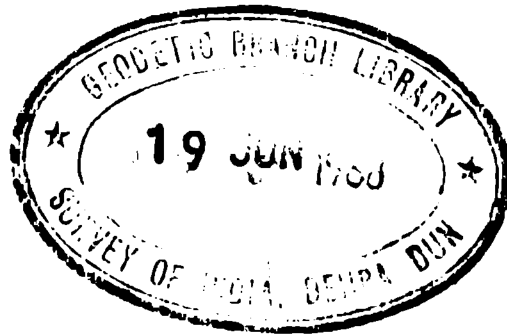
Arthur Swinson

NORTH-WEST FRONTIER

PEOPLE AND EVENTS

1839–1947



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5

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CONTENTS

	Author's Foreword	11
1	Introductory: The Place and the People	15
2	Lord Auckland has a Plan	26
3	Retreat from Glory	53
4	One Flag: One Frontier	85
5	The Years of Masterly Inactivity	100
6	The Poet in Simla	140
7	England Finds a Hero	169
8	The Clash at Panjdeh	197
9	Adventure in Chitral	207
10	The Pathan Revolt	232
11	The End of the Game	255
12	Invasion from the North	267
13	The Mollie Ellis Affair	285
14	The Rise of the Red Shirts	305
15	The Turbulent Thirties	321
	Epilogue	334
	Bibliography	345
	Index	349

9

ILLUSTRATIONS

BETWEEN PAGES 96 AND 97

Mule-train on the Khyber Pass *(R.T.H.P.L.)*

Major Sir Louis Cavagnari with the Amir Ayub Khan. A photograph taken in August 1879 a few weeks before Cavagnari's death. Also in the group are Mr. Jenkyns, a member of the British Mission, General Daoud Shah, the Afghan Commander-in-Chief, and Mustaphi Habibullah Khan. *(N.A.M.)*

General Stewart and his Staff, 1879. *(R.T.H.P.L.)*

General Roberts and his Staff, 1880. *(R.T.H.P.L.)*

Yakub Khan rides into General Sam Browne's camp near Gandamak, 9th May 1880 *(R.T.H.P.L.)*

The Amir Sher Ali: a portrait taken in 1880. *(N.A.M.)*

The gateway to the Bala Hissar, Kabul. *(N.A.M.)*

Kandahar, site of Roberts' victory over Ayub Khan on 1st September 1880. In the distance can be seen the Kotal, which marks the centre of the Afghan position. *(N.A.M.)*

The Sherpur Cantonment, outside Kabul, January 1880. The troops are standing-to at the north-western corner. *(R.T.H.P.L.)*

BETWEEN PAGES 208 AND 209

Night attack on the Frontier. A war artist's impression of an incident during the Pathan revolt of 1897. The gunners are using star shells for the first time. *(Black and White)*

The Russians attack the Afghans on the Khushk river near Panjdeh, 30th March 1885. A war artist's drawing.

Saving the guns at Maiwand, 1880. A contemporary painting. *(R.T.H.P.L.)*

Cavalry on the march near Landi Khana during the Third Afghan War, 1919. *(N.A.M.)*

Big gate at Fort Jamrud; Gordon Highlanders on guard, 1897. *(Black and White)*

Heliographing from Hari Singh to Fort Jamrud, 1897. *(Black and White)*

The attack on Peiwar Kotal, from the painting by V. M. Hamilton. *(R.T.H.P.L)*

Mohmand and Tirah Expedition; dictating terms to Orakzais. 12th November 1897. *(I.O.L.)*

BETWEEN PAGES 304 AND 305

A column of Lancers on the march in the 1890s.

Courtyard of the Mullah's house. A member of the rescue party guarding Mollie in foreground.

Arrival at Shinawari Fort: 24th April 1923. Mollie is wearing the white topee.

Light Infantry on the march four miles from Jamrud during the Third Afghan War, 1919.

Westland Wapitis patrolling the Kohat Pass, 1939. *(Ministry of Defence)*

R.T.P.H.L. – Radio Times Hulton Picture Library
N.A.M. – National Army Museum
I.O.L. – India Office Library

LIST OF MAPS

1 The North-West Frontier — *opposite page* 15
2 Kabul City and outlying areas — 168
3 Afghanistan — 195
4 Peshawar City — 306

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

The North-West Frontier of India must surely be one of the most legendary of places on the Earth's surface. No area of comparable size has seen so much action, bloodshed, intrigue, gallantry, savagery, devotion, patience, or sacrifice. Here, both virtues and vices have been bred on an heroic scale; and the centuries have passed without eroding them. Both Alexander the Great and Field Marshal Alexander of Tunis served here; and between them a great scroll of names—Tamerlane, Babur, Akbar, and, with the coming of the British, Pollock, Napier, Lumsden, Nicholson, Roberts, Robertson, Blood, Churchill, Wavell, Slim, Auchinleck, and even Lawrence of Arabia. Apart from soldiers, the Frontier has involved generations of administrators, politicians, and statesmen: Palmerston, Disraeli, Gladstone, Dalhousie, Lawrence, Lytton, Curzon, Gandhi, Nehru, Attlee, Jinnah, and Mountbatten. Governments have come to power or fallen, through their Frontier policies. The Frontier has not only been the concern of Britain, India, and Afghanistan (and in recent years Pakistan); the mysterious pressures it generates have involved Russia, China, Persia, Turkey, and even France; on two occasions these pressures have brought the world to the brink of war. And (it may be relevant to add) they still seem to have lost little of their potency.

My principal object in this work has been to tell the story of the North-West Frontier, concentrating chiefly on the century during which it was held by the British. I must frankly disclaim any pretensions to having attempted a definitive history: if that work is ever accomplished it will be through the labour of many scholars over many years. The material to draw on is vast, the documents in London alone running into many tons. Dr. C. Collin Davies in his distinguished work *The Problems of the North-West Frontier*

1890–1908, completed in 1931, complained that the papers available even then took him several years to read. And since that date they have grown enormously. The catalogue of published works is endless, too, and is being rapidly expanded as new and explosive chapters on the Frontier's history are being made in Kashmir. My purpose for mentioning this immensity of material is to illustrate the impossibility of covering every aspect of the Frontier comprehensively in one volume; those familiar with the Frontier may find that some important matters have only been touched on in passing, and others have been ignored. I can only hope in these circumstances that my selection will not seem capricious, and explain that it has been based on the demands of narrative and the interest of the general reader.

Any writer dealing with the history of India and Afghanistan has to face the problem of spelling proper names, and especially the names of cities. Here again I have given priority to the demands of the general reader, preferring 'Kandahar' to 'Qandahar' though the latter is probably more accurate. An even more difficult problem arises in quotations from books and papers, and even here I have rashly followed the same principle. The strict canons of scholarship have doubtless been outraged: but the alternative is to accept variations such as 'Kabul, Cabul, Cabool, Cabaul, and Qabul' in the space of a few pages. This policy, like any other, inevitably gives rise to some anomalies, but in the general interest of clarity I feel that these must be accepted, and pray for the reader's indulgence.

For the sake of clarity I should also mention the policy adopted when describing military formations engaged in the various campaigns. Before the Mutiny there were the East India Company's forces and units of the British Army serving with them. After the Mutiny there came the Indian Army, and units of the British Army which served in Indian brigades and divisions. In a technical work it would naturally be essential to specify formations precisely and indeed include detailed orders of battle. As such detail would become wearisome to the general reader, however, I have resorted to employing the term 'British forces' on many occasions, which, though no doubt offending purists, does clearly differentiate these forces from Afghan, tribal, or Russian forces. I have, of course, indicated in each instance whether individual units were British, Indian, or Gurkha.

THE NORTH-WEST FRONTIER

Outer boundary (Durand Line)
Inner boundary (Administrative)
Provincial boundaries
Railways

BOKHARA
HINDU KUSH RANGE
LITTLE PAMIR
OXUS R.
Kala Panja
CHITRAL R.
YARKHUN R.
MASTUJ
SHANDUR RANGE
Yasin
AFGHANISTAN
CHITRAL
Dorah Pass
Laspur
Shandur Pass
Zidig Pass
Chitral
DAREL
Gilgit
KASHMIR
Shomal Pass
Kala Drosh
PANJKORA R.
SWAT R.
KAFIRISTAN
Kamdesh
Kalam
INDUS R.
Chilas
CHILAS
Chandak
Dir
KOHISTAN
Babusar Pass
KUNAR R.
DIR
UTMANKHEL
SWAT
BAJAUR
Kagan
Chak Darra
BUNER
KABUL R.
Kabul
MOHMANDS
Malakand Pass
Palosi
Oghi
Dargai
Jalalabad
BLACK MTS
Amb
HAZARA
Abazai
SHINWARI
Khyber Pass
PESHAWAR
Swabi
Abbottabad
SIKARAM
Nowshera
Shutargardan Pass
Parachinar
Peshawar
Attock
TIRAH
Cherat
Campbellpore
Bagh
Rawalpindi
KURRAM
Kohat
Hangu
Khushalgarh
KHOST
Thal
KOHAT
Teri
Biland Khel
Gumatti
Bahadur Khel
Bannu
Miram Shah
Kalabagh
Jhelum
Maizar
BANNU
Jani Khel
BIRMAL
SHAWAL
Isa Khel
Lala Musa
Mianwali
Lakki
WAZIRISTAN
Jandola
Pezu
Wana
Tank
DERA ISMAIL KHAN
Paharpur
Gomal Pass
LARGHA SHERANI
Dera Ismail Khan
Draband
Chaudwan
Bhakkar
to Quetta and the Bolan Pass approximately 140 miles
ZHOB R.
BARGHA SHERANI
JHELUM R.
CHENAB R.
PUNJAB
INDUS R.

BALUCHISTAN

0 10 20 30 40 50 100 MILES

I

INTRODUCTORY: THE PLACE AND THE PEOPLE

The ancient peoples of India called it 'Sindhu', the Greeks 'Sinthos', and the Romans 'Sindus'. Today it is known as the Indus, or, in its lower reaches, as Darya—the Big River. It rises in Tibet, 17,000 feet up among the glaciers to the north of Kailas Parbat, and for 700 miles strikes north-west through a jagged trough between the mountain ranges, its icy waters descending rapidly and at times precipitously in a fury of froth and spume. Twice it crosses the Ladakh Range before plunging past the Haramosh Peak through a magnificent 10,000-foot gorge. Then suddenly it veers south-west and, joined by the Gilgit river, drops to 4,000 feet before rounding the flanks of Nanga Parbat, the legendary mountain whose snow-capped peak soars to 26,660 feet. Still losing height, it leaves the Great Himalayas to strike south through Kohistan towards the plain of Terbela, which it reaches near Ghazi. Near Attock, thirty miles to the west, it makes a swift lunge through a narrow gorge in a final salute to the mountains, and having been joined by the Kabul river, traverses the edge of the Potwar plateau. Still forging south-west, it penetrates the Salt Range to emerge at last on the Punjab plain. The great adventures are over; but growing and prospering, and receiving the Panjnad or 'five waters' of the Punjab, it flows across the blistering wastes of Sind to reach the Arabian Sea near Karachi.

The Indus is a great river, 1,800 miles long, and drawing its waters from a Himalayan basin of over 100,000 square miles. It is the boundary between India and Central Asia. For a thousand years the influence of Hinduism has stopped at its banks; geographically, culturally, and ethnographically India is the country 'south-east of the Indus and south of the Himalayas'. This range of mountains, the greatest massif on earth, is a formidable if not impregnable barrier; but the Indus is not. From the dawn of history invaders have swept

across it, and no fortresses, no defensive systems, have succeeded in checking them. For long stretches the left bank of the river is commanded by the right; also the channel is constantly changing its course, and when the snows have begun melting in the Himalayas the land for miles on either side is flooded. Bridges and roads are swept away, and even as recently as 1923 the waters threatened to destroy the whole town of Dera Ismail Khan. Altogether, as a physical barrier or as the basis for a military defence line, the Indus is inadequate and capricious; this is a fact which successive rulers of northern India have had to recognise. It is a fact, too, which for many centuries has had a major impact on world history.

The true barrier between Central and Southern Asia lies some 200 miles to the north-west of the Indus. This is the Hindu Kush, a range of mountains running from the great barren uplands of the Pamirs towards the borders of Persia. The name by tradition means 'Hindu killer' and derives from the fact that in previous centuries thousands of slaves brought from India died in its snow-blocked passes. The Hindu Kush was known to the Greeks, who called it 'Paropamisus', and the name still remains, though today applied only to the lower ranges separating Herat from the Russian frontier. Writers at the time of Alexander the Great called the Hindu Kush 'the Indian Caucasus' and the name stuck for centuries, long after the range itself had retreated into legend. Marco Polo saw it far away to his right on his journey to the court of Kubla Khan; Genghis Khan crossed and re-crossed its passes, but the records left by both men are scanty. Well into the nineteenth century the Hindu Kush was unmapped, unvisited, and almost unknown outside the small world of scientists and explorers; and its geographic and political importance was recognised only slowly.

It is a great range, 600 miles long, with its main ridges reaching 15,000 and even 20,000 feet, and subsidiary ridges running off both to north and south. Its deep ravines in the eastern sectors are covered with magnificent forests of deodar, pine and larch, while further west the slopes are bare and sparsely covered with coarse grass which gives seasonal grazing to the wandering sheep which in summer move up from the parched plains. According to Sir Kerr Fraser-Tytler, who studied the Hindu Kush for over half a lifetime, 'the great range is of a desolate, little-known country, a country of great peaks and deep valleys, of precipitous gorges and rushing grey-

green rivers; a barren beautiful country of intense sunlight, clear sparkling air and wonderful colouring as the shadows lengthen and the peaks and rocks above turn gold and pink and mauve in the light of the setting sun'. Colonel Algernon Durand, who saw it for the first time in 1888, standing on a spur of Nanga Parbat, has recorded: 'The Hindu Kush once seen in its most majestic aspects crushes all comparison.' Even the main passes are higher than many considerable mountains, the Khawak at 11,640 feet, the Ak Robat at 12,560 feet, and the Qipchak at 13,900 feet. The first two are open for six months of the year and the third from May to October in a normal season. There are other passes, but they lead through such inhospitable country as to be virtually impassable for large bodies of men or animals. Of the great invaders, Alexander used the Khawak Pass, to be followed a thousand years later by Timur-i-Lang, better known as Tamerlane, who swept down from his court at Samarkand. Two hundred years later, Mohammed Babur, a descendant of Tamerlane, and, on his mother's side, of Genghis Khan, came across the Qipchak Pass to found the Mogul Empire. All down the centuries the passes lay undefended, but still the Hindu Kush proved a formidable barrier; successive Indian Empires withered away as their rulers failed to sustain themselves and their armies. Each winter, as the snows returned to block the passes, the invaders found themselves cut off from their capitals; the power exerted by the mountain ranges was slow and silent, but utterly relentless.

Between the Hindu Kush and the river Indus lies another chain of mountains, the Safed Koh and the Sulaiman Range, which end at Sibi, at the southern entrance to the Bolan Pass. The latter range runs north-east towards the eastern limits of the Hindu Kush, and so with it forms the rough shape of a letter 'V' turned on its side. Parallel to the Sulaiman Range runs the Indus. The passes through this latter range of mountains are not so high as the Khawak or the Qipchak, but they are still formidable, and much more famous: the Khyber, the Kurram, and the Bolan are names which recur again and again in the history of the Frontier. It has been said, and without too much exaggeration, that every stone in the Khyber has been soaked with the blood of battle; the name has become synonymous with treachery, feuds, and barbaric guerilla warfare. As it will be seen, the Khyber with the other north-west passes lie between

the Indus (the cultural boundary) and the Hindu Kush (the physical barrier). Therefore, anyone forming a defensive line on the Hindu Kush has the Khyber behind him; anyone falling back to the Indus plain is dominated by the Sulaiman Range. This is the dilemma which has baffled generations of statesmen and soldiers; policy after policy has been tried and discarded, as the great drama of the North-West Frontier has unrolled. No policy has succeeded completely, and some have led to disaster.

But one must not give the impression that any problem on the Frontier is clear-cut; here geography jostles with ethnology, strategy with history. Although India stops at the Indus, the plain continues for another fifty miles, and inevitably the rulers of the Punjab have extended their domain to the very edge of it, taking in the Peshawar valley. The plain has therefore come to mark the edge of the administered area. But between this boundary and the frontier of Afghanistan (the land of the Hindu Kush) lies a strip of what is called 'tribal territory'. Starting from the Little Pamir in the north, this runs through Chitral, Kohistan, Bajaur, Khyber, Tirah, Waziristan ('the Frontier Switzerland'), and Baluchistan. This tribal or North-West Frontier territory, comprising some 40,000 square miles, once belonged to Afghanistan, and is still largely inhabited by Pathans, the principal race of that country—some 3,000,000 of them. The political frontier therefore does not constitute an ethnic boundary; though the Pathans inside Afghanistan are usually called Afghans, they are the same race as those living on the Frontier, and recognise themselves as such. If nature had made them a docile, peace-loving people this fact might not have complicated the situation on the Frontier: but, as it is, the Pathans are possibly the most ferocious, independent, and warlike race ever known. They may be hated or loved but never can they be ignored. The Pathans, in fact, form an ethnic factor, which, allied to the geographical and political factors already outlined, have through the centuries made the North-West Frontier of India one of the most sensitive and explosive areas on the earth's surface.

Their own name for themselves is 'Pukhtun-wala', or the men who speak Pashtu, their native tongue. They are divided into some dozens of tribes, varying in strength from thousands to hundreds of thousands, and the tribes in turn are divided into khels, which are roughly comparable with clans. The Pathans claim descent from

the Jews and look on King Saul as their great ancestor, but modern science is somewhat sceptical, pointing out that there is only a facial likeness and the prevalence of Biblical names which in any way can be considered as evidence. So far as anyone can tell, the Pathan is of the Turko-Iranian type, and usually has some Indian and other blood in him. The Red Kafirs and northern Pathans, for example, have undoubtedly intermingled with the Dinaric race which was thrown out of Russian Turkestan during the Mongol invasions. They are undoubtedly an ancient race. The Greek historian Herodotus speaks of 'the most warlike of all the Indians, who live around the city of Kaspaturos in the country of Paktuike', and Sir Olaf Caroe has identified Kaspaturos as Peshawar, the unchallenged queen of the Pathan cities, some twelve miles from the mouth of the Khyber. By the tenth century the Pathans were already converted to Islam, and by the fifteenth were powerful enough to invade Delhi under Bahlol Lodi and establish a dynasty which lasted seventy-five years.

In appearance the tribes vary considerably. Some men are light of skin, eye, and hair; many have a long head, aquiline nose, rosy-white complexion, and nut-brown eyes and hair. Other tribes are short in stature, with medium noses, broad faces, and brown complexions. But, whatever their strain, the Pathans always have a remote, proud, independent air about them. They are no one's lackey. For many people they hold a strange fascination; an American State Department official like James Spain, having read of them in Kipling, could throw up his career to go in quest of them. Sir Olaf Caroe, the British administrator, could write after many years on the Frontier, 'for the stranger who had eyes to see and ears to hear, always as he drove through the Margalla Pass just north of Rawalpindi and went on to cross the great bridge at Attock, there was a lifting of the heart and a knowledge that, however hard the task and beset with danger, here was a people who looked him in the face and made him feel he had come home'.

