed to bring Hunza under British control. Two years later a military expedition succeeded in achieving this object. The immediate grounds for the operation were that the local Kirghiz, tired of being robbed, had applied to the British for the protection of their caravans against the Kanjutis. They had applied to China first but fortunately for us she had refused to intervene. Elias and Durand must have felt considerable satisfaction that another gap in India's defences had been filled.

In the political cockpit of Central Asia possession was usually nine-tenths of the law and Elias had said that the Amir of Afghanistan, in his own interests as well as ours, would be well advised to demonstrate formally his occupation of his trans-Oxus territories by occupying them right up to the Aksu or Upper Murghab, which was the boundary recognized by China. The Amir had acted on this advice and stationed a permanent garrison in Shighnan, thus putting the neutral belt theory into some effect from his side, though he did nothing about Wakhan.

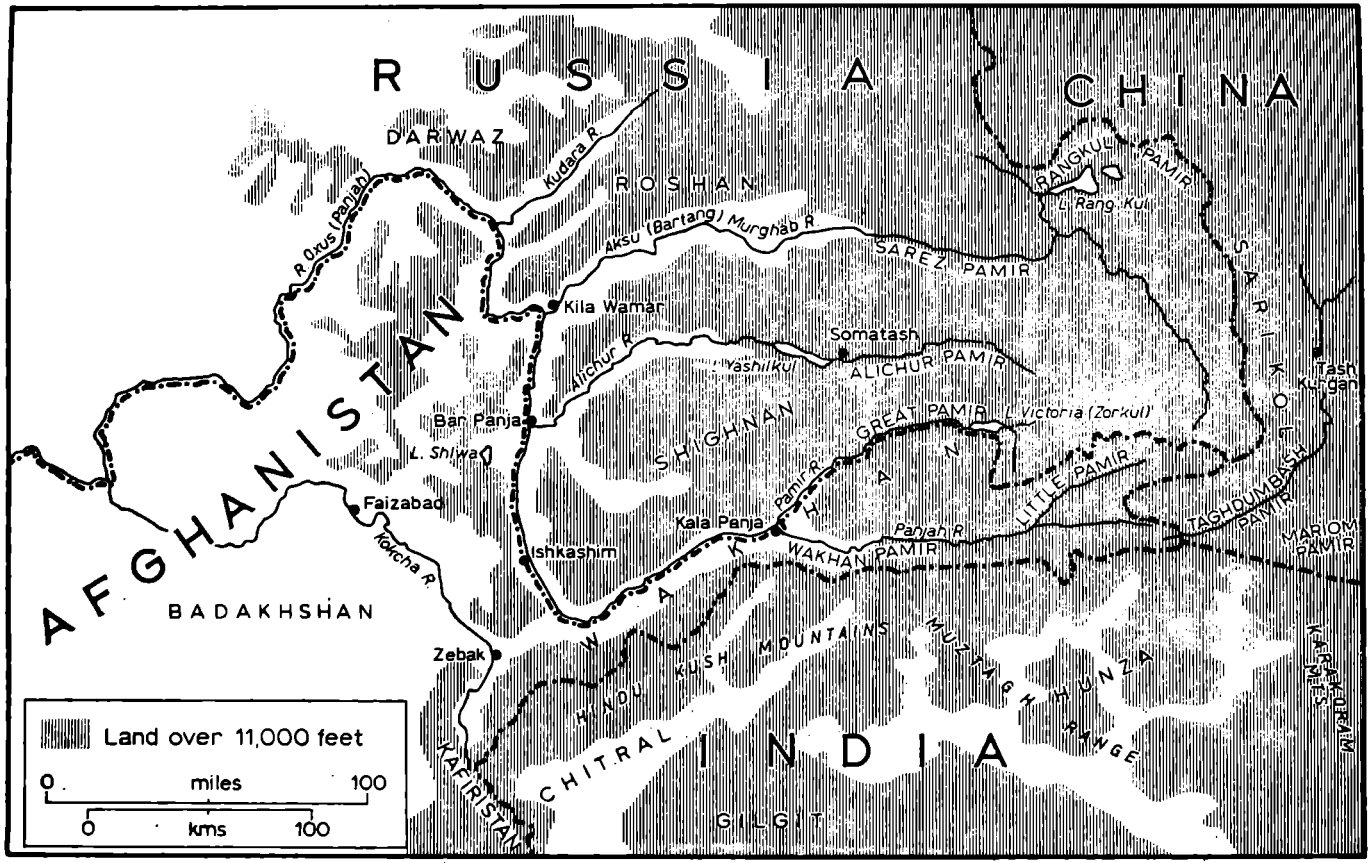
Following his visit to Hunza it was the Government's intention to send Younghusband to Afghanistan to further Elias's neutral belt plan from that side. He was to carry on in Badakshan and Wakhan where Elias had left off. The shelving of the Oxus problem had not lessened Russian interest in the Badakshan region; indeed Elias's visit there had greatly increased it, for they deduced though wrongly, that we

intended to occupy the country, whereas he had shown it was too far off for us to bear any influence. But the Amir had still not recovered from his truculent mood brought about by Ridgeway's and Lockhart's activities. He now had the serious revolt of his cousin, the Sardar of Afghan Turkestan, on his hands and he still felt his possessions were safer under his interpretation of the 1873 Agreement than if he agreed to any further investigation. His refusal now to admit Younghusband was yet another example of what happened in Central Asia when the chance was missed: four years earlier Elias could have gone anywhere with his full approval.

Prohibited from going to Afghanistan, Younghusband was despatched instead on a mission to Kashgar and the Pamirs, once again to follow Elias and this time with the object of implementing his recommendation from the Chinese side. Having ejected the Russian party under Colonel Kostenko from the Pamirs in 1883, China may have considered this act quite enough to sustain her historical suzerainty over the region, and had taken no further steps. Russia however did not at all see it in that light. Elias had found that all the Kirghiz up to the Aksu regarded China as suzerain, but he had also shown that the Chinese had no local military posts nor any officials to maintain their claims. Younghusband's instructions were to explore more fully their precise claims in the Pamirs and to the Aksu boundary and to persuade the Chinese to put teeth into them so that Russia could only enter the territory at the cost of violating China's frontier.

At Kashgar he was successful in making the Chinese see the importance of establishing military posts on the Aksu and he then travelled on to the Pamirs, partly following the route taken by Elias. From the shores of Little Kara Kul he saw the two great peaks identified by Elias, 'huge masses looking over the Roof of the World with Russia, India and China round their bases'. At Rang Kul he could not resist climbing the Lamp Rock to investigate the mystery of its light. He found the cave made a hole right through the rock so that the light came from the other side. That was the secret of the Cave of Perpetual Light. Some would call it sacrilege to have thus exposed such a beautiful myth.

Travelling on, he entered the Alichur Pamir, remarking that Elias had 'travelled in this as in almost every other part of Asia'. The Chinese were by now extending their claim to include the Alichur, although it lay beyond the Aksu. At their request he asked the Afghan commander to withdraw his post from Somatash which lay in the same Pamir, although it was west of the Neza Tash Pass which hitherto had been the locally accepted boundary. This request, which was distinctly *ultra vires* on the part of Younghusband, considerably annoyed the Amir



6. The Pamirs: Boundaries demarcated or recognized by 1896

and necessitated some very tactful explaining away by the Indian Government.

A report in Russia of Younghusband's movements brought Russian retaliation in the form of an armed party under Colonel Yanov which actually entered Wakhan and Chitral, thus violating our protected territory. Returning to the Pamirs it encountered Younghusband and, after the two men had dined together most amicably in uniform in Yanov's tent, the latter announced that he had been ordered by the Governor General of Turkestan to annex the Pamirs and to require Younghusband to leave forthwith for Kashgar. He had no option but to comply but found a hitherto unknown pass into Gilgit, thus avoiding an ignominious return to Kashgar. Yanov must have appreciated thus levelling the score with Younghusband for his brusque treatment of his colleague Grombtchevski. In the light of Younghusband's own independent action described above Yanov can scarcely be criticized, but it caused a severe Anglo-Russian crisis, as it was exactly what our whole policy was aimed at preventing. However, British diplomatic reaction was so forceful that Russia withdrew her claim. One wonders how Elias would have dealt with this *démarche* if he had been confronted with it. With his reputation in Russia and his diplomatic skill it is just possible he might have talked Yanov out of his claim, which had no backing in St Petersburg and is another example of independent Russian military action. In 1892 and almost as soon as this crisis was over, another arose in the form of a clash between Afghan and Russian troops at Somatash. Thereafter the Amir decided he could not exercise effective control over a far from loyal Shighnan up to the Aksu and he withdrew his troops some way back. With the Afghan threat removed, and possibly also at the instigation of Russia, China almost immediately decided to withdraw her troops likewise. These withdrawals by the two kingpins left the Pamirs gap as wide and even more nebulous than before and tore Elias's plan almost to tatters . . . almost, but not quite.

This was a bad period for Lansdowne, for in the same year the old Mehtar of Chitral died, and there was the inevitable strife for the succession between two of his sons. The Amir of Afghanistan, too, joined in the fray with his own plot to annex the country. But for India close control over Chitral was essential and the internecine strife led to the Chitral Expedition, a military operation which was commanded by Younghusband and made his third mission within four years. Whether or not it was a direct outcome of Elias's recommendation on the subject, the fact remains that the Punjab was decided on as the most suitable military base for the future control of Chitral, and Lockhart's recommendation of Gilgit was not adopted. The trouble

in Chitral was the strongest confirmation of Elias's expressed opinion that agreements with the rulers of these frontier states were worthless unless closely backed by military strength, and this was the main outcome of Younghusband's expedition. Thus was filled yet another gap in India's defences.

Younghusband's expulsion from the Pamirs was followed shortly by a renewed demand from Russia to settle the whole outstanding issue, including the Oxus boundary according to the strict letter of the 1873 Agreement. No longer could the British postpone tackling this awkward subject. Fortunately this time military opinion in India and Russia was largely ignored by both sides and it was the diplomatists who thrashed the matter out. The only possible way out of our impasse was to persuade the Amir to abandon trans-Oxus Shighnan and Roshan provided Russia abandoned support of the Bokharan claim to cis-Oxus Darwaz. Sir Mortimer Durand was despatched to Kabul to conduct these difficult negotiations. Our chief argument was that if the Amir held to his claims we could no longer support him if his country was attacked, but if he would agree to abandon them we would pay him an increased subsidy. The other essential condition for our continued support was that we would still require him to hold and administer Wakhan. The risk underlying these negotiations was that the Amir would stand by his claims to the extent of going over to Russia. On the other hand, having found these God-granted possessions such a thorn in his flesh when it came to administering them, he may have been privately rather glad of the chance to relinquish some of them to the care of the Almighty, and to Russia. At all events he agreed. He even grumbled about the expense of having to retain and administer Wakhan, a country in which he had taken very little interest until Lockhart entered it without his permission. But this narrow east/west strip of territory immediately to the north of the Hindu Kush and touching Chinese territory at its easternmost tip was absolutely vital to the defence of India. It was all that remained of Elias's neutral belt plan, but still it would suffice. The decisions of the Amirs of Afghanistan and Bokhara to evacuate their respective trans-Oxus territories left the way open to a final settlement with Russia on the basis of our original Agreement. Only one small gap in the boundary, of about fifty miles, remained to be filled. The Agreement had made no mention of any boundary east of Lake Zorkul and it was this gap north of Hunza between the Chinese claimed Taghdumbash Pamir and Lake Zorkul which had worried Elias. (Hence too his concern about the future of Hunza.) Fortunately the Joint Pamirs Boundary Commission was able to settle the matter amicably in 1895. Many years later, Afghanistan and China concluded a separate boundary settlement along the

Taghdumbash Pamir. This summing-up omits all but the bare essentials of a period of feverish diplomacy and frequent crises. The upshot was that, although not in the manner foreseen by Elias, his plan has held, and though the colour connotation is no longer the same, the red and green lines were kept apart.

To turn now from the political to the scarcely less interesting geographical results. In 1887 a paper based on Elias's visit to Rang Kul, entitled 'The Dragon Lake of Pamir', was read to the Royal Geographical Society by Sir Henry Rawlinson, who identified the Central Pamir track on which it lay as the once famous caravan trade route from Rome, passing from Bactria (Balkh) along the Vallis Comedrum on the way to China. This identification has since been challenged.

Four years later Elias partially broke his silence with a brief factual account of his journey for the official publication, *A Memoir of the Indian Surveys* by C. E. D. Black. This also contained a description of the two mountains he had identified. His taste for scholarship shows when, in referring to Tagharma he recalls the poetically alliterative sentence from Ezekiel xxvii, 14 (Lamentation for Tyrus): 'They of the house of Togarmah traded in thy fairs with horses and horsemen and mules.' There was a sequel to his naming of these mountains, which for the next ten years appeared on British maps as Mount Dufferin and Tagharma. When the Anglo-Russian Pamirs Commission met in 1895, the Russian maps showed them with the local names of Kungur and Muztagh Ata respectively, and in a spirit of accord the British thereupon agreed to adopt both names. The Swedish traveller Sven Hedin was surveying the Tagharma region at the time and he later claimed to have bestowed the name of Muztagh Ata, although, having paid a visit to the Commission, he must have known that it was already on the Russian maps. Hedin was also in error in claiming it as the highest mountain in the Kashgar chain; in fact, he did not even measure it and merely adopted Trotter's measurement, which had applied to Kungur and in any case was too low. Elias's measurement of Kungur turned out to be accurate to within fifty feet, and his opinion that it was the higher of the two was later proved correct.[1]

[1] For my full description see 'Kungur and Muztagh Ata – A Case of Mistaken Identity' in the *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, Vol. LVI, Part 1, February 1969.

There is yet another sequel to the story of Kungur. In *R.G.S. Journal*, Vol. LXVI, November 1925, Skrine describes how in surveying the range from the east he saw and photographed another peak six miles from Kungur which has since been proved by a Russian expedition in 1956 to be some 400 feet higher. Elias could not see it from Lake Kara Kul because his Kungur hid it just as it hid Muztagh Ata from the NNE. Skrine's Kungur 2 is therefore the highest mountain wholly in China. It has never yet been climbed but the

Under Lord Lansdowne the ban on private travel in Central Asia had been lifted provided the Hindu Kush was not crossed. Taking advantage of the relaxation Lord Dunmore led a large party to Yarkand and into the Pamirs in 1892, combining sport with some rather amateurish geography. In particular Dunmore raised again the old claim that the Aksu (Murghab) was the main feeder of the Oxus, and not the Panjah. He argued his case before the Royal Geographical Society and was promptly challenged by the Hon. George Curzon, MP, as he then was. Curzon was a formidable opponent; not only was he a Fellow of All Souls but he was a painstaking geographer and an erudite student of Central Asia. He had already travelled in Russian Turkestan and Persia, and had published accounts of his journeys, and he was particularly interested in the Oxus. Elias was still the only Englishman to have visited the confluences of both the Aksu and the Panjah and as he was then in England Curzon consulted him. In 1893, basing his argument mainly on material with which Elias provided him, Curzon wrote a lengthy letter to *The Times* refuting Dunmore. He said the decision of the true source of the Oxus, one of the most famous rivers in the world, 'was a matter perhaps of less moment than Employers' Liability or Parish Councils, but might nevertheless interest an outside public'. To the scientific reasoning adopted by Elias he added some of his own. Dunmore had based part of his case on etymology, claiming that the word Oxus was a corruption of the Turkish Aksu, i.e. white water. Curzon showed that the name had far earlier derivations and he thought the word itself signified only water, comparing it with English river names such as the Usk, Axe, and Ouse and with *aqua* (Latin), *aix* (French), *usquebaugh* (Gaelic), and even *whisky* (English). To Elias he wrote: 'With the aid of your authoritative memorandum coupled with the results of my own researches my reply will, I hope, flatten out Lord Dunmore and the Aksu theory. It is worth while setting to rest, if one can, so vexed a question.' Elias replied that he agreed with his conclusions though not with all of his arguments.

But one doubt still remained. Was Lake Zorkul, with its outlet the Pamir River, the main source of the Panjah? Lieutenant Wood was the only authority and his survey of 1837 had never been checked. There were other feeders which might have more scientific claims. Quoting Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 'I would find out with Trajan the fountains of Danubias, of Ganges, and of Oxus', Curzon decided to settle the matter himself. In 1894, setting off from Srinagar, he journeyed up through Gilgit and Hunza crossing over the Kilik pass to enter

original Kungur I was scaled in 1956 by the Russians and in 1961 by a Chinese and Tibetan women's expedition, which is a woman's record.

Chinese territory in the Taghdumbash Pamir. From here he crossed over to Wakhan by the Wakh-Jir Pass. Looking down from the top of the pass he saw a long glacier and on descending he saw a rushing stream emerging from two ice caverns. The stream was the Wakh-Jir and after following it down to Kala Panjah where it was joined by the Pamir River Curzon decided that the latter's claim could no longer stand and that the Wakh-Jir was the true source of the Oxus.

He returned to India through Chitral, where he met Younghusband and then, with the permission of a now more amenable Amir, he journeyed through Afghanistan. When he returned to London he described his journey in a comprehensive paper to the Royal Geographical Society. So far as the source of the Oxus was concerned he had examined all possible claimants, including of course the Murghab, before rejecting them in favour of the Wakh-Jir. When he came to revise his paper he again consulted Elias, who offered certain observations which were incorporated in the next edition. Curzon paid Elias due tribute, describing him as 'one of India's most distinguished Civil Servants who, with characteristic intrepidity, sketched out for himself and followed an entirely original route across the Pamirs with which the public has been made familiar only by hearsay'. It was part of Elias's bad luck that Curzon did not become Viceroy in his day. The two men respected each other and accorded well together, and Curzon would have given him the support so conspicuously lacking in the case of Ripon and Dufferin. The rejection of the Pamir River and with it Lake Zorkul, and the final rejection of the Murghab as possible Oxus sources, were of purely geographical interest and had no political results. The ultimate solution of the Oxus boundary problem was in terms of the original agreement and it was just as well that the diplomatists ignored Curzon's paper.

Cobbold visited Roshan and Shighnan in 1899. He was the first English traveller there since Elias, and in Roshan he was detained for three weeks by the Russians. It was four years since the Oxus problem had been finally settled, though we were still regarding Russian activities there with suspicion, and the same applied in reverse. In Kashgar Petrovski boasted to him that Russia knew all about the Elias Report, although he was somewhat wide of the mark in saying that Elias had stated the Pamir tribes would welcome British suzerainty. He found Elias's journey still very well remembered. In Shighnan the inhabitants recalled that he had arrived with an Afghan escort, had treated them liberally and asked many questions. Elias did not mention it, but he may well have set up a local intelligence network to send reports on Russian troop movements, for after he had left the Russians imprisoned a local chief for nearly two years on suspicion of passing us

information. Throughout Roshan he was still spoken of highly which shows how successful he had been in creating goodwill. Some recalled that he had promised they would come under British rule; but it is more likely that he was trying to explain the protection they would receive through our treaty with Afghanistan if their country remained loyal to the Amir. One oddity about him was particularly remembered; it was said that he used to stand for a long time in a stooping position with his coat over his head. Was he taking meteorological observations or was there a physical reason for this peculiar posture?

In parenthesis it may be remarked that Cobbold does not seem to have understood the Anglo-Russian Pamirs Agreement. Using Curzon's map he shows the Russian frontier as contiguous with India's east of Lake Zorkul and with India in possession of the Taghdumbash Pamir. He thereby missed the whole essence of the matter which was that the conjunction of Wakhan with China separated Russia from India. Moreover the Taghdumbash Pamir was always in China. Russian geographers were not infallible and Elias was quick to spot their mistakes, but our own amateur geographers, like Dunmore and Cobbold, were even more fallible.

Looking back on the political and geographical results, no one but Elias himself could possibly say, leaving aside the Kashgar disappointment, that his mission had been a barren one. At the time all he wanted was to forget the whole sorry business, but he was not allowed to: a whole year after his return there was a painful sequel. From one of his letters to Ridgeway it was obvious that he held very strong views against decorations and awards. All the same, Durand had recommended him for one and had been concerned when it did not appear in the next Gazette. The award was actually made but not till the end of 1887. What happened thereafter may be told partly in Elias's own words and partly by means of extracts from the Press.

In a letter to a friend he wrote:

'The Government have just gazetted me to the Order of the CIE in spite of my having often begged them not to do so. As soon as I saw in it the *Pioneer* I wrote and asked to be gazetted out. I do not regard it as a reward and I mean to stick to my refusal in spite of the consequences. I have often told them that I would have no Order, once when it was a question of a CSI.'

True to his principles he went as far as taking Counsel's opinion as to whether he could legally refuse it. Although what Counsel said is not known, he had the last word symbolically by returning the insignia, but there was no precedent for such action and the Indian Office contined to print the decoration.

At home and in India the Press saw the award as an all too typical Government blunder and did not hesitate to say so. One more tactful Indian paper commented:

'Mr Ney Elias is to be congratulated on having obtained a well-earned award. An able, indefatigable and discreet official, he is so unassuming that his merits are not so widely advertised in the press as those of more pushing gentlemen. . . . His work – particularly his expedition down the Upper Oxus to Badakshan – came of necessity to public notice and a large circle of friends will be glad of the graceful recognition it has somewhat tardily received.'

On the other hand the *St James's Gazette* wrote:

'The Asiatic who has come in contact with European civilization is always keen to get stars and crosses. The Russians sedulously encourage this weakness and make a fair amount of capital out of it. But the Indian authorities are not adepts in the art of decorating and will even make mistakes when the subject selected is one of their own officers. Mr Ney Elias, a distinguished traveller and political officer, was gazetted a Companion of the Indian Empire the other day and has asked to be relieved of the honour.'

The Press never forgot the episode. When he retired an Indian paper eulogizing his career, remarked: 'Whether the services which Mr Elias has rendered to the Government will obtain further recognition is a question we prefer to leave undiscussed.' And when he died the same paper wrote:

'For sheer distinction of service "Mr" Ney Elias had more legitimate claims to figure high up in the honours list than dozens of men who appear there. If we are not mistaken he scornfully rejected a CIE which was thrown at him like a bone after one of his brilliant exploits.'

The *Pioneer Mail* recollected:

'Mr Ney Elias, by one of those maladroit acts that the Government sometimes commits, found himself once a CIE. It is well known that he declined it. A London correspondent to an influential English paper opined that there was reason to believe that Mr Elias was of the opinion that his services to his country deserved recognition sooner or more marked when it came.'

This episode took place at a time when there were many signs of favouritism and lobbying and a lot of feeling that the best men were not getting awards. The Viceroy gave a great deal, not to say an undue, amount of his time to their bestowal. The recently instituted Order of the Indian Empire, which was the lowest of awards for service in India, in particular caused him a lot of worry. He told the Secretary of State it was 'very much *déconsidéré*', he had even had to reprimand an Indian recipient for speaking scornfully about it and he wished it had not been instituted. All the awards had to be approved by the Queen and in his letters to the Secretary of State he discussed at length quite a number of individual recommendations and especially those for his own staff, but sometimes much more lowly ones such as the manager of a railway, and he said he was bound to disappoint many aspirants. Considering his close personal interest in them it looks impossible that he could fail to see that Elias's achievement merited prompt recognition, yet assuming his Pamir mission was what it was intended to mark, it was a year too late. By contrast, Lockhart had received not only the CIE but also a knighthood within months of his expedition, whilst Ridgeway had been knighted whilst still in the field. Younghusband was also very promptly honoured after his first mission. The comparison may not be exact, for all three were soldiers and decorations have always been a soldier's perquisite; India was still mainly a soldier's country and Elias was merely a civil servant. But civil servant or not a knighthood was the only appropriate award at this stage of his career, for altogether he had now carried out four hazardous missions for the Government.

There is no reason to suppose that Dufferin was anti-semitic, but according to members of his family Elias believed that his name was a handicap throughout his service and they thought it was the real reason why he was not knighted. There is no evidence to support either suggestion and if that was what he himself thought he was probably wrong, though it may have been why he said he did not want an award. The trouble, as we have seen, was that through his hard upbringing he had acquired an impossibly idealistic standard. Every man wants his work to be recognized and Elias was no exception, but in his case there was some ambivalence. Thus he would be dissatisfied with no mark of appreciation yet he would also have been uneasy if he had received the appropriate one, for a knighthood would have made him more acutely conscious not only of his name but also of that impossible standard. Probably no honour would have relieved him of his sense of grievance with its undertone of masochism, but this belated minimum award was just rubbing salt into a deep wound. Dufferin had already withheld his personal recognition; if he did not

want to reward him adequately he might at least have taken him at his word and left him undecorated altogether. Even if Elias had offended him by his criticism of the other two missions (though careful research has yielded no such evidence) Dufferin's behaviour was unworthy. It looks all the more as though Kipling was right.

The most appropriate comment of all, and especially because it touched Elias's particular brand of humour, was the following in January 1888 in the *Pioneer*. (Could Kipling have been the author? He was actually serving on that newspaper at the time, and his Departmental Ditty 'A Legend of the Foreign Office' shows what he thought of the CIE.)

'The refusal of the CIE by that distinguished Asiatic traveller Mr Ney Elias brings to mind some verses written not so many years ago. A well-known Civilian retired undecorated after many years service but he was not left in peace in England as the following lines make only too clear:

THE LAMENT OF THE CIE

' "Kismet! My fate has reached me! Though I for my part have done
With files, and a Viceroy's smiles, and the warmth of an Indian sun.
They turned me adrift without shrinking, after thirty-five years of toil,
And I cursed the land where I'd laboured, as I shook off the dust of the soil.
I applied for a short extension, but they fobbed me off with a sneer,
Lest the howls of the Junior Civilians should reach The O'Donnel's ear.
(Yet they got an extension for Morris, as they wanted his aid it would seem,
To further their favourite project – the Local Self-Government scheme.)
My official career in the Indies was a failure I've reason to know;
After thirty-five years as I've mentioned, as a plain District Judge I'd to go.
Yet I started with Thomason fairly – poor Colvin was always my friend:
I think it was Muir who unmade me – my spirit with his didn't blend.
He thought that I wrote for the papers, and contracted a radical taint;
I'd better have stuck to religion, and made of Mahomet a Saint.
When once due promotion had passed me it never came near me again,
And though I plagued Strachey and Couper, my pleadings were ever in vain.
The High Court I angered most deeply, for I said that I could, if 'twould please,
Work myself down to their level – a descent not of grades but degrees!
Thus I left the curst land, not reluctant to cast off the trammels of years:

I left behind sorrow and anger – I left, too, my hopes and my fears.
And now – I think Couper will pity: I think even Muir will feel pain –
I think even Strachey will smile now, if his health will allow him the strain –
For Ripon and Co. to annoy me, have followed me over the sea –
They meant it perhaps in kindness, but – *they've made me a* CIE." '

Chapter XIV

SEVENTH EXPEDITION

The Campaign in Sikkim

When he got back to Simla from the Pamirs, Elias was much more seriously ill than the Boundary Commission doctor had suggested, and in December he was invalided home to England on a year's sick leave. After being so long away, he had much to do before he left, apart from completing his report. Knowing he would never be returning to Ladakh, he had a last thought for Leh, his mountain retreat for so many years. He recommended that his little dispensary, whose work he had thought so important, should be taken over by the Moravian mission, which had just come to work there. Unlike Colonel Lockhart, he did not approve of converting the natives and earlier he had opposed a request for missionaries in Ladakh; but if they had to come, the Moravians were at any rate medical missionaries who did not attempt conversion. They began with bad luck, for on arrival two of their members succumbed to a form of typhus which broke out every spring; not fatal to Ladakhis, it often was to new arrivals.

During his nearly two years 'on special duty', as the confidential journeys of Political Agents were always officially described, our relations with Tibet had again, under Dufferin's forward policy, come to the forefront. An Indian civil servant A. D. Carey, accompanied by Andrew Dalgleish, had taken good advantage of the Viceroy's permissive attitude to private exploration. Besides making a complete circuit round the boundaries of Sinkiang, they had penetrated deep into northern Tibet. The reports of their journey coincided with a trade depression at home and various Chambers of Commerce seeking new outlets clamoured for the opening up of the country. They acquired a champion in India, Colman Macaulay, who was a civil servant in the Bengal Government. Macaulay had earlier submitted a paper on the advantages, both commercial and political, to be gained by a full-scale mission to Tibet and he had blatantly lobbied his views whilst on leave in England. In 1885 his plan was approved, unhesitatingly in London though somewhat reluctantly in Calcutta. China professed full approval of the mission, either because she did not expect it to succeed or possibly because she hoped it would lessen the control of the

lama faction, which may have held too much power in Lhasa for her liking. The expedition assembled in Sikkim, but ran into immediate difficulties with the local lamas across the border. Consisting of five officers and a guard of nearly a hundred sepoys it was as usual far too big. The lamas caused the Chinese Resident at Lhasa (his title of Ampa in Tibetan was synonymous with Amban in Turki) to send an alarmist report to Peking calling it an invasion and at the same time they sent a deputation to obstruct Macaulay. Telling his story later to *The Times*, Macaulay claimed he would have been able to achieve a compromise and even to reach Lhasa, though it seems very doubtful if he would really have got that far. However, he was not given the chance because the British Government, fearing to embarrass our relations with China, which happened to be reasonably amicable at the time, yielded to pressure from Peking and the mission called off. Dufferin, who felt the venture had been imposed on him by the British Government, was actually relieved to be given the excuse to cancel it. He had feared another Margary affair, and, having just annexed Upper Burma, he wanted no more complications with China at that time. The Chinese Government were likewise pleased; not wanting their lack of control over Tibet put to the test, they had procrastinated since originally approving, and although they had already agreed by the Chefoo Convention of 1876 that a mission should be allowed into the country they would undoubtedly have played on the sentence 'having due regard to the circumstances' if opposition in Lhasa had been maintained, as it probably would have been.

At home, British commercial interests, not knowing the facts and always pressing for markets in Tibet and China, expressed their feelings at the postponement of their hopes loudly though unavailingly. More serious was the effect of the cancellation on Tibet, for it led the local lamas to suppose the British were weak. Jubilantly, they assembled troops on the Sikkim border and in the middle of 1886 these advanced across the Jelap Pass some miles into Sikkim territory, where they remained and refused to budge. Sikkim had been an Indian Mandatory State since 1861, but its young Maharajah was then in Chumbi on the Tibetan side of the border. This in itself was not unusual; Tibetan and Sikkimese intermarried as a normal state of affairs and the Maharajah's mother and his wife were both Tibetan. But he had been there for several months and showed no inclination to return and rule his country, nor did he comply with our requests that he should order the withdrawal of the Tibetan troops. Furthermore, strong rumours were circulating that Tibet was intending to annex Sikkim and these were strengthened by the fact that all her revenues were being sent to the Maharajah.

Elias could never forget Tibet and he knew more about the country

than anyone else at home or in India. In March 1887, soon after he arrived home on sick leave, when he learned what was afoot, he sent a demi-official paper to W. J. Cunningham in the Foreign Department. He wrote:

'So much has been written in newspapers about reviving the Tibet mission that I am tempted to offer some remarks. If they are not required they can be dropped in the waste paper basket that yawns at your side. I don't know if the Government of India have any idea of reviving the mission but this is in case anything is contemplated. A Conservative MP has told me he intends to move some proposal and I know a good deal of misapprehension exists on Tibet at home and in India. My views may be wrong they but can't lead to worse than the late mission. I have gathered them chiefly from enquiries collected in days when foolishly I had a craze to go there, and also from watching Tibet for six years in Ladakh.'

He began by dispelling two fallacies, the first that Tibet was part of the Chinese Empire, or at least that Peking had supreme power over it, and the second that Tibet was an integrated state. These misconceptions he traced to European authors following the writings of the Emperor Ch'ien Lung, whose views were discredited by the Chinese themselves, and to the Jesuit missionaries. One reason for the continued belief in Chinese supremacy was that, whenever Tibet refused entry to travellers from the Indian side, Lhasa pleaded Chinese orders. Yet from the east and north, that is from China and Mongolia, travellers were also stopped, but as Chinese obstruction could not then be the excuse the reason given was the risk of being attacked. In reality, Tibet was a region not all under one government, and Turki-speaking peoples held the name to include Ladakh and Baltistan as well as Sikkim and parts of Szechuan and Kansu; but the territory governed by Lhasa was on a different footing from the rest. The Chinese government in writing to us intended eference only to the Lhasa governed portion of the country. Both Prejevalski and Carey had proved the accessibility of northern Tibet. Lhasa was the spiritual capital (like Rome) of northern Buddhism but it actually controlled only the permanently cultivated low lying region.

There was no dispute, he said, that at Lhasa China was regarded as the suzerain power, but proof of her lack of control had been shown three or four times in the ten years up till 1884. For example, Prejevalski in 1878 had actually been given a Chinese passport, but nevertheless he had been stopped by Lhasa. China was proud of her foreign possessions and would not willingly repudiate control of Tibet if she held it, but she had admitted insufficient control to issue passports to European

travellers although she issued them willingly enough for Sinkiang. In 1884 the Tsungli Yamen had expressed the hope that we would not press the matter because their Imperial Resident had admitted he was powerless.

The appointment of a Resident at Lhasa was in exchange for lama representatives at Peking as hostages for loyalty, but the Chinese Resident had no control except over official ceremonies and rites. It was an example of the traditional moral ascendancy which China imposed by her prestige. He compared the position of China in Lhasa with our own position in Nepal with whom we had a treaty. Our resident there had certain treaty rights but no liberty of action or influence. If the French applied to us for passports for Nepal on the ground that we were suzerains we could only say we would give them a letter and hope for the best, but that it would not be our responsibility if things went wrong.

If we still wanted to achieve relations with Tibet he thought it might be worth putting the will and power of China to the test. He understood the Macaulay mission had applied first to China on commercial grounds and that it failed through Tibetan opposition, but that since then Peking had actually tried to encourage trade between India and Tibet. He believed Tibet mistrusted our intentions with our surveyors, geologists and large military escort, and would never admit us by direct negotiation. A possible new approach was for a Chinese mission from Peking with a European attached, an imperfect means which however might lead to something. He did not want it to be thought he was advocating a new expedition. In his view the political value of Tibet was nil and trade possibilities negligible. Strategically it might have attractions to Russia as the only approach to Nepal, but as long as Tibet remained closed to us it would be closed to Russia too.

The Viceroy's Secretary, D. M. Wallace, minuting the paper, said somewhat loftily that it should not be taken as pure unmitigated gospel, but from what Elias had said we ought to be very careful about calling on Peking to control Lhasa. He thought the point about trade was important. It was thanks to Macaulay that many people at home including Chambers of Commerce believed Tibet to be a new commercial field; but Macaulay had later changed his objects from commercial to political and the Indian Government could not see what even these were. Evidently reflecting Dufferin's views, Wallace thought we should now aim at allaying Chinese suspicions about Tibet so as to proceed with delineating the Sino-Burmese frontier. Dufferin considered the views of Elias important enough to send copies of his paper to the Foreign Secretary, Lord Salisbury, as well as to Sir John Walsham in Peking, but as will be seen it is very doubtful whether his exposure of the facts

of Chinese control over Tibet had any real effect either in Calcutta or Whitehall. Although there should have been no further misconception it remained all the same.

The Member of Parliament referred to by Elias was Sir John Simon. He duly put down his parliamentary question about Tibet . . . and received the familiar reply that 'the matter had not been lost sight of'! Indeed it had not; an unexpected development occurred in the following year in the shape of a military campaign.

Elias found an opportunity for expounding the theory and practice of Chinese suzerainty to a wider public in an article he contributed to *The Times* four months later, entitled 'The Relations between China and Nepal'. Nepal was one of the few remaining frontier states he had not visited but his work in the Foreign Department as well as his own private studies had made him familiar enough with its history. He wrote:

'In ordinary times these claims [to suzerainty] lie dormant. Nothing is heard of them except through some formal announcement in the Peking Gazette. But when a foreign power appears on the scene, those claims instantly become active, aggressive and highly inconvenient. . . . However obscure the history of the relations between China and these States may be and however unsatisfactory the proof of suzerainty, the boldness with which the Chinese make their claims and the tenacity with which they hold to them even to the extent of going to war, must always given them a political importance which intrinsically they do not deserve.[1] To the Government of India especially these shadowy claims are of the utmost moment for they are exercized in respect of almost every independent or semi-independent state on the northern frontiers of Hindustan. They are never definite and when it suits the convenience of the Chinese Government all responsibility is calmly denied.'

With this preamble he described the recent relations between China and Nepal which had just sent a mission bearing tribute. This had been learned in India with some amazement as it had not been believed that China took any interest in that remote hill state. Apparently, Elias had acquired copies of the Chinese documents which accompanied the Mission. One was a memorial from the Resident at Lhasa saying how he had received the mission, inspected the tribute, entertained the envoys and instructed them in the etiquette of the court at Peking before sending them on their way. The memorialist excused himself from accompanying the mission on the grounds of being busy keeping order

[1] There is a fallacy in this argument. A state must be politically important at least in Chinese eyes if it is worth going to war about. The real point was the difference between Chinese and Western ideas of what was important.

at sundry festivals. The real reason probably was that he did not fancy a crossing of the passes into Szechuan in mid-winter. The document was the clearest proof of Nepal's acknowledgment of vassalage and Chinese acceptance of suzerainty.

There should have been no amazement in India by this time about Chinese suzerainty; there had been quite enough examples of how it functioned. But Elias thought it was time the Indian Government came to some understanding with China in regard to the frontier states before any feelings or fears had been aroused. In particular it was important to clear up the anomaly of Tibet, where China was on the one hand proclaiming in the *Peking Gazette* that she actually governed the country through the Residents (there were actually two) at Lhasa and that her orders were obeyed. Yet on the other hand she professed herself unable to induce the Tibetans to receive a mission from India.

Towards the end of his sick leave *The Times* ran a series of articles on India entitled 'The India of the Queen', the first of which, 'The Expansion of India', was written by Elias. His earlier series on the 'Native States of India' had shown how qualified he was to take a broad perspective of events during the past fifty years. The article would interest no one today except for one paragraph which concerned education and the rising tide of political interest among Indians. He noted that our imperial dealings with India had given rise in England to diplomatic responsibilities and military exigencies involving close Parliamentary supervision, and that under British rule the population of India had grown greatly in excess of its size under any previous rule. A small section of the population had been swiftly educated in the ideas of Europe:

'We have nurtured two generations of university youth in India on the strong meat of English political eloquence. They quote to us the *Areopagitica* of Milton and the *Representative Government* of Mill, but the mass of people still remain face to face with the primitive struggle for existence in an Asiatic country – a struggle no longer mitigated for the survivors by the sharp Asiatic cauteries of unchecked famine and internal wars.'

He foresaw an Imperial Parliament with Indian Members, otherwise these words written over eighty years ago are not entirely outdated today.

His return to duty at the beginning of 1888, for the time being in somewhat better health, coincided with the episode of the CIE, which

made an inauspicious start. He did not know what his next work would be, and he must have been in a sore and unsettled state of mind. His posting, when it came in March, turned out to be uninspiring. It was to be the State of Jaipur as Boundary Settlement Officer and as Agent for Rajputana, but what he did there does not matter for it was quite unimportant. It is not impossible that he was banished there to do penance for having embarrassed the Government; to refuse a graciously bestowed award and then allow his refusal wide publicity is not tactful. However, he was not there long before his health broke down again. For the third time he was suffering from liver congestion and he went home for a further six months to recuperate.

A persistent failure of the Indian Government was not to recognize the importance of China, which it seemed to regard only as a tiresome state liable to make additional trouble with its own feudatory frontier states. This was not at all the view of the Foreign Office, which ever since the Treaty of Tientsin had been at great pains to cultivate good relations with China. Some thought British placation went too far, but the prize for friendly relations was the enormous trade potential, and competition between the other Western powers was extremely keen. The Foreign Minister, Lord Salisbury, in particular was annoyed by the Indian Government's narrow imperialistic attitude. It was some years before India took a broader view and as one consequence sent Indian Army officers to Peking to study Chinese. Meanwhile there was still only one expert on China in the Indian Civil Service and that was Elias. At this juncture his experience was greatly needed in Sikkim where a good deal had been happening in the past year.

The Tibetan troops which had crossed the Jelap La, the recognized boundary between Tibet and Sikkim, had refused to budge. The Maharajah, a weak young man with no taste for office, was still absent without leave disporting himself at Chumbi, the local Riviera, a pleasant valley about twenty miles inside Tibet, and showed no signs of returning. This had been the state of affairs for the past eighteen months, during which time the Indian Government had striven to persuade China to secure the withdrawal of the Tibetan troops but with complete lack of success. The longer the Government delayed action the more the Tibetans believed it to be weak; but admittedly the problem was complex. Sikkim was an independent state, but although having a treaty with Britain she regarded herself as a vassal of Tibet as well. In most friendly terms China had counselled patience whilst using her good offices to persuade Lhasa to withdraw her troops but nothing happened. The Resident concerned, an unpopular old gentleman sometimes called The Eating One and at other times even more insultingly The Turtle One, had had his term of office extended and was probably enriching

himself in league with the lamas. The Viceroy had written two letters in friendly terms to the Dalai Lama, who had refused to accept delivery, though he very likely read them unofficially. During all these fruitless negotiations it was Sikkim that suffered, for her trade with Tibet was at a standstill, her morale was falling and so was her faith in the power of India.

At the beginning of 1888 Sir John Walsham in Peking was instructed to set a time limit at the end of which India would expel the invaders. He based it on grounds of obstruction to trade, to avoid putting it in terms which might raise the suzerainty issue over Sikkim, which in turn might lead to a dispute about the actual border between Sikkim and Tibet. Meanwhile, a small force which had been assembled at Darjeeling moved up to Sikkim. The time limit expired on March 15th and on March 21st, the force attacked the Tibetans at their post at Lingtu. Thus began what the *St James's Gazette* called 'Our Little War in Sikkim.' It took place at 13,000 feet, the highest altitude at which British troops had ever fought, and in a damp foggy climate with alternating heavy rain and snow falls. Yet throughout it the British sickness rate was no more than 7 per cent and the Indian rate was only 5 per cent. The commander of the force Colonel T. Graham, had under him 1,300 British and Indian troops and four guns. He had two difficulties to contend with. The first was the long supply line from Darjeeling, one hundred miles away; the second was political. His instructions were to eject the Tibetans and clear the road leading up to the Jelap La but without crossing the passes entering Tibet. These two limitations presented greater problems than the enemy, who as soldiers were not formidable. They were medievally armed with an assortment of spears and swords, and with match-locks which were either tied to a tree or supported on two prongs by a friend of the firer. For personal defence they carried charms of which dried tortoises were the most popular although not noticeably effective. Ousted from Lingtu in the first engagement, the Tibetans merely retired to a village nearer the pass which they fortified, whilst Colonel Graham's troops improved the road and brought up more supplies. The road from Darjeeling was so poor that, as the *St James's Gazette* remarked, by the time the beef on the hoof arrived they resembled Pharaoh's lean line.

Colonel Graham insisted that he could not clear the Tibetans from Sikkim without entering Tibet, and that the Government still refused to allow. After a month's delay the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal arrived for an inspection, and the Tibetans doubtless in full knowledge of his arrival staged a counter-attack. This time they suffered considerable losses and were driven out of their fortified village and across the pass but they remained a threat just on the other side of it. Another

delay ensued, during which reports reached the Political Officer that the Tibetans were building up a force of considerable strength – some reports said more than 10,000 – in the Chumbi Valley. Colonel Graham asked for and got 500 Gurkhas as reinforcement. It was only when it was realized from the enemy build-up that Peking could not – or perhaps would not – bring pressure on Tibet, and that the enemy were staying in the Chumbi valley and thus giving him no chance to attack, that he was authorized to cross the Jelap La. In September he did so, routing the enemy and inflicting such heavy casualties as must have destroyed all faith in dried tortoises. Two days later he entered Chumbi, twenty miles away, and finding it evacuated brought his troops back to Sikkim next day. That was the end of this well conducted little campaign. With all fears of annexation thus removed, Sikkimese morale quickly recovered.

It was now the turn of the politicals. It had taken the Tibetans, and no doubt the Chinese too, several months to learn that we were not weak. This misapprehension, of course, had been just the result of our prolonged efforts and hopes to get China to settle the matter by peaceful negotiation. The impact of the military operations stirred the Chinese to action at last and the Resident was very promptly instructed by Peking to go to Sikkim and negotiate a British–Tibetan treaty. The Turtle One, who it was supposed had been told as far back as the first military engagement to go there, had not unexpectedly dragged his feet. He had now been replaced, but once the hostilities ended his successor did not hurry either, whether by inclination or by instruction was not clear. However he finally arrived in December.

Meanwhile, the British negotiators had already assembled in Darjeeling, ready to go up to Sikkim to meet him, and they were getting bored with the inactivity. Elias returned from home in time to join the team, although the abrupt change in climate must have again put his health at risk. In November *The Times* reported that he had been deputed by the Indian Government to conduct negotiations with the Chinese Resident acting on behalf of the Tibetans, and that he had just arrived in Sikkim. This as it turned out was only partially true. The leader of the British team was Mortimer Durand who had been appointed to give status as the Viceroy's personal representative. As his advisers he relied on Elias, with his intimate knowledge of Chinese and Tibetan affairs, whilst A. W. Paul, who had been Political Officer during the campaign, was his expert on Sikkim. When Durand reached Gangtok he wrote to Elias who was up near the frontier, sketching his views on the negotiating procedure they should adopt. He proposed that Paul should *entamer* the negotiations as he had borne the heat and burden so far and it would be unfair to supersede him. He himself would stay

in the background as referee and would not come up unless there were difficulties. Optimistically, he thought the Tibetans should be the chief negotiating party, with the Ampa there to sign any agreement as a witness and not as a ratifier. He asked Elias whether he thought we should put down our minimum demands and stick to them, or put them high including a war indemnity, free trade and intercourse, and scale down if necessary. He considered we could easily occupy Phari or Lhasa if necessary. His last words have a familiar Whitehall echo about them; they were: 'Don't say anything to the military people. They always talk.'

Elias, with his usual forethought, replied that he had already been considering our method of approach and had drafted a proposed form of agreement. He preferred the minimum demand approach, provided that the Indian Government would back it with a threat to advance in the spring. If not, it would be wiser to adopt the indemnity plan, but in order to avoid any semblance of losing face by subsequent scaling down he did not want to name a punitive sum. He anticipated our two main difficulties in dealing with the Tibetans would be firstly that, as he had reason to believe, the Ampa would try to stop them from having any direct dealings with the British, and secondly that it would be difficult to bind the Tibetans as the various lama factions would certainly disown any signatories subsequently. Lastly, as regards trade he said he had been surprised to read in the papers that the Indian Government would demand trade facilities. He knew from Ladakh experience that trade with Tibet was a myth – a single yak could carry all we might expect. He was sure the Tibetans would resist to the utmost either a trade agreement or a British Resident in Lhasa. Elias also wrote to Paul outlining his plans. On the broad view he said the effect of an agreement plus an indemnity would be excellent *vis a vis* the Russians and moreover would raise our prestige in the Kashmir territories.