Not everyone feels this fascination; and for many the excitement of crossing from India to Central Asia has always been mixed with apprehension and fear. This feeling has been beautifully caught by John Masters, as he describes the passage of his heroine, Anne Hildreth, at the outbreak of the Second Afghan War in 1879:

'Across the scrub-covered plain approached men with camels

The men had the faces of eagles and walked with a long, slow lifting stride. One of them looked up as he passed by. Anne smiled at him, expecting the salaam and the answering smile of an ordinary Indian wayfarer. But this was not India. The man stared her down, from pale green kohl-rimmed eyes. He carried a long rifle slung across his shoulders; a woman, shapelessly swathed in red and black cotton, swayed on top of the camel that he led; a lad of fourteen walked behind the camel; the lad had no beard, but his stride was an exact imitation of his father's lilt, and he too carried a rifle.'

And he too carried a rifle. . . . Whether fascinated by them or not, one must never forget that one of the basic facts about the Pathans is their taste for violence. Thinking of themselves as Afridis, Wazirs, Mahsuds, or Mohmands, their absolute allegiance goes to the clan, and they live according to their own law, Pukhtunwali, 'the way of the Pathan'. The first commandment of this law is badal, revenge. A Pathan is bound to take revenge for any wrong, whether actual or fancied, and whether he has suffered it personally, or his family or khel. Most of their grievances stem from 'zar, zan, or zamin'—gold, woman, or land. Vendettas may have their origins in trivial, even negative, actions, such as a failure to show proper respect, but once begun they grow in size and violence; because a man has been slighted in a remote village by the Helmand river another may be murdered in Bombay or London or Paris many years later. Some vendettas are ended only after one of the families concerned has been wiped out, or has submitted to the ultimate humiliation of nanawatai and throws itself at the feet of its enemy to ask for mercy. The second law of the Pathans is melmastia, or hospitality, and this is so strong that it takes precedence over badal on certain occasions; even an enemy who seeks refuge must be granted it, and if necessary protected against his pursuers. The clan leader is called a 'malik', the Arabic title for king; but the malik has no regal powers and only maintains his position through constant exertions. He is little more than the first among equals. The Pathans, in fact, are intensely democratic, and the jirga or council is one of their oldest institutions. Its decisions are ruthlessly enforced. Within the family, however, the husband is a law unto himself. He can, if he wishes, put his wife to death for infidelity, and can deal with a daughter who has disgraced the family just as severely. Pathan women, in fact, outside the small circle of noble families, are little more than chattels.

Though the Pathans are the principal people of Afghanistan and the Frontier area, there are other considerable groups, notably the Ghilzais, who claim to be descended from Noah. The probability is, however, that they are of Turkish origin, and come from the Khalaj tribes, which originated to the north of the Tien Shan mountains. Like the Pathans, the Ghilzais are subdivided into clans —the Tokhi and Hotak, the Andar, and Taraki. For centuries the Ghilzais have come down into the Derajat in the northern Punjab for periods of the year with the whole of their families and their animals, and some have stayed. Other tribes of Turkish origin are the Turkmen, who live along the southern bank of the Oxus, and smaller groups like the Kazaks and Chagatai Turks of northern Afghanistan. To complicate the ethnological picture even further there are Mongol tribes such as the Hazaras, descendants of the Mongol Tartar regiments of Genghis Khan. These inhabit the narrow valleys and rugged passes of central Afghanistan, and are a courageous, good-natured people. In the summer they tend their sheep, and in winter, when their lands are entirely covered with snow, they occupy themselves in spinning and weaving and working in cloth and leather. The Tajiks, a tribe settled chiefly around Kabul and in Kohistan, are of Persian origin, a shrewd, avaricious, but hard-working race. Apart from the races and tribes listed here, there are dozens of other tribes and sub-tribes to be introduced as the narrative demands. But even this cursory glance at the peoples of Afghanistan and the Frontier region should serve to show that it is an ethnological jigsaw of frightening complexity, the relic of a dozen or more lost empires. Along the Frontier alone there are Kafirs, Chitralis, Mohmands, Shinwaris, Afridis (who guard the Khyber), Orakzais, Darwesh Khels, Bannuchis, Waziris, Dawaris, Marwats, Mahsuds, Bhittanis, Baluchis and in Kalat State and Mekhran, the Brahuis—and even this list is by no means comprehensive.

The Afghans were recognised as a separate people long before the birth of their country. The Moorish traveller, Ibn Batuta, who passed through Kabul in 1333, reported it inhabited 'by a tribe of Persians called Afghans. . . . They hold mountains and defiles, possess considerable strength and are mostly highwaymen.' The derivation of 'Afghan', incidentally, is unknown, though it was first used in a work called *Hudad-al-Alam* by an anonymous Arab

geographer, written about A.D. 982. While other peoples developed, the Afghans remained as shepherds and highwaymen, and their attempts at establishing their own country were spasmodic and ephemeral. When Mohammed Babur, the Barlas Turk, reigned in Kabul in the sixteenth century, he considered Afghanistan to consist solely of the country lying south of the Kabul–Peshawar road. Possession of Herat and Kandahar was consistently changing as power in Persia and northern India ebbed and flowed. When Akbar established the Mogul Empire in Delhi in 1556, after the battle of Panipat, the country of the Hindu Kush became merely an outpost, and such it remained for nearly 200 years. The Uzbegs fought the Moguls for Badakhshan, the high barren plateau near the Oxus loop, and the Persians for Herat; the Persians and Moguls fought for Kandahar; and altogether the situation was confused and unstable. With the weakening of the Moguls, about 1650, the pattern changed considerably, with the Persians reoccupying Kandahar and threatening Ghazni, while the Afridis of the Khyber revolted against the Moguls. The early eighteenth century saw the rise of the Persian, Nadir Quli Beg, afterwards known as Nadir Shah, who came from the Afshars, a Turkish tribe. From an early age he showed marked qualities of leadership and military genius; he defeated the Ghilzais and the Abdali (or Abdulahi) clan, and by 1738 had captured both Herat and Kandahar. In September of that year, emulating the great Persian emperors of the past, he crossed the Indus to attack the Mogul emperor, Mohammed Shah, and beat him in a pitched battle near Delhi. Here he remained for two months, while peace terms were negotiated, then restored the Mogul emperor to his throne, before marching north again. His price was the annexation of all the Mogul territories north and west of the Indus, so again this great river became the political frontier. Nadir Shah reached Kandahar in 1740, and soon was on another campaign, to acquire territories north of the Hindu Kush as far as Samarkand, Bokhara, and Khiva. His empire now extended as far east as that of the ancient emperor Darius, before his defeat by Alexander the Great. But unfortunately old age did not mellow Nadir Shah; on the contrary his reign became steadily more barbaric, his people being driven to desperation. In 1747, when he was on his way to deal with a revolt by the Kurds, some members of his court murdered him. The commander of his Afghan body-

guard, a man called Ahmad Shah Abdali, managed to escape from the Persian camp with some companions and reached Kandahar. Here Ahmad Shah was elected the first king of the Afghans, and assumed the name of 'Dur-i-Durran', the Pearl of Pearls, his tribe, the Abdalis, coming to be known as the Durrani. Ahmad Shah controlled all the country of the Hindu Kush lying between the Oxus and Indus rivers. The northern and western boundaries lay very much on the same lines as they do today, but to the south his kingdom included the North-West Frontier region, and the province of Baluchistan at its southern extremity. Within a few years, however, the Afghans had occupied large territories of the Punjab in northern India and in 1756 looted Delhi. Unable to leave his own capital for too long (like all the Afghan rulers who succeeded him), Ahmad Shah deputed his son, Timur Shah, to rule over his provinces east of the Indus, and by 1758 the boy was engaged in a desperate struggle with the armies of the Mahratta Confederacy. In that year they succeeded in driving him back across the Indus, and Ahmad Shah himself had to come back into the field and conduct a bloody campaign to decide who should rule northern India. On the 14th January 1761, on the field of Panipat, some thirty miles from Delhi, the Afghans and the Mahrattas met in one of the decisive battles of history. Both sides mustered armies of almost 100,000 men and the slaughter went on from morning to late afternoon, when the Mahrattas, with their leaders killed and their picked battalions decimated, fled the field. Never again did they attempt to rule northern India; and the victorious Ahmad Shah went on to defeat the Sikh army near Lahore, and annexed Tibet. For a few years he ruled an empire stretching from the Atrek river to Delhi and from the borders of Tibet to the Indian Ocean. The North-West Frontier had been temporarily obliterated.

The situation, however, was very unstable. Before the end of 1761 Ahmad Shah was glad to restore Delhi to a Mogul prince, and in 1767 he gave up the central Punjab to the Sikhs, retaining Lahore, Kashmir, and Multan.

With Ahmad Shah's death, Timur had to dispute the throne with his brother Sulaiman Mirza, who had been proclaimed king in Kandahar, the city dominating the south-western regions of Afghanistan. Sulaiman was quickly defeated, but Timur, disgusted with the conduct of the people of Kandahar, moved his court to

Kabul, which then became the capital of Afghanistan, and has remained so until today. In 1793 Timur died, it is thought from poisoning, and the Durrani Empire decayed. By some curious mischance he had failed to nominate an heir, and as twenty-three sons survived him, the bickering and fighting went on for some years. Zaman Shah, the fifth son, who forced his way on to the throne with the backing of the powerful Muhammadzai tribe, was defeated and blinded in 1800 by his brother Mahmud, and took refuge in India. Mahmud, indolent and incompetent, was deposed three years later by Shah Shuja. In 1809 he in turn gave way to Mahmud, whose second attempt to rule Afghanistan ended in disaster, not only for himself but the whole Sadozai family. In 1818 he seized Fateh Khan, his chief adviser and leader of the Muhammadzais, and had his eyes put out. This sudden act of barbarity roused the whole Muhammadzai tribe, who drove the Sadozais from Kabul, leaving them to take refuge in Herat, a town on the western fringe of the country, near the borders of Persia. The forces which had created the North-West Frontier operated again to restore it. Once more, in the central sectors at least, the Indus became the boundary line.

The internecine warfare continued in Afghanistan for another eight years, one princeling after another trying his luck on the throne, until in 1826 Dost Mohammed, youngest son of a murdered Muhammadzai chieftain, took control. Dost Mohammed—one of the main actors in the drama to come—was tall, finely built, and had a regal air about him. His eyes were keen and his conversation was vigorous. He was astute, determined, though not without a grim sense of humour. He once remarked to a British officer that, as a Mohammedan ruler, he would sweep the British unbelievers into the sea if he got the chance, then added charmingly that as he temporarily needed their help, he would have to treat with them.

By now the Sikhs had acquired a powerful and cunning ruler named Ranjit Singh, whose armies had seized Kashmir, Multan, the Derajat (in the northern Punjab), and in 1820 had crossed the Indus to wrest control of the Peshawar valley. This action was to prove one of the most important events in the whole history of the Frontier and to shape events which have followed right up till today. To Dost Mohammed, gazing round his shattered kingdom from the court in Kabul, the situation must have seemed dark indeed. But before he could even raise an army to march against

the Sikhs he became aware that new and greater forces were coming into play. The Russians had just begun surveying the Caspian and Aral seas in Central Asia and were preparing to send a new expedition against Khiva, 450 miles beyond his northern frontier. To the south, the British were steadily extending their hold on India and had already defeated the Mahrattas. Ostensibly they had no intention of approaching the Frontier and had signed a treaty with Ranjit Singh whom they regarded as a firm ally. However, there could be no doubt that they had become very much aware of the Frontier's existence; the Governor-General, Lord Auckland, was already urging the British envoy in Persia to dissuade the Shah from attacking Herat. 'We must view with umbrage and displeasure', he wrote, 'the scene of interference and conquest on our north-western frontier.'

The scene was now set for one of the most fateful and bloody phases in the history of the Frontier.

2

LORD AUCKLAND HAS A PLAN

On the 27th November 1838 Lord Auckland arrived at Ferozepore, a Punjab town near Lahore, accompanied by his sister, the Honourable Emily Eden, his advisers and staff, and a vast retinue of servants. His object was to review his army before it marched into Afghanistan, and to meet Ranjit Singh, the ruler of the Punjab. For miles across the plain there stretched the tents of the infantry, the cavalry, and the artillery, set out immaculately in rows. Through the centre of the camp there ran a wide avenue which was now lined by the guard of honour, resplendent in its full-dress uniforms. At an agreed signal there was a roar of guns, then the military bands struck up, and a line of elephants moved slowly down the avenue, carrying Ranjit Singh and his staff, in a blaze of oriental magnificence. From the further end of the avenue, Lord Auckland and his party, also mounted on elephants, advanced to meet it, cheered on by the thousands of troops, who came thronging from their tents. Perhaps carried away by the excitement, the mahouts spurred on their great beasts, and the two processions closed steadily, then collided. For some minutes there was chaos and some danger, as the elephants wheeled and crashed into each other, and the howdahs swayed precariously, threatening to eject their distinguished occupants into the roaring crowds below. However, the mahouts somehow managed to regain control, and Auckland found himself facing Ranjit Singh, their two elephants now standing side by side. Then, as the howdahs were manœuvred to within inches of each other, Ranjit Singh stood up, and was handed across the gap. Quickly hands stretched out to pull him into his seat, then the elephants swung round again, and both processions, hemmed in by a great crowd of troops and onlookers, headed for the durbar tent. Here the press was even greater; some members of the Sikh bodyguard

began wondering if their aged chief would be crushed to death, and brought up their guns in readiness to fire. But somehow relative order was restored again, and then, flanked by Auckland on one side and Sir Henry Fane, the British Commander-in-Chief, on the other, Ranjit Singh slowly made his way into the tent.

He was dressed, Emily Eden records, in a red silk dress, and wore stockings, but after resting upon the settee for a while 'soon contrived to slip one off, that he might sit with one foot in his hand, comfortably'. By him, caressing his leg, sat his favourite boy, Heera Singh, magnificently dressed and 'loaded with emeralds and pearls'. After the formal greetings had been completed some of Auckland's aides came forward with a picture of Queen Victoria by Miss Eden herself, resting on a green and gold cushion. All the company stood up, and as the artillery outside fired a salute of twenty-one guns the gift was handed over. For five minutes or more Ranjit Singh examined the picture with his one remaining eye, asked if the details were accurate, then remarked that it was the most gratifying present he could have received. 'On my return to camp,' he added, 'the picture will be hung outside my tent and I shall have a royal salute fired.' In this cordial atmosphere two howitzers and 200 shells were presented, followed by 'an elephant with gold trappings and seven horses equally bedizened'. But then things went wrong: in the excitement one of the shells which had been knocked over rolled into Ranjit Singh's path, and, before anyone could prevent him, he had tripped over it and fallen flat on his face. He was hauled to his feet and proved unhurt; but the incident was looked on as a bad omen by the Sikhs present. The symbolism of their ruler lying prostrate before the British guns was too plain for comfort.

The following day, when Auckland returned the visit and rode into the Sikh camp, the pageantry was even more magnificent; and foremost among the troops were the royal bodyguard dressed in yellow satin, with gold scarves and shawls. Even their beards were enveloped 'in a drapery of gold or silver tissue to protect them from the dust', and their arms (declares a Sikh historian) 'were all of gold'. As the festivities progressed, Ranjit Singh became so amenable that to the annoyance of his prime minister and staff he was heard to declare, 'The Sikhs and the English are to be all one family, and live in the same house.' Any suspicion and jealousy,

Emily Eden noted in her diary, had been completely overcome; Ranjit Singh was now determined to demonstrate how completely he trusted the English.

Not all the English were quite so sanguine; and some viewed the Sikh court with distaste. The dancing girls were considered far too naked and 'the antics of some male buffons' completely disgusting. Emily Eden in her girlish naivety had failed to appreciate the paederastic nature of Ranjit's relations with the gorgeously bedizened boys around him, but those who did were somewhat revolted. The sight to Victorian eyes must certainly have been extraordinary, with the boys seated on gold and silver chairs, and Heera Singh 'one mass of jewels . . . his neck, arms, and legs were covered so thickly with necklaces, armlets, and bangles, formed of pearls, diamonds and rubies, one above the other, that it was difficult to discover anything between them'. In the words of Sir John Kaye, 'it was a melancholy thing to see the open exhibition . . . of all those low vices which were destroying the life, and damning the reputation of one who, but for these degrading sensualities . . . was one of the most remarkable men of modern times'.

Though assessing Ranjit's tastes and sexual habits from a strictly Victorian standpoint, Kaye was undoubtedly right in his main judgment. This was undoubtedly the most remarkable ruler produced by India in the nineteenth century. Almost from nothing he had built up a great Sikh empire and now dominated the whole Punjab and the Peshawar valley. His first great office was the governorship of Peshawar, to which he was raised, ironically enough, by the Afghans, on the understanding that he would recognise their overlordship. However, as he soon observed, the Sadozai regime in Kabul was fast waning, so he took the power into his own hands. Travelling in disguise, he visited the British camps and noted how the native troops were trained. Then, carefully insuring himself by a treaty of 'perpetual friendship' with the East India Company, he engaged French, Italian, and Dutch officers to train his own forces and build up the Khalsa, the army of the 'elect' or 'chosen' people, as the Sikhs called themselves. Rapidly his territories expanded. But he was too subtle to use force as anything but a last resort; negotiation led to bargaining, bargaining to coercion, and coercion to bullying, and only when this failed did the Khalsa receive orders to march. By the time Ranjit was forty, the Sikh nation,

which barely numbered half a million, were lords of all they surveyed.

But having secured his empire he made no attempt to organise or improve it. According to Bosworth Smith, 'a good army and a full exchequer were . . . the only objects of his government'. Taxes were levied on necessities and luxuries alike, and powerful governors in each province were appointed to ensure their collection. But, curiously enough, no accounts or balance sheets were demanded, and for sixteen years the Army Paymaster neglected to submit any statement whatsoever. Ranjit himself could neither read nor write, and the only aide-memoire he ever used in his life was a notched stick. His criminal code was simple but severe, and its mode of execution varied according to the local governor. Thefts or ordinary murders were punishable by fines; crimes of gross violence by mutilation—the loss of ears, nose, or hand; and the worst criminals were hamstrung. General Avitabile, an Italian who served him as the governor of Peshawar, found this code too lenient, however, and substituted his own; anyone opposing his will was blown from the guns, or turned out to die in the sun, naked and smeared with honey, or sawn in half between two planks, or impaled, or flayed alive. Ranjit's police force was used chiefly to put down disorder and facilitate the movements of the army. There were no judges, no schools, no hospitals, no proper roads. There was no written law whatsoever. Still, the regime was stable, and though Ranjit Singh was old, tottered on his feet, and drank regularly to excess, no one dared oppose him. As Emily Eden put it, ' . . . he has made himself a great King; he has conquered a great many powerful enemies . . . he has disciplined a large army; he hardly ever takes away a life which is wonderful in a despot; and he is excessively beloved by his people. . . .' Modern historians regard these observations as rather shrewd: by the oriental standards of the day, Ranjit's regime was relatively liberal.