As might be expected, the negotiations quickly ran into trouble. The Tibetans left the lead to the Ampa, or Resident as Elias preferred to call him, who naturally enough deployed to the full the Chinese talent for procrastination, and Elias could make little headway in finding out what he was prepared to offer. Durand soon had to discard his role as referee and take a direct part. Lacking the Government's support of a threat to advance, the 'minimum demand' approach had to be dropped and the proposed indemnity was also abandoned. On Sikkim our standing was that we could not accept Tibetan interference with our Indian Mandatory States, that the only frontier we recognized was the water parting which had never been disputed (there was even a post on the Jelap La to mark it) and we therefore saw no need for actual demarcation. In respect of Tibet we reaffirmed our recognition of

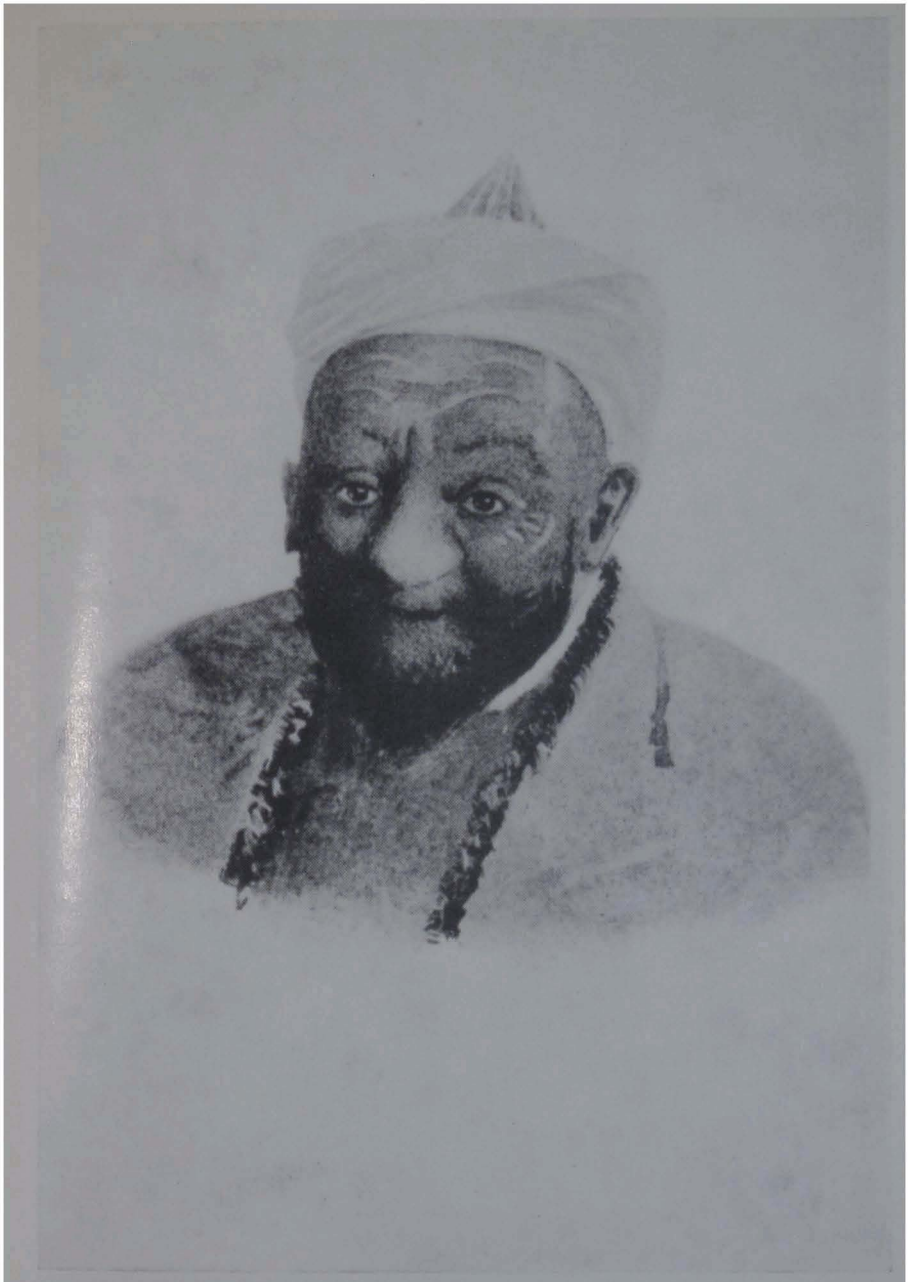
Chinese suzerainty but pointed to the difficulties of non-intercourse and asked for a trade agreement.

For his part the Resident stuck to the assertion that Tibet was a part of the Chinese Empire and that the Government of Lhasa was subordinate to Peking. He maintained he could guarantee their agreement not to interfere with Sikkim but that nevertheless he could not arrange a trade agreement nor could he guarantee the protection of British subjects entering Tibet. These last two were the real bones of contention, as Elias had foreseen. He had many further meetings with the Resident's entourage with the object of finding out how much of this was bluff. At one stage the Resident put a seemingly artless question to Durand. He asked, with a typically deprecatory laugh: 'Excuse please, silly question, but what happens if China declares war on England?' Durand replied that in that case China would certainly be defeated as before. On which the Resident said: 'Only joking, please forget.' Reporting this Durand said that he did not think the Resident was serious, because he was laughing as he asked. He seems not to have recognized this Chinese apologetic technique for putting a test question. However, to be on the safe side the Resident was 'allowed' to see some British troops on parade. He was very visibly impressed and there was no more talk of war. There is no doubt that China was greatly concerned about her control over Tibet. As Dr Alistair Lamb has pointed out, Lhasa was the seat of Tibetan Buddhism whose influence spread beyond Tibet and over all Mongolia, and the support of the lama hierarchy was thus most important to the Manchu dynasty.

The Resident continued to insist that Sikkim should pay the traditional annual homage both to Tibet and to China and that the Maharajah should wear his ceremonial dress on formal occasions with the Mandarin's hat and buttons appropriate to his Chinese rank.

The British Government was at first inclined to accept this as mere formalism. But fortunately Durand consulted Elias and Paul, who advised him that in Chinese eyes much more than mere formalism was at stake. Elias told him firmly and in writing that if we gave in and allowed the Maharajah to keep up his Chinese ceremonial it would exalt Chinese prestige at the expense of our own and would have serious repercussions in Kashmir, Nepal, Bhutan and Hunza. Durand wisely accepted the advice and threatened to break off negotiations if the Chinese persisted in their claim. In his turn the Resident threatened to return to Lhasa. Although the Chinese Government told him to remain where he was, he ignored the order and went back. At all costs he wanted to avoid a written treaty which would have brought him into disfavour in Peking.

Mr Hart, an official of the Chinese Maritime Customs, was then sent



8. The Mir of Hunza (Ghazan Khan). (By permission of the Secretary of Foreign and Commonwealth Relations.)

9. The Anglo-Siamese Boundary Commission, 1889–90 (from *Scott of the Shan Hills* by G. E. Milton). Elias at back on right.

to continue the negotiations. So far there had been a good deal of bluff on both sides and honours were fairly even. Even without a treaty we had freed Sikkim from the risk of annexation and had restored the political situation as well as the trade of the country. We had also avoided the awkward question of actual frontier demarcation. On the other hand China had yielded nothing so far on her claims to suzerainty. Deadlock was reached when we refused to renew discussions unless China was prepared to recognize our sole supremacy in Sikkim together with its external relations with other countries and the withdrawal of her claim that the Maharajah should continue to send letters and presents to China and Tibet. At this point China produced fresh proposals effectively recognizing all these claims, and at the end of 1889 the Sikkim Convention was signed giving Britain all we needed. The Convention agreed that trade facilities across the Sikkim – Tibet frontier should be discussed thereafter. But that is another story and it was Elias's successor Younghusband who ultimately carried the flag to Lhasa.

To prove what little note Tibet took of Chinese control, the Tibetans actually established a new customs post on the Sikkim side of the Niti pass whilst negotiations were still proceeding, and a detachment of Ghurkhas had to be sent to demolish it and thus prevent what might have been a repetition of the Jelap La incident. *The Times* took this opportunity to comment with satisfaction on the recent change in the Indian Government policy towards trans-frontier exploration, which for so long had been actively discouraged, it remarked, even 'when conducted by officers of such experience as Ney Elias.' The want of trans-frontier knowledge had cost us dearly on numerous occasions from the Afghan Boundary Commission downwards, where reluctance to allow British officers to examine the confines of the Empire had nearly involved us in disaster. Now that these restrictions had been relaxed, *The Times* felt that the experience and discretion of officers like Colonel Woodthorpe and Elias would result in the accumulation of the fullest information with the minimum of risk from future entanglements.

Long before the negotiations ended Elias and Durand had returned to India. Shortly afterwards it was the latter's turn for a breakdown in health and he had to spend a year in England. Elias had not contributed much by his own standards but he had stiffened Durand at a crucial point in the discussions and his experience of Chinese diplomatic methods may well have saved the day. Did he, one wonders, make a sentimental journey up to the Jelap La in order to set foot in Tibet, the land he had tried to visit for so long? The idea must have crossed his mind but he would probably have considered it cheap in such circumstances. It was the last time he ever saw his beloved mountains

where he may have found more tranquility than anywhere else in his life.

Just before he went up to Sikkim, *The Times*, had printed a long article by Elias on 'The Chinese in Tibet'. It expanded the historical part of his earlier demi-official paper and put the current Sikkim campaign and subsequent negotiations in their correct perspective. Whilst he was actually in Sikkim *The Times*, always a supporter of serious exploration, also printed three articles which it had commissioned from him under the heading 'Recent Explorations in External China'. The subject of exploration remained as important to him as ever, far exceeding sordid Asian politics and intrigue. If he could not explore, and it was obvious that his health would never let him do so again, at least he could write about it.

He was able to record that after a dozen years of neglect a wave of exploration had taken place. Between 1885 and 1887 half a dozen Englishmen, all new names, on four separate journeys, had covered a great deal of new ground. H. E. M. James with Francis Younghusband and Fulford had journeyed through Manchuria and climbed the fabled Long White Mountain. Younghusband had afterwards returned to India from Peking. Colonel Bell, VC leaving Peking at the same time but travelling faster and by a different route, had reached India a month sooner and was thus the first Englishman to accomplish this feat. James's party also visited the Russian garrison at Vladivostok. At the same time Carey and Dalgleish had carried out their exploration of northern Tibet. All these journeys were to some extent inspired by Russian expansionism. As these travellers gave their views on the military strength of China, Elias took the opportunity to develop some thoughts and opinions of his own on the subject. These *Times* articles were an excellent medium for expressing his views in public without breaking the rules of secrecy and without bringing on himself any risk of censure as a Government servant. From long experience he knew his opinions were more likely to be heeded by appearing in *The Times* than any number of official reports 'through the usual channels.'

As there was still talk of a possible alliance with China in the event of war with Russia, he was concerned to dispel the complacent idea of China and Britain waging an idealistic war against a common enemy for our benefit and for the peace of the world. He quoted with approval what Prejevalski had said: 'For many a long day China cannot hope to create an army at all similar to European armies.' And he was able to reinforce this view with that expressed by H. E. M. James, himself an experienced and practical Bengal civil servant. James had written:

'Until Chinese habits and ways of thought are changed – a process that

will take many generations – they will not attain to that pitch of discipline, purity of administration and self-control which alone will enable them to use European methods and appliances of war effectively. When they have attained to it they will not want to devastate the world.'

To which Elias added that in the course of modern history the Chinese had only shown military enterprise at periods immediately following conquest of their own country and before their conquerors, the Mongols and Manchus, had had time to succumb to the process of absorption. The truth was that China was a weak state and had no warlike spirit. He believed it unlikely that China would ever trust a European nation.

'In general the more reasonable a course seems to be in our eyes, the less so it always appears to China. With Asiatics nothing is ever to be gained by pointing out the mutual benefits of a proposed measure. They cannot gauge our motives any more than we can gauge theirs and we know from long experience that whenever we ascribe a motive for their actions we find ourselves wrong.'

He held strongly that it was never wise to adopt a conciliatory attitude towards the Chinese.

To compensate for an unwarlike spirit China had developed the art of impressing foreign states with a sense of power and dignity to a point further than any country had ever carried it. In this he believed numbers, antiquity and exclusiveness all played a part, as well as oriental ignorance and possibly also a common hatred of European powers. China ruled by the spell she cast, and he ended his last article by hoping that the European mind would avoid falling under the influence of celestial glamour.

These articles aroused enough interest for *The Times* to re-print them as a pamphlet and in this form the author's name appeared on the cover. There was no mention in them of his Pamir exploration and indeed he did not refer to his own work at all.

The exploits of Carey and Dalgleish had particularly pleased Elias for they had followed the recommendation he had made in 1884 in his draft paper, 'Desirable Explorations in Tibet and Eastern Turkestan'. As soon as he heard that Carey had safely reached the lowlands of Turkestan before winter set in ('for even a Tibetan or a yak could hardly survive a winter in the Tibetan highlands') he wrote to congratulate him. Shortly afterwards, the gallant Dalgleish was murdered by an Afghan whilst crossing the Karakoram Pass. As a trader for fourteen years he had been known and trusted throughout Turkestan.

His murderer was identified, and he was tracked the length and breadth of Central Asia for two whole years by a corporal and two sepoys of the Indian Army. They eventually cornered him in Samarkand, where he committed suicide before he could be extradited. As a feat of detection and dogged persistence their exploit must surely be unsurpassed.

Chapter XV

THE EIGHTH EXPEDITION—
The Anglo-Siamese Boundary Commission

By the time Elias had returned to Calcutta from Sikkim Lord Lansdowne had assumed office as Viceroy. Lansdowne was the fifth of the Viceroys whom he had served and with him he was happier than under any of the others. One reason was that he was no longer struggling for recognition; his experience and advice were heeded. Another lay in the character of the new Viceroy. He was more understanding, less lofty and certainly more considerate than his two predecessors. On frontier matters he continued to pursue Dufferin's policy, which suited the soldiers admirably and gave his Foreign Department plenty to do. At home Lord Salisbury as Foreign Secretary reiterated the old complaint that the Viceroy seemed to take too narrow and imperialistic a view of consolidating India's frontiers and had too little regard for the diplomatic consequence of ignoring the Russian and Chinese points of view. But although against earlier Viceroys the complaint was well grounded, it was not justified against Lansdowne.

Elias was not left idle in India for long. About the middle of 1889 he was gazetted Political Agent in Baluchistan, but three weeks later the appointment was cancelled; once again more important work for him had cropped up. In October he was appointed Commissioner of the proposed Anglo-Siamese Boundary Commission and thus found himself once more back in Burma, the country he had left with no regrets fifteen years earlier. From a professional point of view it was an important appointment and not even Elias could deny it, and besides it carried further promotion from Second to First Class Political Agent which helped to compensate for his late start in the Civil Service

Much had happened in Burma during his long absence. King Mindon, the crafty monarch whom he blamed as chief instigator of the Margary disaster, had died. King Theebaw, whom Mindon had chosen from amongst his ninety odd sons to succeed him, had proved a weak and ineffective ruler and this fact, linked with the constant clamour of British commerce, had led to the annexation of Upper Burma. Another factor which had influenced the annexation was Anglo-French rivalry. Both Mindon and Theebaw had developed relations with France as a

counter to British influence. The French certainly had designs on Upper Burma and hopes of exploiting the potentially rich market of Yunnan. In 1885, as the result of a war with China, France had gained Annam thereby advancing her frontiers that much nearer Burma. The annexation thus impeded further French designs, but on the other hand its effect was to introduce new and controversial frontiers with China and Siam as well as France.

These frontier matters were inseparable from the administrative problems concerning the tribes lying mainly within, but sometimes athwart, the Upper Burma frontier. Something has already been said of the Kachin tribes to the north. For the most part these had been tributary to the kings of Burma, although they were always prepared to rebel if it suited them, and they looked to Yunnan as much as to Burma for their prosperity, since at least three trade troutes passed through their territory. To the east lay the Northern and Southern Shan States, whose economy relied mainly on their teak forests. The Shans are widely spread; normally a peaceable race originating from the Himalayan foothills they are, or were, found in Yunnan and even on the Upper Yangtze and were thus accustomed to living under alien rule. Not counting the Karenni to the south, there were upwards of forty of these states and sub-states, some tributary to Burma, some maintaining a lofty independence and all of them frequently warring against each other whenever Burmese rule was weak. To the extent that the kings of Burma attempted to control them, they acted on the Chinese principle of not letting them combine. Some of the bigger chiefs had married into the Burmese royal family, but the only attempt at inter-tribal co-operation had been the linking in recent years of a few tribes in what was known as the Limbin Confederacy, under the Limbin Prince, in opposition to Theebaw. Shortly before the annexation the Prince had been succeeded by his great nephew, who was a further source of trouble till an expedition was sent against him.

The administration of this diverse collection of tribes presented some pretty problems to the Burmese Commission which was the body responsible under the Chief Commissioner, Sir Charles Crosthwaite, for administering the country. He was perhaps not always well served by his officials; the terms of service did not appeal to the ambitions of Indian Civil Servants; they were more attractive to army officers who were usually without administrative experience and such was the need that some footloose young men may also have found their way into the Commission. But they were desperately hard worked in a thoroughly bad tropical climate and the sickness rate was very high. The immediate and most important step was to bring all these tribes into subjection

under the new régime, willingly if possible but otherwise by coercion. The result was that for the next four years numerous military expeditions accompanied by Political Officers were despatched into these unknown tribal territories. Most of the chiefs gave their allegiance willingly; they saw better prospects for themselves under British rule than under the previous Burmese kings, but sometimes force had to be used. It was wonderful training in leadership for army officers, but once away from the telegraph they were apt to ignore frontiers which were anyway ill-defined, and it was their carefree crossings into China which caused Lord Salisbury anxiety at home lest China should raise the issue. Fortunately, the Peking Government had just as dim an idea of where its boundaries lay as we had ourselves.

By 1890 most of the Cis-Salween chiefs had accepted British rule, but there were some exceptions still to be dealt with, and some tribes bordering the Mekong whose allegiance might more properly belong to China and Siam. At the time of the annexation these Trans-Salween States looked a potential embarrassment to us, and in spite of our promises to all States previously tributary to Burma, China might have had them for the asking; but our offer was never precisely made and six years later, when she did ask, our policy had altered in order to counter French expansion.

To appreciate the frontier problems brought about by the annexation we cannot do better than follow the Viceroy, Lord Lansdowne, who in 1891 drafted a memorandum on the whole subject entitled, 'A note on the Burma–Chinese and Burma–Siamese Frontiers which was evidently intended as policy guidance for his own Foreign Department. He based it on a note prepared for him by Elias whose recommendations he followed very closely. The Viceroy wrote:

'I think it is extremely important that the questions which have arisen upon the Northern and Eastern frontiers of our Burmese possessions should be dealt with, not fragmentarily, but as a portion of one large question involving our frontier policy in these regions and I will attempt to clear the ground by advancing two or three conclusions which I have arrived at after reading Mr Ney Elias's excellent notes, and the reports submitted by the local officers. I hold strongly that we should restrict our responsibilities in regard to these outlying tracts . . . within the narrowest limits consistent with imperial interests.

'I think it of extreme importance that our attitude towards China should be generous and conciliatory. She is suspected of intrigues on our Himalayan frontiers but we have much to gain from her friendship and she is probably the best neighbour that we can have in this part of the world.

'If China is our best neighbour I have no doubt whatever that France is our worst and I believe we should avail ourselves of every opportunity to make use of China as a buffer between ourselves and France just as we have endeavoured to use her as a buffer between ourselves and Russia. I regard the Siamese as unsatisfactory neighbours, owing to their weakness and on account of the unsatisfactory nature of their diplomacy . . . but I would do nothing calculated to drive her into the arms of any other European power. I agree with Mr Ney Elias in believing that it is most desirable that we should exclude the Chinese from the upper basin of the Irrawaddy. It is desirable to do so both in order to avoid complications with her in respect of the trade following the course of that river and also because it would be a distinct gain to obtain from Upper Burma a frontier which would be virtually an extension of Assam and would prevent any other Powers from coming in between us and the great mountain ranges of the north.

The second part of the Viceroy's note was devoted to recommendations for settling the dispute with Siam which had led to the Boundary Commission and to agreeing the boundaries with both Siam and China, and it will be referred to again later. The Elias Note covered the whole Burmese frontier problem; the reference to China as a buffer and the comparison with India's northern frontier problem *vis à vis* Russia shows his trend of thought. He kept a copy of Lansdowne's memorandum as well as his own note and it is interesting to see later how their proposals worked out. The Viceroy's paper shows how undeserved was the Foreign Secretary's charge that Lansdowne took a narrow and imperialistic view; it proves that, in fact, he was an anxious as Lord Salisbury for amicable relations with China. In his references to Elias's contributions Lansdowne showed he was generous enough to be able to acknowledge the advice of his subordinates and not to claim their ideas as his own.

The actual proposal for an Anglo-Siamese Commission had originated with the Siamese themselves. In 1888 the chief of Eastern Karenni whose territory lay athwart the River Salween had not only held aloof when all the other chiefs along the Salween had accepted British rule, but had actually invaded a British Shan State west of the river. The Karennis are a race distinct from the Shans or Laos. Two British columns set out to cut him off and the Siamese were invited to co-operate from the east; an invitation which, as might be expected, led to trouble. The Siamese troops moved into Karenni were no help in cornering the chief, but having moved in they remained, disrupting the economy of the State by milking it of its teak and illegally collecting dues. This was no part of any bargain in return for their help, though it

was known thay had some sort of claim to a small tract of territory east of the Salween. The Government of India accepted the suggestion of a Commission to settle the dispute provided it included the investigation and delimitation of the Burma–Siamese frontier further north where the allegiance of certain tribes whether to Burma or Siam was also in doubt. It was also stipulated that claims by British subjects to compensation for disruption of the timber trade should be investigated. Plans for the Joint Commission broke down when the Siamese refused to send their representatives to Rangoon and proposed instead a meeting point in Siamese territory which was serviced neither by railway nor telegraph. Without doubt, they knew their case was a weak one and they wanted to avoid a confrontation.

Despite the breakdown it was decided to assemble and despatch the British side of the Commission. In October 1889 Elias was informed of his appointment as Chief Commissioner and received an imposing document, with a gold coat of arms big enough to impress any wild chief, giving him authority as the Viceroy's representative and containing very detailed instructions for carrying out his task. Before he left Simla and before the Siamese refusal was known he met briefly some of the Siamese officials, but he said afterwards that he had not then appreciated how backward they were. With unpleasant memories of missions behind him Elias now had the chance to run one according to his own ideas. On principle, as we already know, he disapproved of big missions, but this time there was no help for it. A military escort was essential in this wild country, not only to match the Siamese if they should turn up but because the Commission would be entering tribal territory of doubtful allegiance beyond the Salween. He needed to work fast to finish before the heat and rains and that meant decentralizing the work to assistants. He had to carry supplies for the whole force, so that their provision would not bear hardly on the local population. Three times he had seen the bad effects of missions relying too much on local supplies and he was not going to repeat that mistake. In one other respect the Commission was a great improvement on the earlier ones, all of which were commanded by politically inexperienced soldiers. Here he, as the expert, was in full command and the military escort was provided solely for his protection.

His assistant Commissioners were J. G. Scott, Acting Superintendent of the Shan States, W. J. Archer, Vice Consul at Chiengmai in Siam, Major G. Barrow and Captain Jackson. The last named was responsible for the actual survey. There were two doctors, Close and Darwin. The officers with the escort were Colonel Clark and Captain F. J. Pink and the troops consisted of 150 British and Ghurkhas with two guns, together with a detachment of police of the Shan Levies. Altogether

the whole personnel with bearers, bullock drivers and the rest amounted to 600 and needed 700 animals as transport. The Commission was thus of no mean size but at least Elias could reflect that it was less than half the size of some he had been concerned with before. Scott had the administrative task of assembling the party at Fort Stedman, one of the posts established for keeping order in the Shan States.

Some of his assistants deserve a word to show the type of man he had to help him. The photograph of them gives an impression of studied amateurism which belied their ability. Scott had already spent four years in the Shan States, having previously been a schoolmaster in Rangoon and a correspondent with the French troops in the campaign against China. He had got to know his States extremely well and had a way with the Chiefs. He was a somewhat boyish enthusiast who shirked neither adventures, bullets nor hardship, and he had plenty of experience of all three. His diaries, kept mainly for his mother's reading, contain delightful racy comments, thus: 'Villagers doosed skeery of us'. 'H. is coming up to be Commissioner. Doosed hard luck. He'll grab all the credit.' 'Dined with T. Got on very well. Capital dry sherry.' He shared with Elias a dislike of large escorts and more than once settled an inter-State war single-handed, which he claimed saved thousands of pounds in expense, but for which others always got the credit . . . and the awards. However, like Elias, he too got a belated C.I.E., and ultimately, after spending the rest of his career in the Shan States, also a knighthood. As he had earlier written home that he expected to be appointed Commissioner he was probably disappointed at the time, and it was as well that he shared with Elias a keen interest in Shan history and languages and that Elias had to his credit his own *Introductory Sketch of the History of the Shans* which was still an official work of reference. Barrow had had previous experience with Lockhart in Chitral and was the compiler of the official Gazetteer of the Afghan Provinces on the Upper Oxus. Archer was the expert on Siam and spoke the language.

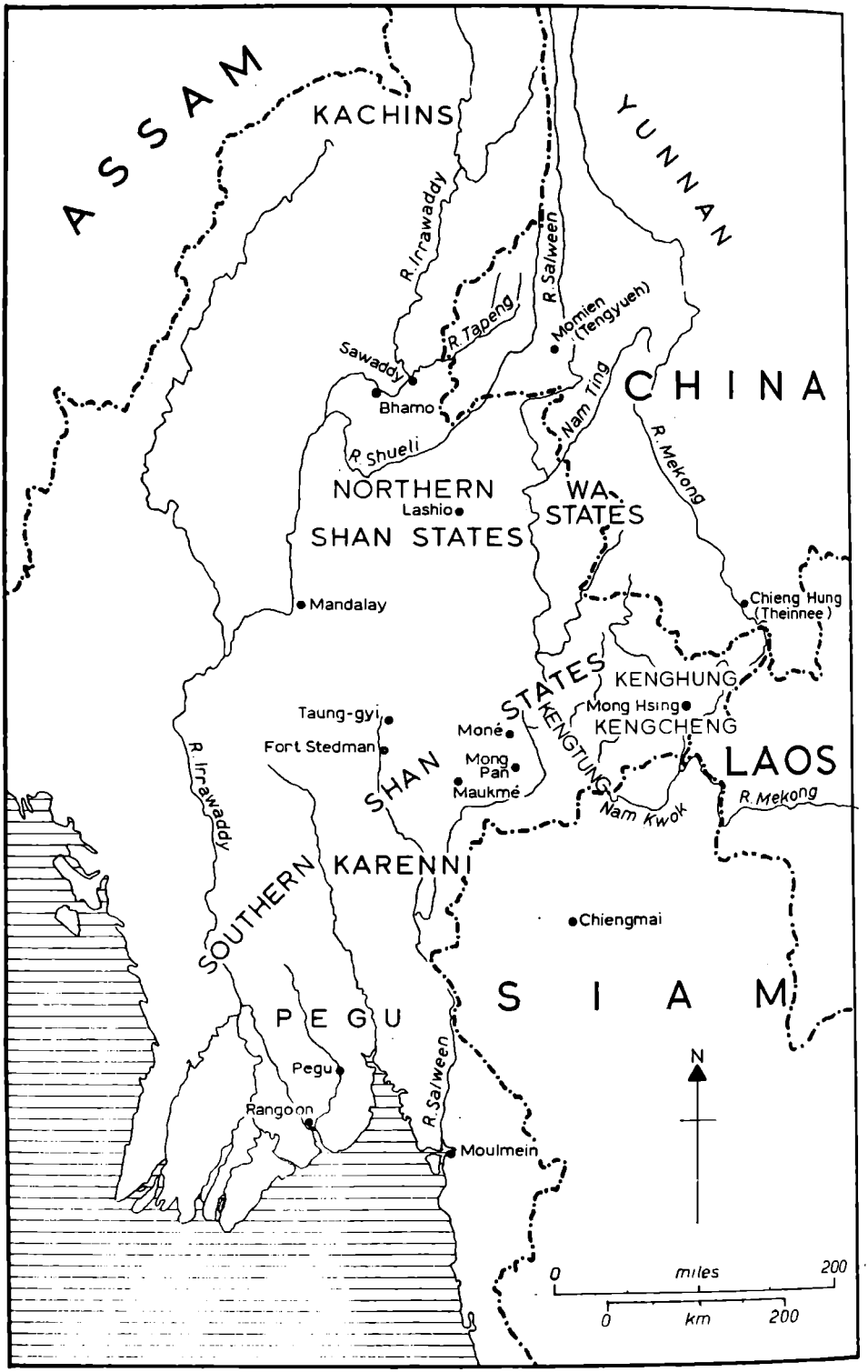
Another colourful character was Pink, who later became a noted martinet and commanded a battalion of The Queen's which won Kitchener's Trophy for the best battalion in India. One of his serjeants recalled that the men took a considerably less enthusiastic view of that competition than Pink, who drove them so hard they nearly mutinied. He had no opinion of any army except the British nor of any regiment except his own and was fond of affirming that all natives were 'Dogs, and sons of'. Pink recollected Elias with affectionate admiration. He said he had been a wonderful little man to work for and had a great sense of humour. Rather reluctantly, but as an insight into his make-up, must be recorded Pink's further recollection that Elias detested Jews.

This dislike was presumably a manifestation of his inherited insecurity which renunciation alone did not allay.

By the beginning of December Scott had collected the transport and the Commission set out for Eastern Karenni. Elias intended to deal first with that State and then work northwards. He soon found how impracticable a country it was for west-east movement because of the scarcity of roads. The Irrawaddy, the Salween and the Mekong all flow approximately north and south; in between lie ranges which Elias might not have called mountains but which rise nevertheless to 7,000 feet and from them short fast-flowing feeders join the three main rivers. The vegetation is sub-tropical jungle and contains most of the noxious animals and insects known to man, generally speaking the smaller the more troublesome. It was much more difficult country than Elias had found in the Shueli valley 450 miles further north and there was every reason therefore to get the job finished before the monsoons began and turned rivers into torrents. Scott says it then rained without ceasing sometimes for three days at a time, and he once recorded a drop of 20°F in twenty minutes.

The instructions given to Elias cannot be faulted. He was to make recommendations for the adjustment of the frontier with evidence supporting his views. He could take evidence on oath, call for Shan and Siamese documents supporting territorial claims, and estimate the value of claims against the Siamese occupation. He could depute his Assistant Commissioners to act on his behalf and jointly to form a sub-Commission. In making recommendations for territorial sovereignty he was to be guided by evidence of relations existing between local States and the powers to which they were tributary at the time of the annexation of Burma by Great Britain. If there were any doubts about a boundary line, he was to choose one defined by natural features, difficult to pass, but which would separate adjacent tribes fairly and equitably. In all matters in which the evidence was in conflict, he was to bear in mind the Government's policy of an amicable situation and should endeavour to compromise. The Viceroy told the Secretary of State that he had intentionally given Elias the fullest possible freedom of action. The crux of the matter and the test of his own skill in finding a solution lay in balancing the selection of suitable geographical boundaries with the satisfaction of ethnological claims.

Before Elias left Fort Stedman he had met Sawlawi, the new Chief of East Karenni, who had replaced Sawlawpaw the chief who had refused allegiance. Apart from his grievance agains the Siamese for their depredations the Chief had some against the British too. He thought we had abandoned his State beyond the Salween to the Siamese and that he had been slighted. He may have had some justification, for Sir



7. Burma: the Third and Eighth Expeditions

Charles Crosthwaite had at one time recommended that we should not occupy any of the trans-Salween States and had suggested that we should offer to treat them as 'independent tributary States in subordinate alliance with India'. He thought this would secure peace without too much British responsibility, though how any savage chief might interpret such a phrase may be left to the imagination. However, when he saw how the Siamese were behaving in Karenni the Chief Commissioner changed his mind.

Elias had originally intended to leave the military escort at Fort Stedman and take only the sixty police with him but hearing on good authority, 'if any authority can be good in this country', that he might meet with Siamese obstruction he decided on bringing the escort up. Before leaving Fort Stedman he had asked for permission to send Scott on a separate mission to Kengtung, the most northerly of the States, whose boundaries and allegiance were in dispute. Permission was refused and he thought the Government had missed possibly the only chance of settling the matter before the roads became impassible.

As soon as Clark's escort arrived the whole Commision set out. In the first week Elias was laid low for five days with fever. This was the only occasion that he ever mentioned a specific complaint in his journals. It turned out to be malaria, which further debilitated him in the years to come. Once in Cis -Salween Karenni he divided the Commission into three survey parties each with an escort and fifteen days supplies. He led one accompanied by Pink, and the other two were led by Scott and Archer. The Chief of the Karenni was with him too, anxious to point out his territory. Elias told him to be conservative and not to claim more than he could prove title to, for there were certain strips of his territory to which the Siamese, or rather the neighbouring Shan chief in Siamese territory, might possibly have a just claim.

He reached the Salween on the last day of the year, at a point where the river was about 200 yards wide. On the opposite bank he saw a stockade with a Siamese flag. Thereupon he hoisted the Union Jack and together with Archer crossed the river unarmed and in plain clothes. The stockade was in charge of a Siamese lieutenant to whom Elias accorded fairly cool treatment. He told him that until the rights and wrongs of the matter had been settled the Siamese had no more claim to Karenni than the British. The lieutenant said he had been sent for the protection and help of the British, to which Elias replied that he had his own escort which was purely for safety and not intended for military occupation, and that he needed neither help nor protection to do his job. The lieutenant could therefore please himself whether he accompanied the party or not. Rather dubiously he decided to stay with the party but departed after two days.

For the next month the Commission was busy hearing claims, inspecting local boundary posts and choosing and surveying a suitable frontier line. Elias had brought the whole escort across the Salween because by this time he had heard frequent reports of the presence of Siamese troops and it was necessary to prove the Commission's right to be there. He soon saw for himself how the Siamese had been helping themselves to teak and taxes and generally disrupting the economy. Local opinion was that the Siamese, fearing they would lose the territory, had decided that 'if they could not have the river they would have the fish'. He found that when the Siamese decided against joining the Commission they had not only withdrawn from the disputed territory but had also split up and established stockades along the Salween in four small neighbouring states north of Karenni which had already given their allegiance to Britain, with the obvious intention of being obstructionist and testing our determination to hold them. Travelling down the river by boat, he met a Siamese major who wanted to stage a reception for him, which Elias firmly refused because he was in disputed territory. He gave the major the same treatment as the lieutenant, which effectively humbled him. Elsewhere Archer found a party of 200 Siamese in occupation and believed that without the escort under Clark he might have been in severe trouble; this was in territory indisputably British. In one of the states the local headman had transferred his allegiance to the Siamese. Elias gave the Siamese troops an ultimatum of twenty-eight hours to clear out. They need no further persuasion and were gone in three hours and a small operation was then mounted which captured the headman and installed a loyal successor. The only trouble was that Scott, who already knew the headman, said afterwards that they had captured the wrong man.

There is no doubt whatever that the Commision would have been in serious difficulties if Elias had not brought up the whole escort, and his firm handling made the right impression on the Siamese and had a sustaining effect on the Shan chiefs. In a letter to the Viceroy's Secretary he said that the Siamese were clearly not advanced enough for a Joint Commission and that a final settlement would have to be dictated at Bangkok.

The unexpectedly impracticable country had slowed the work down and Elias decided on his own authority to reverse the Government's decision and despatch Scott forthwith to Kengtung, the northernmost Shan state, which lay astride the Mekong. It formed a salient between Yunnan and Siam and because of its proximity to French newly acquired territory it was of more than local importance and had never been visited since the annexation. Scott was of course delighted at this opportunity for an independent jaunt. Colonel Clark caused what seems

to have been the only note of dissension in the Commission by refusing Elias's request to provide an escort. He probably thought the escort was already extended enough for safety. Elias merely noted in his daily log that he thought Clark was being unnecessarily obstructionist and got over the difficulty by sending Pink with Dr Darwin and a scratch party of eighteen Sikh police of the Shan Levies and the same number of recruits.

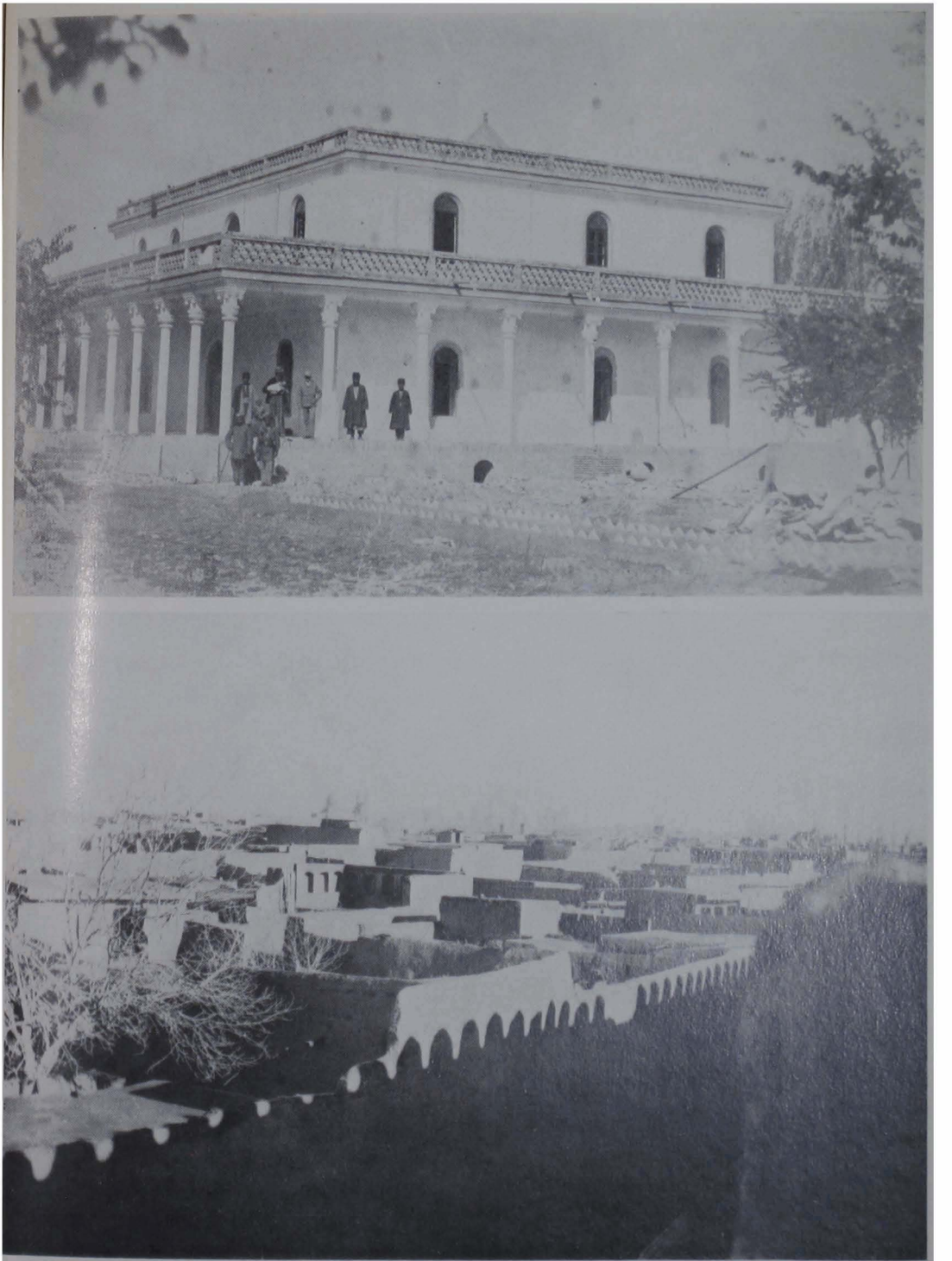
A vivid description of Scott's visit to Kengtung is contained in his biography by his wife, G. E. Mitton (Lady Scott). He found it ruled by a somewhat truculent young Sawbwa (chief) only sixteen years old. Shortly after their arrival he heard a fracas and some shooting. His Indian clerk rushed to his tent shouting, 'Your Honour, there is a battle fighting, there is murder'. If this was a prelude to an attack on his party it would have been extremely serious. He proposed to go and investigate, unarmed as usual. Pink would not hear of this, so they went together and found someone had shot two of the party's muleteers, killing one and wounding the other. Further investigation showed the culprit to be the Sawbwa himself, who was said to be fond of testing his markmanship on people. Evidently, as Scott's clerk remarked, he was 'unacquainted with the Penal Code'. Scott was in no position to put the Sawbwa on trial, so he named a stiff sum in compensation, which was actually paid. Thereafter the Sawbwa reluctantly gave his submission though only after a lot of persuasion and after he had seen a demonstration of shooting and bayonet fighting by the escort. Scott's report on his independent mission was too late for inclusion in the main report but was sent through the Chief Commissioner of Burma. He had successfully forestalled the Siamese and ultimately probably the French as well.

Whilst Scott was away in the north Elias was completing his work in the south. Following his categorical rejection of all Siamese claims, a suitable frontier had to be delineated and surveyed and Jackson's team worked strenuously. The only step which Sir George Crosthwaite did not much like at the time was that Elias himself accepted the submission of all the States concerned and appointed loyal chiefs. He felt the job of receiving their submission should have awaited Scott's return. The omission to define the relationship between the Commission and the Chief Commissioner of Burma was the only lacuna in the instructions Elias had been given. These had said he was to report to the Indian Government's Foreign Department, thus by-passing the Chief Commissioner who not unnaturally feared Burmese interests might be prejudiced. The matter was resolved by arranging that all Elias's interim reports and letters should pass through Crosthwaite 'under flying seal'. Crosthwaite's feelings were finally assuaged when

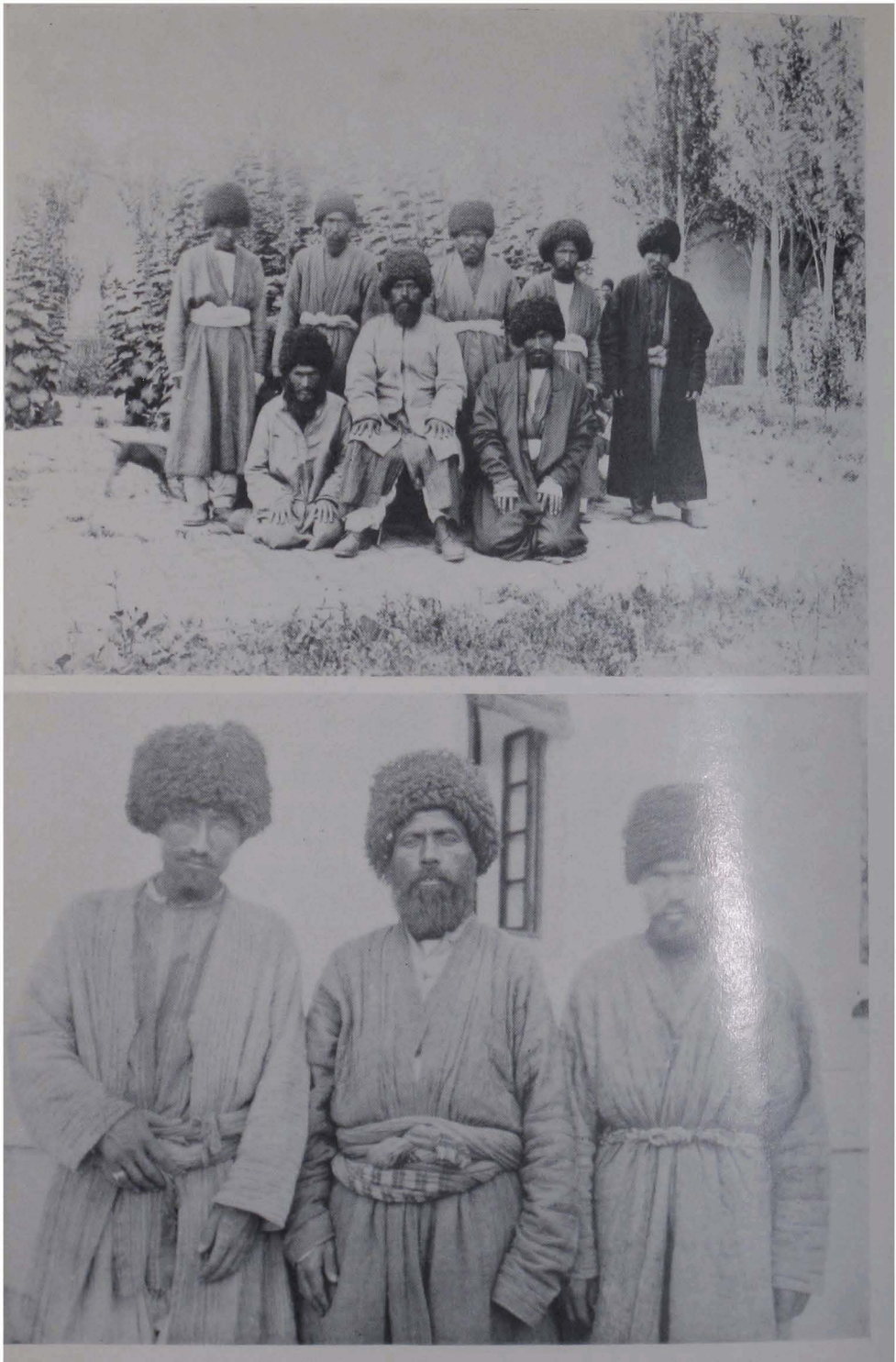
Elias went to Rangoon to complete his report, which he discussed with the Chief Commissioner. He wrote privately to the Viceroy that he found Elias somewhat reticent and prone to compromise but that except for some minor points (which seem to have been put up by Scott) he agreed with all his recommendations.

Only one official complaint came from Siam. In the middle of February, Elias met a Siamese official in British territory whom he expelled with the same brusqueness which he had accorded the Siamese officers, and which indeed was his usual way of dealing with oriental officialdom. This one complained about his curt treatment and a protest was lodged by the Siamese Foreign Office on the grounds that he had been in Siamese territory at the time. The British Foreign Office firmly rejected the grounds for the protest and said that Elias had been fully justified, after which no more was heard on the subject from Bangkok.

By April, and before the weather broke, the Commission had completed its work. Throughout the five months in the field the health of the personnel had remained fairly good considering the climate and the testing conditions. Elias believed that this was at least in part due to a daily dose of quinine, but no doubt it was mainly because the organization had been good and the men's needs well provided for. He had been instructed to submit interim reports if it seemed likely that his final report would not be ready by May and he had adopted this course by sending two, as well as some long letters. He had kept a daily log of events as well, so he had not left himself too much to do at the end. He rejected all the Siamese claims to Eastern Karenni except for two small valleys and this had the advantage that the Salween would lie fully in British territory, for, as a waterway of some importance to the teak industry it would have formed a bad boundary both economically and strategically. Further north he had proved the Siamese had no claims whatever to any part of the four states in which he had found them in temporary occupation. As was only to be expected there were a few difficulties in reconciling ethnological boundaries with suitably defined and strategic geographical boundaries and in these cases he chose the latter, which where possible followed the water parting of the Salween. Supporting reports were also put in by Scott and Archer. The former, in his capacity as Superintendent of the Shan States, criticized part of the proposed southern and eastern Karenni boundary where Elias had recommended allocating a small sector to Siam, and thought that pressed for time he had compromised somewhat arbitrarily. This was rather unfair for the Government's instructions had been to seek an amicable compromise, but Scott disliked giving up any of his cherished territory. When Scott had finished his independent mission, instead of



10. *Top:* The British Residency, Meshed. Elias can be seen holding his terrier, *Bottom:* Meshed from the City Wall (R.G.S.).



11. The Turkoman bodyguard at Meshed (Public Record Office.)

returning immediately to Fort Stedman he went back to Karenni where he found Sawlawi and his people very content with the Commission's findings.

The newspapers did not devote a great deal of space to the work of the Commission. Elias acted as their correspondent, but as far as he was concerned its work was of no great interest. He saw it simply as a matter of boundary delimitation with a backward country and although much of the territory had not been traversed before it did not count in his eyes as exploration. There was no special secrecy in its work and news of its objects and composition was contained in short reports in the Indian papers and in *The Times*. A week after his appointment *The Times* had said that

'Mr Elias the able and experienced chief of the Commission was in Calcutta making preparations and that he would be travelling through a wild country where it would be impossible to procure supplies, so that it would be requisite to travel with a larger baggage train than would otherwise be necessary.'

It looks from this as though Elias still felt the need to excuse the size of his party. Another paper commented that 'rather serious pretensions had been put forward by Siam as to the allegiance of certain tribes claiming British protection, but that Elias was specially qualified to conduct successfully the present delicate mission'. This of course was written before it was known that the Siamese had refused to participate.

Whilst the Commission was in the field Elias found time to send two despatches to *The Times* which were published in March and April. The first described the itinerary which was being followed and the revised plans for the escort which was now accompanying the Commission instead of being left in the rear to back it up. It remarked that no serious difficulties were anticipated

'but in dealing with an Asiatic power it is always as well to be prepared for delays and a certain amount of passive resistance. On the first arrival at the Salween the troops holding the Siamese outpost were inclined to dispute the passage of the river: but the reserve escort cleared the way without bloodshed, though not without having to disarm a Siamese serjeant who displayed more valour than discretion'.

These dry comments especially the one about oriental delays and passive resistance are fully in his form. The second despatch said that the chief of the Commission had now returned to Calcutta and that all the territory in dispute had been mapped and investigated. No settlement had

been arrived at because the Siamese had refused at the last moment to meet the Commission and reach a joint settlement, and the Government of India would now have to settle the frontier direct with the Siamese Government. This Elias said was 'a question of some importance in view of our frontiers in the direction of the French possessions'. After describing how the Siamese had behaved obstructively the despatch ended, 'Lately the relations between the Commissioners and the Siamese were rather strained.'

Reporting the return of the Commission and the good progress made, an Indian paper commented:

'The work of the Commission has been done none the less effectively that it has been done quietly and without fuss. As on former occasions the leader of the expedition has conducted the present enterprise in an altogether faultless manner. The tracing of the frontier was no easy task and the journey along the Salween lay largely in absolutely unknown country among a barbarous if not hostile people. Difficult roads, a trying and treacherous climate . . . and responsibility for the welfare of the expedition are some of the conditions which must be taken into account in any attempt to estimate the arduous nature of this enterprise which is now brought to a close without a hitch.'

He had no hand in writing that report, which is the only one underlining the difficulties and potential risks of the Commission's task. What may be added is that, besides his already proved geographical and diplomatic skills, Elias had now shown himself a most able leader. He may have been lucky in that the non-appearance of the Siamese Commission undoubtedly saved him a lot of tough bargaining, but the obstructionism could easily have led to awkward incidents, and the fact remains that of all the big missions he had ever been concerned with his own was the only one which was trouble-free. His comment to Professor Parker when he was twenty-eight that he had complete confidence in himself may be recalled. Not only had he proved it on every occasion since, but he had now shown he could impart it to his subordinates which is a hall-mark of true leadership. Recalling his lonely days as a small boy in Dresden it might be said that Elias on this Commission contributed in a small way to prove the truth of the observation that noted leaders have often been solitary and introverted in their childhood.