It should not be imagined that the debauchery he laid on for the entertainment of Auckland and his party was anything unusual; for years he had been drinking to excess and indulging in whatever his own or other imaginations could devise by way of debauchery. Beautiful Kashmiri girls littered his court, though disease and age steadily lessened his enjoyment of them; but when he turned to boys for consolation he still retained the girls, mounting them on horse-

back and making them gallop. When Emily Eden met him she thought he looked like 'an old mouse, with grey whiskers and one eye', and she might also have added that he was frail, white-bearded, and bent. But his mind still functioned and, drunk or sober, his power from Peshawar to Lahore was absolute.

Lord Auckland, the Governor-General, as might be expected, presented a violent contrast in every way. At this time fifty-four years of age, he was a plain, undemonstrative Englishman from Beckenham in Kent. Most people found him gentle, pleasant to deal with and kind-hearted, and his servants thought the world of him. His courtesy never varied, whatever the station, race, or creed of the person he was dealing with; he treated the Indians just the same as the English. If he happened to stumble upon some instance of personal distress which it was in his power to alleviate he would take action at once. He was born George Eden, his father being the first Lord Auckland and his mother sister to the Earl of Minto, and initially settled on a legal career. In 1809 he entered Lincoln's Inn to read for the Bar, but the following year managed to get a safe seat in the House of Commons, where he sat as a Whig. Playing himself in quietly during the years after Waterloo when his party was in opposition, he spoke upon every conceivable topic; there was nothing too dull or insignificant for his modest talent. Such pertinacity often pays dividends, and (so Auckland's biographer notes) 'His regular attendance and plain commonsense commended him to the Whig leaders'. In 1830 Lord Grey made him President of the Board of Trade, and four years later he became the First Lord of the Admiralty—apart from W. H. Smith, the bookseller, the most un-naval First Lord there ever was. However, Britain was at peace and few opportunities to blunder presented themselves, so the following year, when Melbourne decided to revoke Sir Robert Peel's nomination of Lord Heytesbury as Governor-General of India, he substituted Auckland (he had succeeded to the title in 1814) instead. The reason for the switch has never been explained, though it is hard not to believe that Palmerston was behind it. Auckland had been on terms of intimacy with him for some time, and during his term at the Board of Trade corresponded with him regularly. Palmerston may have regarded Auckland as a 'safe man' who would carry out his bidding without too much argument; and in the event he proved right. Auckland (to quote Vincent Smith)

'. . . was an able and conscientious man but he lacked the personality to dominate a situation and was prone to be influenced by spirits more ardent than his own'. Smith also accuses him of having 'a vein of moral weakness which led him to acts which still seem in perspective to be wholly out of character'. Altogether, one might say, he was an able enough administrator when times were quiet, but no man for a crisis; and soon after his arrival in February 1836 it was a crisis he had to face.

Before turning to this, however, it is necessary to devote a short space to British methods of governing their Indian territories at this time. The latter did not come directly under the Crown, but were held by the proprietors and directors of the East India Company (a private body) 'in trust for His Majesty, his heirs and successors, for the service of the Government of India'. The Charter Act, from which this passage is quoted, had been passed in 1833, designed to last for twenty years. The East India Company was run by a Court of Directors numbering twenty-four, a quarter of whom retired each year. There was no limit to their authority over the Government of India, so it was laid down, 'with the exception that in all matters other than patronage the Board of Control might compel them to act as it pleased'. The Court could recall the Governor-General or any other servant, so long as Parliament did not choose to intervene. There is no record of its doing so, but, on the other hand, successive Governors were treated rather roughly; sometimes they were looked on as little more than regional executives. The Board of Control virtually meant the President of the Board, who was a member of the Cabinet. This minister, however, had no power to write the Governor-General direct, and from his office in Cannon Row communicated with the Court of Directors in Leadenhall Street. The Court, however, were bound by law to obey any instructions received from the President, and send him copies of all proceedings and letters they received. This circuitous arrangement worked fairly well where routine matters were concerned, but Her Majesty's Government (Victoria ascended to the throne four years after the Charter Act was passed) refused to communicate confidential matters to twenty-four citizens, and so a Secret Committee had to be formed, the members of which were sworn in. When the Governor-General wrote a 'Secret letter' he addressed it to the Secret Committee instead of the Court, and the Committee

was bound to send it to the President. The latter, of course, acted with the knowledge of the Cabinet, and so, despite the asinine administrative arrangement, the latter's commands were eventually put into operation. Naturally, the Court of Directors, being powerful men, had their own representatives in the House of Commons, and through these could exercise indirect checks on government action. Finally, the whole system was frequently reduced to absurdity by the use of 'D.O.', that is demi-official, and private letters. The Governor-General could write privately to the President, the Prime Minister, or any other member of the Cabinet. Auckland, as we have seen, kept up a regular correspondence with Lord Palmerston, the Foreign Secretary. Within India the Government consisted of the Governor-General, the Commander-in-Chief, and three members of Council. Their duties were 'the superintendence, direction, and control of the civil and military government of the territories and revenues of India'.

The British territories at this time, it should be remembered, by no means included the whole of the Indian sub-continent. For the most part they comprised Bengal, Bihar and large tracts of eastern India, the United Provinces, the North-West Provinces reaching up towards Delhi, Madras in the south and Bombay province in the west. In central India the Nizam of Hyderabad ruled a vast state, as did the ruler of Oudh in the north; Ranjit, as we know, ruled over 100,000 square miles in the Punjab, and to the south and west Rajputana and Sind were still independent. Altogether, India was an ungainly patchwork of states and rulers, and the only thing which could be said with any certainty was that the territory governed by the British was growing steadily.

But it is time to return to Lord Auckland, Ranjit Singh, and the durbar at Ferozepore. This came to an end on the 30th November, when the British Commander-in-Chief, Sir Henry Fane, manœuvred his forces in battle formation, launching them to attack imaginary enemies with great élan. Ranjit Singh declared himself most impressed; then on the following day made his farewells and returned with his retinue to Lahore, dragging his newly acquired howitzers behind him. The Bengal Army, 9,500 men all told, including artillery, struck its tents and on the 2nd December began the long march towards the Indus and Afghanistan. It cannot be said that it marched with any great enthusiasm, and rumours

abounded that Sir Henry thought so little of the project that he had refused to go. The project was, in simple terms, to remove the Amir, Dost Mohammed, from his throne at Kabul, and install in his place the exiled monarch, Shah Shuja. This was the first time in history that a British army had approached, let alone crossed, the North-West Frontier of India, and it is necessary to go back a few years in time to explain how such an extraordinary event came about.

From the early years of the century Russia had been exerting pressure on Persia in the Caucasus, and, greatly alarmed, the Shah turned to Britain for help. But Britain was preoccupied with Napoleon, and it wasn't until 1814 that an Anglo-Persian treaty was negotiated, by which the British pledged to go to the aid of Persia if she were attacked by a European power, either by sending arms or providing a subsidy. But even as the treaty was being signed the Russians were moving forward again and soon forced on Persia a treaty whereby the latter was robbed of the right to maintain warships in the Caspian Sea and agreed to recognise the Russian occupation of Georgia. In 1828 the Russians increased their pressure, and by the treaty of Turkmanchai consolidated their possessions south of the Caucasus. British policy at this time was pusillanimous, to say the least, and the Persians came to the conclusion that their best course was to try to compensate their losses in the west by attacking Afghanistan to the east. In this enterprise they were encouraged by the Russians, and in due course the plan crystallised into a campaign against Herat, the Afghan town standing on the western flank of the Hindu Kush, and guarding the road to Kandahar and India.

Herat is an ancient town which has been scourged by many conquerors from Genghis Khan onwards; for years it flourished under Tamerlane, and in the early sixteenth century the Sultan Husain Mirza Baiqara made it the most famous centre of literature, culture, and art in the whole of Central and Western Asia. According to Arnold Toynbee, the historian, who paid a visit in 1960, Herat is a beautiful, mellow city, harbouring the tombs of many poets and great men. But 'the beauty of Herat does not lie in the details, however lovely each of these, singly, may be. It lies in the panorama of the city embowered in its valley.' But, unfortunately, despite its beauty and its tactical importance, Herat is very susceptible to an attack from the east.

In the early 1830's the Persian schemes were delayed by the deaths

of the Shah and his heir-apparent, which occurred within a few months of each other, but with the accession of the Shah Mohammed Mirza they soon revived. By July 1835 Palmerston was writing to Sir Henry Ellis, the British representative in Teheran, telling him 'to warn the Persian Government against allowing themselves to be pushed on to make war against the Afghans'. Ellis replied in November—one must realise that letters at this time often took months to be delivered—that the Shah now had 'very extended schemes of conquest in the direction of Afghanistan . . . and conceives that the right of sovereignty over Herat and Kandahar is as complete now as in the reign of the Safavi dynasty'. (The latter was a sixteenth-century dynasty during which Herat had belonged to Persia.) It was soon after this correspondence had passed that Auckland arrived in India; but before he could understand the situation in detail, let alone formulate a plan, it was complicated by the arrival of a letter from Dost Mohammed. The Afghans had recently defeated Ranjit Singh's army near Jamrud, at the mouth of the Khyber, but had refrained from reoccupying Peshawar. Dost Mohammed wanted to enlist the aid of the British in coming to a more permanent settlement, and wrote Lord Auckland accordingly. The latter, however, did not take the request very seriously, and replied that it wasn't British practice to interfere with the affairs of independent states. He added, however, that he had a project in mind for the development of the Indus basin and would be sending a representative to discuss various commercial matters with the Amir. In due course the representative was chosen—Captain Alexander Burnes, a young Scotsman, who was to play an increasingly important role in the drama to come, a role that was to end in tragedy.

The reasons for his selection are clear enough. As a young officer in the Company's army he had distinguished himself as a translator of Persian and a cartographer. He was a witty talker and wrote amusing accounts of his experiences which commended him to his superiors, and when in 1830 it was decided that a gift of horses should be sent to Ranjit Singh (as a pretext for discovering more about his regime), Sir John Malcolm, Governor of Bombay, chose Burnes for the job. Burnes—always an opportunist—went on from Lahore to Simla, where he reported to the Governor-General, Lord William Bentinck, and somehow persuaded him to sponsor further

travels through Afghanistan and Central Asia. In Kabul he was graciously received by Dost Mohammed, for whom he developed a great liking, then pushed on over the Hindu Kush to the Oxus valley, and from there to Meshed, Bokhara, and Tehran. Arriving in London in 1833, he became an immediate celebrity, and all the great hostesses invited him to come and tell his stories. At Holland House he enjoyed a considerable success, and soon the learned societies were after him, followed by the statesmen. Needless to add, his book of travels was a best-seller. Burnes was not the first traveller in modern times to reach Kabul; before the close of the eighteenth century an Englishman called Forster had traversed Afghanistan and reached the borders of the Caspian. Thirty years later, in 1823, Mountstuart Elphinstone published his book of travels which was virtually to become a textbook on Afghanistan. In 1819 two more Englishmen, Moorcroft and Trebeck, set out on a journey of exploration which was to last six years; and they were followed by a Scot, Edward Stirling, who was serving in the Bengal Civil Service, then Arthur Connolly, a cavalry officer. But their accounts stirred up little interest and were soon forgotten. It was Burnes who arrived at the right time, when the thrill of exploration was in the air and the Russian advance across the Central Asian desert had brought Afghanistan into the news. Nothing could prevent his early promotion, and soon a knighthood was added to mark the approval of the Establishment; seldom have the talents of a young officer brought such swift reward.

But many men graced with a surface brilliance have flaws of character underneath, and Burnes was no exception. According to Sir Henry Durand, his ambition 'was too hot a flame for the cautious fulfilment of his duty. . . . Sanguine, credulous, never pausing to weigh events, and not gifted with a comprehensive mind, he was easily carried away. . . .' Maud Diver, the novelist, whose sources are usually very accurate, castigates his moral behaviour, asserting: 'Wisely adopting Mohammedan dress, he unwisely adopted Mohammedan habits of life; including the harem. . . . His lack of dignity and diplomatic caution . . . alienated the respect of the chiefs.' Some criticisms were no doubt motivated by malice or jealousy, but there can be no doubt that there was a good deal of truth in them. However, in 1837 all the world had seen of Burnes was his brilliance and enterprise; and in the autumn of that year he

headed north for Kabul, with two assistants, to renew his acquaintance with Dost Mohammed.

Although Auckland had intimated his idea of sending a representative to Kabul soon after his arrival in India, the plan was no doubt brought to realisation by a dispatch from the Secret Committee, dated 25th June 1837. This instructed him 'to watch more closely than has been hitherto attempted the progress of events in Afghanistan and to counteract the progress of Russian influence'. The mode of doing this was left to his discretion, the dispatch merely indicating that he might send a confidential agent, or adopt 'any other measures that may appear to you to be desirable in order to counteract Russian influence in that quarter, should you be satisfied ... that the time has arrived when it would be right for you to interfere decidedly in the affairs of Afghanistan'. A more intelligent man might have realised from this document that a situation was blowing up which demanded an experienced mission, not merely an enterprising young Scotsman. But Auckland merely went ahead as planned, not even bothering to summon Burnes for consultation before he left.

Burnes, it will be remembered, went purely on a commercial mission and had no powers to commit the Government of India. But, in the event, his first conference with Dost Mohammed made him realise that the latter had no interest in commercial matters or the development of the Indus basin; what he wanted was help to recover Peshawar from the Sikhs, whom, he declared, had basely wrested it from him while he was engaged in a war with Shah Shuja, who was attempting to recover the throne. Except for murmuring politely that the British Government would do all it could to ensure peace between the Sihks and Afghans, Burnes could make no reply; and before further instructions could be obtained, news arrived that Kohun Dil Khan, the chief of Kandahar, was intriguing with the Persians and Russians. Meanwhile, Auckland had realised the inadequacy of Burnes' brief, and about the 8th September 1837 ordered his chief adviser, Sir William Macnaghten, to send off new instructions. These, though rather vague, completely altered the nature of Burnes' mission, robbing it of any commercial objects and substituting political intelligence instead. Burnes, of course, was completely unequipped for this new role: Auckland had blundered.

Macnaghten, the official who drafted the instructions, proved to be a controversial character, just as Burnes and Auckland himself, and some critics have held him primarily responsible for the disasters to come. Sir Henry Durand has charged that he allowed 'phantasms of remote danger to warp his judgment'. General MacMunn describes him as 'a Secretariat man pure and simple . . . in service jargon [he] had "never held the baby", had never been called on to handle men and affairs on the spot'. Fraser-Tytler argues that he never 'grasped the realities of the Afghan situation'. Sir John Kaye considers him a baffling character. He was undoubtedly a brilliant linguist and scholar, he had a quick brain and never stopped working, but—'Most men have an unhappy faculty of believing what they wish to be true. In Macnaghten this propensity was unnaturally developed. God had cursed him with a strong delusion that he should believe a lie. . . .' It was certainly an evil fate which allied him with Auckland and Burnes.

But to return to Burnes' new instructions, which were dispatched from Calcutta on the 11th September. 'The quiet and unassuming character of your mission . . .' Macnaghten wrote, 'will, owing to recent events, be very much changed; and instead of your being merely the bearer of an invitation to the Amir of general friendship . . . in matters of commerce, you may be looked for as an arbiter of peace, and possibly of a supporter of extravagant pretensions.' As it went on, the dispatch grew even more vapid, and the only lucid clause asserted that, whatever arrangements for Peshawar were discussed, 'the honour and just wishes of our old friend and firm ally Ranjit Singh' must be given priority. Burnes still had no direct political power, and his only possible role was to argue and report. When Dost Mohammed realised this—which was fairly soon—their exchanges lost any sense of reality. However, Burnes did learn Dost Mohammed's views on a number of matters, and in an able dispatch pointed out that our alliance with the Sikhs was a diminishing asset; that when Ranjit Singh died, which he must do fairly soon, all stability would vanish. Meanwhile, by giving his interests complete priority over those of Dost Mohammed, we were driving the latter towards the arms of Russia.

Burnes already had concrete evidence for this last assertion. On the 19th November the Amir had advised him that a Russian agent, Captain Vickovitch, was on his way with a letter from the Tsar.

This was in reply to a letter from himself, imploring the Tsar's help against the Sikhs. Dost Mohammed was very frank about the whole matter, asserting that he did not wish to receive agents from any other power if he could gain sympathetic consideration from the British. He even volunteered to refuse to receive the Russian, but Burnes thought any such action unnecessary, and when Vickovitch arrived he naturally tried to discover the exact nature of his mission. In these efforts he was unsuccessful; but, as Dost Mohammed's manner remained friendly to him and grew increasingly cold towards the Russian, he was not unduly depressed.

What was depressing was the onward march of the Persian armies towards Herat. Leaving Teheran on the 23rd July they had lumbered across the plain, and on the 15th November had taken Ghorian, a fortress forty miles from Herat. On the 1st December the siege of Herat itself began, and according to reports it could not hold out very long. At this time Lord Auckland was engaged on a leisurely progress through India, divorced by some hundreds of miles from the Council in Calcutta and the apparatus of government. Despite the news from Afghanistan, he apparently saw no reason to change his plans, or to vary his attitude towards Dost Mohammed. When Burnes' latest dispatch arrived, urging him to decide which he would support—the Afghans or the Sikhs—Auckland told Macnaghten to snub him. The Governor-General, Burnes was told icily, did not agree with his proposals. Dost Mohammed's correct course was to make overtures for peace and endeavour 'to appease the feelings of the powerful monarch whom he had offended'. If he did this, and at the same time relinquished 'alliances with any power to the westward', he could rely on British goodwill, but not otherwise. If Dost refused to take this course he would have to accept the consequences, and Burnes should request the dismissal of his mission and return to Peshawar.

This letter, which was sent on the 20th January 1838 and received some time in March, rendered any further negotiations in Kabul quite hopeless and on the 26th April Burnes left for Peshawar. En route he reported to Auckland at Simla and warned him that Dost Mohammed was now in earnest negotiation with the Russian agent, Captain Vickovitch.

Meanwhile at Herat some extraordinary things had been happening. A few weeks ahead of the invading Persians there had

arrived, wearing Eastern dress, a young Irish artillery officer by the name of Eldred Pottinger. Like Burnes, he had a taste for travel, and had obtained permission from the East India Company's army to travel in Khurasan. Pottinger was the beau ideal of a Victorian hero, tall, strong, handsome, virtuous, religious, utterly courageous, and industrious. Finding himself in Herat at the outbreak of war, he did not move on at the first opportunity, but stayed and aroused the people to fight. He showed them how to organise the defences, to repair the walls, to site the guns, and repel invaders. The result was that, instead of surrendering to the Persian hosts, the Heratians began resisting. Whenever their spirits flagged under the bombardment from the Shah's artillery Pottinger would be among them, driving, urging, encouraging. In April the city had still not succumbed. Pottinger's arrival had, in fact, proved one of the extraordinary accidents of military history.