The final report had to run the gauntlet of the various interested parties. Scott's comments have been noted already. Crosthwaite's Chief Secretary wrote that in general he agreed with its findings. Crosthwaite himself, relieved that he had not been by-passed, also gave

it his official blessing, (and indeed writing ten years later he said the work had been good and lasting). He said the Siamese had been unfriendly and that as the Karenni claims had been proved substantially correct we must in honour agree to them. It then became the turn of the Indian Government to study the recommendations and the maps of the proposed boundaries.

It was August 1890 before the Indian Government had completed their study and forwarded the Report and their conclusions to the India Office at home. It was pointed out that the whole investigation was *ex parte* because the Siamese had avoided a joint enquiry. That meant that the actual boundaries would still have to be demarcated and it was important to do so quickly because the French were likely to extend their sphere of influence in the region, and delimitation of the respective British and French spheres was therefore essential. The Indian Government accepted the whole of Elias's recommendations without a single reservation, pointing out that only in Eastern Karenni was any land ownership left for decision. They hoped the Siamese would quickly be evacuated from Trans-Salween Karenni since that State had suffered much under their occupation. This acceptance *in toto* was a great triumph for Elias.

There was a faint echo of the CIE affair about this time. Whilst he was still in the field the acting Secretary of the Foreign Department wrote to Wallace, the Viceroy's Private Secretary, that he wanted a CIE for Younghusband (who had just returned from Hunza) 'if a CSI is out of the question, but on the precedent of Elias perhaps a CIE is all he can expect'. He went on to say in the patronizing tone of a minor bureaucrat 'Incidentally Elias will be coming up for a CSI if he has done his work well in Burma'. There could have been no denying he had done his work well, but in all probability Elias reminded the Secretary with some force that he meant what he said about honours so this time the award was stifled at birth.

To summarize the results of Elias's recommendations it will suffice to to refer again to the Viceroy's memorandum discussed earlier in this chapter. Besides the State of Kengtung which Scott had visited there were two other major Shan States in this salient both of them lying astride the Mekong. Elias, in his own note to the Viceroy, recommended that as China had some pretensions to Kenghung which was the more northerly of the two we should intimate to the Chinese that we had no intention of pressing any rights there that we had inherited from Burma. This would appease China in return for the stand we were taking against her claim on the Irrawaddy basin. Lansdowne agreed and would have considered making a stipulation that China should not in her turn transfer Kenghung to any other state, but as it would be so obviously

aimed at France he thought it might give rise to complications. Ultimately in 1894, when China took this state over, Lord Salisbury did nevertheless include the stipulation. But it was wasted for China very quickly ceded a portion of the state to France and Siam yielded Laos which after all gave France a boundary coterminous with Burma.

Between Kenghung and Kengtung lay the third major state of Kengcheng, which the Viceroy thought we might transfer to Siam. Unfortunately this State became a shuttlecock batted about between Britain, Siam and France. When Scott visited it in 1891 the Sawbwa offered submission to the British which Scott was not empowered to accept, and he was told he must consider himself under Siamese protection. Within a year French expansion caused a *volte face* in our policy and the Sawbwa was told he must now consider himself under the British. Most naturally he objected to this ambivalent treatment and he turned as a last resort to the French, whereupon we removed him from office. This episode did no credit to the British Government.

The Viceroy next referred to Siamese claims on Trans-Salween Karenni. The Indian Government had of course just accepted Elias's findings that they had none, but agreement still had to be reached in London and Bangkok and the Viceroy now wrote that he would be very sorry to make any concessions. It is enough to note here that the boundaries recommended by Elias were ultimately accepted by Siam in 1893 and that they remain unchanged today. Finally on the subject of the Burma–China frontier it should be recorded that in connection with Chinese claims on the Irrawaddy basin the Viceroy's Note was ultimately adopted as official policy and expanded into a Memorandum which became the brief for the British delegates at the series of Burma-China Frontier Conferences. By that time a further suggestion by Elias had been acted upon, namely that an exploring party should set out from Assam to reconnoitre the disputed region between the Salween and the Irrawaddy and ascertain whether there was a conspicuous waterparting range which would make a natural frontier. The Conferences began in 1892 and ended in the Convention of 1894. His Note of 1891 was his last outstanding contribution to the policy and geography of China and Central Asia and it is fitting that like his last mission it should have had such enduring results. For nearly twenty-five years his life geographically and politically speaking had been bound up with China and with all the countries on her western and southern frontiers, and for most of that time, whether heeded or not, he had been the Indian Government's only expert on this vast region; but a break had come. From his next and last post he would be viewing Central Asia from the Middle East.

Chapter XVI

CONSUL GENERAL IN PERSIA

Russian Intrigue and Persion Corruption

In December 1891 the *Gazette* announced that the Queen had been 'graciously pleased to appoint Ney Elias, CIE, as Her Majesty's Consul General for the Province of Khorassan and Seistan and to reside at Meshed'. Khurasan borders the Soviet Republic of Turkmenistan to the north and the Herat province of Afghanistan to the east, whilst Sistan further south also borders Afghansitan as well as Baluchistan. At that time Persia, to use the earlier name, was a country of growing importance to Europe, both strategically and economically, and Meshed was very far from being a backwater. From there not only could Elias bring the weight of his experience of High Asia to bear from the angle of Western Asia, but he would be able to utilize his flair for diplomacy towards increasing British influence in the region. The appointment of Consul General covered only one side of his work. The other and more important side that was he was the Agent to the Governor General of India, i.e. the Viceroy, by whom he was chosen in the first place. Hence he was answerable both to the Government of India and, through the British Minister in Tehran, to the Foreign Office in Whitehall; strangely enough this dual role worked well in practice.

Besides his professional qualifications there were personal reasons for appointing Elias. He was now forty-seven and as Sir Percy Sykes later remarked he had become the doyen of a series of great travellers in Central Asia. But it must have become obvious to the Government of India and sadly also to himself that his travelling days were over: only courage and determination had seen him through his last three active roles. The climate of Calcutta did not suit him and because of it he would have been unable to give his best in the Foreign Department there. Not that the climate of Meshed was ideal; though dry it had extremes of temperature with piercingly cold winds in winter. On the other hand, at an altitude of 3,000 feet it was easy in summer to escape on horseback to pleasant resorts in the mountains nearby. Meshed had a special appeal to him as a centre from which to pursue his historical studies of the tribes of Central Asia. Persia was noted for her historians and in Meshed he was likely to gain access to writings and rock inscrip-

tions which he had already heard about on his travels and in his talks with tribesmen in Turkestan, whose history was often recorded in Persian as well as in Turki. Commenting on his appointment the *St James's Gazette* said the Indian Government was to be congratulated on its selection.

'Wherever Mr Ney Elias has had an opportunity of showing his qualities he has proved himself a man of capacity and tact and he has accomplished feats which long ago entitled him to far more generous recognition than has been accorded to him. As Consul General at Meshed he will hold a post for which he is particularly fitted.'

As to the strategic and economic reasons why Persia in general and Khurasan and Sistan in particular had become so important at that time, it needs no imagination to realize that Russia was the clue. The text book for the period is Curzon's remarkably detailed and accurate work, *Persia and the Persian Question*; it was a sequel to his earlier *Russia in Central Asia* and, as before, he wrote it after studying Persia at first hand whilst special correspondent for *The Times*. Curzon was no lofty casual commentator; he made himself a master of his subject firstly by travel the hard way (he must be the only man to become a Foreign Secretary and a Viceroy who habitually cooked his own dinner on the road) and secondly by painstaking research. He published his book in 1892, only a short time before he became Under Secretary of State for India. Up till then the growing importance of Persia had been insufficiently recognized at home and Curzon did a great deal to correct the balance.

Our contact with Persia had begun in about the year 1800, when there were actual fears that Napoleon, with Russia, might invade India across the Caspian. An invasion by Afghanistan was also a possibility to be guarded against. Accordingly we signed a treaty with Persia which provided that she should not make peace with Afghanistan, her traditional enemy and then occupying parts of Persia, unless the Amir renounced his designs on India. In return we agreed to help Persia with weapons and in other ways, if she was attacked either by Afghanistan or by the French.

In 1814 we signed another treaty aimed against France, in which it was agreed that all European armies hostile to England should be excluded from Persia; this treaty gave us high status in Persia. We even succeeded the French as instructors and organizers of the Persian army. What we failed to foresee at the time was that Russia and not France was the real danger. In 1800 Russia had annexed Georgia from Persia and by 1825 she had occupied Erivan and Tabriz

as well. By the treaty of Turkomanchai signed between the two countries in 1828 and followed by a Commercial Treaty, Persia was no longer fully independent. Under the treaty Russia obtained certain extra-territorial privileges which were immediately claimed by other Western nations.

To balance her heavy loss of territory to Russia, Persia went to war with Afghanistan in 1832 to try to gain new territory, or rather recover former territory, for Afghanistan had once been a province of Persia. This caused serious though possibly exaggerated alarm in India, for if she was successful Russian influence could well become established up to the Hindu Kush. The Eastern question really dated from this period. The last date to note is 1885 when we concluded our treaty with Afghanistan as a bulwark against Russia as well as strengthening her against Persia. It did not however, prevent Persia from occupying Herat and for a short time we were at war with Persia. Much of the continual antagonism between the two countries can be accounted for by the fact that though both were Moslem by religion, the Persians were adherents of the Shiah sect whilst the Afghans were Sunnis and the two sects blended no better than oil and water, especially when roused against each other by their mullahs.

Meanwhile, Russia was still expanding in Central Asia, and with the complete occupation of Trans-Caspia and a contiguous boundary she was in the strongest position to influence Persia eastwards from the Caspian. She now governed Bokhara and Samarkand as well as Merv and Khiva. She had built a railway, the Trans-Caspian, which linked all these cities and territory as far as Tashkent and was in process of extending it. During the same fifty-year period Britain had not been altogether idle, for we had gradually annexed the fertile provinces of India as well as British Baluchistan; we had gained control of the foreign relations of Afghanistan, which in effect made Britain her suzerain; and railways had been constructed as far as Quetta and Karachi, south of Afghanistan. But in the light of Russian expansion our main object in Persia was to maintain a *status quo*.

Internally the great difficulty Western nations had to contend with was the corruption of all governors and officials in Persia whose sole desire it was to amass wealth and as quickly as possible. Western interests in the development of Persia included the short-lived Tobacco Régie, a British contract granted by the Shah to control all the tobacco in the country. The concession was abused and created disturbances which caused the Shah to cancel the contract; for a time it did no good to British prestige. More successful was the telegraph, which was a credit to British engineers though for long its vagaries, due to pilfering of telegraph posts and other forms of petty exploitation, made it less than

reliable. The administration of the customs was in Belgian hands. The British firm of Reuter held the concession to construct railways and develop mines, and the same firm also ran the Imperial Bank of Persia. To counter the last Russia established the Russian Bank. She used it just as she had already done in China as a political weapon to gain financial control and through it she launched a loan which severely crippled the country. This did not make the Russians popular; in fact, their heavy-handedness throughout Central Asia made them consistently unpopular albeit usually respected. But so far as Persia was concerned the Shah, Nasir-Ud-Din, whose reign lasted fifty years, was unpopular too and if Russia had annexed the whole country most would have accepted it resignedly as the will of Allah. In Central Asia people were, as we have seen, accustomed to exploitation by their rulers; it was not the principle but merely the degree against which they sometimes rebelled. By the time Elias arrived there Russian and British spheres of influence had become defined enough to be shown on some maps of the day. Russia had the northern sphere from the Caspian Sea along the whole of Trans-Caspia on the north, and along the Herat boundary with Afghanistan to the east. Great Britain's sphere was the south which included all the ports on the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. On the east it included Persia's boundary with Baluchistan, which had been partly demarcated in 1872, as far as the southern part of Afghanistan. Thus Khurasan with Meshed lay in the Russian sphere whilst Sistan fell in the British sphere.

Just as north of the Hindu Kush and in Chinese Turkestan, Russia enjoyed the immense advantage strategically and commercially of interior lines of communication which she exploited to the fullest. Britain and India were on the circumference with the disadvantage of no railway system in Persia, but with one big advantage of access to the ports in the south. Russia in her expansion was casting envious eyes on outlets in the Gulf or the Indian Ocean, but in spite of her geographical advantage, which enabled her to flood Persia with Russian-made goods, she had by no means a monopoly. India traditionally traded overland with Persia through Afghanistan and also by sea to Persian ports on the Arabian Sea. Her trade could have been greatly increased if it had not been for the punishing dues exacted by the Amir of Afghanistan, ultimately to his own advantage. Even so Curzon calculated that the combined British and Indian trade with Meshed exceeded Russian trade in total value.

It might be thought that since Afghanistan was now reasonably firmly established by treaty as a friendly buffer state, we should not have been too worried by Russian activity in the country beyond Afghanistan. But British notions of suzerainty, unlike China's, involved

a *quid pro quo*. The Amir's relations with foreign states were controlled by us and in return if he was attacked we were bound to go to his defence. Since Afghanistan and Persia were historic and religious enemies and Russia would be quick to seize her opportunity if there was war between the two countries, Britain was in consequence very concerned indeed that no more of Persia fell into Russian hands. Whilst Russian activity was still being maintained in the Pamirs, although on a reduced scale, it had recently been greatly increased in Persia. Both Alexander and Timur (Tamerlane) had reached India by way of Persia and it was still the most obvious invasion route. Hence Meshed as a listening-post was now more important than Leh or Kashgar.

Besides its coterminity with Trans-Caspia and Afghanistan and its strategic importance, Russia had a more immediate interest in Khurasan in that it was the most fertile region in north Persia. Somewhat to the detriment of its own economy it supplied Trans-Caspia, which included the large non-productive area of the Karakum desert, with almost all its grain as well as fresh produce. That provided an additional temptation to Russia to annex the province. Her interest in Sistan was at a longer range. Lying more than 500 miles south of Khurasan, this province, formerly fertile, was now largely a desert region, but it was halfway towards an outlet on the Indian Ocean and it lay on the southern strategic route to India. It was for this reason that Britain had occupied part of Baluchistan which was strictly a geographical region extending into Persia and inhabited by nomad Baluchi tribes.

This outline serves to show the importance of Persia to Britain as well as Russia towards the end of the nineteenth century. At the time Elias arrived the cold war was being fought just as actively there as in the Pamirs, the only difference being that the field of campaign was a sovereign if backward State instead of a mountainous Tom Tiddler's ground. Whether or not Russia ever seriously contemplated an invasion of India (General Kuropatkin's key plan was such common knowledge that with hindsight it is possible to suspect a 'plant'), Persia offered her a wonderful field for the further embarrassment of Britain and India, and exceptional opportunities for the Russian taste for intrigue. She made the best possible use of this latter characteristic, often maladroitly and sometimes absurdly, and it needed an astute and experienced man to counter it. Even though this part of his work did not at all accord with his own inclinations, Elias was by now resigned and accustomed to the intrigue which was inseparable from work on India's frontiers.

To reach Meshed he went by sea to the Gulf, probably Bushire. On his journey north we do not know whether he travelled by Government post, which meant that the traveller received about as much consideration as a piece of his own baggage, or whether he hired or

bought his own ponies and camels. He had plenty of experience of the latter method, and as he was an important official and had to make a due impression he is almost sure to have chosen it in preference to the post. The long journeys and great distances from civilization which faced an official in those pre-jet days were inseparable from their jobs and not worthy even of comment. Fast time for this particular journey was a month, but that winter it took Elias two months of laborious and painful travel for he fell seriously ill *en route*.

On arrival at Meshed at the end of December 1891 he was only just well enough to receive an official welcome from the Persian Governor of Khurasan. It began some miles from the city and lasted for three days with much tea drinking, exchanges of visits, guards of honour and all the usual oriental honorific speeches. In the circumstances this was a severe ordeal but he submitted to it well knowing the importance, as Her Majesty's representative, of giving the best possible impression of the dignity and authority which Eastern countries expected. The impression would have been somewhat dissipated by the insignificant official residence in the bazaar quarter, which was the best his predecessor had been able to do for himself. This residence had called forth the scorn of Curzon, not only in his book but in a long letter to *The Times*. He compared it most unfavourably with the spacious Russian Consulate General and described it as 'little short of discreditable and in attenuated and miserable surroundings'. 'An immediate duty', he said, 'was imposed on the Government to provide for the maintenance of the Consul General in a style and in quarters better fitted to represent to the native mind the prestige of a great and wealthy power.' These views were already held strongly by Elias, and in a postscript to his book Curzon was happily able to record that Elias had succeeded in acquiring a worthy site.

Knowing his dislike of society, it would have been interesting to learn how Elias reacted to the little European community in Meshed; it consisted of only eight men and four wives, but it must have seemed a hive of society after Leh. His own staff consisted of a Vice Consul, E. C. Ringler Thomson, whose wife was also there, an Assistant Consul, Fraser, with Dr Woolbert, as Surgeon, and an Attaché, Khan Bahadur Moula Bakhsh, as interpreter and adviser on Persian affairs. For supposed reasons of safety foreigners in Meshed always had to ride and to accompany him he had a personal guard of two sergeants and three privates of the Queen's Own Corps of Guides, fine men in imposing uniforms. Besides these there was a Persian guard of a sergeant and six men and a bodyguard of twenty-two Turkoman Sowars. For a time there was an Indian assistant attaché until he had to be removed from Meshed somewhat hurriedly.

As for the rest of the European community, what mattered most to Elias was the rival Russian Consulate General. The Consul General was M. de Vlassow, who was the first incumbent of the post and had been appointed in 1888. It was on account of his appointment that our own Consulate General had been established under Elias's predecessor, Colonel (later General) MacLean. Russian Consuls General in the East were of higher standing than their fellow diplomats in Europe, consequently de Vlassow had a somewhat larger staff than Elias and ranked as a Major General. It must have given some piquancy to life in Meshed that both de Vlassow and his Secretary had English wives and for good measure there was also Madame de Vlassow's daughter, Miss Fitzroy, an attractive young lady. Did these three ladies, who thus had a footing in both the rival camps, always manage to avoid talking 'shop' or did they too take a discreet part in the intrigue which was the principal activity in Meshed? An occasion when one of them let a cat out of the bag will appear later.

Meshed was only about 200 miles west of Bala Murghab in Herat, where Elias had convalesced with the Afghan Boundary Commission in 1886, and observing activities along the boundary it had demarcated was to be one of his major concerns. Between Meshed and the Afghan border lies a range of mountains which are a continuation and declination of the Pamirs and the Hindu Kush. Meshed was the capital city of both Khurasan and Sistan and the Persian Governor General of this province had his seat there. It was also a holy city with a large priestly and extremely fanatical population. Historically Khurasan had been a cockpit of wars, though not at all because its indigenous inhabitants were warlike – like the Turkis of Chinese Turkestan these Tajiks or settlers wanted only to trade or cultivate their fertile valleys. The reason for its stormy past lay in its geographical location. Alexander had passed through it and Chingis had laid it waste. As matters stood it was now in some danger of again being caught up in conflict. Through Khurasan Russia could turn the Afghan flank and in that event Sistan would also become important to Russia, because it flanked any western approach to Afghanistan and India and was therefore a threat if in foreign hands. That explains the interest she had recently begun to show in this insalubrious region where the 'Wind of Herat', said to originate in the Pamirs, swept it at forces of up to 70 miles an hour for a third of the year.

Sistan was populated mainly by nomad Baluchis, but the populations of Meshed and Khurasan was far more heterogeneous. Besides the original Iranians of Aryan stock there were Arabs, Timuris, Turks, Kurds, Hazaras, Baluchis and Turkomans, and some with Mongol blood, the descendants of the hordes of Chingis and later of Timur. Nomad tribesmen made up about a quarter of this mixed population.

They lived in black goats-hair tents, grazing their flocks towards the mountains in the spring and back to the plains in the autumn. In so doing they covered hundreds of miles and only reluctantly were beginning to recognize national boundaries. At least six different languages were spoken and Khurasanis had in common only the Moslem faith, unless one includes a detestation of the Persian government and a complete lack of loyalty to the Shah. Ethnically these peoples were of immense interest to Elias, who had met their kith and kin throughout Central Asia. Whilst in Meshed he compiled a complete list of all the tribal groups in Khurasan giving their locations, districts of origin, and the number of families in each. There were over forty and such a diverse number of minorities would have presented any modern local government administration with some pretty problems. He may have intended to use the list as part of a thesis or perhaps for a more ambitious work on the ethnology of the tribes of Central Asia, but too little time was left to him, and the list remains in manuscript.

His first task after his round of ceremonial visits was over was to study the internal conditions of Khurasan and Sistan. As a realist he was not likely to have been unduly put out by what he found. He knew that government in Persia was traditionally corrupt and inefficient so he would not have been overmuch concerned to learn that the pay of the soldiers in the province was seven months in arrears and that it was because their officers had misappropriated it. Naturally enough, the soldiers started to create disturbances and they were about to be relieved. There were also disturbances in the north-east where the tribesmen were out of hand because the Shah could not spare the troops to keep order. Events like these merely set the general pattern to be expected. Conditions could have been worse, and indeed they became a lot worse as time went on.

Elias had also to study the current relations between Persia and Afghanistan. He was bound to be closely involved in these because there was constant friction between the Governor General and the Governor of Herat, the frequently disturbed and dissident Afghan province bordering Khurasan. By the terms of our treaty with Afghanistan, which made Britain responsible for her external relations, the two Governors could only communicate through Elias. As go-between in his capacity as the Viceroy's Agent he had here a responsible task in keeping the peace. At the time the chief potential source of trouble was the refugees from both countries living in Herat and Meshed, but he had also to keep a close watch lest minor frontier incidents became major issues.

As Consul General it did not appear at first that his work would be very onerous. It would be familiar enough for already at Leh he had

had to support and encourage British and Indian trade with Kashgar, and this was his principal consular task at Meshed. It also meant dealing with the usual difficulties, such as non-payment for goods by Persian merchants, the release of goods wrongly held by the Persian customs, and in general seeing that justice was done to British subjects as far as possible according to British standards. One of his first actions was to report on the delays and breakdowns on the telegraph line to Tehran and Sir Frank Lascelles, the Minister, noted appreciatively how quick and accurate he was at summing up the causes and remedies needed. The actions of the Dutch Manager of the Imperial Bank of Persia caused trouble also and indeed the running of the Bank caused friction throughout his time in Meshed.

The most demanding of his duties as Agent was to watch and report on Russian activities, not only in Persia and on the Herat frontier but in Russian Trans-Caspia, and just as importantly on Russian relations with Afghanistan. After his experiences in Chinese Turkestan and the Pamirs, he knew as well as anyone the Russian capacity for intrigue. He had seen something of the machinations of Petrovski in Kashgar but even so he may well have been impressed, even appalled, as he gradually learned the extent of the web of espionage woven by de Vlassow from Meshed. De Vlassow and Petrovski were alike in some respects; both men were intelligent, well-read and enjoyed entertaining, but when it came to plotting de Vlassow had no rival. The gradual realization of what he was up against must have been very depressing to Elias; with no taste for plotting, yet he had to uphold British prestige and willy nilly he found himself drawn into countering de Vlassow's activities. In so doing he scored some considerable successes, aided no doubt by the Russian tendency towards clumsiness. It meant appointing his own reliable native agents, or newswriters as they were called, as well as discovering what de Vlassow's men were up to and which Persian officials were in his pay. Altogether, life in Meshed was going to prove no idyll in a Persian garden.

One of the more unpleasant features of Meshed was the particularly insanitary condition of the city. For example, a water-way which could have been made beautiful ran down the centre of the wide main street but the authorities allowed it to be a noisome drain. An alarming outbreak of cholera occurred during Elias's first summer there and quickly spread to the surrounding countryside. The life of the city came to a standstill. De Vlassow and Elias took their staffs off to the hills, but not before two of the latter's native servants had succumbed. He had to send daily reports to Lascelles for the information of the Shah and at one time he estimated the death rate at 200 a day, notwithstanding that it was a milder form of cholera than in India. He adopted the

practice laid down for the army in India in such epidemics, which was to strike camp every day and march slowly to a new site; and this he kept up till August, when the outbreak had abated. One useful result was that at his representation the Shah ordered all slaughter houses to be removed to sites outside the city. The outbreak caused riots in Asterabad (Gorgan) and one time a rumour was current that Russian doctors were poisoning people to prevent the spread of the infection, an act that even de Vlassow would never have inspired. A cholera epidemic must have been a most alarming experience to live through in those days when Dr Collis Browne's specific of Chlorodyne was almost the only known remedy.

Back again in Meshed, Elias had to report disturbances in Sistan due to dissatisfied Afghan Baluchi tribesmen wishing to emigrate to Persia, just as nomads did when they found conditions not to their liking in the days before the West invented boundaries. Afghan troops pursued them and there were casualties on both sides. At the Governor General's request Elias intervened with the Governor of Herat. The Governor General himself was saddled with numbers of Afghan refugees whom he would have been willing to exchange for Persian refugees in Afghanistan, but dared not because he said the Amir of Afghanistan was becoming even harsher in his punishments than before, if that was possible. He was probably not exaggerating for the British Indian newswriter in Kabul who was apt to retail with relish anything gruesome or scandalous, and seems to have had sources very close to the Amir's household, had lately reported that in one month alone the Amir had ordered six people to be thrown down the Dark Well. Three of these were women of his own household who had committed the heinous offence of becoming pregnant. Judging by the newswriter's monthly reports, the Dark Well must have been a spacious affair. He also reported in the same month that three miscreants had been condemned to having their eyes gouged out and three more had been condemned to death by being fired from the muzzle of a cannon. For the sake of economy they were all roped together and disposed of in one shot. The various bits and pieces were subsequently gathered up and considerately buried.

This was about the same time that the rebellion against the Amir, previously referred to in connection with his withdrawal from Shighnan, broke out at Maimena in Herat. There was evidence that a local mischief maker was at work with Russian sanction. The Amir defeated the disaffected Uzbeg tribes concerned, who fled to Russian territory where they were naturally enough not welcome. Russia, at least recognizing our treaty rights when it suited her, asked us to negotiate with the Amir for their return, but when the trouble died down most of

them returned to Afghanistan of their own accord, finding life under the Amir less irksome than in Russia, where they were not allowed to settle with their flocks.

The perennial feud between Meshed and Afghanistan now entered a new phase. Meshed, as an important centre of the Shiah sect with influential mullahs and many religious students, was always concerned for the welfare of its co-religionists and passions were quickly aroused if wrongs were suspected against them; foreigners and other infidels were then made the scapegoats. A persecution had begun against Afghans of the rival sect Sunni living in Meshed because it was said that subjects of the Amir who happened to be Shiahs were being persecuted in Afghanistan. Prompted no doubt by the mullahs, the Governor General asked Elias to intercede with the Amir to put a stop to it, pointing out that by Persia's treaty with Britain she could not go to war with Afghanistan. Elias said that the Amir's treatment of his own subjects was an internal affair and that we could not intervene, but he seized the opportunity to warn the Governor General of the risk of mob violence in his own capital if he did not stop Afghan persecution there. Altogether the risk of religious feeling between the two countries leading to something worse was becoming too great to be ignored and at Lascelles' request the Viceroy took the matter up with the Amir. The latter's reply was that there were very few Shiahs in Afghanistan and if there was any persecution it must be at Russian instigation (both countries often found Russia useful as a scapegoat), but that he himself was greatly concerned about the treatment of his subjects in Meshed. The Governor General's reply, which was conveyed through Elias (who more or less drafted it for him), was that both countries must ensure that there was no persecution and this seems to have satisfied the mullahs for disturbances ceased for the time being.

Whilst all this was going on Elias discovered that de Vlassow had bribed the officials of the Persian telegraph to let him have copies of all through telegrams passing, as most of them would be, to India. This was scarcely a friendly act, but it was not made the subject of any official complaint. Besides, by this time Elias himself probably had a few informants amongst Persians with Russian contacts. What was regarded as serious, however, was the increase of Russian activity in Sistan and on the Baluch frontier. To counter it the Indian Government decided to send Lieutenant the Hon. H. D. Napier to Sistan and the district of Kain for eighteen months. When de Vlassow heard about it he sent a Russian doctor there on the excuse of investigating an outbreak of plague, though he had previously told Elias he did not believe it and had firmly denied to him that he had sent the doctor. Russians then, just as Russians today, did not seem to mind being found out in their

untruths. Elias not only knew the doctor had gone but he also knew that de Vlassow had given him a letter of introduction to the Chief of Kain. The result was that Napier's reception in Kain was none too friendly and the Chief had to be called to order by the Shah and apologize to us. Napier fared better in Sistan, where he had been warned to work as unostentatiously as possible because the boundary between the province and Afghanistan had not been defined and the Shah was anxious lest the subject be raised. He reported that he was being shadowed by two more Russian doctors, but it turned out that they were ornithologists who really were more concerned with birds than with Napier; nevertheless they were not above dropping hints that plague would break out in Sistan if the province persisted in dealing with India. It was discovered later that one of Napier's own servants was in de Vlassow's pay.

During all this time the Russians never ceased their intrigues along their Herat frontier. There were reports that a Russian officer was telling the Afghans there that if a British force entered Afghanistan as was rumoured, the Russians would help drive them out. The Amir complained to the Viceroy that Russian officers were crossing the Herat border without the Governor's consent and were behaving high-handedly. As another act calculated to annoy the British, General Kuropatkin was expelling all Indian traders from Trans-Caspia at short notice, but a complaint by our Ambassador at St Petersburg caused the order to be countermanded. Elias discovered that the Persian Foreign Office representative at Meshed was acting as interpreter for de Vlassow in his intrigues with disaffected Afghans, and de Vlassow scored another point when with the help of this official he obtained the dismissal of the Deputy Governor of the Persian District of Sarakhs on the grounds of suspected intrigue with Britain. Elias was discreetly silent as to the justification. The Russians were also circulating in Persia an anti-British journal; the strange feature about it was that it was printed in London.

It is evident that during his first year of office Elias's health was deteriorating seriously. One of the requirements of his work was to travel extensively about Khurasan and Sistan to show the people that Russia was not the only country interested in Persia. But he was no longer up to it and was only able to make short journeys which did, however, afford him opportunities for historical research. He was particularly interested in rock inscriptions dating back to the days of the Mongol conquest, and Moula Bakhsh translated two for him which he reported to the Royal Asiatic Society. One of these was at Khurambad and referred to a certain Muhammed Kwarazm Shah, who was pursued there in AD 1220 by two guards sent by Chingis Khan. The second had first been seen by Napier on a rocky pass north of Meshed. In this

apocryphal inscription the scribe praised his master, a notable Uzbeg warrior. Making due allowance for the greatness of Allah but hopeful no doubt of royal favours to come, he began:

'By divine favour and grace and by Providential assistance his Majesty, Lord of the Happy Conjunction, the Emperor, Conqueror of Countries, the Implorer of Aid of the aiding God, Abul Fath, Learned of the World and Viceregent of the Merciful, may the days of his glory be perpetuated, and may the spirits of the exigencies of his generosity be prolonged. God has given precedence to warriors with their riches and souls over people who go not to wars.'

After this modest beginning the author praised his master's victory 'over a multitude of infidels and deviationists in the year 915 (AD 1410) and honoured them by leading them into the road of Paradise' (massacred them?). 'The speed of his campaign was such that the quick flying bird of conception and the swift paced steed of imagination are impotent and powerless to conceive and imagine their survey'. We may hope the scribe was suitably rewarded for his effort for the victory he described was in reality a defeat. It is perhaps of passing interest to learn that there were deviationists even in those days.

Elias's other relaxation was the building of a new Consulate General to his own designs and fully up to the standards which both he and Curzon believed necessary to uphold British prestige in Asia. The first signs of his interest in architecture had appeared in his schoolboy diary in Dresden, and later he had commented enthusiastically on the glories of Benares. In more recent years it may be recalled that he had thought it a pity the Amir of Afghanistan did not erect imposing buildings to impress the populace as the Chinese did. He must have been delighted at this unexpected chance to be his own architect and to put his ideas into bricks and mortar and beautiful gardens.

The building was accomplished with great speed and was finished, with the eight acres of gardens laid out and trees planted, early in 1893. The *St James's Budget* re-published Lord Curzon's picture of the former Residency, which it described as a battered caravanserai, alongside one of the imposing new edifice. It was of two storeys surrounded by a broad Corinthian pillared verandah which supported a balcony, with a domed cupola on the flat roof. There was also a hospital, which from his days in Ladakh Elias had regarded as such a valuable adjunct to prestige in Asia. The grounds were enclosed within a wall, with a gateway and turrets in the Persian style. There is no doubt of the effect it had on our standing in Khurasan where many had begun to think Russian influence would always predominate.

The Times correspondent in Tiflis reported that in comparison the Russian Consulate was now quite insignificant. He said the people of the city and the surrounding countryside had not failed to notice the improvement and that the report that the English 'General' as he was commonly styled, had built a grand house for himself and was evidently of higher rank than the Tzar's representative, was likely to be noised abroad far and wide. Recent notables who had come to Meshed to pay their respects to the new Governor were said to have paid particular attention to this outward and visible sign of British influence.

The Residency impressed later generations of British travellers quite as much as Asian visitors. But in half a century its epitaph came to be written, for with the granting of independence to India the British Government was no longer responsible for its upkeep. Wilfred Blunt has graphically described the desolation of the Residency when he saw it some twelve years ago:

'. . . Ruins less spectacular than those of Persepolis but more poignant in that they bear immediate witness to the happy life that so recently flowed here. . . . Crumbling walls, . . . glassless amateur water-colours . . . hang upon bulging walls from which Morris wallpaper is peeling . . . English armchairs half buried under fallen ceilings . . . toys where once children played. . . . "Look out!" cried Mr Raj, the caretaker, stepping briskly aside as half a hundredweight of roof fell on the landing. "Tell them in Tehran," he said "what it is like here. I have written many times." I said I would tell them. I am still haunted by that scene and by the tearful eyes of Mr Raj as he said goodbye and returned to the desolation he must call his home.'

Shortly afterwards, Sir Clarmont Skrine, one of our last Consuls General at Meshed (he had previously been Consul General at Kashgar) was able to get a small *ex gratia* grant for urgent repairs but by now the ruin must be virtually complete. It is a sad end, but its designer and first occupant would no doubt have reflected on the cities and palaces he had seen in Central Asia, battered by wars and buried by sands and would have expected no more than an ephemeral existence for his own contribution. It had after all served its turn. He knew his *Rubaiyat* and he would surely recall the words of Omár Khayyám, himself a Khurasani from Naisháp̀úr:

'They say the Lion and the Lizard keep
The Courts where Jamshýd gloried and drank deep.'

There is a personal touch in the picture reproduced by the *St James's Budget*. Holding his terrier, Elias is standing on the verandah with members of his staff and his orderlies of the Corps of Guides grouped

around him. Terriers seem to have been popular with lone travellers and explorers in those days. The boyish George Scott owned one in the Shan States which was 'a nailer for snakes and centipedes'. The verbose and exuberant Central Asian archaeologist, Sir Aurel Stein, also had one which he usually referred to as his 'little canine friend' or 'his faithful four-footed companion'.

During all his time in Meshed Elias was studying Persian. He never claimed to be a linguist, though he was fluent and extremely well read in German and French, but he by no means belonged to that school of diplomatists which disdained all knowledge of the language of the countries to which they were *en poste*. Chinese he certainly spoke, some Russian, and without doubt he had a working knowledge of several of the Turki dialects of Central Asia, as well as Hindustani. What he called his Persian vocabulary is as comprehensive as a short dictionary. Although he relied on his interpreter for all official meetings, he acquired enough Persian for reading and for ordinary conversation and there were probably occasions when talks were best conducted without the presence of a third man. He also interested himself, like other visitors to Persia, in carpets. Some beautiful specimens of Turkoman Tekke work which he acquired still survive, and he wrote an article for *The Times* on the weaving industry.

In the latter half of 1892, what appeared to be a relatively minor incident led to most unpleasant consequences which taxed all his diplomatic resources. It began with the murder outside Meshed of two obscure Persian travellers of no apparent consequence. Murders with robbery as the object were after all not so uncommon in Khurasan, but it was a considerable surprise when the local authorities accused three of Elias's Turkomans and tried to arrest them. He had to request the Persian Government to warn the Meshed authorities that there would be serious trouble if they did. He was completely convinced of their innocence and fortunately he had put himself in a strong enough position to refuse to allow their arrest until he had conducted his own independent inquiry, which he and Thomson carried out in the presence of a Persian magistrate. The inquiry showed the emptiness of the charge; his men were nowhere near the scene of the murder and he was able to prove their alibi. They could not even speak Persian, as the supposed witnesses had said. Not only were the bodies of the victims not available but even the two men said to have been accompanying them could not be produced by the authorities, and indeed none of the witnesses proved credible. It was obvious to Elias that, whether or not the men had been murdered, it was a trumped up charge by the Persians. The question was what lay behind it. Gradually he was unable to uncover the plot. It goes without saying that the man behind it all was de Vlassow.

For some time these Turkomans, who had been employed by our Consulate General for several years, had been a thorn in the side of the Russian Consul General, who claimed that they were Russian subjects because their goats, wives and other possessions were in Trans-Caspia. The fact was that he believed them to be spies. Two of them who had been declared British subjects had resisted Russian efforts to persuade them to turn their coats and spy for Russia. Elias also discovered that all his letters to the Persian authorities on the subject were being read by de Vlassow who was also drafting the replies. But there was even more than that behind it. He had very good grounds for suspecting that the two victims were carrying a large sum of money from de Vlassow to his Agent at Jám for the purpose of sending a spy to Herat. He had tried several times previously to send spies there, but each time Elias had thwarted him by finding out their names (by means which he does not disclose) and sending word of them to the Governor of Herat. Lascelles sent the report of the inquiry to the Foreign Office, saying he approved of every step Elias had taken.

It was quite an achievement to have defeated a Russian at his own speciality. We are apt to believe that modern Russian plotting and espionage is a product of the Revolution, but the performances of de Vlassow in Meshed and Petrovski in Kashgar, and indeed of many lesser performers in Central Asia during all this period, suggest that it is no new characteristic. In countering de Vlassow, Elias had two great advantages. The first was that the British, in Persia as well as in Afghanistan, were on the whole preferred to the Russians, who though they ruled justly in their new lands, never troubled about making themselves popular. The second was the instinctive trust which he inspired wherever he went in Asia. Just as with the Chinese officials he found it paid to be firm with the Russians; any show of *laisser faire* was merely mistaken for weakness and therefore to be exploited.

Having rescued his men on this occasion, the problem of protecting them in the future still remained. There followed a long-drawn-out effort by the Russians to eject all the Turkomans from the British service, which was still going on three years later. A partial solution was to naturalize them as British subjects. This presented no difficulty for they were all most loyal and it was exactly what they wanted to become. The Foreign Office approved and the legal steps were duly taken. But as Russia continued to claim them the men had to be warned that if they ever crossed to Russian territory we could not help them. They had no desire to return except to retrieve their flocks and wives. They feared that these might be interfered with and indeed the Russians did search their belongings for incriminating evidence and claimed their families had expressed no wish to go to Persia. Then, as now, Russia

made a great fuss about defections, even though these Turkomans were really of no political value to them. Not even after representations by our Ambassador did they give up intimidating these unfortunate men and it was lucky they had Elias to stand up for them. Characteristically, he was always immensely loyal to those who served under him.

By September 1892 Elias's health had deteriorated so much that Dr Woolbert, the Residency surgeon, said he must go home. In his report he said that he had arrived in Meshed suffering from dysentery and that during his nine months there he had never once been perfectly fit in spite of most careful dieting and treatment. His long residence of twenty-six years in climates varying from Siberia to Burma had gradually undermined his constitution. He was now suffering from a chronic disorder of the liver with various unpleasant attendant symptoms. The climate of Khurasan, with its wide variations of temperature, was peculiarly unsuited to him; even a cold wind was enough to bring on an attack of diarrhoea. Dr Woolbert considered he would only get worse if he remained and meanwhile he was unable to undertake any duty requiring travel on horseback for any distance. In spite of his great reluctance to quit his work the doctor said he had no alternative but to recommend home leave for at least eighteen months, and preferably two years. It was a question, indeed, whether he ought to give up the East altogether.

Dr Woolbert would have liked him to leave Persia at once but the Russian route to Europe was practically closed at the time through a succession of quarantines by which travellers were subjected to considerable discomfort. The quarantine station at Baku, where Elias might have been marooned, was on a bleak island on the Caspian and he decided not to risk travelling till the worst of the winter was over. The next few months must have tried him very greatly, yet no one reading his despatches would have believed they were the work of a sick man. They were as lucid, balanced, and precisely argued as always. His superiors never seem to have questioned his judgment; amongst all the papers which have been examined there is not one on which they showed any disagreement with his views.

Before he left P. H. Sykes (later Colonel Sir Percy Sykes) arrived in Meshed on his first visit to Persia, the country to which he was to devote his life. Elias sent an orderly and two horses to meet him and bring him in to the city. He found the new Residency just completed, though Elias was still occupying the old inconvenient Persian house. Before they parted Sykes sought his advice about his future movements. Always with exploration in mind Elias, whose kindness, said Sykes, was proverbial, advised him to cross the Lut region, much of which was still blank on the map, and visit Kerman. He lent Sykes his books on

Persian travel and he also pressed stores on him, for Sykes was somewhat improvident in these matters . . . he seems to have subsisted mainly on Bovril and had almost exhausted his scanty supply. As a geographer and explorer he fell distinctly below Elias's standards. However Sykes enjoyed his week at Meshed. He said the fact that de Vlassow and his Secretary both had English wives added greatly to the pleasures of social intercourse and he had never been made more welcome than in this tiny colony. Perhaps Miss Fitzroy may have had something to do with this rosy view. Nevertheless there must surely have been tensions between the rival Consulates General which he was too inexperienced to notice.

Elias did not leave for home till the beginning of March and the Russians allowed him to travel by the Trans-Caspian railway to the Caspian Sea, where he took the ship to Baku, thus shortening his journey. Dr Woolbert and his wife also left for home at the same time and no doubt looked after the patient on the way. Dr Duke, who became the next Residency surgeon, travelled up from Bushire in the record time for this caravan journey of thirty-two days. Until he too went on leave in May, Thomson, the Vice-Consul, was left in charge and his first act was to move into the new Residency which he described as most satisfactory.

Elias's *locum tenens* was Colonel C. E. Yate, who had had experience with the Afghanistan Boundary Commission. He reached Meshed by way of Herat. Although Yate was well known to the Russians he had to complain officially of their discourtesy when he paid an official call on their border post. During the next eighteen months he travelled a great deal both in Khurasan and Sistan. His reports were not always reliable and his suggestion that we should occupy Sistan more effectively in order to forestall possible Russian occupation was severely frowned on by the Indian Government who warned him against any interference. By his own account he got on very well with de Vlassow, whose ability as a party host impressed him. Indeed, so successful was the Russian wine punch which de Vlassow brewed on the occasion of his birthday party that Yate got the recipe from him. De Vlassow had Yate shadowed on his first visit to Sistan, and Yate was able to obtain a copy of a letter written by his agent in Sistan to the Persian interpreter at the Russian Consulate General. Yet when Thomson went home on leave, travelling through Trans-Caspia, he was received in the most friendly way by General Kuropatkin, who saw to it that he was shown everything at Ashkhabad, the headquarters of his army. This strange dichotomy in the Russian character between the official and the social was never more apparent than in Central Asia at that time and all British travellers whether official or private experienced the worst and best of both aspects.

Chapter XVII

A HISTORY OF THE MOGHULS OF CENTRAL ASIA AND THE SECOND TOUR IN PERSIA

Elias's sick leave was the subject of a sympathetic paragraph in the *Observer*, which commented that no official of the Indian Foreign Department was more deserving of a period of rest from active service, for since 1874 he had had a continuous series of arduous labours. It turned out to be very far from a rest. His first step on his return was to undergo a painful operation for piles For months he was incapable of work or study and we hear nothing of him except that he was convalescing in Dorset. He knew what he wanted to do as soon as he was well enough, but in his weakened condition recovery was desperately slow.

It had been a long-standing ambition, inspired perhaps by Sir Henry Yule, to fill a gap in the history of Central Asia and to add to it some results of his own ethnical research. Years earlier at Leh, Robert Shaw had shown him a medieval history of the Moghuls of Central Asia, *The Tarikh-i-Rashidi*, by the Turki historian Mirza Muhammad Haidar. Their land was Moghulistan, which later became Chinese Turkestan, and had no connection with the Moghuls of the Indian dynasty founded by the Emperor Babur, although Mirza Haidar was Babur's cousin. The *Tarikh-i-Rashidi* is the only history to throw a shaft of light on the Dark Age of Central Asia, covering two centuries between about AD 1347 and AD 1542. Mirza Haidar began to write it in 1542 because he believed his tribe to be the purest in racial descent from Chingis Khan, and he wanted to record its history before it became obliterated.

Shaw had begun a translation, but when he died both the original and his translation had been lost. Elias had searched Asia for years but the only copy he could hear of was in the hands of the Amir of Afghanistan, who had quoted it in support of his claim to Badakshan. He therefore had to wait till he could study the versions already in the British Museum. His first plan had been to continue a translation begun by W. Erskine, the first translator of Babur's Memoirs, but he found his own Persian inadequate; so he was joined by E. D. Ross (later Sir Denison Ross) of the British Museum, who undertook the translation

of the whole history. By the time he was strong enough to start work he had little more than a year left before his return to Persia, and Ross too had to go abroad, so they had to work strenuously against the calendar.

The rendering into English was difficult, for Ross had to work on two versions, one in Turki, the other in Persian. Moreover, the Mirza, although a Turki, wrote in Persian, in which language he was inclined to show off, using even more flowery epithets than was customary. Thus to describe a battle he would say: 'The standard of the Khan was filled by the winds of victory and success whilst the faces of his enemies were covered with the dust of death and destruction.' Nor was it enough for the Khan, tired after his exertions, to take his boots off before going to bed: 'He relieved his blessed feet from the fatiguing companionship of his boots.'

The history itself cannot be described here but it is an exciting one, with many vivid insights into the nomadic way of living and fighting and with fascinating comments, too, on the geography and natural history of the region. One reviewer subsequently likened it to a chapter from the Arabian Nights.

As Ross translated a batch of folios they agreed them together and Elias appended copious notes, until finally he had only his own Introduction to write. Characteristically at this point he committed an error for which posterity can scarcely forgive him. He wrote: 'The reader will probably find it more satisfactory to be referred to a published authority than to rely on the Editor's own reminiscences.' Modesty can be carried too far and only by searching between the lines do we find some personal touches which crept past his guard.

The most significant of them was the bald statement that he was 'personally acquainted more or less with all the tribes and races the author introduces, and with most of the localities.' It is an astonishing claim, considering the extent of the region and the number of tribes involved; but we know him well enough by now to accept that it must have been literally true. It is in a footnote to Mirza Haidar's description of the wild camels of his day that he makes the cryptic reference to them mentioned in Chapter Three. He also allowed himself to discuss mountain sickness. Mirza Haidar's uncle had died of it during a disastrous invasion of Tibet, and it was then ascribed to the bad air of certain passes. Elias discussed its occurrence and symptoms in the light of later western knowledge as well as describing various native nostra. Another personal glimpse concerned the Mirza's mention of certain grasses poisonous to horses on the road from Kashmir to Ladakh. Elias confirmed that these grasses still existed in his day, over 300 years later, at the western foot of the Zoji Pass.

It would be out of place here to comment in detail on the Introduction,

but the Dark Age of Central Asia was a period full of incident, and he quoted the Veiled Prophet of Khurasan:

'Men from the regions near the Volga's mouth
Mixed with the rude black archers of the South
. . . Chiefs of the Uzbek race,
Waving their heron crests with martial grace;
Turkomans, countless as their flocks, led forth
From th' aromatic pastures of the North;
Wild warriors of the turquoise hills – and those
Who dwell beyond the everlasting snows,
Of Hindoo Kush in stormy freedom bred. . . . '

As he described it more prosaically:

'Wars were on foot on every side; states were being overrun and cities besieged, whilst rulers went down almost from day to day in wars or intrigues. The princes and descendants of exiled ruling families . . . found themselves forced to take a side in defence of their house . . . or in self-defence: and in many cases they seemed to have changed sides with little consideration for the rights and wrongs of the cause. When they were strong they attacked a neighbour with or without reason; if successful they engaged in a short period of bloody revenge and debauch, but soon had to "mount" as the phrase was for a new campaign. If beaten they fled to some other neighbour and if not put to death by him, waited in exile till a turn of fortune's wheel should afford a fresh chance of aggrandisement or plunder.'

The burden of this horrific description of life in those days he summed up in the word 'mutability'. The other great lesson he deduced was that of 'mobility' which came naturally to these nomads living in steppe country with few belongings but their families and flocks, so that they could pack up and depart in a night, limited in movement only by grazing and water.