As it so happened, there was a British officer with the Persians, a Lieutenent-Colonel Stoddart, who belonged to the Military Mission at Teheran. When Pottinger arrived in the Shah's camp on a mission from the rulers of Herat, Stoddart was naturally somewhat amazed. But the attempted mediation of these two officers with the Shah was quite fruitless: he intended to take Herat, he told them, and wanted no argument. So Pottinger went back to his headquarters in the city and fought on. But his opinion, which he communicated to Burnes in a letter delivered just before he left Kabul, was that Herat could not survive beyond the end of April.

In fact it held on a good deal longer, though its situation remained precarious and its people on the borders of starvation. But however bad the news, Lord Auckland pursued his chosen path, unflurried, unhurried, and immoveable in his opinions. However, in June he asked Burnes for his advice on the best methods for counteracting Dost Mohammed's drift towards Russia, and Burnes, in a last effort to get his views accepted, wrote bluntly: 'Dost Mohammed . . . is a man of undoubted ability: and if half you do for others were done for him . . . he would abandon Persia and Russia tomorrow. . . . The man has much to be said for him . . . and if Afghans are proverbially not to be trusted I see no reason for having greater mistrust in him than of others.' These observations were sound and logical and in accord with everything that Burnes had pleaded before. But in the same letter he wrote that if Dost Mohammed were to be

replaced on the throne of Kabul 'the British Government have only to send Shuja-ul-Mulk to Peshawar with an agent and two of its regiments, as honorary escort, and an avowal to the Afghans that we have taken up his cause to ensure his being fixed for ever on his Throne'.

This, suggestion to quote Fraser-Tytler, 'was a strange and fatal blunder. . . . It savours of weakness, of a desire . . . "to tell Master something he wanted to hear".' Nevertheless, Auckland accepted it with immediate enthusiasm and relief, as did Macnaghten and his staff. This was the move he was looking for: in one blow he would comfort his firm ally, Ranjit Singh, remove the aggravating Dost Mohammed, warn the Persians, and advise the Russians that he was not to be trifled with. With his own nominee in power at Kabul, and Afghanistan firmly under British paramountcy, the balance of power would be automatically restored in favour of the British.

Shuja-ul-Mulk was none other than the deposed monarch, usually known as Shah Shuja. Since being thrown out by Dost Mohammed in 1810 he had made repeated efforts to regain power, first with the aid of the Sikhs and later with the Persians. For a time he was able to hold Peshawar, but then the Governor of Attock seized him in 1812 and for a year he found himself a prisoner in Kashmir. Later on he was supported by the Rajah of Kistawar, a Himalayan state adjoining Kashmir, but finding no direct military aid he threw himself under the protection of the British at Ludhiana. In 1818 and again in 1834 he had made abortive attempts to invade Afghanistan, but now his fortunes were low, and there was nobody left to whom he could turn for help. However, it so happened that he had impressed the British agent at Ludhiana, Captain Wade. For some time before Burnes' fateful letter Wade had been singing the praises of Shah Shuja, and passing on information received from Masson, an agent beyond the Indus, which indicated that he was popular in Afghanistan and would be received with enthusiasm. Burnes had seen Masson's reports, too, and chose to rely on them rather than his own observation and judgment. The extraordinary thing is that Masson was by profession an antiquary, and without any training or qualifications as a political intelligence officer. He probably wasn't paid for his services, and he certainly hadn't penetrated to central Afghanistan. As far as one can judge, his reports were neither checked nor corroborated, and the reason for their unquestioning

acceptance by Captain Wade is problematical. Perhaps (as Sir Henry Durand alleges) Wade was utterly fatuous, or perhaps he had taken such a liking to Shah Shuja that this coloured his professional judgment. All one can say for certain is that Masson, the obscure antiquary, was responsible for a major and disastrous change in British policy.

As for Shah Shuja, it is generally accepted that he had a dignified but winning way about him, and an evident desire to please. Mountstuart Elphinstone had written of him in glowing terms fifteen years earlier. But a ruler needs more than charming manners, and except for his pertinacity Shah Shuja's virtues were somewhat shadowy. However, enthusiasm for him in the British camp grew steadily, and from the talk of the advisers and secretaries one might have thought him a mixture of Alexander and Charlemagne. If anyone had doubts they are certainly not recorded.

But it was one thing to decide that a new monarch should be installed in Kabul and quite another to put the plan into action. Pondering the matter at his headquarters in Simla in May 1838 Auckland came to the conclusion that the key to the question lay in the Sikhs. They had already backed Shah Shuja's attempt to regain the throne in 1834 and were still in treaty relations with him. If, therefore, Ranjit Singh's army could head north in support of the force led by Shah Shuja and financed by the British the matter could be accomplished without too great an expenditure of effort. All the British need do (except for providing limited finance) would be to furnish a few staff officers and political advisers. Whether Auckland considered the feelings of the Afghans at all is very doubtful; probably he comforted himself with the fact that internecine warfare was their national pastime, and, reasoned that as they had changed their loyalties eight times in the last forty-five years, they could change again.

But the question now was: would Ranjit Singh co-operate? Macnaghten, dispatched hurriedly to his court at Lahore, found him in a receptive frame of mind. For the British to become a party to his treaty with Shah Shuja, he declared grandiloquently, 'would be adding sugar to milk'. So the tripartite agreement was drawn up and signed, and arrangements between Ranjit Singh and Shah Shuja (once he was on the throne) were discussed in detail. The military arrangements, the question of whose forces were to be used and in

what numbers, were, however, skated over very swiftly. Macnaghten merely asked Ranjit whether he would like his own army to act independently, or whether he would prefer to act in concert with the British, and naturally he chose the latter alternative. But by some mysterious process, as negotiations went on during June and July, the British role grew and Ranjit's diminished. By the 13th August, Lord Auckland was writing to the Secret Committee that he had decided 'to give the direct and powerful assistance of the British Government to the enterprise of Shah-ul-Mulk, in a degree which was not in the first instance contemplated by me, from a conviction, confirmed in the most decided manner by every opinion of authority on the subject, that the measure could not be trusted mainly to the support of the Sikh ruler. . . .'

Ranjit Singh, of course, had never intended to risk his beloved regiments in the north-western passes. He knew the Afghans at close quarters, and indeed, it was the Afghan, Zaman Shah, who, forty years earlier, had appointed him Governor of the Punjab. He knew how the tribes could fight in the mountain passes and how bitterly they would resent any foreign intrusion. Even when offering his co-operation the shrewd old profligate sensed that Lord Auckland had the bit between his teeth, and before long British troops would be committed. All he had to do was make sympathetic noises and wait, and the British would rid him of Dost Mohammed and clear up the Peshawar situation of their own volition.

While Ranjit Singh knew the Afghans, knew the country across the Indus, and the approaches to Afghanistan, Lord Auckland did not. The formidable military and logistical problems facing his adventure were only dimly perceived by him; all he knew was that he had to go on. It is doubtful even if the situation at Herat was the main spur; the city was still holding out, and Palmerston was exerting considerable pressure in the Persian Gulf. Already on the 27th July his envoy had given the Shah a solemn warning that if he persisted in his plans Britain would regard herself free to take any action she chose, including a full-scale war. Fraser-Tytler has suggested that Auckland, like so many rulers before him and after, was being sucked towards the Frontier by the mysterious forces it generates. 'There is a fate about this restless frontier', he writes, 'which has been too strong for mankind ever since the days when

the Greek rulers of Bactria died fighting in face of the invading nomads till now. . . .' Whether there is any truth in this need not be argued now, but the fact is that on the 10th September, Auckland issued orders for the mobilisation of 'the Army of Afghanistan'. Three weeks later, on the 1st October, Macnaghten issued on his behalf the Simla manifesto which declared:

'The welfare of our possessions in the East requires that we should have on our western frontier an ally who is interested in resisting aggression, and establishing tranquillity, in the place of chiefs ranging themselves in subservience to a hostile power, and seeking to promote schemes of conquest and aggrandisement.'

So the die was cast, and the military machine ground into action.

But how was the army to reach Afghanistan, and by which routes? The British frontier at this time lay on the Sutlej, and between its forward cantonment at Ludhiana and the Khyber Pass lay the Punjab, most of its five great rivers, and the Indus. Once the army crossed these with all its baggage and guns there would still be the difficult task of threading a way through the Khyber and the treacherous Khurd-Kabul beyond. A more westerly route to Kandahar would provide easier country, but the distance would be great—some 850 miles from Ferozepore, and another 325 miles from Kandahar to Kabul. On the other hand, the first 450 miles of the journey, as far as Sukkur, would be flanked by the Sutlej, which would not only provide water but transport. Eventually this longer route was chosen. The troops, under Major-General Sir Willoughby Cotton, would consist of three infantry brigades and one cavalry brigade. The bulk of the units would be provided by the Company's army and would consist of Bengal Native Infantry, but there would also be two battalions of British troops, the 13th Foot and the 3rd Buffs, and the 16th Lancers. This force would be supported by the Bombay division (two infantry and one cavalry brigade) under Lieutenant-General Sir John Keane. Shah Shuja's own force would consist of six infantry battalions and two cavalry regiments, under the command of Brigadier Simpson from the 19th Bengal Infantry.

This was to be the first campaign of Victoria's reign, and the army commanders, not to mention Lord Auckland, had therefore a special reason to make a success of it. Formed up on parade, and at the durbar at Ferozepore, the troops looked magnificent, their uniforms a blaze of colour. But both native and British troops were

dressed in the European fashion, in thick red tunics, shakoes, and white cross-belts. The Bengal Horse Artillery were in brass dragoon helmets with leopard-skin rolls, white buckskin breeches, and high jack-boots. Only the Irregular Horse wore uniforms suited to the climate.

If the uniforms were out of date the administrative and supply system was almost prehistoric, and based on that of the old Mogul armies. The army was supplied from what General MacMunn calls 'a huge moving city of shops which followed it pick-a-back'. The regimental agents and contractors fed the men, mended their clothing, and soled their shoes. Except for arms, ammunition, and military stores, they supplied every single article they might require.[1] Apart from the merchants and contractors, there was a huge army of tent-pitchers, and once the bazaar-master gave the order (after the Quartermaster-General's staff had allocated the site) up went the city of tents. Every merchant knew his exact position in the city, and though it moved on from day to day, the geography was the same. Unfortunately, however, no sanitary arrangements were made, and once cholera or dysentery was brought into the camp it spread like lightning.

If the campaign were a long one, even this vast crowd of followers could not carry sufficient stocks, and the hereditary grain carriers, especially the Brinjaras with their pack-bullocks, were contracted to bring supplies from the base. These had to be protected, and so during the years regiments of irregular cavalry had grown up. The whole system was clumsy, wasteful, and inefficient. The Bengal Army, for example, which only mustered 9,500 fighting men, took no less than 38,000 camp-followers and 30,000 camels. The wonder is not that it moved slowly but that it was able to move at all.

Regarding Cotton and Keane, all we need say of them is that even by the standards of the day they were not particularly distinguished. Cotton never seemed to realise the necessity of reconnoitring ahead, even when his army was halted for some days; and as for Keane, Sir John Kaye remarks: 'Of him [the troops] knew little and what little they did know did not fill them with any very eager desire to place themselves under his command.' But in

1. This system died hard and was not finally abolished till 1917. Even in 1942 when the 2nd British Division arrived in India and opened its own canteens it was promptly ordered to abolish them and take on Indian contractors.

the campaign, as in any other, the opinions of the troops were not called for; and when the orders to march came through they would obey them.

At the beginning of November there was a surprising development in the military situation. Auckland received a letter from Colonel Stoddart, the envoy at Herat, dated the 10th September and informing him that the Shah of Persia, 'in compliance with the demands of the British Government', had raised the siege and was withdrawing his armies. The danger from Persia and Russia had suddenly vanished. One might think that a reasonable reaction to this news would be to cancel the expedition, or at least reconsider its advisability, but Auckland did no such thing. On the 8th November he issued an order stating that although the Shah's action was 'a cause for congratulation' he would still go ahead with his plans. His reasoning was that the expedition had never been planned principally to relieve Herat, and the situation in Afghanistan was in any case unchanged by the Shah of Persia's withdrawal. For this obstinacy he has been condemned; Kaye argues that the expedition was no more than 'a folly and a crime'. Whether Auckland was now acting off his own bat, or in accordance with a policy laid down by the Court Directors, has been hotly disputed. Much of the argument turns on which letters had been received by whom and on which dates. But one cannot ignore, however, a secret dispatch from the Secret Committee, dated 24th October and *after* they had received the news from Herat. This lays down, for example, that 'The security of India and the North-West Frontier makes it an indispensable fact that we should establish influence and authority which later occurrences may have deprived us of. . . . It becomes imperative duty to adopt some course of policy by which Kabul and Kandahar may be united under a sovereign bound by every tie and interest . . . to Great Britain. . . . Such a Prince might, we are inclined to believe, be found in the person of Shah Shuja. . . . We accept the opinion of the agent at Ludhiana in his letter of the 1st June, 1838. . . .' The dispatch went on to instruct Auckland that he should use so many troops that there could be no chance of failure, then declared:

'We are aware that we have recommended to you . . . a series of measures which may require great exertions. . . . We are also aware that in carrying out our arms from the Indus we may appear to

contemplate schemes of aggrandisement that every consideration both of justice and policy would induce us to condemn, but in truth there is nothing aggressive in what we propose.'

By the time Auckland received this communication the durbar at Ferozepore was over and his army was on the march. In reply to questioners he had declared that the decision was his own, solely his own; but no doubt this dispatch arrived as a great comfort to him.

Sir Willoughby Cotton and the Bengal army marched, to be exact, on the 10th December. 'It was clear, bright, weather—the glorious cold season of Northern India. . . .' Sir John Kaye recalls, 'Nature seemed to smile on the expedition, and circumstances to favour its process. . . .' The first 450 miles were south-west down the left bank of the Sutlej, and water and supplies were plentiful. At Sukkur the Bengal Engineers had constructed a magnificent bridge of boats over the Indus which the native sepoys showed no reluctance to cross. After the Bengal army came the Bombay troops under Keane, and by the 19th February all the men, the animals, and the massive baggage train were across. Shah Shuja and his force meanwhile crossed at Shikarpur, to the west. Now the army—soon to be known as 'the Army of the Indus'—was in Baluchistan, and its troubles began. No staff plans had been made for crossing the waterless plains of Kacha Gandava, and so as the march went on hundreds of horses and camels were lost, and the rest weakened considerably. To make matters worse, the Baluchis came down from the hills and began raiding the baggage train. The staff, in their ignorance, had imagined that they would be able to replenish supplies from local merchants as they were accustomed to do in India, but now realised to their horror that circumstances had changed entirely. To make matters worse, their old carrier system failed.

However, despite hunger, thirst and administrative blunders, the army pushed on. On the 16th March the leading elements of Cotton's division began threading their way through the Bolan Pass, on their way to Quetta. This was the first time a British Army had negotiated any of the North-Western passes, and fortunately there was no opposition. Nevertheless, the road proved hard; more camels were lost, and a good deal of baggage was discarded. The camels each carried a day's food for 160 sepoys, and when they started going down in hundreds the supply situation deteriorated

even further. Then marauders came down to harass the rear brigade, and time was lost in a number of skirmishes. However, on the 26th March, Cotton reached Quetta (at this time a dismal collection of mud houses round the Shal-kot fort), where he was ordered to wait until Keane arrived with his division. Keane, however, had tried a short cut which put him even further behind, so it was not until the 31st March that he arrived, and the 7th April that the combined army could push on. Typically, Cotton had failed to use his time at Quetta to reconnoitre the Khojak Range which lay ahead, so had no idea which of the three passes he should select. In the event, Keane (who had now taken command) chose the worst and lost more baggage, more camels, 27,400 rounds of ammunition, and some of his spare gunpowder. When he arrived at Kandahar on the 26th April he had only two days' supply of half-rations for his men, and his cavalry had been wrecked as a fighting force, most of its horses being too emaciated to work.

But despite all the supply troubles, the situation was promising. Shah Shuja, crossing the Khojak by an easier route, had outmarched Keane and arrived in Kandahar on the 23rd, three days ahead of him. Though his reception had been a cool one and the chiefs had remained aloof, no demonstration was made by the populace. In general, the people had remained quietly indifferent. Gradually the units of the Bombay army arrived intact, and by the 3rd May the whole force was complete. Five days later Shah Shuja was formerly placed on the throne.

The next object was to march on Kabul and overthrow Dost Mohammed, but for a time the army was immobilised. The cavalry had to be largely remounted, the camels put out to graze, and the camp-followers allowed time to recover from their exhaustion. The fields around Kandahar were thick with grain, but this still had to be cut and collected, and meanwhile, to assuage their hunger, the troops bought large quantities of fruit. The result was that dysentery and a variety of stomach complaints swept through the ranks, the hospitals filled, and a good many British troops died. To complicate matters even further, a grain convoy under the Loharee chiefs had vanished somewhere in the mountains en route from India, as had the treasury which was coming from Shikarpur. Keane therefore found himself running short of cash and tried to raise a loan from the local authorities. Needless to say, they declined courteously.

In India the plight of the army was still unknown, and on the 24th May news of the 'capture of Kandahar' was greeted with wild enthusiasm and celebrated at the Queen's Birthday Ball. 'The scene', wrote Emily Eden, 'was Ammandale, a valley one thousand feet below Simla, where tents and a boarded platform for dancing had been set up. . . . "Victoria, God Save the Queen, and Kandahar" in huge illuminated letters adorned the great fir trees. There we were eating salmon from Scotland and sardines from the Mediterranean in the face of those high hills, some of which have remained untrodden since creation. . . .' Fêtes champêtres, archery competitions, dances and whist provided other diversions; the whole atmosphere was one of heady excitement. Further news from the front was expected hourly.

For some time none arrived. By the end of May, Macnaghten had so convinced himself of the ardour of Shah Shuja's reception that he was trying to persuade Keane to leave the Bombay division at Kandahar and march on Kabul with the remainder of his force. 'Not a shot will be fired,' he asserted. Initially Keane agreed, but, having discussed the suggestion with his staff, fortunately changed his mind. This havering, however, produced a bad impression in the army; senior officers were shocked that their commander should allow the political envoy to advise him on tactical matters. Finally, Keane decided to leave two battalions of native infantry, two troops of horse artillery, some of Shah Shuja's cavalry, and his siege guns as a garrison, and on the 27th June left Kandahar for Kabul.

By now the heat was considerable, but for Afghanistan the road was good, and in the Turnuk valley forage for camels and horses was plentiful. For miles at a time in the early stages of the march the troops found themselves penned in a narrow valley, dominated by overhanging cliffs, and constantly wading across the river as the road swung from side to side. All the time they were climbing steadily. Kandahar lies at 3,340 feet, but Kalat-i-Ghilzai, eighty miles on, lies at 5,540, and Ghazni, the great fortress some 200 miles on, at over 7,000 feet. As they approached the latter the air became cooler, which was a merciful relief. But the Ghilzais now began to show themselves, their cavalry moving parallel to the army on either flank. When any opportunity offered itself they swooped down on the baggage train, killed a few camp-followers, then made off with what they could carry. But they were not in great enough

numbers to do great damage, and by the 18th July, Keane found the head of his column within two marches of Ghazni. The following day Shah Shuja arrived with his troops, and Brigadier Willshire brought up the rear with the British Infantry.

The question now facing Keane was whether Ghazni was occupied. Burnes, riding ahead of the army, brought in a report that its garrison had fled, but Keane wisely treated this with reserve. When he reached the suburbs it was to find that they were occupied in some strength, and the Afghan outposts were only driven in after some skirmishing by the light companies of the Bengal infantry. Across the vineyards were dug series of deep trenches, the vines being planted in the bottom, and these proved ideal for defence. When the walls of Ghazni came into view Keane was somewhat horrified by them. Protected by a moat, they rose up some seventy feet, and mining and escalading were out of the question. Luckily, a disgruntled nephew of Dost Mohammed had turned up, and he was able to give detailed plans of the defences. These indicated that the only hope of attack was via the Kabul gate, and so it was decided (according to Sir Henry Durand, who was there) 'to attempt to blow open the gate and so carry the fortress by a coup de main'. Stupidly, Keane advised Macnaghten of his plan and he in turn told Shah Shuja. By the 21st July, when the assault troops were in position, the Shah's babbling attendants had allowed the news to be leaked to the garrison who quite naturally stood to.

Then there was another hitch. On the night of the 21st, blue light signals were observed on the hills dominating the camp to the eastward; next morning their significance became apparent as 6,000 Ghilzai cavalry came charging down the hill. The trumpets sounded the alarm, and as the Lancers and the Bengal cavalry went out to meet the challenge the gunners went into action and shells began exploding among the Ghilzai horsemen. Soon they were in disorder, then wheeled their horses about and raced back over the crest.

The assault took place on the 23rd. With a party of engineers Henry Durand advanced towards the Kabul gate, but when he was still 150 yards away the Afghans spotted him and a hot fire came down from the ramparts. Somehow Durand, with a few sappers carrying sacks of powder, was able to hurl himself towards the foot of the gate. Here the sacks were quickly deposited, then Durand and a sergeant ran along the base of the scarp, uncoiling the fuse,

while the Afghans fired at them from their loopholes, hurled lumps of earth and stones and bricks. Durand and the sergeant were hit again and again by these missiles, but fortunately escaped the bullets, and eventually reached the shelter of the sally-port. Here they tried to light the fuse, but the match failed to generate sufficient heat, and in the end Durand fired his pistol at it. This failed also, and he had to resort to matches again. Altogether the business took so long that the officer commanding the covering party imagined that Durand must have been killed. With great courage he ran towards the gate and was within a few feet of it when the gunpowder went up, hurling him back several yards. Now was the moment that the infantry should have poured through the gateway, but the bugler had been killed, and as the sappers tried to contact the nearest infantry commander complete chaos developed. At one time buglers were sounding the retreat rather than the advance, but at last General Sale got his brigade under control and pushed on through the smoke. The initial rush of the Afghan swordsmen came in so swiftly that the leading troops were pressed back and only after desperate hand-to-hand combat was the way cleared so that the companies following behind could stream into the city. Here, according to Kaye, 'there was much hard fighting. In a frenzy of despair the Afghans rushed out from their hiding places . . . and plied their sabres with great effect, but only to meet with fearful retribution from the musket-fire or the bayonets of the British infantry. There was horrible confusion and much carnage. Some, in their frantic efforts to escape by the gateway, stumbled over the burning timbers and were slowly burned to death. Others were pursued and hunted in corners like mad dogs, and shot down, with a curse and a prayer on their lips. . . . Many an Afghan sold his life dearly, and, though wounded and stricken down, still cut out at the hated enemy.' By nightfall the governor, Hyder Khan, had surrendered and all resistance ceased; the great fortress fell with the loss of only 200 men killed and wounded. Needless to add, the Afghan losses were considerably greater, half their garrison becoming casaulties.

The fall of Ghazni had an immediate impact. When Dost Mohammed received the news he ordered his son, Akbar Khan, to evacuate Jalalabad and fall back rapidly on Kabul with all the forces he could muster. This withdrawal so demoralised the Afridis

guarding the Khyber Pass that they evacuated the fort of Ali Masjid at its mouth, which was then occupied by General Wade, who later advanced into the pass unopposed. Keane therefore commanded—or imagined he commanded—the route back to India.

Meanwhile Dost Mohammed concentrated his entire army, 13,000 men, at Arghandeh, west of Kabul on the Ghazni road, and riding among them, koran in hand, he urged them to fight in the name of God and His Prophet. But not a soul responded. Even his own bodyguard forsook him, and a rabble hacked his tent to pieces, seized his bedding and carpet, and made off with many of his private possessions. Giving battle was out of the question, and, friendless and crownless, the Amir fled from Kabul, covered by his son, Akbar Khan, with a handful of loyal cavalry. Hearing the news, Keane sent off Colonel Outram and a party of officers in pursuit, but they eventually returned empty handed.

On the 6th August, Sir John Keane and his party camped outside Kabul.

On the 7th, Shah Shuja rode into the city on a white charger, with Sir Alexander Burnes at his side, followed by his personal cavalry. After thirty years in exile, the Shah could be forgiven for feeling triumphant, even though his restoration had been achieved by British bayonets; and certainly, dressed in magnificent regalia and resplendent with jewels, he looked the part of a king. Not far behind him rode Sir William Macnaghten in full diplomatic rig, then Sir John Keane with his staff and brigade commanders. But despite the brave show there was no public response. The people came to their windows and doors to stare silently and did not even salaam as their new ruler went by. This, it appears, did not worry Shah Shuja who made straight for the Bala Hissar, the citadel and palace which he had known as a boy, and chortled in childish delight. Here the British officers left him to enjoy his moment of triumph in peace. Their immediate object had been accomplished.

In Simla, needless to say, the news was received with a burst of frenzied excitement, and a new crop of balls, fêtes champêtres, and galas was launched in Lord Auckland's honour. He was the hero of the hour, whose courage and optimism had been amply justified; he was the statesman whose policy had been vindicated. In grateful recognition of his services Her Majesty's Government created him Lord Eden of Norwood.

A few, very few, voices were already asking the question which posed itself: Now that Shah Shuja was on the throne, how was he going to be kept there? But in the general mood of self-congratulation and rejoicing no one listened. No one wanted to listen. And the death of Ranjit Singh, which had occurred at Lahore, barely caused a ripple on the surface of events.

53

3

RETREAT FROM GLORY

Kabul derives its importance from its geographical position. It stands at the convergence of great military roads, from Herat and Kandahar on the west, from Central Asia and the Hindu Kush on the north, and from India via the Khyber and the Khurd-Kabul passes on the east. The altitude is 6,000 feet, which gives the city an equable climate in summer and a cold winter. In 1839 the population was about 100,000, crowded together, as in all Eastern cities, though the general aspect was pleasing. Lieutenant Rattray, who was there during the occupation, wrote: 'Kabul . . . is well-built and handsome, and is one mass of bazaars. Every street has a double row of houses of different heights, flat-roofed and composed of mud in wooden frames. Here and there a large porch of carved wood intervenes, giving entrance to the courtyard of the residences of the nobles, in the centre of which is a raised platform of mud, planted with fruit trees and spread with carpets. A fountain plays near; and here, in the heat of the day, loll the chiefs at ease, as they smoke their pipes to the sound of sacringhi or guitars. The houses overhang the narrow streets; their windows have no glass, but consist of lattice work, wooden shutters . . . the shop windows are open to the sun, and the immense display of merchandise, fruits, game, armour, and cutlery defy description. The Grand Bazaar (or Chahar Chouk) has a substantial roof, built in four arcades. . . .' The other building of note was the Bala Hissar or citadel, which commanded the whole of the city. It was cold and uncomfortable, and the army didn't much relish sharing it with Shah Shuja and his court; but at least it was safe, and they made the best of it.

During the autumn and winter of 1839 the officers and men settled down to enjoy themselves. Prompted by Macnaghten, Shah Shuja instituted 'the Afghan Order of the Durrani Empire', and

at an investiture Grand Crosses, Knight-Commanderships, and stars were handed out liberally to anyone with a claim to distinction. Sir John Keane, who had just been elevated to peerage as Lord Keane of Ghazni, had special cause to be gratified. Junior officers went in for less esoteric delights, making up parties to visit places of interest in the neighbourhood, and moving about the countryside unmolested. According to Captain John Nicholson, there was horse-racing and cricket in which 'both the chiefs and the people soon learned to take a lively interest. Shah Shuja put up a valuable sword to be run for, and several of the native gentry entered their horses. Being great gamblers in their way, they looked on with astonishment at the bowling, batting, and fagging of the English players.' In return the officers attended the Afghan cock-fighting, 'betting freely, and lost or won their rupees in the best possible humour'. When the lakes froze over, the regimental armourers were given the job of making skates, objects which aroused enormous interest among the Afghan nobles. Skating was a method of progression quite unknown to them.

Not all the sports aroused such amiable reactions. The Afghan ladies were very attractive, and by the customs of the time were allowed a great deal of freedom. The result was that a good many love affairs sprang up between them and the handsome young English officers to whom they were very much attracted. Though inevitable, these affairs were eventually to cause a good deal of trouble. As Sir John Kaye put it: 'The temptations which are most difficult to withstand, were not withstood by our English officers. The attractions of the women of Kabul they did not know how to resist. The Afghans are very jealous of their women; and there were things done . . . which covered them with shame and roused them to revenge. Complaints were made . . . but in vain. The scandal was open, undisguised, notorious.' And the Afghans neither forgot nor forgave.

In September it was accepted that the occupation would have to last well into 1840, and the expense was mounting up alarmingly. General Willshire was therefore ordered to march back to India with the Bombay division, and he was followed the next month by Keane and the bulk of the cavalry. In Kabul, General Sir Willoughby Cotton took over command, while General Nott remained at Kandahar. Shah Shuja, who wanted to avoid the cold

winter in Kabul, left for Jalalabad accompanied by Macnaghten and an escort of several battalions; and as the snows gradually covered the whole country, the Afghans hibernated and began some deep thinking about their future and what they should do with their imposed king.

So far, despite Macnaghten's bland assurances, the chiefs had not come in from the countryside to prostrate themselves before Shah Shuja, nor had the local governors and other distinguished men of the realm. No firm foundations of government were being laid whatsoever. Equally serious was the fact that co-operation between the British and the Afghans was deteriorating rapidly and in danger of breaking down. Macnaghten's staff, which consisted of young army officers, had been sent out to the districts with orders to help the Shah's officials take control. But the latter were often corrupt, and their practices revolted the Englishmen, who, nevertheless, were bound to uphold them. Another development was that, with Macnaghten firmly in control, these young political officers took precedence over the military commanders in their districts, although the latter were frequently much senior and more experienced. The result was that feelings between the army and the Political Service (as it was called) steadily deteriorated. Also, as Cotton increasingly abdicated his military responsibilities to Macnaghten, the army began getting itself into a complete muddle.

When Shah Shuja came back to Kabul in the spring of 1840 he insisted that the army vacate the Bala Hissar. It was his palace, he complained, as well as a fortress, and with troops cluttering every inch of it his court could not function properly. Anxious not to offend the King, nor take any step which might indicate a permanent occupation, Macnaghten agreed, and communicated his decision to Cotton, who raised no objection. So the next step was taken towards disaster. A cantonment was built to the north-east of the city, by the old Kohistan road; bungalows, shops, and offices were put up, and the army proceeded to make itself comfortable. The site had been chosen for convenience, and was overlooked by the hills; security was not considered at all. Soon, as the officers sent for their wives and families who came streaming up from India in bullock-carts, 'the Folly of the Plain' (as the subalterns came to call it) became as gay as the cantonments of Calcutta or Peshawar. Everyone from the generals downwards behaved exactly as if they

were in India; some went so far as to argue that *they were* in India, as the North-West Frontier now lay on the Hindu Kush. As the occupation dragged on and the cantonment grew into a thriving city, such arguments naturally gained force.

The year did not pass, however, without some major excitements. In July news arrived that the Russians were marching on Khiva, the dark walled city in Uzbekistan, 450 miles north of the Afghan border. In fact, the expedition had been planned in August the previous year when the Russians had been foiled at Herat, under the pretext that the Khirghiz Cossacks had been raiding their caravans in the area and carrying off Russian subjects as slaves. The expedition was put under General Perofski, who, when he saw the troops allotted to him, was more horrified than Wellington in the Peninsula; half of them were recruits, and of these two-thirds were Polish exiles and the rest criminals. However, he did his best to weld his 9,000 men into some semblance of a striking force; in his base at Orenburg he drilled them incessantly, made them march behind military bands to try to induce a little 'swagger', and even taught them marching songs. He was quite aware of the physical difficulties confronting him in the Ust Urt desert north of Khiva, and set up forward dumps of rations and fodder. But, in the event, the terrain, the heat, and the disastrous decision to launch the expedition at the wrong time of the year, completely defeated him. Before his force had reached half-way it was down to 1,856 men, and out of 10,500 camels only 1,500 survived by mid-April. The expedition was called off.

The threat, however, remained; as Perofski put it in an order to his troops, 'We must . . . retrace our steps towards the frontier. There we shall await the further orders of the Emperor. Our next expedition will be more fortunate.' Palmerston was of the same opinion. Writing to Auckland on the 4th July (before news of the débâcle had reached him), he remarked: 'I believe the Emperor [of Russia] is not at present desirous or prepared to attack us in India . . . but I am firmly convinced that he covets the acquisition of Khiva . . . because it is an important stage on the road to India.' Receiving this message from the Foreign Secretary, Auckland could not but fail to congratulate himself on the foresight of his policy: the further the Russians came south, the more necessary it was to push north and confront them.

The other excitement in 1840 was generated by Dost Mohammed. For some time Shah Shuja had been taunting Macnaghten with the ineffectualness of his efforts to catch the deposed monarch, who was still roaming the countryside with a small force, and the following dialogue is said to have taken place:

SHAH: I suppose if I were to catch the dog you would prevent me from hanging him.

MACNAGHTEN: It will be time enough to talk about that when Your Majesty has caught him.

Following this exchange, on the 31st October Macnaghten wrote to Auckland that should the King somehow capture Dost Mohammed 'I shall request His Majesty not to execute him till I can ascertain your Lordship's sentiments'. Six days later the question ceased to be academic, for Dost Mohammed and his troops advanced to within forty miles of Kabul. General Sale moved up rapidly to meet him and the two forces met at Parwandarrah in the Nijrao hills. When Dost Mohammed saw the British cavalry he raised his sword and shouted: 'Follow me. Or I am a lost man.' The Afghans charged and cut through the British cavalry, who, despite the bravery of their officers, showed little fight, and, after hacking any dismounted men to pieces, the Afghans advanced to clear the field. In panic, Burnes wrote off to Macnaghten advising that Sale's force must retire, and urging that all available forces should be concentrated for the defence of the capital. But then quite suddenly the situation changed. The evening after the skirmish at Purwandurrah, Macnaghten was taking his evening ride outside the city when he saw two horsemen approaching. One of them galloped up to him and announced breathlessly that the Amir was approaching. Macnaghten just had time to ask, somewhat puzzled, 'Which Amir?' when Dost Mohammed rode up, and, flinging himself from his horse, tendered the hilt of his sword, and said solemnly: 'Sir William, I have come to claim your protection.' Calmly Macnaghten handed back his sword and asked him to remount, then side by side they rode into the city. Here during the next few days Dost Mohammed was visited by Cotton and many of the senior officers, who were very impressed, and drew striking comparisons between the Amir and the King. Shah Shuja, incensed,

refused to receive his relative, exclaiming: 'I couldn't bring myself to show common civility to the villain.' There seemed to be no question, however, of any trial or execution; and on the 12th November Dost Mohammed was sent under escort to India.

During 1841 the position, both military and political, steadily deteriorated. The King bitterly complained of the restraints put on him; and the army came to the firm conclusion that the regime was a misbegotten one, and most of the King's ministers and agents needed shooting. In Calcutta and London Treasury officials were already composing barbed minutes on the cost of the occupation; and Auckland was under increasing pressure to make economies. Luckily for him, Palmerston was still backing his policy, and indeed on the 22nd January had written: 'Now is the time to belay in Asia; make fast what you have gained in Afghanistan, secure the Kingdom of Kabul, and make yourself sure of Herat.' But by the spring, however, costs had spiralled to such an extent that some action had to be taken, and reluctantly Auckland cut off the subsidies which had been paid to the Afghan chiefs in an effort to win their co-operation.

The reaction was immediate. Three Ghilzai chiefs, who had already proclaimed their hatred of the British at a meeting on the 12th January, raised the standard of revolt and occupied the Khurd-Kabul Pass, to the south of the capital. General Sale and his column, who were returning to India, had to fight their way through, and occupied Jalalabad. Soon all the eastern Ghilzais were in revolt, and there were murmurings around the capital. By a cruel stroke of fate the command of Kabul had been handed over by Cotton to an ageing and decrepit general by the name of Elphinstone. If Cotton was undistinguished, weak, and lacking tenacity of purpose, he was still a military genius compared with his successor, who must surely rate as one of the most supine, stupid officers ever given command. Ironically, he had already informed Auckland of his incapacity when the appointment was mooted: he was ill and on the brink of retirement, he explained, and might also have added that his eyesight and his nerve were failing. His objective wasn't Kabul but Cheltenham. However, with a complete disregard to the lives of his troops, Auckland insisted; and the old man dragged his weary bones north through the passes. So another step was taken towards disaster.

At the beginning of November, Palmerston received a private

letter from Auckland in which he said 'we write with anticipation of fresh excitement in Afghanistan'—and for once his prophecy came true. At 8 a.m. on the 2nd November, Macnaghten received an urgent message from Burnes, who was still living in the city, that there was a disturbance, though he hoped he could deal with it. Later on, flames and smoke could be seen issuing from the neighbourhood of his residence, and rumours circulated that he had been murdered. Soon these were confirmed, and Macnaghten learned that the mob had burst into Burnes' house, killed the guards, then slaughtered Burnes himself. Two subalterns who went to his aid were killed also.

Now was the time for decisive action, but Elphinstone merely sat up in bed and listened to advice from anyone who might choose to come in and give it. He made no attempt to call an 'orders group', or even to discuss matters with Macnaghten. In the evening he merely wrote to him: 'We must see what the morning brings, and then think what can be done. . . .' Needless to say, the next morning and each one that followed it brought new disasters.

The only positive action was taken by Brigadier Shelton, who occupied the Bala Hissar with a body of troops. His orders were 'to maintain a sharp force on the city from the howitzers and guns, and to endeavour to fire the houses by means of shells. . . .' The reasoning behind this order was presumably that, when they saw their homes burning, the Afghans would give up; but instead they rose in larger numbers, and the Bala Hissar was cut off. On the 4th it was discovered that the King's Garden had been occupied and the fort of Mohammed Sharif, which meant that the cantonment was isolated from the commissariat fort, where the supplies were kept. Then the latter, which was defended by an Ensign Warren and a hundred men, came under heavy attack, and attempts to reinforce it were beaten off with heavy loss. At 9 p.m. Elphinstone called a conference at which it was agreed that Warren must be helped at all cost, and a night operation was planned. This did not get going, however, till dawn when, to their amazement, the troops moving into the attack found Warren and his men coming forward to meet them. He had abandoned the commissariat fort and all the supplies in it. When being asked his reason, he replied insolently: 'I will give my reasons to the court of inquiry'—but in the ensuing chaos no inquiry was ever called.