Elias also used his Introduction to criticize a current ethnological theory. The theory was that the descendants of Chingis Khan could have quickly lost their Mongol characteristics and language through their habit of inter-marriage with the conquered races. It was considered that 200 years after their great conquests all traces of their Mongol ancestry would have disappeared. Thus even the Emperor Babur, himself a descendant, would be to all intents and purposes a Turk, whilst the French Orientalist Léon Cahun wrote that it would be as great a mistake to take Timur for a Mongol as the Black Prince for a Frenchman.

Elias believed that the theory could be held only to apply to the Khans and ruling families and not to the 'rank and file', whose nomadic existence, tending their flocks, would confine them to a marriage within their own or neighbouring tribes. He believed Mirza Haidar's claim to the purity of Mongol blood in the Moghuls was therefore valid. In support of his theory he was able to cite the Hazaras of Afghanistan who were still, six and a half centuries later, typically Mongol in feature. He believed he might find still further evidence in Persia, and when he returned there to his great satisfaction he did find the very proof he needed.

The book was published early in 1895, just as he returned to Persia. Ross had departed abroad before him so Elias had had to correct all the proofs himself. There are signs of fatigue in his writing of the Introduction and for the same reason he missed errors in the proofs, but to have produced a complex and densely annotated work of this nature in little more than a year can only be described as a *tour de force*. With one exception the book received extremely complimentary reviews, both specialist and general. Many of the authorities knew the hardships under which Elias had laboured, and some thought the work should have been sponsored by the India Office. The exception was the *Athenaeum's* reviewer, whose detailed criticisms were carping and not always valid. Whoever he was, he seems not to have liked Elias. Perhaps he thought he should have had the task of translation. But in spite of the promising reviews only 200 copies of the book were actually sold, and Elias had to foot a loss by his publisher. Even though intended for specialists it was nevertheless a mistake to call it the *Tarikh-i-Rashidi*. On revision he re-titled it the *History of the Moghuls of Central Asia*, but by then it was too late.

The work has been much used by later historians and geographers, and in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* the great Russian historian V. V. Barthold speaks of 'the excellent English edition by Elias'. Of Mirza Haidar's own work Barthold writes that 'his information is not everywhere reliable and in the few places where the tribe (he was a Dughlát) is mentioned in other sources it contradicts these'. Part of the Introduction is outdated. But Olaf Canoe in his *Soviet Empire* considers its exposition of the Turk-Mongol question and the Chagatai successors of Chingis is still clean.

This account of what Elias intended as only a first major venture into the historical field has been a digression from recounting his active life, but asked which he regarded as the more important, his contribution to the history of Central Asia or his diplomatic work, there is no question how he would have answered.

There is a postscript which forms one more link between his explora-

tion and his historical interest. On their journeys through the Pamirs both Elias and Younghusband had seen an inscribed stone on the Chinese border in the Alichur Pamir which recorded a Chinese 'victory' against the Khojas, and the story was still on the lips of every Kirghiz, Shighni and Badakshani. The Khojas were a sect of priest-kings and miracle workers originating from Samarkand but widely distributed in Central Asia. In Eastern Turkestan they achieved temporal as well as spiritual power and they ruled there until the middle of the eighteenth century when they were ejected by the Chinese across the border into Badakshan, as the stone recorded. In 1895, going through Robert Shaw's papers, Younghusband found a short document in Turki partially translated by his uncle which turned out to be an Epitome of the History of the Khojas, the *Tadhkira-i Kwajagan*. He gave it to Elias, who took it back to Persia, where Moula Bakhsh finished the translation for him and he wrote an introduction. He had it published by the Royal Society of Bengal under Shaw's name, out of respect for his original contribution. Both the translation and the introduction have since been superseded by a later work. Shortly after Younghusband saw the stone, the Russians removed it to a museum in Tashkent. Though shorn now of their spiritual as well as their temporal power the Khojas have survived. Some live in Peking and Lattimore met one in the thirties. Together these two histories of the Moghuls and the Khojas span a period of 400 years, during which the Portuguese missionary Benedict Goës was the only European able in 1605 to penetrate into Central Asia.

It speaks volumes for the regard in which Elias was held by this time that the Indian Government and the Foreign Office should have held his post open for him, not only for two years but for a further three months extension. There had been some question of his returning at the end of 1894 but Sir William Broadbent, a celebrated consultant, advised strongly against it. He said Elias had consulted him three times on account of weakness resulting from dysentery as well as lumbago and other symptoms and that during his leave he had had a severe operation. Although better as regards most of his symptoms, he was still weak, and in his present condition and at his age he would regard such a journey as that required to reach Meshed in winter as attended with serious risk to his health and even his life. There can have been no great hope in the India Office that he would be fit enough to carry out his work if and when he returned. Perhaps Elias himself was the only man who still hoped.

There was also the matter of his pension. It worried him unnecessarily

that, although he had spent twenty-one years in the Indian Civil Service, the first four, during which he was not on the establishment, did not count towards his pension. Actually he was quite well off, for he had lived frugally enough and even on his small salary he must have saved. This needless financial worry was just a symptom of his basic insecurity. Another aspect of this was resentment, as a form of release for the aggressive side of his nature which he usually controlled and which lacked any normal outlet. Authority in the shape of the Government was an obvious and convenient scapegoat. Moreover since his earliest days he had felt the need to prove he could be independent. His mother was still alive and, if illness forced his retirement, that in his own eyes would be an admission that he had let her down. Nevertheless, overriding these frailties, there remained his very high sense of duty and determination not to let mere physical ailments interfere with his work. In the end based on some obscure precedent his pension for the first four years was granted.

While he was in England affairs in Meshed and Khurasan continued to simmer without actually boiling over. A new Governor General was appointed, but he was no better than his predecessor and did not last very long in his job, especially as de Vlassow constantly plotted against him. If there was less baiting of the British Consulate General, this was partly because in the frequent absences of Yate on tour Thomson ran the Consulate and through his previous experiences as a trader in Trans-Caspia he appears to have understood the Russian schizoid mentality extremely well. His technique was to praise their hospitality, which immensely pleased these 'white Orientals' as he termed them. But to criticize only one act of theirs adversely, or to behave as an official, was to 'scratch the Tartar'.

Whilst Yate was on tour Thomson received news of Russian troop re-inforcements arriving in Trans-Caspia. The move took place when a further portion of the border between Afghanistan and Russian Turkestan was about to be demarcated, and the Amir also moved some troops up. It looked as though the Russian move was an attempt to influence the border commission, through more seriously it might have been taken as a sign that General Kuropatkin would strike against Afghanistan if the Amir gave him any opportunity by misbehaving. In the event nothing came of the move, which was just another of the innumerable examples of Russian persistence in exacerbating frontier problems. At about the same time Russia was pressing the Shah to cede her the small and apparently unimportant village of Firuzah on the Ashkabad frontier. Very discreetly, with orders to avoid passing through any Persian towns where there was either a telegraph or a Russian agent, a subaltern, Lieutenant Cunningham, was sent there to

see why the Russians wanted it. He found its importance lay in commanding a pass into Persia on a route which a Russian army might be expected to take, and furthermore it lay in a fertile valley which would provide supplies. After Cunningham made his report it need scarcely be said that the Shah decided he did not want to part with Firuzah.

Another example of the ineptitude of Russian espionage also occurred. One of de Vlassow's juniors, looking somewhat agitated, arrived on Thomson's doorstep whilst he was having breakfast to say that the Governor of Herat had wrongfully arrested an innocent Russian Turkoman and he asked for his immediate release. As it happened Thomson had received the Governor's report just half an hour earlier. The man was a Russian disguised as a Turkoman and he had bluffed his way to Herat by saying that he had a message for the Governor. At the time a rumour was rife in Herat that Britain was about to annex the province, but whether the agent had started the rumour himself or had been sent to find out the truth of it was uncertain. Thomson disconcerted de Vlassow's official by calling the man by his Russian name and his protestations thereafter were a trifle hollow. To add to the mess their man had got them into, General Kuropatkin personally sent a message asking for the release of the so-called Turkoman but by that time he was already, on Thomson's advice to the Governor, on his way back to the frontier under escort. The Russians never seem to have suffered any embarrassment when their plots went awry, nor did they desist even temporarily.

Before the end of the year de Vlassow's campaign against the new Governor General was rewarded and the Shah dismissed him. He was no loss, for he had been weak and inefficient as well as dishonest. Having mulcted the city for all it was worth during his term of office he made an appropriately ignominious exit from it, being pursued for some miles into the country by disgruntled and angry creditors. Meshed was left virtually bankrupt. The new incumbent who inherited this state of affairs was Prince Muaiyid-ud-Dowleh, a cousin of the last Shah and an old friend of de Vlassow, who clearly expected great benefits to accrue to Russia by his appointment. His Vizier however happened to have been three times to England and boasted the Queen's Jubilee Medal.

De Vlassow's hopes were shortlived and by the following year he was completely disillusioned. Not only was the Prince inefficient, but he showed himself most friendly disposed towards the British; so de Vlassow lauched another campaign to bring about his downfall and get his own nominee appointed. To this end he tried to bribe the Chief Mullah of Meshed to work for him, but the Mullah refused. A more successful effort was to spread a rumour of a bread shortage. The alarm was

quickly taken up by the religious student fraternity, ever ready to make trouble in the name of Allah. Riots started and many bakers' shops were burned down. The rumour was entirely unfounded for there was ample flour in the city but its supply was controlled by the Governor General. Thomson was at a loss to know how the rumour started without his knowledge until the English wife of de Vlassow's secretary remarked casually to his own wife over morning coffee that members of the Russian Consulate General knew several days in advance that there would be riots and had been warned to be ready to bake their own bread. This was the only instance known of one of these ladies compromizing her adopted country and it was clearly inadvertent.

At the end of the year Sir Frank Lascelles, who was not altogether *persona grata* with the Shah, was relieved as Minister in Tehran by Sir Mortimer Durand. The posting from India of Elias's chief was sensible, for Persian internal affairs were of more immediate importance to Calcutta where they were also more fully understood, than to the Foreign Office. Durand and Elias were the two Indian Civil Servants with the clearest understanding of both India's frontier problems and Russian motives. Since Russian pressure on Afghanistan was at this stage being increasingly exerted through Persia, they made an ideal team in the best place to counter it. Almost Durand's first act was to lay down a policy for his subordinates either at the instigation of the new Viceroy, Lord Elgin, or else of the Foreign Office, which aimed at being more conciliatory towards Russian officials. Thomson, was able to report quite shortly afterwards that he noticed a distinct improvement in relations between the two Consulates General though it did not last very long. However, a policy of *détente* was very important at this time, when negotiations with Russia for a final settlement of the Upper Oxus and the Pamirs frontier problems were reaching their climax.

At the beginning of 1895 Thomson reported what he described as a gala day for the Europeans of Meshed. A romance having developed between Surgeon Captain Duke and Madame de Vlassow's daughter, Miss Fitzroy, they were duly married by Thomson in his office before the assembled Russian and other guests. Afterwards the bride and the Russian party returned to the Russian Consulate to be followed in state by Thomson with the bridegroom. At the Consulate the religious ceremony was performed by a visiting American missionary with Thomson now in the capacity of best man, a role which Elias only escaped by being on leave. The wedding breakfast was attended by all the Europeans in Meshed, except the British Telegraph Clerk, who was unaccountably absent. Could it be that he loved Miss Fitzroy from afar and was unable to face the ceremony? The great day was duly

recorded in the Indian Government's secret Monthly Information Bulletin. The couple tactfully elected to live on neutral ground in a Persian house, where the first weeks of their married life were marred by demonstrations instigated by religious students who threatened to evict them. These disapproved on principle of foreigners and infidels living in Meshed and the American Missionary too was so persecuted that he had to appeal to our Consulate for protection.

There were more disturbances in Meshed; the troops' pay was again six months in arrears and they forced the Governor General to send a telegram to the Shah. The Governor General was already showing signs of wanting to quit his job. As the province was bankrupt he was not making any money for himself and what little authority he had left was constantly being undermined by de Vlassow, who told him that his own stay under such a régime was quite useless and that he had never seen such conditions during his six years in Meshed. The Governor General was also in trouble with the Imperial Bank; he had been refused a loan and was trying to get his own back.

De Vlassow sent another agent to Herat. Not only did Thomson know the man's name but he also knew what the Russians were paying him. Judging by the correspondence it appears that Thomson was getting copies of de Vlassow's letters to the Governor General on other matters, especially about his negotiations with the Bank. For instance, Thomson knew he wanted a curb put on our control over its affairs. Our source was probably the Vizier who had just had his term of office extended and had to be dissuaded from sending a letter of thanks to Durand for his supposed good offices. At the same time the Vizier was having a fight of his own with the Russians and apparently was getting the best of it.

This briefly was the state of affairs when Elias finally returned to Meshed in May 1895. Knowing what was in store for him one of the few attractions ahead was that he would be living in his own new Residency and it would be exciting to see how his Persian gardens were faring. It was his first real home since the bungalow at Leh which he had left ten years earlier, and on his return he was ceremoniously escorted to it by the Meshed authorities who greeted him outside the city. He must have been still tired after his labours on the *Tarikh-i-Rashidi* but he was soon embroiled once more. One of his Turkoman Sowars, who had bought some land and a house near a shrine, was being victimized by the mullahs and he was being mobbed and ill-treated. The Governor General was told that if the victimization was not stopped an appeal would be sent to Tehran. De Vlassow was still

continuing his vendetta against these unfortunate Turkomans. His latest piece of intimidation was to make a legal claim against one of them on the grounds of bankruptcy. The Sowar in turn wanted to counter-claim for the confiscation of his property in Trans-Caspia until advised against it by Elias. They had become so well known to the Foreign Office by this time that their photograph taken by Dr Duke appears in the Records, with Elias's comment that it showed they were quite rough fellows and not in the least in the class we would employ as agents or newswriters.

The Shah, greatly concerned at the feud between the Imperial Bank at Meshed and the Governor General and fearing worse, sent a message to the commander of the bank guard urging him to diligence. The commander replied that he would do his best but that his men were naked, no rations had arrived since the beginning of the year, neither had the promised cash presents been received; in short, his men were in great distress. In June Elias heard privately that the Governor General had been dismissed. If this was a victory for de Vlassow it was a hollow one. The new Governor General, Asif-ud-Dowleh, was not the man he had hoped for. Not that any Governor could have done much with his new post, for Muaiyid-ud-Dowleh had made off with the whole of the next year's advance revenues. Asif quickly reported that Khurasan was bankrupt and that he could not raise the money the Shah required of him. If he paid all the pensions owing by his predecessor he said he would be a ruined man and that already he had had to pawn his sword, doubtless a symbolic rather than a factual statement. By way of encouragement the Shah offered him an extension of office, but this was understood to be merely conditional on his not receiving a higher bid for the post in the meantime.

Another blow to the tottering administration of Khurasan fell when the Governor General arrested his own Commander in Chief of the Forces at a supposedly friendly conference. The Commander in Chief was an old man but very friendly disposed towards the British (his enemies claimed he was in our pay) and the Governor General feared he was becoming too strong. He was the man who had quelled the bread riots of 1894 after the earlier Governor General had failed. Besides his army post, he was chief of the influential Timuri tribe and it was feared his imprisonment would cause them to rise. He was so severely ill-treated in captivity that both Elias and Durand had to intervene strongly on his behalf. The Shah castigated the Governor General and three months later he reinstated the Commander in Chief. Soon afterwards Elias intercepted a report from one of the Russian agents in Afghanistan which showed de Vlassow as having intrigued against the Commander in Chief. At the same time this agent was

reporting more unrest in Herat. He said there was disaffection amongst the troops in the province because it was twelve years since they had been given leave to visit their homes and if trouble arose they would be likely to turn against the Amir. The report was probably exaggerated but the Russian army was making the most of it, and Rusians guards on the Herat frontier were behaving so high-handedly towards the Afghans that the Amir once again appealed to the Viceroy for advice. It is possible that the army was acting, as has been suggested earlier, without reference to Foreign Office policy in St Petersburg.

Although Elias did not lack sources of information on Persian and Afghan affairs, indeed all the Afghan sources were under his control, he had always had difficulty in getting reliable news from Trans-Caspia. Originally he seems to have had only one newswriter there and this man's reports could not be cross-checked. The information we needed chiefly was of troop movements and of any extensions to the existing railway system. Yate had put forward the suggestion that we should agree to accept Russian Consuls in India in return for a British Consul at Baku. He said he did not think Russian officials could do any particular harm in India, whereas a British official in Baku could give timely warning of troop movements if there was a serious threat of war. It need scarcely be said that the Indian Government ignored this suggestion. Although the newswriter often reported that extensions to the railway were under way, de Vlassow always denied these reports and Elias was inclined to believe him.

Towards the second half of 1895 there were persistent rumours of increased military activities and Elias sent some special agents to check them. These men were known only by a letter of the alphabet. At least one was of sufficient status to meet and talk to Russian officers. Another was shadowed and nearly caught and the Russians scored a point by intercepting his report to Elias. The agents reported more manoeuvres and 'sham fights', and on one occasion that water was being splashed on the heads of the soldiers of some units, which was a Russian army custom only performed before going on active service. That agent reported: 'I assure you the atmosphere is very cloudy'. But in truth there was no build up of troops sufficient to anticipate war, and extensions to the railway made little if any progress. In October Elias was visited by a Japanese Colonel who had travelled through Siberia and Trans-Caspia to Persia. The Colonel said the railway over the Oxus at Charjui was in very poor condition and not fit to use; he considered Russia was concentrating all her resources on the Trans-Siberian line and these observations served to confirm Elias's own assessment.

On the other hand the Russians were certainly maintaining their interest in Sistan and in the same month they established a new official

Agency at Jám. Elias was able to acquire a copy of the agent's instructions and realizing the man would need careful watching he sent back his own former native agent whom he had recently been employing in in Meshed. He also persuaded the Persians to accord our man precedence over the Russian. At that time two Boundary Commissions under Arthur McMahon were at work in Sistan demarcating the Afghan and Persian boundaries with Baluchistan. These activities greatly interested de Vlassow who told Elias he was proposing to send a doctor there to study yellow fever, cholera and typhus. Elias reminded him that he had already fished there once for cholera without success and suggested the doctor should go to South America or the West Indies if he wanted to study yellow fever. The only yellow fever he knew of was an outbreak in the Russian army. De Vlassow protested he was really serious about it, but when Elias said the Commissions had nearly finished de Vlassow thought after that all he had better spare his doctor from the fatigue of a journey in such hot weather.

Time brought no improvement in Persia's relations with Afghanistan. That they were no worse was probably due to the patient efforts of Elias. A perennial feud was waged by the Amir of Afghanistan who wanted his commercial agent in Meshed recognized by the Governor General and tried all kinds of means, diplomatic and otherwise, to achieve his end. At one point he threatened to break off trade relations with Persia. Both Elias and Durand had to be very firm with the Governor of Herat, who was behind the trouble, and he was reminded that he would not welcome a Persian agent in Herat in return for the recognition of his own man in Meshed. Fortunately the Amir could not escape the clause in our treaty which governed her foreign relations with Persia, because feelings between him and the Indian Government were often strained (notably over Chitral in 1895), and Russian agents in Afghanistan were always ready to make the most of any trouble there might be. Indeed there were times when the Amir may well have been in secret communication with Russia, since his exile there.

Elias's second period at Meshed was proving if anything more worrying than the first and opportunities for relaxation must have been rare. He was particularly interested just then in seeking for traces of the descendants of the original Mongol conquerors. He was therefore delighted to find half a dozen settlements undoubtedly Mongol, still living in Khurasan and Herat. He visited one of these settlements at Sangbast, only twenty miles south-east of Meshed, and another about twenty-five miles north of Turbat-i-Haidari. At the former about 200 people lived in great poverty sharing a walled enclosure with some Haidaris. The bulk of them had unmistakably Mongol features and spoke Mongol freely among themselves, as he was able to prove by

testing them. Their mullah said they and other small settlements had moved from Herat in recent years and they called themselves Chingizi. At the second settlement they said they had come from Turkestan 400 years before, when they had all been tent dwellers, that is to say nomads. He believed that altogether about 3,000 families of these Mongol descendants still lived in settlements in Khurasan and Herat. Here was convincing proof of the theory he had enunciated in the *Tarikh-i-Rashidi* and he was able to tell of his discovery in the revised edition.

In April anti-foreign feeling in Meshed with religious backing was running very high. The flag on the Russian Consulate building was torn down and de Vlassow threatened to send for 300 Cossacks to restore order. It is noticeable that while de Vlassow blustered Elias counselled. There was no doubting who was the more effective; when serious trouble arose it was Elias to whom the Persian authorities turned for advice. At the time the Chief Mullah was more instrumental than the Governor General in keeping order particularly since the most unruly classes in the provinces were the priests and so-called religious students. It was not for nothing that Elias had cultivated relations with him and now in response to his appeal the Chief Mullah effectively quietened his followers.

In May 1896 the Shah of Persia was assassinated. The first man in Meshed to receive the news was Elias who got it from Durand. Knowing what would happen if rumours began, he at once went to the Governor General to break the news, and took the opportunity to advise him on what should be done; in particular he warned him to deal firmly with any disturbances. Next day he sent Moula Bakhsh, who strongly advised the Governor General to declare himself immediately as being under the orders of the Shah's nominated successor. Gratefully the Governor General acted on his advice. He himself had received only garbled accounts of the assassination and Elias was the sole reliable source of information. Once again Elias appealed successfully to the Chief Mullah to use his influence to keep the peace in the city. The prompt actions of Durand and Elias in all likelihood saved Meshed from a period of even more serious disturbances. It happened that de Vlassow was away at the time or he might have seized the opportunity to stir up trouble. As it was he could only hasten to the Governor General on his return in order to get the latest news. After a few days Elias was able to report that there was no public feeling at the death of the Shah; the people, as was usually the case in the east at such times, being only concerned with their own safety. This was the last time the worthy old Chief Mullah was able to be of service.

Shortly afterwards, a local mischief maker put a notice on the Russian

building, saying in effect 'Russians go home'. The culprit was a priest and the Governor General was afraid to arrest him, for shots had recently been fired into his own garden. But the Chief Mullah was too seriously ill to deal with him and he died shortly afterwards. He was a very great loss to our Agency, for thereafter the priests became increasingly out of hand and the current Governor General was no stronger than his predecessors. He had very soon told Elias he was sick of his job and wanted to give it up; in which event he would, as Elias remarked, leave many unsettled claims behind him. The Chief Magistrate blamed the Russians for much of the trouble in the city. He alleged it was being stirred up by the Russian Consular Interpreter with the object of creating a pretext for the despatch of Russian troops to quell the disorders.

Having successfully negotiated the hazards of the assassination, the last few months of Elias's period in Meshed were clouded by serious domestic troubles within the Consulate. One Mirza Hassan Ali Khan CIE, who had been at the Consulate as an assistant, first to General MacLean and subsequently to Elias, had to be removed hurriedly from Meshed. No precise charge was laid, but his activities were suspect and he had become a political embarrassment. It looks as though he had fallen for Russian blandishments.

The next event was still more distasteful; Thomson's house was burgled. This in itself might have been nothing much; the matter was reported to the Persian authorities and no doubt pressure would have been applied to them to find the culprit. But Thomson took the law into his own hands, and without telling Elias he went to the City Magistrate and demanded the release of a man being held for the robbery. What was worse, he threatened the Magistrate. Under Thomson's threats the Magistrate handed him over, but as soon as Elias heard of it he at once returned him, stipulating that no torture should be used. The man had once been Thomson's servant, though he had been discharged. The incident did a great deal of mischief and Elias reported Thomson's insubordinate behaviour. It was not an isolated case and poor Thomson's weakness now came to light. He was an alcoholic. Once before, in 1890, he had been suspended from duty and there had been subsequent lapses. He was given an ultimatum by the Indian Government either to resign at once or to accept the disgrace of dismissal. He chose the former and departed forthwith. His reports show that he had been good at his job but the wisdom of the Indian Government in leaving him in Meshed with its restricted conditions for foreigners must be questionable. And how difficult and unfair must the position have been for Elias with his known loyalty to his subordinates, to have as his chief assistant a dipsomaniac liable to be incapable at a time of crisis.