After two days of heavy but indeterminate fighting Elphinstone found himself unable to continue active command, and called in Brigadier Shelton from the Bala Hissar. Like the General, Shelton had fought at Waterloo, but, despite his great physical courage, seems to have been a cantankerous individual of limited ability. According to his account of the meeting he was put 'in charge of the cantonments' but was unable to carry out the job as everything he did was corrected by Elphinstone, who 'reminded me that he commanded, not I'. Elphinstone complains on the other hand that 'I did not receive from [Shelton] that cordial co-operation . . . I had a right to expect; on the contrary, his manner was most contumacious; from the day of his arrival he never gave me information or advice. . . .' The situation was, of course, not only Gilbertian but tragic; if Elphinstone was too sick to command he should have handed over completely. Shelton, seeing the state of his commander, should undoubtedly have called a conference of senior officers, then taken charge himself. Such an action would have required moral courage, but it was the only possible course if the army were to be saved. It was never taken.

By mid-November, Shelton was at loggerheads with Macnaghten also. The envoy, with his facile optimism, was still confident that the army could last out the winter in Kabul, and opposed any preparations for a retreat. The key to the situation, he insisted, was General Sale's force at Gandamak, and if this marched north to the capital the Afghans could still be decisively defeated. Repeated messages were dispatched to Sale, who decided for excellent reasons to move on Jalalabad and stay there. Shelton, however, was confident that sooner or later the force at Kabul would have to retreat, and instead of action there was argument. On the 10th Shelton and other officers went to Elphinstone and urged that the Rika-bashi fort (a small building overlooking the cantonment), which the Afghans had now occupied, should be taken. It was within musket range, and the fire from its snipers was becoming rather serious. Elphinstone havered, however, and it was only when Macnaghten supported Shelton that he finally gave way. Hurriedly a plan was worked out and the storming party under Shelton moved up on to its start-line; then, just as the order to advance was to be given, Elphinstone turned up with an aide and remarked, 'I think we had better give it up.' To this the aide replied, 'Then why

not countermand it at once?' So Elphinstone gave the order and the troops returned to the cantonments. Here two hours of bitter argument and vituperation took place before Elphinstone gave way, and the operation was put on again. By now all surprise had been lost, and the troops were disgusted and demoralised by the vacillations of their commanders. However, they fought with tremendous courage, and though the plan was a bad one and the slaughter considerable, gained their objective. The following day 600 maunds—about twenty tons—of wheat were found in the fort and safely brought back into the cantonment. Also some villagers, seeing the troops' success in battle, plucked up courage to bring in some supplies. As only two days' rations were left, this addition was more than welcome.

But the tactical situation continued to deteriorate. On the 13th the Ghilzais occupied the Bemaru heights in great strength, and it was obvious that something would have to be done about them. When Shelton broached the question, however, there was more argument, and Elphinstone would only consent to an operation at all when Macnaghten took the responsibility. The attack went in late, in column, and the Afghan cavalry, seeing their opportunity, launched into one of their lightning charges. As the battle was fought close by the cantonment, it was watched anxiously by the women and children. Among them was Lady Sale, whose journal is surely one of the most remarkable war diaries by a woman ever published. 'The Afghan cavalry charged furiously down the hill upon our troops . . .' she writes. 'No squares were formed to receive them. All was a regular confusion: my very heart felt as if it had leapt to my teeth when I saw the Afghans ride clean through them. The onset was fearful. They looked like a great cluster of bees, but we beat them and drove them up again.' Now it came the turn of the Horse Artillery. Under Lieutenant Vincent Eyre (who was later to become Sir Vincent, and an historian of the campaign) they came rapidly into action from the cover of a gorge and 'from this position . . . soon cleared that plain, which was covered with horsemen . . . we were successful on all points'. All this effort would be wasted, however, if the Ghilzais' guns, dominating the cantonment, could not be captured, and one was taken without difficulty by the Shah's 6th Infantry. The troops detailed to bring down the second gun, however, came under such a hot fire that they shrank

from their duty and bolted, so it was left to Eyre to spike the gun. Meanwhile an attack had developed against the cantonment, and it wasn't until eight o'clock that this was beaten off. By then the British losses were heavy, but with the capture of the guns, the day was counted a limited success. It was the last time there was any success whatsoever to record, even a glimmer of it. 'Henceforward . . .' says Eyre, 'it becomes my weary task to relate a catalogue of errors, disasters, and difficulties, which, following close on each other, disgusted our officers, disheartened our soldiers, and finally sunk us all into irretrievable ruin, as though Heaven itself . . . for its own inscrutable purposes had planned our downfall.'

The catalogue opened when Major Pottinger (the 'hero of Herat') came in with a subaltern, both of them wounded in several places, to announce that his detachment guarding Charikar had been wiped out. All Kohistan, to the north, was in revolt. On the 16th news arrived that Sale had ignored the appeals for help and marched to Jalalabad. It was now obvious that no help would come from that quarter, so Macnaghten urged that the troops should abandon the cantonment and move into the Bala Hissar, where they would at least be secure. But neither Elphinstone nor Shelton would agree to this: they argued that the carriage of the sick and wounded would be difficult, there would be no firewood, the enemy would greet the loss of the cantonment as a defeat, and probably attack the army as it moved. What Elphinstone and Shelton were agreed on was that the army should retreat to India, but Macnaghten wouldn't consider this. In a long letter—one of the oddities of this campaign is that everyone was busy writing, even in the most appalling conditions—he argued. 'We should have to sacrifice the valuable property of the government; we should have to sacrifice his Majesty. . . . I fear too, that in a retreat very few of our camp-followers would survive. . . .' What he might have added was that with retreat his policy, his reputation, and his career would have gone. On the 22nd the Afghans occupied the village of Bemaru, from which, with the aid of liberal bribes, the army had been drawing fresh supplies. That night Elphinstone held a council of war and it was agreed that a strong force should go out next morning and occupy the Bemaru hills, but Shelton, who wanted to occupy the village as well, was overruled. At daybreak the force detailed for the task went out, but for some reason took with them only one

gun. The village was soon seen to be occupied, and so, under Shelton's orders, the infantry put in an attack, but this proved unsuccessful.

By now all the Afghan troops in the area had been alerted, and thousands of them came streaming towards the sound of the guns. From a hill separated from the British position by a gorge they brought down a withering fire, and Shelton realised that if he stayed where he was his force would be wiped out. So, leaving five companies near the village, he crossed the gorge with the remainder of his force (including the gun) and formed the infantry into two squares, with the cavalry in their rear. For a time the gun fired into the massed Afghans with great effect, but in the end became so heated that it had to be taken out of action. From now on the British had to rely on their muskets, and to their horror found themselves out-ranged by the Afghan jezails. Then, as the casualties mounted, the Afghan infantry, with a skilful use of ground, set on the squares, which hurriedly retreated. Frantically Shelton called on the cavalry to charge, but panic had seized them and they refused to follow their officers. Keeping his head, Shelton ordered the 'halt' to be sounded, and the flying regiments turned, and re-formed their squares. Then an extraordinary thing happened. The Afghan cavalry, seeing their leader, Abdullah Khan, fall wounded from his horse, fell into confusion and fled towards the city. Macnaghten (who was watching the battle by Elphinstone) urged that the infantry should seize their chance and pursue them, but Elphinstone rejected the idea. It was far too risky, he said. The next development came swiftly; having found reinforcements, the cavalry swept back across the plain to attack the British squares. The first wave was dealt with effectively, but then some Ghilzais suddenly burst from cover and joined in the attack. The squares were beginning to waver. Shelton, who had been hit five times but somehow remained on his feet, went back a few paces to give an order, and the troops, wrongly imagining that he was deserting them, broke ranks and streamed down the hill in confusion. The rout of the British was complete. In a confused mass of infantry and cavalry they staggered back into the cantonment, harassed and cut down by the encircling horsemen. 'This . . .' wrote Brigadier Shelton, 'concluded all exterior operations.'

Shelton had been damned by everyone who took part in or who

saw the action. Lady Sale wrote: 'The misfortunes of the day are mainly attributable to Shelton's bad generalship. . . .' According to Vincent Eyre: 'In this miserable and disastrous affair no less than six great errors must present themselves, even to the most unpractised eye. . . . All have heard of the British squares at Waterloo, which defied repeated desperate onsets of Napoleon's choicest cavalry. At Bemaru we formed squares to resist the distant fire of infantry, thus presenting a solid mass against . . . the best marksmen in the world. . . .' Shelton said later that he didn't form squares, but merely threw back his flanks en potence, but the evidence is against him. The presence of the single gun absolutely damns him; two could have stemmed the Afghans, and a troop destroyed them.

It was at this time that news of the Afghan uprising reached Lord Auckland in Calcutta. Immediately he went into a black mood of despair, and seemed incapable of taking any decisive action to remedy the situation. 'It seems to me that we are not to think of marching fresh armies', he wrote on the 1st December, 'for the re-conquest of that which we are likely to lose. . . . The difficulty will not be one of fighting and gaining victories, but of supplies, of movements, and of carriage. The troops in Afghanistan are sufficiently numerous. They would but be encumbered by great numbers, and reinforcements could not arrive before the crisis will have passed. If the end is to be disastrous, they would but increase the extent of the disaster.' This pathetic, illogical, and despicable letter indicates, perhaps as clearly as anything he ever wrote or said, the sheer incompetence, the stunted stature, of the man when faced with a major crisis. On the same day he wrote to Sir Jasper Nicholls, the new Commander-in-Chief, arguing that the Government of India could not afford to send a relief column to Kabul, and, in any case, it was the wrong time of the year. He then added: 'I fear that safety to the force at Kabul can only come from itself.'

This, as we know, was wishful thinking; the commanders there were as craven as Auckland himself. The only man who was really trying to face the dilemma confronting the garrison was Sir William Macnaghten; he may have been opportunist, ignorant, and misguided, but his courage was superb. Unfortunately, however, it was allied to a pathetic faith in the power of gold, and he believed even now, that if sufficient were slid into the right palms the situation

might still be retrieved. On the 25th he called a conference of the chiefs with a view to negotiating terms under which the British could retreat. But the chiefs were arrogant and offensive; Sultan Mohammed Khan declared that the Afghans had beaten the British in battle and therefore had the right to dictate terms of capitulation. He then demanded that they should surrender, giving themselves up with all their arms, ammunition, and captured treasure, as prisoners of war. Macnaghten rejected such terms out of hand; so the following day the chiefs delivered a letter stating that unless the British surrender forthwith, and left Shah Shuja to his fate, they had better prepare themselves for war. To this Macnaghten replied that 'We prefer death to dishonour and it will remain with a higher power to decide between us'. Whether by this he meant that Almighty God would favour the British as usual, it is not quite clear, but if he did the Deity was due to disappoint him.

On the 1st December the Afghans made a determined assault on the Bala Hissar, but were repulsed with great slaughter; however, they attacked the Mohammed Sherif fort (which overlooked the cantonment) with more success, and on the 6th December it had to be surrendered. On the 8th December Macnaghten wrote Elphinstone asking him to state a firm opinion 'whether or not . . . any further attempt to hold out against the enemy would merely have the effect of sacrificing His Majesty King Shuja and ourselves'. If this were the case, he added, was not the only alternative left 'to negotiate our safe retreat out of the country, on the most favourable terms possible?' The General replied that the situation was now so desperate that 'no time should be lost in entering into negotiations for a safe retreat'. So the chiefs were contacted again, and on the 11th December Sir William Macnaghten rode out with three captains to meet them on the plain near Siyah Sang. Here, after the opening formalities, he expressed regret that the former feelings between the British and the Afghans should have been disrupted, and (to quote Eyre) stated that 'he was willing to enter into negotiations for the smoothing over of the present difficulties. . . .' He then proposed that the British should withdraw under a safe conduct and be furnished with supplies for their journey. Here Akbar Khan (Dost Mohammed's son) interrupted, declaring angrily that there was no need for supplies—the British could retreat at once, but the other chiefs silenced him. Macnaghten then read out his detailed

proposals which, after two hours' discussion, were in general agreed. Captain Trevor then rode off with the chiefs 'as a hostage for the sincerity of Macnaghten' and the latter returned to the cantonments. Here he wrote a report in justification of his conduct, lamenting that the whole country had risen in rebellion, that communications were cut off, and almost every public officer 'whether paid by ourselves or his Majesty' had gone over to the chiefs. Also the troops were deserting, and starvation faced the whole army if it stayed much longer. But even in the face of this evidence he still could not face the utter destruction of his policy 'We shall part with the Afghans as friends . . .' he added, 'and I feel satisfied that any government which may be established hereafter will always be disposed to cultivate a good understanding with us. . . .' Poor Macnaghten! He still had no real penetration, where it came to the Afghan character, and his time was running out.

On the 13th December, in accordance with one of the clauses of the agreement, the army began evacuating the Bala Hissar; all discipline had gone now and the troops looked little more than a rabble. Three days later the chiefs put on the pressure, refusing to provide food or forage until they had further assurances that the British would evacuate every fort in the vicinity of the cantonment. On the 18th there was the first fall of snow which covered the ground to a depth of five inches. 'Thus', wrote Vincent Eyre, 'a new enemy entered upon the scene, which we were destined to find even more formidable than any army of rebels.' But the latter were still pressing, and on the 20th demanded that 'a portion of our guns and ammunition should be given up. They also required Brigadier Shelton as a hostage.' This so enraged a subaltern called Sturt (Lady Sale's son-in-law) that he walked into the General's room and urged that the army should break off the treaty, grab all the transport it could lay its hands on, and march to Jalalabad with all speed. But Elphinstone declined such a course; the will to command had long deserted him.

Three days later the chiefs laid a trap for Macnaghten. Still confident that they could be bribed, he had sent his carriage as a present to Akbar Khan, and the latter, when thanking him, wrote suggesting that Amin-ullah Khan, one of the leading chiefs, should be seized and delivered to the British as a prisoner. Mohammed Khan's fort should then be swiftly reoccupied, followed by the Bala Hissar. If

Macnaghten agreed to this proposal he was to sign a document and return it by the messenger. Frantically clutching at any straw and apparently consulting no one, Macnaghten signed, thereby sealing his own fate. On the 23rd December he again rode out to the plain near Siyah Sang, attended by three captains on his staff, Lawrence, Trevor and Mackenzie. Of the cavalry escort detailed to accompany him, only sixteen troopers were ready, and, as he noticed, the ramparts of the cantonment were poorly guarded. Bitterly he remarked to his staff, 'It is all of a piece with the military arrangements throughout the siege.' If he was anxious about the coming meeting with Akbar Khan he certainly kept himself under admirable control; when his staff mentioned the possibility of treachery he remarked: 'Dangerous it [i.e. the plan] is; but if it succeeds, it is worth all the risks: the rebels have not fulfilled even one article of the treaty, and I have no confidence in them; and if by it we can only save our honour, all will be well. At any rate, I would rather suffer a hundred deaths than live the last six weeks over again.'

The meeting took place about 600 yards from the cantonment, half-way between the river and Mahmood Khan's fort. Captain Mackenzie led forward an Arab horse which Macnaghten wished to present to Akbar Khan, and the latter accepted it with a suitable speech of thanks. He then suggested that both parties should dismount, and Macnaghten did so, followed by his staff, and they reclined on some horse blankets which the servants had spread out on the snow. By now a great crowd of Afghans had appeared in the background, and was steadily edging forward. When Mackenzie and Lawrence protested that a secret conference could not be conducted before an audience the chiefs who had accompanied Akbar Khan lashed out with their whips and the crowd retired a little. Akbar Khan then asked: 'Are you ready to carry out the proposals we have agreed?' to which Macnaghten replied: 'Why not?' With this, Macnaghten and his officers were seized from behind and their weapons snatched from them. The three captains were then forcibly seated on horseback behind Afghan riders, who began galloping through the milling crowds which attacked them with knives and screamed for the death of the infidels. Trevor slipped from his seat and was immediately hacked to pieces, but the other two reached the cantonment unhurt. Meanwhile Macnaghten had been knocked to the ground by Akbar Khan and for

some time they were locked in combat. Macnaghten cried out: 'Az barae Khoda!' (For God's sake!), then Akbar Khan drew a pistol and shot him. Whether he died immediately is not known, but the Afghans closed in and attacked his prostrate body with their knives. Dost Mohammed's son had taken his revenge—ironically with one of the pistols Macnaghten had given him a few days earlier.

On the 6th January 1842 the army began its retreat from Kabul. Major Eldred Pottinger had been asked to assume the role of Political Agent and Adviser, and he had lost no time in negotiating terms for the evacuation. These were signed on the 30th December by eighteen chiefs, and provided for a safe conduct to the border. No one had any faith that the Afghans would observe the agreement; no one had faith in anything, but it was a question of marching or starving. There were left now 4,500 troops, an immense amount of baggage and stores, some hundreds of sick and wounded, a large party of women and children, and 12,000 panic-stricken followers. Deep snow covered every inch of the mountain and plain, and the cold was so great that it penetrated even the warmest clothing. A cut had been made through the eastern rampart and through this streamed the melancholy column of troops, gun-wagons, carts, camels, and horses. The advance guard was led by the 44th Foot and included some sappers and a squadron of Irregular Horse. It was commanded by Brigadier Anquetil. In the main column, commanded by Shelton, came two regiments of Native Infantry, Anderson's Irregular Horse, a detachment of the Horse Artillery with two guns, and the women and children with their escort. In the rearguard, under Colonel Chambers, came two regiments of Native Infantry (including the Shah's 6th), the 5th Light Cavalry, and the remainder of the Horse Artillery with four guns. At 10 a.m. a message had been received from Nawab Jabar Khan requesting Elphinstone to delay his departure for another day as the Afghan escort had not arrived, but already the head of the column was in motion and any cancellation of orders would have quickly led to chaos. Also, the northern sector of the cantonment was already filling with a large crowd of Afghans which had swept down from Bemaru; they were rushing in and out of the huts, looting everything they could lay their hands on. It was evening before the main body had finished filing out on to the plain, and dark before the rearguard got on the move. Their first night was spent only a short

distance from the camp; many people were shot by exultant Afghans who let off their jezails from the ramparts.

Shah Shuja had watched the retreat all day from a room in the Bala Hissar; he knew that not only the army was doomed, but himself.

All night the cantonment blazed, and the leaping flames could be seen miles off by the troops bivouacking on the plain. They could not hear the fanatical shrieks of the Afghans, but these went on all night also.

On the morning of the 7th January the column moved off in the reverse order—'if that could be called *order*', writes Vincent Eyre, 'which consisted of a mingled mob of soldiers, camp-followers, and baggage cattle, preserving not even the faintest semblance of that regularity and discipline on which depended our only chance of escape from the dangers which threatened us'. Many of the men when called to get up at first light had not responded; they had been frozen to death in the snow. One reason for the chaos was that the followers had not waited for any orders, but had folded their tents and moved off at first light. According to Lady Sale, the troops merely followed suit, no orders being given and no bugles sounding. Some of the sepoys had already gone off with the followers, and when asked to explain themselves, replied, 'I have a lame foot . . .' 'I can't find my regiment' or 'I've lost my musket'. Demoralisation could go little further.

To add to the discomfiture of the army, the Afghan looters had moved out from Kabul, and found their way into the camp even before the column had abandoned it. Other Afghans were more hostile still, and, as the three-pounder mountain guns were dragged past a small fort, a party of horsemen dashed out and captured them. Other parties moved on either flank of the column as it wound slowly across the plain. Elphinstone comforted himself at first by asserting that they were the escort provided under the agreement of the 30th, but he was soon disillusioned. Some time before noon the Afghans set upon the rearguard who had to bring their guns into action and keep up a steady fire to hold them off. Even then Brigadier Anquetil had to send for reinforcements, and, in the growing confusion, the Afghans were able to swoop down on the middle of the column and capture a good deal of baggage.

The column had left Kabul with five and a half days' rations to

last till Jalalabad, and so it was necessary to press on as fast as possible. But when Elphinstone and the head of the column reached Butkhak a message arrived stating that if he advanced any further the rear-guard would be destroyed. He therefore had no alternative but to halt and send back what troops and guns he could spare to help them. So on the 7th the column moved a bare five and a half miles. Watching it closely was Akbar Khan, and Captain Skinner, learning this, galloped across to see him. Akbar Khan argued that the column had been attacked because it marched before the Afghan chiefs were ready; however, he added, if it would halt where it was for the night he would provide food, forage, and firewood. For this service he required six hostages to ensure that the retreat did not continue beyond Tizin before General Sale had evacuated Jalalabad. These terms were agreed, and the firing having stopped, camp was made at the entrance to the Khurd-Kabul Pass.

Things were even more chaotic that night than they had been on the 6th. Lady Sale wrote in her journal: 'Again no ground was marked out for the troops. Three fourths of the sepoys are mixed up with the camp-followers, and know not where to find the headquarters of their corps. Snow lies a foot deep on the ground. No food for man or beast; and even water from the river close at hand difficult to obtain as our people were fired on in fetching it.' Hands and feet were so frozen that hundreds of men were put out of action. The cavalry had to be lifted on to their horses. And the snow was packed so hard into the horses' hoofs that a hammer and chisel was needed to cut it off. So many tents had now been lost that those who could find room in one at all were crammed to suffocation; Lady Sale shared a small tent with eight others. By morning, according to Eyre's calculations, only a few hundred troops were fit for duty.

At first light the Afghans began firing on the camp, and it was only when Major Thain put himself at the head of the 44th Foot and led an attack that they made off. Captain Skinner, seeing what was happening, galloped across to Akbar Khan to protest. Akbar Khan's reply was a further demand for hostages, so Major Pottinger, Lawrence and Mackenzie were handed over. The firing then ceased again.

It was midday before the column moved on. At the entrance to the Khurd-Kabul Pass, says Eyre, 'an attempt was made to separate

the troops from the non-combatants, which was but partially successful, and created considerable delay.... The idea of threading the stupendous pass, in the face of an armed tribe of blood-thirsty barbarians, with such a dense irregular multitude, was frightful....' He did not exaggerate; the pass is five miles long, and shut in by precipitous hills. Down the centre of it rushes a mountain stream which the narrow path keeps crossing. Unfortunately the stream wasn't frozen, though sheets of ice and snow covered the banks, making the passage of men, and especially of animals, slow and treacherous. As the defile narrowed the hostile tribesmen[1] could be seen massing on the heights, and soon a hot fire came down. Some of Akbar Khan's attendants tried to restrain the tribesmen, but without success, and before long horses, camels, men and women lay dead or writhing in agony on the snow. Lady Sale and her party, who were mounted on horseback, galloped forward and most of them escaped. The ladies riding on camels were not so fortunate, and, as their beasts sank down dying, had to abandon them and their baggage to try to find lifts elsewhere. Mrs. Mainwaring was carrying her baby in her arms but still did not give up. 'She had to walk a considerable distance ... through deep snow', wrote Lady Sale, 'and also had to pick her way over the dead, dying, and wounded, both men and cattle, and constantly to cross the streams of water, wet up to the knees, pushed and shoved about by men and animals, the enemy keeping up a sharp fire, and several people killed close to her. She, however, got safe to camp with her child....'

The camp that night had little comfort to offer. 'We had ascended to a still colder climate than we had left behind', writes Vincent Eyre, 'and were without tents, fuel, or food: the snow was the only bed for all, and for many, ere morning, it proved the winding-sheet. It is only marvellous that any should have survived that fearful night.' Even after dark, wounded were streaming in, moaning and whimpering and trying to find shelter, but there was no shelter to be had, no food, no drink; and most of them lay down in the snow to die. Lady Sale lay on a bank with her daughter and son-in-law, Lieutenant Sturt, and someone kindly threw them some blankets. She says: 'Dr. Bryce of the Horse Artillery came round and examined Sturt's wound. He dressed it: but I saw by the expression of his

1. Contemporary accounts refer to 'Ghazis', i.e. fanatics. They probably came from several tribes.

countenance that there was no hope. He afterwards kindly cut the ball out of my wrist and dressed both my wounds.' Later on that night some tenting was found, into which the three of them moved, Sturt suffering terribly from his wound. When Lady Sale looked out of the tent next morning she found it surrounded by dead men.

On the 9th Elphinstone intended to commence marching at 10 a.m., but the troops were already on the move by eight, anxious to escape from the vile pass. However, a message arrived from Akbar Khan advising the General to call the men back, as he had not yet made arrangements to escort the column. Both officers and men wanted to ignore this message, declaring that, if they were to survive, their only chance was now to get on as swiftly as possible. But Elphinstone wouldn't have it, and the men were brought back. This action so enraged many of the sepoys that they promptly announced their intention to desert.

While the column was halted, Lieutenant Sturt died of his wounds. Lady Sale and her daughter saw to it that he was buried in the snow, and she adds simply: 'We had the sorrowful satisfaction of giving him a Christian burial.'

Towards noon Captain Skinner arrived back in camp with a suggestion from Akbar Khan 'that all the widowed ladies and married families . . . should at once be made over to his protection, to preserve them from further hardships'. He promised to escort them personally, one day's march in the rear of the column. Elphinstone was for rejecting the offer, but Skinner was able to persuade him, and so the party moved off, with Captain Troup, the brigade-major of the Shah's forces, who had been wounded, and were taken to the Khurd-Kabul fort where rooms were allotted to them. Lady Sale records that: 'At midnight some mutton bones and greasy rice were brought to us. . . . All that Mrs. Sturt and I possess are the clothes on our backs in which we quitted Kabul.' Not all the party reached the safety of the fort; a child was brought in covered with his mother's blood, having been rescued from some tribesmen who were taking him up to the hills. The mother was never seen again.

In the afternoon Elphinstone ordered the troops to parade, as a party of Afghan horsemen were seen mustering for the attack. The 44th Foot mustered 200 men, and the native infantry regiments about 120 each; the cavalry were even weaker, the Irregular Horse being down to 100 and the 5th Light Cavalry down to seventy. The

attack did not materialise, but neither did the food and fuel promised by Akbar Khan, so more men died in the night.

On the tenth the column plunged on again, with the camp-followers crowding the route ahead. The native troops had now lost all discipline, few could fire their muskets and a good many had thrown them away. 'Hope', says Eyre, 'seemed to have died in every breast.' But to their eternal credit the 44th somehow held together, and with the remaining Horse Artillery guns provided the advance guard. Before long the Afghans were seen occupying a position high on the right, and as the column came into range poured down a devastating fire on to it. Writes Eyre: 'Fresh numbers fell with every volley, and the gorge was soon choked with the dead and the dying; the unfortunate sepoys, seeing no means of escape, and driven to utter desperation, cast away their arms and accoutrements, which only clogged their movements . . . and along with the camp-followers, fled for their lives.' This was the moment the Afghans had been waiting for, and, drawing their swords, they rushed down on the luckless sepoys and slaughtered them. The last remnants of the Native Infantry ceased to exist, and the treasure chest, together with all the baggage, was carried away in triumph. While this was happening, the forward elements of the column had reached Khak-i-Jabar, about five miles ahead, without further opposition, and here they decided to halt to let the rest catch up. But all that arrived was a few stragglers bringing news of the massacre. Aghast, the men looked at each other while the truth slowly dawned on them: that the main body and the rearguard had been cut off and destroyed. They themselves were the only survivors. The 44th Foot were now down to 140 men, the Horse Artillery fifty, and one twelve-pounder gun, and the cavalry 150 men. There was also a large body of camp-followers still surviving.

As usual that evening, Captain Skinner rode off to liaise with Akbar Khan, and carried a message from Elphinstone, protesting at the attack on his column, despite the promise of safe conduct. In reply. Akbar Khan regretted the slaughter, but said that the tribesmen were now so elated as to be beyond the control of their own chiefs. As a last resource he suggested that the troops still left should lay down their arms and place themselves under his protection, after which he would assure their escort to Jalalabad. The camp-followers, he added, must be left to their fate. Elphinstone

had no option but to decline, and so the following day the march went on.

The road lay downhill for about five miles and led into a narrow defile. Here, to their horror, the troops stumbled across the dead bodies of the followers who had gone ahead of them; they were lying in heaps, shot, cut down with swords, and mutilated. Among them were some British officers who, having been wounded earlier on, were travelling with the followers. They had been slaughtered, too. The defile was about three miles long and covered by the fanatical tribesmen, who poured down a destructive fire from the heights. The column, however, had no alternative but to plunge on, leaving its dead where they lay, and succouring the wounded as best it could. Shelton rose to great heights of courage this day, commanding the rearguard. In Eyre's view he saved the entire column from being massacred. By 4 p.m., when it reached Tizin, Eyre estimated that 12,000 men, including camp-followers, had been lost since Kabul. And the column wasn't yet half-way to Jalalabad.

Elphinstone tried again to negotiate with Akbar Khan, but Skinner came back with the same proposals as the night before: that the followers should be abandoned, and the troops should hand over their arms and place themselves under his protection. These were still considered unacceptable, and after a conference of the senior officers it was decided that a night march should be attempted with the object of reaching Jagdalak, a distance of twenty-two miles, by the early hours of the following day. There was a short cut over the hills, which it was thought should be passable. As a ruse, Akbar Khan was informed that the column only intended to move to Seh Baba, and at 7 p.m. the march began. It was now bitterly cold and the climb was exhausting; some men, including Dr. Duff, the superintendent surgeon of the force, collapsed and lay down to die. Mercifully the column wasn't fired on till it reached Barik-ab, when a few random shots were heard. These, however, caused immediate panic among the followers, who charged through the 44th Foot, acting as the advance guard, and chaos ensued. Herded in the defile, they blocked the way ahead, and some hours were lost in the darkness before the troops could sort themselves out and push on to Kattar-Sang, where they waited for the rest of the column to catch up. It succeeded in doing so, but not until 8 a.m., which was far

too late. There were still ten miles to go before Jagdalak, and the tribesmen were already crowding the surrounding heights. The delay caused by the stampeding followers had, in fact, robbed the retreating column of its last chance of escape. But still, doomed and withering, it staggered on, mile after mile, beneath a hail of bullets. Brigadier Shelton still commanded the rearguard, still by some miracle of courage and determination kept it in being, and held off overwhelming hordes of tribesmen.

About 3 p.m. what was left of the column reached Jagdalak, and took up a position behind some ruined walls crowning a hillock by the roadside. To give heart to their men, the officers took up a forward position in line, and led the cheers for Shelton and his men as they struggled up the last yards of the slope, still under fire. Following the column, the Afghans moved up to the hills dominating Jagdalak, and continued to bring down fire. The walls gave some protection from this, but men were still being hit. To quote Eyre again: 'The exhausted troops and followers now began to suffer greatly from thirst, which they were unable to satisfy. A tempting stream trickled near the foot of the hill, but to venture down to it was certain death. Some snow that covered the ground was eagerly devoured, but increased, instead of alleviating their sufferings. The raw flesh of three bullocks which had been fortunately saved, was served out to the soldiers, and ravenously swallowed.' But the firing down from the tribesmen grew steadily worse, and the followers in their panic rushed about blindly looking for shelter. The chaos was so great that Captain Bygrave and fifteen British troops decided to storm the tribesmen's positions if they died in the attempt. Seeing them charge, the tribesmen retreated, but no sooner had Bygrave gone back to the main position than they returned and resumed their firing.

At 5 p.m. Captain Skinner arrived with a message from Akbar Khan. This requested Elphinstone's presence at a conference, and demanded that Brigadier Shelton and Captain Johnson should be handed over as hostages for the evacuation of Jalalabad. Elphinstone, seeing no alternative, handed over temporary command to Brigadier Anquetil, and went off with Skinner and the two officers. Witnessing his departure, the troops lost any last shreds of hope; in their view the Afghan treachery was so great that negotiation only led the way to more slaughter. However, Elphinstone and the other officers were

courteously received by Akbar Khan, and given food and drink. Akbar Khan also promised to send supplies to the troops.

On the 12th January the tribal chiefs arrived at Akbar Khan's headquarters and at 9 a.m. a meeting was held. At this the chiefs screamed their hatred of the British, and threw off Akbar Khan's efforts at mediation. Only the suggestion that 20,000 rupees should be handed over appeased them to any degree whatsoever; and even then nothing was agreed on. In the afternoon Elphinstone protested at being separated from his troops any longer (if only he had shown some of this resolution at Kabul!) and demanded that he be allowed to return. At 7 p.m., however, firing broke out at Jagdalak, and it was learned that the troops, impatient and probably not believing that the General would return anyway, had decided to push on.

The suspense had, of course, been considerable. The tribesmen were mustering on the hills all around and at any moment might launch an attack. Trying to ascertain what was happening at Akbar Khan's headquarters, Major Thain and Captain Skinner rode out towards it, but were stopped by a tribesman, who rushed up to Skinner and shot him in the face. He lingered on in great pain till 3 p.m. when he died. By now the tribesmen had begun firing again from the heights, and Thain, Bygrave and other officers took up parties of men to drive them off; but each time they came back again and the murderous fire was resumed.

No one gave the order to advance, but when night came down and there was still no word from Elphinstone, men got to their feet and headed along the path towards Jagdalak. The sick and wounded had to be abandoned and left to their fate. The road led down into the valley, and for a mile and a half the column pushed on down the bed of a stream, through a desultory fire. But then the hills closed in to a formidable defile some two miles long, and the road led upwards towards the kotal, or head of the pass. Here it was blocked by a barrier which had been set up, consisting of the prickly branches of what Eyre describes as 'holly-oak'; this took some time to remove, and meanwhile the tribesmen collected in force. From now on a withering fire was poured down at close quarters and the massacre was even worse than at Tanga Tariki. Then the tribesmen charged furiously downhill and set on the milling mass of troops and followers. Only a pitiful remnant managed to force a way through the barrier, perhaps forty men all told. Twelve officers,

including Brigadier Anquetil, were killed. There was no pretence at organisation or command now; the small bands of survivors, mostly cavalry and mounted officers, pushed on for dear life. Luckily for them the tribesmen were so busy plundering the dead that they marched unmolested. Then the country opened out and the going became easier. But there were still other obstacles ahead. The tribesmen were guarding the only bridge over the Surkab river, and when a subaltern of the 44th led a party to storm it, he was killed with a number of his men.

As the sun came up on the 13th, the survivors of the Kabul force were approaching Gandamak, twenty-nine miles from Jalalabad. Only twenty men were still capable of bearing arms. Leaving the road, which was blocked by gathering forces of Ghazis, they took up a defensive position on a hill to the left, determined to sell their lives dearly. Some time during the morning a party of Afghan horsemen approached, and Major Griffiths, the senior officer now surviving, entered into negotiations with them for a safe conduct to Jalalabad. A crowd of Afghans now gathered round. At first they seemed friendly, but as they made attempts to snatch the men's arms, firing broke out and the negotiations were broken off. According to Eyre: 'The enemy, taking up their post on an opposite hill, marked off man after man, officer after officer, with unerring aim. Parties of Afghans rushed up at intervals to complete the work of extermination, but were as often driven back by the still dauntless handful of invincibles. At length, nearly all being wounded more or less, a final onset on the enemy sword in hand terminated the unequal struggle. . . . Major Griffiths and Mr. Blewitt had been previously led off to a neighbouring fort, and were thus saved. Of those whom they left behind, Captain Soutar alone with three or four privates were spared, and carried off captive. . . .' A few officers and men who were mounted had ridden off towards Fatehabad after bursting through the barrier, and six of them, Captains Bellew, Collier, and Hopkins, Lieutenant Bird, Dr. Harpur and Dr. Brydon, reached the village. Here some peasants brought them food, and they unwisely delayed to eat it; suddenly a party of tribesmen appeared and attacked them. Bellew and Bird were cut down immediately, but the other four managed to scramble on to their horses and galloped off, still pursued by the tribesmen.

On the afternoon of the 13th, when the garrison at Jalalabad were

busy at work improving their defences, their arms piled and their equipment close at hand, a sentry on the ramparts happened to look up and saw a solitary horseman struggling towards the fort. Word was passed to the officers, who brought out their field glasses and watched the figure moving slowly towards them. Both the horse and the man were obviously in the last stages of exhaustion, the horse stumbling and swaying and the man slumped forward on its neck. Writes Sir John Kaye: 'A shudder ran through the garrison. That solitary horseman looked like the messenger of death. Few doubted that he was the bearer of intelligence that would fill their souls with horror and dismay. . . . A part of the cavalry were sent out to succour him, and brought him in wounded, exhausted, half-dead. The messenger was Dr. Brydon, and he now reported his belief that he was the sole survivor of some sixteen thousand men.'

In fact he was not the sole survivor; Elphinstone, Shelton, Pottinger, Eyre, and the other hostages survived, as did Lady Sale and most of the women who were led into captivity, though their sufferings were great, and it was many months before they were rescued. Nevertheless, the destruction of the Kabul army was complete. This was an event unique in British military history; and indeed to find a parallel one must go back to Caesar's commentaries and the destruction of General Sabinus and his army by the Gauls. Needless to add, the characters of Sabinus and Elphinstone are almost identical.

When Lord Auckland received news of these disasters he pronounced them to be 'inexplicable as they are appalling'. Pressed by Sir Jasper Nicholls, he assembled a small force at Peshawar under Brigadier Wilde, but that was about all. Not until Lord Ellenborough arrived in India on the 28th February and took over as Governor-General was any major action taken. Then General Pollock was put in command of a force of 8,000 men, and on the 5th April he forced the Khyber Pass and advanced on Jalalabad. He still lacked the orders he wanted—to revenge the defeat of the Kabul army—and arriving at Jalalabad, he found that Sale and the garrison there were holding out with little trouble, and had indeed defeated the Afghans in a pitched battle outside the city.

While Pollock was still in the Khyber, Shah Shuja was murdered in Kabul; the last relic of Auckland's policy had perished.