His consideration for his staff was never more marked than in Thomson's case. Realizing that he would have to fend for himself Elias sent home to *The Times* a detailed report by his ex-Vice Consul on trade conditions in northern Persia and Russian Turkestan. Russia had just introduced new Customs Regulations along the whole Persian border, aimed at discriminating against European and Indian trade. Thomson's report described the effect of these regulations on all the main items of trade with Persia from green tea to cotton, kerosene and candles. He was clearly an expert and his report could have led to useful commercial employment which was no doubt why Elias sent it to *The Times*. It was a thoughtful and generous act. Thomson's speciality had been trade, but the greater need at the time was obviously for a political agent, and on the advice of Durand and Elias the Indian Government decided to appoint an experienced Indian Civil Servant. The whole incident must have greatly added to Elias's burden. The only man on whom he could always fully rely was the stalwart Attaché, Moula Bakhsh. Besides their work they shared common interests in history and ethnology and often made trips together in search of rock inscriptions and historical relics in the vicinity of Meshed. It looks as though Moula Bakhsh was his only real friend at Meshed.

The improvement in his health had been very short lived. Gradually all the symptoms which he had suffered from before he went on leave returned, even the cause of his severe operation. In June Dr Duke wrote that the disorders were so easily excited and were causing so much suffering and depression that the fear of arousing them was forcing him to live on an inadequate diet. He said he was incapable of any unusual exertion or fatigue and that the hardships incurred if he were to visit the more distant parts of his charge might well prove disastrous.

In a lengthy report Duke outlined his career in the east since he had gone out to China in 1886. Referring to the extremes of climate and altitude in which he had lived it was in Duke's report that we learn for the first time how, at the end of his Mongolian journey, he had camped out all the way from the Russian border to Nijni Novgorod, an experience as Duke wrote, to try the strongest. Apart from the hardships he had undergone during his main exploring period, out of the twenty-two years in the service of the Indian Government he had spent more than eleven outside India proper. During many of these he had lived under conditions where any degree of ordinary physical comfort had been unattainable and constant fatigue and exposure had been the rule; they had been infinitely more trying than ordinary service in the relative civilization of India. Since 1874 he had had sick leave in England amounting to four and a half years; in all his service he had never enjoyed an ordinary leave in good health. His service in Persia

had led to the final breakdown of a never robust constitution and Dr Duke had come to the conclusion that, so long as he remained in Persia or in any Eastern country, his condition would only become worse. He concluded: 'I consider Mr Elias should no longer remain in Persia and that his health unfits him for further service in the East.' Thus at the age of fifty-two the blow fell. In August his retirement was announced in the *Indian Gazatte*, but he carried on until November, when Yate returned to succeed him, this time permanently.

In the meantime affairs in Meshed continued from bad to worse. In one of his last despatches just before the Governor General resigned Elias wrote:

'From all sources I learn the priests are entirely out of hand, and the Governor General has no power to coerce them. The result is no one dares to lift a finger in the interests of the foreigners. Nothing like the collapse of all Government functions and responsibility has been seen in recent times.'

During their years together in Meshed this conclusion may well have been the only one on which he and de Vlassow found mutual agreement.

On November 13th, from a staging camp on the Russian-Persian border, Elias reported that he had handed over his charge to Colonel Yate. He had again received the permission of the Russian Government to travel home through Trans-Caspia and Yate has recorded how kind the Russians under General Kuropatkin were to him. They may never have met before, but as Kuropatkin himself had begun his service in Central Asia (he had been in Kashgar in 1876 at the same time as Forsyth's second Mission) he must have known Elias very well by report. Unlike the diplomats, there was that camaraderie already commented upon amongst the geographers and soldiers, those men in the front line as it were, in both countries. They respected each other, and in particular we know of the Russian regard for Elias and his work. Now Kuropatkin put himself out to see that his guest, who was so plainly a desperately sick man, had every attention and comfort on his way home, and he attached a member of his staff to accompany him all the way to Krasnovodsk. It was a chivalrous gesture. The temptation is to cry with Cicero: *O tempora, O mores!*

Once again Elias had time for reflection in a Russian train. On the first occasion, twenty-three years earlier, he had been travelling through Russia after crossing Mongolia. That was after an achievement. He was young, ambitious, and burning for further exploration. Now he was fifty-two, ill, and at the end of his career. By his own idealistic standards he had achieved so little and had suffered so much in the way of frustra-

tion. His last years in Persia had been a weariness to the spirit as well as to the flesh. It would mean little to him except that as a bounden duty he had established British prestige in northern Persia when previously there had been almost none. And this moreover at a time when Russia had come to regard her own power in the region as virtually unchallengeable. If there was ever the risk that Khurasan might have defected to Russia, or that Russia might have ultimately annexed Khurasan, it was due to Elias in no small part that neither action was any longer a possibility. As for his political information, he had built up almost from nothing a body of reliable agents and newswriters, so that in the end nothing of political importance took place in Persia or Afghanistan without his knowledge. Persian officials came to him for advice and imparted their confidences knowing he would not compromise them. He had shown himself more than a match for Russian intrigue; by the end of his time he was usually a move ahead of de Vlassow who professionally speaking must have been greatly relieved to see him depart. However much he may have hated the work, Elias had proved himself a skilled diplomat and a first rate Political Agent.

Taking a wider sweep round India's frontier he could have reflected on his success on the Burma-Siam frontier and, through his knowledge of China and Tibet, on the part he had played in ensuring that Sikkim remained within the Indian hegemony. Glancing westward he would have observed that the Amir of Afghanistan had recently withdrawn from trans-Oxus Shighnan and Roshan and had resettled such of his loyal subjects who preferred his rule to Russia's. The Amir had also put Cis-Oxus Darwaz under the control of Badakshan, and more importantly the vital wedge of Wakhan. He would have watched with interest the work of his successor, Younghusband, in the Pamirs and the unfolding of events in Chitral and Hunza which had resulted in these two key states becoming more firmly established under Indian control. The buffer state policy was taking shape at last and the main gaps in India's defence were nearly all closed. He would have discerned that the period of greatest rivalry between Russia and Britain was over and that tension had decreased since the Pamirs Agreement. Looking back even he could scarcely deny that by his work in all those regions he had made a not unimportant contribution to these progressive improvements in India's defences. Nor would he be stretching his imagination to picture the results if the conjunction of Afghanistan and China by the Wakhan strip had not been achieved. Russia would then have reached the Hindu Kush and it would not have taken her agents long to stir up trouble in the border states. With these in turmoil they could have extended their subversive work to India with results which might have led to the premature end of the peace which Elias and so many men

like him had striven to preserve. Looking forward, there would be two glimmers of hope. He would have the time now to devote himself to the history and ethnology of Central Asia, and he could support and encourage future explorers.

Yet in his sickness and depression his thoughts are more likely to have been of regret at missed opportunities for geographical exploration and ethnical research, and of thinking how far short he had fallen of the standards he had set himself. If he allowed himself any satisfaction at all about his years in Meshed he would probably recall only two achievements. One would be the building of his Residency, and the other that he had successfully shielded and supported his worthy Turkoman Sowars in the face of de Vlassow's prolonged campaign against them. To end these speculations it can be said with certainty that none would regret his departure from Meshed more than those same Turkomans who have proved as loyal to him as he to them.

There is nothing more to tell. Among the plans he was discussing with friends during his brief retirement was one for a new edition of the Emperor Babur's autobiography, and there is a hint that at long last he was contemplating writing his own reminiscences. But the sands had run out. Faithful to his abiding passion, he had just corrected the proof of a paper for the Royal Geographical Society on what still remained to be explored in Central Asia when he died suddenly of septicaemia at his chambers in North Audley Street, London, on May 31, 1897, only seven months after his retirement. In truth he was so physically worn out that he no longer had the resistance to fight infection. He was only just fifty-three.

Epilogue

Ney Elias's story has now been told and there is little to add. It is a far cry back to the misty past of those early days in China when ambition vied with family duty and finally won, at unknown cost to himself but to the lasting benefit of exploration and of India. Perhaps, after all, the most formative period began much earlier during those solemn lonely schooldays in Dresden. We have followed him a very long way since then, indeed across most of Asia and through many vicissitudes and much frustration intermingled with his signal successes and achievements.

The reason why no biography was ever written is not hard to seek. All that was known of his life was no more than the tip of an iceberg. The rest lay buried in the secret archives of the two Governments concerned. By the time they became accessible he had been forgotten by all, or nearly all, and even when the project was first mooted almost forty years ago not all the documents were available. Moreover, as if in keeping with the secrecy of his life, all his private papers had disappeared; the last record of them was that Sir Francis Younghusband had undertaken to advise on their disposal, but what his advice had been was not known. They were only re-discovered seventy years later by the Royal Geographical Society in whose care they had been left. Besides the daily journals he had kept on all his missions and explorations (except unaccountably the original log of his Mongolian journey), they also contain some initialled official memoranda which might not otherwise have been attributable to him. Lastly there are copious historical notes, proof of his untiring industry and of what he still had to offer if he had lived.

Totally missing from his papers are any personal letters unconnected with his work, none from his mother, his friends nor even from Miss White. He must have destroyed them all. Nor did his brothers and sisters preserve any from him. The family taboo against any expression of personal feeling was so strong that inevitably we are left with a sense of disappointment. Only twice in his whole career have we had a glimpse behind the rigid curtain of his repression. The first time was as a young man in Peking. It will be remembered how he had then said he was determined to do something worthwhile. By his subsequent career he can surely be said to have justified that resolve. The second time was in his Pamir journal, with his emotional reference to the 'engaging

young moon'. The moon is an archetypal symbol of femininity and this revelation was perhaps the conscious, if fleeting, emergence of a deeply buried longing. It scarcely needs to be remarked that on both these occasions he was under exceptional stress.

When he died his brothers and sisters wanted someone with the knowledge to write a memoir of his life, and Robert took all the papers to the Royal Geographical Society to discuss the matter. But before anything could be decided he had to recover them because Ney's mother had decided no memoir should be written. Just why she ruled against any recognition of her distinguished son can only be conjectured; most mothers would have been only too anxious for such a record. But after all that has been written about her influence it is a possibility at least that she had never forgiven him for defying her by choosing his own life. At any rate, it is final proof that her domination over her family never waned. It was far from being a loving or even an affectionate influence; imperious would not be too strong a word.

In the end a memoir was written for the Royal Geographical Society by Ney's old friend and admirer, Stephen Wheeler. He also wrote the notice for the *Dictionary of National Biography*, which besides recounting his travels made particular mention of his wide knowledge of the history and geography of Central Asia. He recalled a point about the Mongolian journey which he must have gleaned from Ney in private conversation but which Ney did not think worth mentioning in his own account. 'For many weeks', wrote Wheeler, 'he travelled in constant fear of attack; he had scarcely any sleep; and when he reached the Siberian frontier the Russian officers stared at him as if he had dropped from the sky. . . . His indomitable will and silent courage carried him through all the perils of the way.'

Will-power and courage were certainly needed on all his expeditions, but by themselves they do not ensure success. Each of his expeditions involved exceptional danger, but they were marked by thorough preparation and planning, care to attempt no more than looked feasible, and adaptability as circumstances dictated. Risks are inherent in exploration but with the possible exception of his dangerous independent exploit on the Burma-Yunnan Mission he never took them unnecessarily. It was a combination of cool calculation, allied to his remarkable understanding of native races, that enabled him to avoid disaster and brought him his successes.

In the diplomatic field his achievements owed much to a complete mastery of his subject, but perhaps even more to his ability to command the respect of native rulers and officials. This ability, which he possessed to an unusual degree, may have derived from a happy combination of his Jewish sensitivity with a certain natural quiet dignity, with a result

which might well accord with the Oriental's image of the representative of a great country with a reputation for fair dealing.

There was one unspoken aim about all his diplomatic work which could easily escape notice. Besides being sincerely humanitarian he was fundamentally a man of peace. In his recommendations on frontier delineation and in his dealings with other races he always sought to arrive at the best means of preserving peace. In this he was uniformly successful; no war, not even a skirmish, resulted from his adopted policies, and in an age of expansionism that is a creditable record.

In reading his story the physical backround against which he worked has constantly to be borne in mind. At a rough calculation he could easily have spent six years of his life in actual daily travel far from his base, pitching camp each night and packing up every morning, and in conditions ranging from tropical Burmese jungle to Mongolian deserts, great altitudes, Siberian steppes, blizzards and eternal snows. Life a hundred years ago, beyond the relative security of the foreign Concessions in China and the comparative civilization of India, was rigorous in the extreme. Living in our present age it is easy to forget that if he was in difficulties there was no radio to summon help, nor helicopter to lift him out; indeed, except at his last post not even the telegraph. It needed courage, resource and endurance to survive.

In an attempt to diagnose the source of Ney's constant illness, Dr Duke's report was submitted to a specialist. With true Scottish caution he would go no further than hazarding that it was 'not beyond the realms of possibility' that he was suffering from both bacillary and amoebic dysentery. As a layman who more recently suffered from the latter form for two years, it may be commented that the symptoms described were so depressingly familiar that the specialist was being over-cautious, but to have suffered for over twenty years. . . . It was not diagnosed as a distinct infection till the first decade of the present century and only after that was a cure found. So although Ney could have felt better in England there would have been no hope of full recovery. Moreover, the secondary symptoms and the semi-starvation diet took their toll over the years. It was not uncommon in those days for men to suffer like him from the day they set foot in India till they departed or died.

One facet of his personality has barely been touched on. One of the few letters he kept was from Lord Lansdowne, thanking him for a copy of the *Tarikh-i-Rashidi*. Lansdowne wrote that he was glad to be reminded of the days when they worked together in India and when 'I so largely profited by your assistance in dealing with intricate frontier questions now virtually settled.' For Ney there was more behind this than a generous acknowledgment. If his mother's influence is accepted as

primary it follows that his father's lead was less than adequate. That would explain why he showed a tendency in his life to seek substitutes for his father. And who more appropriate for his purpose than Viceroys? Hence his very marked feelings of disappointment when they failed to support his plans or, in the case of Dufferin, ignored him. So his happy relations with Lansdowne, the fifth Viceroy under whom he served, would be of more than usual significance to him. It is noticeable that during that period, although severe malaria was added to his other trials, he never reported sick.

It would be idle to speculate on Ney's attitude towards religion because he offers no clues, but mountains humble men and the hint of mysticism is strengthened by his symbolic references to the planets. These references suggest that his interest in the stars and planets went beyond their use as navigational aids or for meteorological purposes. Perhaps the comet which he saw as a schoolboy released the latent sense of mystery which some believe to be part of man's nature.

Those who have asked what lay behind the mask he presented to the world and what drove him on have been offered a solution in these pages. He cannot be blamed for his frailties. Like everyone else his temperament was a compound of heredity, the example and early upbringing of his parents, and not least, of the environment in which he found himself. They were all somewhat unusual, especially the last. Because of his need to repress all normal emotions he had to find another outlet. His choice of career was a challenge which entailed great physical stress, and often mental distress too, and their combination made him the more prone to ill-health. But by the same token his repression played its part in his many assets, not least in his self-reliance, his consideration for others, and his devotion to his work. If there is one characteristic which finally impresses above all others, it is his outstanding integrity.

For over seventy years he has been a forgotten man, but in his day he was so well known and held in such high regard that this biography can suitably conclude by recalling what was said at his death by the men who knew him best, and by an ever sympathetic Press. After making the obvious allowances for generosity it is still possible to discern in the notices and letters an unusual depth of feeling. Professor Parker's intimate recollection has already been referred to. Younghusband had of course lost a close friend and mentor, but many of the other writers can have known Ney only by repute. Did they nevertheless detect his essential vulnerability behind the aloof exterior? Perhaps that is one reason why this lonely explorer attracted popular appeal in spite of himself; and why today, when there are no more terrestrial fields left to be conquered except by teams of scientists, it is the lonely voyager who now captures the imagination of the public.

Without exception the newspapers recollected his journey of twenty-five years earlier from Peking to Siberia in the depth of winter during the fanatical Moslem rebellion; some remembered the parallel with H. M. Stanley in Africa. They praised him for his courage and clear-sighted intelligence as well as for his modesty. The *Scotman*'s obituarist wrote that his achievements, remarkable as they were, never obtained for him a tithe of the popular applause and recognition accorded to men who had done nothing in comparison with his work. He had heard it said that Ney Elias probably knew more of the geography of Central Asia, and had certainly done more, than any other European with the possible exception of Prejevalski. Another writer recalled that every geographer knew that what he said could be implicitly relied on and that it was impossible to think of him and 'travellers' tales' as even remotely associated together. Of his character all the notices referred to his retiring nature, and the *Pall Mall Gazette*, recalling the episode of the CIE, said he was morbidly sensitive about anything that could be construed into self-advertisement, and ended, 'truly an Englishman of another age than this'. The *Homeward Mail*, recounting his services when he retired, had ended with the graceful tribute: 'There is but one of those who are fully aware of the facts by whom they are likely to be underestimated. That one is Mr Elias himself.' And when he died the same paper wrote: 'His true distinction was to die undistinguished.'

The Times' obituary was entrusted to Francis Younghusband, than whom there could have been no better choice. He was the only writer who knew all the secrets and he was one of the few who knew just how greatly his constant ill health added to the hardships of his work, 'all latterly made at the call of duty'. One observation in particular may be quoted: 'He was as restless and sensitive of constraint from his superiors as he was devoted to the interests of those under him.'

Writing privately a week after his death to Ney's sister Jessie, Younghusband said how thankful he was that *The Times* had given him the task of writing about him because

'he was always a true good friend and I hoped that I could in some way make people in England understand the man he really was. I have always thought him the best traveller there has ever been in Central Asia because he was not only so extraordinarily determined on getting through his journeys but he brought back such truthful and accurate accounts. His only fault was that he invariably began his reports in a way which made people in offices think that his work must have been a great failure. He evidently had an extraordinarily high idea of what he ought to have done and in his modest way, considering he had not

come up to his own high standard, he wrote as if the whole thing had been a failure.'

As so much of his life was spent in the service of India let an Indian newspaper pay Ney Elias the last tribute: 'Few of the Queen's servants in Asia have done so much and talked so little of what they have done.'

A Selective Bibliography

G. J. ALDER, *British India's Northern Frontier 1865–1895*, London, 1963.
J. ANDERSON, *From Mandalay to Momien*, London, 1876.
C. E. D. BLACK, *A Memoir of the Indian Surveys 1875–1890*, London, 1891.
WILFRID BLUNT, *A Persian Spring*, London, 1957.
FRED BURNABY, *A Ride to Khiva*, London, 1877.
LÉON CAHUN, *Introduction à l'Histoire de L'Asie. Turcs et Mongols*, Paris, 1896.
OLAF CAROE, *Soviet Empire*, 2nd Edition, London, 1967.
LOUIS L. CORNELL, *Kipling in India*, New York, 1966.
GEORGE B. CRESSEY, *Land of the 500 Million*, U.S.A., 1955.
CHARLES CROSTHWAITE, *The Pacification of Burma*, London, 1912.
RALPH P. COBBOLD, *Innermost Asia*, London, 1900.
GEORGE N. CURZON, *Russia in Central Asia*, London, 1889.
Persia and the Persian Question, London, 1892.
The Pamirs and the Source of the Oxus, London, 1896.
Frontiers, Romanes Lecture, Oxford, 1907.
J. A. DABBS, *Discovery of Chinese Turkestan*, The Hague, 1963.
LORD DUNMORE, *The Pamirs*, London, 1893.
D. FORSYTH, *Autobiography and Reminiscences*, London, 1887.
M. G. GERARD *et al.*, *Report of the Proceedings of the Pamirs Boundary Commission 1896*, Calcutta, 1897.
J. B. M. HENNESSY, *Report on Exploration in Great Tibet and Mongolia Made by A . . . K . . . in 1879–82*, Dehra Dun. India, 1884.
RENÉ GROUSSET, *Conqueror of the World*, London, 1967.
ABBÉ HUC, *Souvenirs d'Un Voyage Dans la Tartarie, le Thibet et le Chine Pendant l'Années 1845–46–47*, Paris, 1853.
RUDYARD KIPLING, *Departmental Ditties*, London, 1915.
E. F. KNIGHT, *Where Three Empires Meet*, London, 1903.
ALASTAIR LAMB, *Britain and Chinese Central Asia, the Road to Lhasa 1767–1905*, London, 1960.
The China-India Border, London, 1963.
Asian Frontiers: Studies in a Continuing Problem, London, 1968.
OWEN LATTIMORE, *The Desert Road to Turkestan*, London, 1933.
High Tartary, London, 1940.
Inner Asian Frontiers of China, London, 1940.
Mongol Journeys, London, 1941.
Pivot of Asia, London, 1952.
Studies in Frontier History, London, 1962.
A. LYALL, *Life of the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava*, London, 1905.
C. J. MARKHAM, *Report on the Sikkim Expedition from January 1888 to January 1890*, Calcutta, 1890.

G. E. MITTON, *Scott of the Shan Hills*, London, 1963.
MICHAEL PRAWDIN, *The Mongol Empire*, London, 1940.
N. PREJEVALSKY, *From Kulja Across the Tien Shan to Lob Nor*, London, 1879.
L. POTAGOS, *Dix Années de Voyages dans l'Asie Centrale et l'Afrique Equatoriale*, Paris, 1885.
ROBERT SHAW, *Visit to High Tartary, Yarkand and Kashgar*, London, 1871.
GEORGE SEAVER, *Francis Younghusband*, London, 1952.
ERIC SHIPTON, *Mountains of Tartary*, London, 1951.
C. P. SKRINE, *Chinese Central Asia*, London, 1926.
W. E. SOOTHILL, *China and the West*, London, 1925.
SIR AUREL STEIN, *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, London, 1912.
P. M. SYKES, *Ten Thousand Miles in Persia*, London, 1902.
A History of Persia, London, 1915.
The Right Honourable Sir Mortimer Durand, London, 1926.
DOROTHY WOODMAN, *The Making of Burma*, London, 1962.
G. R. G. WORCESTER, *Sail and Sweep in China*, London, 1966.
C. E. YATE, *Khurasan and Sistan*, London, 1900.
F. YOUNGHUSBAND, *The Heart of a Continent*, London, 1896.
FIJNE VAN SALVERDA and others, *Memorandum on the Improvement of the Hwang Ho or Yellow River, North China*, The Hague, 1891.
JOURNALS: *Royal Geographical Society*
Royal Asiatic Society
Royal Central Asian Society
Royal Society of Bengal
The Contemporary Review
Dictionary of National Biography – Volume XII Supplement. (*See Elias.*)

Published Works by or edited by Ney Elias

'The New Bed of the Yellow River', *Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1869

'Notes of a Journey to the New Course of the Yellow River in 1868', *Royal Geographical Society Journal*, XL, 1

'A Journey through Western Mongolia', *R.G.S. Journal*, 1873, XLIII, 108.

'Visit to the Valley of the Shueli in Western Yunnan', *R.G.S. Journal*, XLVI, 198

Introductory Sketch of the History of the Shans in Upper Burma and Western Yunnan, Calcutta, 1876

The Tarikh-i-Rashidi of Mirza Muhammed Haidar, Dughlát, English version translated by E. D. Ross and edited by N. Elias, London, 1895

Re-issued and re-titled *A History of the Moghuls of Central Asia*, 1897

An Apocryphal Inscription in Khorassan', *R.A.S. Journal*, 1896, p. 767

'Notice of an Inscription at Turbat-I-Jàm', *R.A.S. Journal*, 1897, p. 47

A History of the Khojas of Eastern Turkestan, by R. B. Shaw, edited by N. Elias, Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1897

INDEX

Errata: The Wei Ho is the more northerly of the two rivers both shown as Wai Ho on Map Two.

Omitted from Map 2 on p. 36, Chinkiang (mentioned on pp. 39, 40, 43) lies at the junction of the Yangtze River and the Grand Canal.

The Pall Mall Budget (pp. 130, 140) should read *The Pallmall Gazette.*

GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD

Head office:
40 Museum Street, London, W.C.1
Telephone: 01–405 8577

Sales, Distribution and Accounts Departments
Park Lane, Hemel Hempstead, Herts.
Telephone: 0442 3244

Athens: 7 Stadiou Street
Auckland: P.O. Box 36013, Northcote Central N.4
Barbados: P.O. Box 222, Bridgetown
Beirut: Deeb Building, Jeanne d'Arc Street
Bombay: 103/5 Fort Street, Bombay 1
Calcutta: 285J Bepin Behari Ganguli Street, Calcutta 12
Delhi: 1/18 B Asaf-Ali Road, New Delhi 1
Hornsby, N.S.W.: Cnr. Bridge and Jersey Street, 2077
Ibadan: P.O. Box 62
Karachi: Karachi Chambers, McLeod Road
Lahore: 22 Falettis' Hotel, Egerton Road
Madras: 2/18 Mount Road, Madras
Mexico: Villalongin 32, Mexico 5, D.F.
Nairobi: P.O. Box 30583
Ontario: 2330 Midland Avenue, Agincourt
Philippines: P.O. Box 157, Quezon City D-502
Singapore: 248c-6 Orchard Road, Singapore 9
Tokyo: C.P.O. Box 1728, Tokyo 100-91