It was during these operations that the British obtained their

first close look at the Khyber and realised what a formidable obstacle it was. Eight miles to the west of Peshawar lay the old Sikh fort of Jamrud, and four miles beyond this was the eastern mouth of the pass. From Jamrud to Torkham at the other end was no less than fifty miles—and every inch of the way covered by strong fire positions. In the bottom of the gorge ran a torrent which the steep path was not always successful in avoiding. Twenty-five miles in there was the fortress of Ali Masjid, perched on a rocky knoll, and beyond this the gorge narrowed and continued beneath great overhanging rocks. Seven miles further in came Landi Kotal, which stood at 3,509 feet, the highest point on the pass, and here there were terraced fields and villages with their watch-towers. From now on the descent was even worse than the climb, and the journey to Landi Khana was like going down into a pit. Beyond, as the road flattened out, was a small horseshoe valley, with the village of Bagh set among terraced trees, and then came Torkham and the western mouth of the pass. No one, not even a large force, could enter the Khyber without trepidation; and the Afridis and Shinwaris, perched high on the observation posts, made it quite clear that no intruders were welcome.

There was now a lull while Ellenborough issued stirring but vague proclamations and Pollock waited for orders. On the 4th July General Nott (who was still holding out at Kandahar) received a letter from Ellenborough stating that he must withdraw to India *but could go via Kabul if he wished*. This was the loophole the soldiers wanted. Nott immediately got in touch with Pollock, and it was agreed that Nott would march on Kabul, while Pollock marched north to support him. On the 9th Nott commenced his march, and by the 30th had entered Ghazni. Seven weeks later, on the 17th September, after defeating strong forces of Ghilzais, he arrived at Kabul to find the Union Jack flying from the flagmast on the Bala Hissar. General Pollock had arrived two days earlier, having fought and won a major battle against the Ghilzais and other Afghans.

'The sight of Kabul', says General MacMunn, 'was a magnificent one. . . . The British Army now camped in the valleys was now far larger than the Afghans had yet seen. . . . Streets of tents as far as the eye could see, and masses of men in scarlet coats and black shakos paraded and marched in every direction. Brass helmets flashed in the sun, guns peered from every corner of vantage.' This was a very

different army with a very different commander from the one which had retreated ignominiously the year before. Pollock had no envoys or political officers to bedevil him; by the wise decision of Lord Ellenborough he was in supreme command and could act swiftly. The Afghan chiefs were understandably apprehensive.

But in the event no massive retaliation was attempted. The Afghans had already been defeated decisively in the field, the Kohistani towns of Istalif and Charikar had been razed by a punitive expedition led by General Sale, and numerous private acts of vengeance had been carried out. The only public punishment, so far as Kabul was concerned, was the destruction of the Grand Bazaar, the Chahar Chauk, through which the mutilated body of Sir William Macnaghten had been dragged and exposed to insult. The job was carried out by the sappers, after giving the population due notice.

In an effort to lay the foundations of a new regime, Pollock arranged for Shah Fath Jang, a member of the royal house, to be crowned as king; but the expedient did not prove successful. When the time came for the army to leave he pleaded to go with it.

The march back began on the 12th October. Pollock understood the art of mountain warfare, and knew that you could not move through valleys unless you secured pickets on the hills. His force therefore went through unmolested. Nott, however, had still not learned this elementary lesson, so lost some men and baggage. However, the Governor-General and the Commander-in-Chief were awaiting the victorious army in Ferozepore—where Lord Auckland and Ranjit Singh had reviewed the Army of the Indus four years previously. Triumphal arches had been erected, a temporary bridge had been thrown across the Sutlej, and the ceremonial elephants were led out in their gorgeous trappings. On the 17th December Sir Robert Sale crossed the bridge at the head of his troops, as the crowds cheered and the guns boomed forth their salute. Only the elephants cast a gloom over the proceedings by refusing to salaam with their trunks as rehearsed. However, the band of the Lancers struck up with 'See the Conquering Heroes Come' and all was well. A week later General Pollock arrived with his forces, and on the 23rd General Nott. 'Then', says Sir John Kaye, 'there was feasting and festivity in the gigantic tents, hung with silken flags, on which in polyglot emblazonments, were the names

of the actions which had been fought.' The celebrations went on till the end of the year and finished up with a great parade of 40,000 men and a hundred guns, under the command of Sir Jasper Nicholls. 'On this grand tableau the curtain fell; and the year opportunely closed in gaiety and glitter, in prosperity and parade.'

But the situation was—if anyone paused to think among the junketings—that the British were back on the Sutlej, in the base from which they had marched in 1839. Russia was still advancing. And, with the death of Ranjit Singh, the North-West Frontier lay open and exposed.

On the 1st October 1842 Lord Ellenborough was working in Simla, in the room where four years earlier Lord Auckland had drafted the proclamation precipitating the First Afghan War. Ellenborough was about to issue a proclamation too, but very different in content and tone. 'The Government of India', he declared, 'directed its army to pass the Indus in order to expel from Afghanistan a chief believed to be hostile to British interests, and to replace upon his throne a sovereign represented to be friendly to those interests, and popular with his former subjects. . . . Disasters unparalleled in their extent, unless by the errors in which they originated, and by the treachery by which they were completed, have, in one short campaign, been avenged upon every scene of past misfortune. . . . The British arms now in possession of Afghanistan will now be withdrawn to the Sutlej. The Governor-General will leave it to the Afghans themselves to create a government amidst the anarchy which is the consequence of their crimes.'

When Auckland read these words in London he was naturally incensed. 'The proclamation is an uncandid and wild document and I am nettled by it', he wrote Palmerston. When Ellenborough arrived in India 'he found every man who could be spared . . . advancing upon the field of action. With these means success has been achieved, and he might have had the generosity to acknowledge the efficiency and singleness of purpose with which I gave him aid.' Justifying the dilatoriness after news of the Kabul disaster had arrived, Auckland continued: 'It was plainly my duty to give strength to my successor and to leave to him the election of advance or retreat.' (This, of course, is nonsense. His duty lay with the

troops, who were paying with their lives for his absurd policy.) Answering Ellenborough's first point, that the army was sent across the Indus 'to expel from Afghanistan a chief believed to be hostile to British interests . . .' Auckland asserts that it was *not* sent for that reason—'The object was to repel the advance of the Persian Army under Russian encouragement. . . .' This statement is quite inaccurate: the Persians had retreated from Herat before the army marched. Also, Auckland in his own proclamation had stated that his object was to install on the throne of Afghanistan 'an ally who is interested in resisting aggression'. Before closing his letter to Palmerston, Auckland roundly asserted that : 'The primary objects of the expedition were gained, foreign aggression was repelled, and the promise yet remained of the establishment of British influence and the extension of British commerce throughout Central Asia.' The sole fault, he declared, lay with Elphinstone, whose 'feebleness of action' allowed a local disturbance to grow into an insurrection. Typically, he neglected to add that it was he, Auckland, who had insisted on appointing this effete soldier.

To what extent was Auckland personally to blame? To what extent was he endorsing a policy outlined by the Court of Directors, the Government, and especially by Palmerston? Sir John Hobhouse, Chairman of the East India Company, said in June 1842, 'Auckland must not bear the blame . . . it was the policy of the Government.' When one reads this statement in conjunction with the Secret Dispatch of the Secret Committee, dated 24th October,[1] which gave instructions regarding the invasion of Afghanistan, it is difficult to dissuade oneself that Hobhouse was telling the truth. What is more obscure, however, is the role of Lord Palmerston; and it may not be without significance that the correspondence between him and Lord Auckland at the vital period is missing. But, from his general correspondence and dispatches at this period, it is quite evident that he was obsessed with the advance of Russia in Central Asia and the security of the North-Western Frontier of India. In a letter to the Duke of Wellington, for example, dated 22nd May 1838, he was writing: 'It would not be provident to dispatch a very large force to the Indus without forming a large reserve up on the Frontier.' But at the same time there can be no doubt that Auckland was hankering after some major achievement,

1. See page 45.

some great victory which would crown his period in India and be for ever associated with his name. Headquarters take their tone from their chiefs, and the hysterical delight which broke out in Simla at news from Afghanistan is not insignificant. Whether or not the policy was Auckland's, he embraced it wholeheartedly; he rose with it and fell with it.

The North-West Frontier first came to the notice of Parliament in February 1840 when Viscount Melbourne moved a vote of thanks to the Army of the Indus, after the occupation of Kabul. Members—whether approving of the campaign or not—agreed that the troops and their commanders 'deserved the gratitude of the House'. On the 8th February 1842 the Frontier was mentioned again in quite another context, when a member arose to ask whether any dispatches had been received concerning the newspaper accounts of 'the alleged insurrection in Kabul'. Sir Robert Peel, the Prime Minister, replied that a dispatch had just arrived 'but I have not been able to inform myself of the contents'. A month later more questions were asked, but Peel stonewalled again, saying that his information was still indirect, and nothing had come from Kabul. In April, when members still persisted, he stated perfunctorily: '... the information received by the Government, except for the melancholy facts which are already before the public is exceedingly imperfect. The causes which have led to such enormous loss of life are still imperfectly known.' In May he pleaded the public interest in withholding information and continued on this tack till news of Pollock's advance came through in the autumn. There was no major debate on the war until June 1843 when H. J. Baillie moved that the whole correspondence leading up to it be produced. In the course of a long speech he castigated those responsible for the war. 'The resources of our Indian Empire are being wasted', he said, 'in the vain attempt to subdue a race of men no less fierce and valiant, a country fitted... by nature for defence, and so remote by its position as to render war on a large scale almost a hopeless undertaking.' The boundary of our Indian possessions, he urged, should lie on the Indus.

Baillie was supported by Disraeli, who pointed out that the East India Company was now claiming the cost of the war from the British Government. Developing his theme, he argued that the British would never lose India by internal insurrection or by foreign invasion. 'If ever we lost India it would be from financial convulsion

It would be lost by the pressure of circumstances, which events like the war in Afghanistan would bring about by exhausting the resources of the country.' As for Lord Auckland's talk of 'establishing a barrier' on the North-West Frontier, Disraeli argued with some wit that if the British only left it alone Afghanistan would constitute the finest barrier there could be. 'The soil is barren and unproductive. The country is intersected by stupendous mountains . . . where an army must be exposed to absolute annihilation. The people are proverbially faithless. . . . Here then are all the elements combined that can render the country absolutely impassable as a barrier, if we abstain from interference.'

Replying, Sir Robert Peel argued that the question before the House was whether the papers should be produced; and his view was that they should not. Palmerston immediately arose to support him, on the grounds that British relations with Russia were now cordial, and it would be inexpedient to open old wounds. As regards Auckland's policy, he stated that 'all persons who were qualified to form a sound opinion thought that immediate measures were necessary, with a view to securing Afghanistan for British interests'. The authority he quoted at great length, and appeared to rely on, was the late Sir Alexander Burnes.

Needless to add, the debate was fruitless, and the papers were not produced. It later transpired that the correspondence forwarded by Auckland for the perusal of the Government had been deliberately cut and edited to give a false impression. This piece of deceit stands to Auckland's eternal discredit, but by the time it was discovered he had been dead many years. The entire correspondence was not published until 1859.

In January 1843 a horseman rode out of the gates of Lahore and headed north for the Indus. This was Dost Mohammed, who, with the blessing of the British, was now on his way to Kabul to ascend the throne of Afghanistan for the second time. His mood was determined rather than triumphant; his country was torn and disaffected, and the situation on the North-West Frontier was still dark and uncertain.

4

ONE FLAG: ONE FRONTIER

Despite his faults Lord Auckland had not been unlikable as a man; his successor, Lord Ellenborough, was almost repulsive. Vain and pompous, he was also irascible and domineering. He had no respect for the opinions of others, and the thought of being offered advice was anathema to him. He was a brilliant orator, however, and when making his great speeches came alive in a way that he did at no other time. Like so many of the mid-Victorians, he hankered after military glory, but there were two obstacles which barred him from achieving it: the first, his abhorrence of any risk, and the second, the fact that he did not happen to be a soldier. In these circumstances his only hope was to find some kindred spirit among the generals, someone willing to embark on adventures, with a chance of success—and by good luck such a man had just arrived in Poona to take up an appointment on the staff. He was sixty years old, a veteran of the Peninsular Wars, and scarred by a dozen wounds; but the lust for conquest still burned in him as strongly as ever. His name was Charles Napier.

'Eventful as my life has been', he had written in 1840, 'my present high position and the threatening state of the country render it probable that the short portion which is left to me of life may be the most eventful of the whole.' Considering at this time that he was merely commanding the Northern District of England, with half-starved miners for an enemy, this prophecy seemed somewhat rash, but it had always been Napier's policy to prepare for opportunities long before they arrived. He didn't drink or over-eat and kept his body lean and hard. Though he was of medium height, his presence was commanding, and his beaked nose projected itself below a massive forehead towards whomever he was addressing. His sight had faded, and his eyes were obscured by small steel

spectacles, but his gaze still remained penetrating. His hair, which he wore long and waving, in the mode of former days, combined with his white beard to give him the most extraordinary appearance, and most officers meeting him for the first time wondered what had hit them. His energy, his attack, his speed of action, still remained superb, and he would tolerate no dawdling among his subordinates. Being informed, while at Poona, that a regiment in his area was in a state of mutiny, he wrote to its commanding officer: 'I expect to hear that you have put down the mutiny within *two hours* after the receipt of this letter.' On the 3rd September 1842 he received orders to leave Poona to take command of Upper and Lower Sind, and, as he realised instinctively, this was the call he'd been waiting for; invisible bugles were sounding the 'advance'. 'Charles! Charles Napier!' he wrote excitedly in his journal, 'take heed of your ambition for military glory; you had scotched that snake, but this high command will, unless you are careful, give it all its vigour again. Get thee behind me, Satan!' But, as so often, Satan needed more than one bidding, and the second never came.

Sind straddles the last 300 miles or more of the Indus river before it reaches the Arabian Sea. No one in those days described it as a pleasant place to live in, and many soldiers declared its climate to be the worst in the world. The heat is frightful from early spring to late autumn, the thermometer frequently reaching 117 degrees in the shade, and temperatures of 124 degrees are far from unknown. The eastern regions lie in the Great Indian Desert, where dust-storms blow up with amazing rapidity, and sand pillars go whirling across the wastes (the dreaded 'dancing dervishes'). The wind is like a blast from a furnace, and when the storms come they blot out the sun with a curtain of sand, suffocating men, horses, and camels alike. Charles Napier was caught in one of these storms soon after his arrival, but miraculously survived to record his impressions. 'The air was calm, but suddenly everything animate and inanimate became overcharged with electricity, and the sand, rising violently, blinded the horses; the human hair stood out like quills, streaming with fire, and all felt a strange depression of mind, until the evil influence passed away.'

The population, which numbered about a million, was a mixture of Baluchis, Sindhis, Hindus of Punjabi origin, and Afghans. The dominant race was the Baluchis, and one of their tribes, the Talpuris,

had conquered the whole country a century earlier. At the time of Napier's arrival it was divided into three states—Khairpur or Upper Sind, Hyderabad or Lower Sind, and Mirpur, each state being ruled by an amir, a descendant of the Talpuris. It is difficult to find anything good or even exculpatory to say about these men; by the standards set by Ranjit Singh at Lahore, their courts were bestial and depraved. Their sole desires, so far as one can judge, were wealth and sensual indulgence, and the keeping of order they left to hordes of Baluchi horsemen, paid regularly and granted unlimited licence to plunder. The mass of the people, realising that they would be robbed by taxes if they managed to gain anything above mere subsistence, were apathetic. But their treatment of each other was just as barbarous as the treatment they received from their rulers; husbands often murdered their wives not only for adultery but for the mere suspicion of it.

'We have no right to seize Sind', Napier wrote after packing his bags for the journey to Karachi, 'yet we shall do so, and a very advantageous, humane, and useful piece of rascality it will be.' Still the proprieties had to be observed, evidence of treachery had to be discovered, and the whole affair stage-managed to make it look inevitable. Awaiting Napier at Karachi was a letter from Ellenborough stating his determination that any amir who had recently shown hostile designs against the British Government should be punished, once evidence of guilt had been established. Napier, however, no fool when it came to assessing risks, put things rather differently, informing his staff that the principal object of the exercise was not to secure a buttress for the British Empire but to rescue the people from an effete despotism. 'My object', he declared with facile imagery, 'is to resuscitate the goose; but while doing so the Amirs may go by the board: if so, it is their own fault. Did God give a whole people to half a dozen men to torment?' Soon documentary evidence of treachery was forthcoming; Nasir Khan of Hyderabad had written to a chief called Bibrak, Rustam of Khairpur to the Maharaja of Multan. . . . There is no need to dwell on further details; a good deal of the documents were suspect, and some were plain forgeries, but they would serve. The amirs, realising what was in the wind, became restless, and, when Napier began intimating that an even harsher treaty was being drafted, mustered their Baluchi horsemen. Napier, of course, had no trouble in persuading

himself that these defensive actions were the prelude to an attack, and declared with some heat: 'My mind is made up. If they fire a single shot, Sind will be annexed to India.' Vainly Colonel Outram[1] tried to plead with him, only to be lashed for his pains by Napier's tongue. 'You provoke me, Outram,' the old man cried, 'you pity those atrocious rascals!' By the end of November the draft treaty was with the amirs, who, though having no intention of signing, continued parleying week after week. If only they could delay matters until the hot season arrived, so they believed, Napier could not take the field with his force. But Napier refused to be sold a dummy. On the 8th December he issued a proclamation stating that, in accordance with the treaty, the country from Sabzalkot to Rohri was to be given up, and further negotiations followed, during which the amirs mustered every available horseman. But Napier was not impressed. 'I laugh at your preparations for war,' he scoffed, 'I must have your acceptance of the treaty immediately—yea or nay.' No acceptance came, so on the 15th December Napier marched his troops across the Indus to occupy Sabzalkot and Bhung Bhara. Things were going his way; the war clouds were gathering nicely. But seated outside his tent at Rohri, and watching the lines of flickering camp-fires, he suddenly became seized by feelings of guilt. 'My god!' he wrote, 'how humbled I feel when I think! How I exult when I behold! I have worked my way to this great command, and am gratified at having it, yet despise myself for being so gratified. . . . I despise my worldliness. Am I not past sixty? A few years must kill me; a few days may! And yet I am so weak as to care for these things! . . . the weakness of man and the pride of war are too powerful for me. . . .'

But the weeks went by; the amirs kept on arguing; and somehow the war wouldn't come to the boil. With the approach of the hot weather, Napier realised that he could still be robbed, that the cup of glory could still be snatched from his lips. But then on the 12th February he had a slice of luck. A party of horsemen were surprised near his camp at Sakranda, and their leader was found to be in possession of a letter from one of the amirs of Hyderabad. This directed him to summon every man capable of wielding a sword and muster on the 9th at Miani, some ten miles north of Hyderabad. Now, as Napier was quick to observe, this letter bore the same date

1. The Resident, i.e. the Governor-General's representative.

as a letter he had received from the amirs, begging him to delay his own advance till the 9th. This, he had no difficulty in persuading himself, was complete evidence of treachery, of the amirs' firm intention to attack him; and his first duty now was to his army. If it stayed where it was, so he reasoned, it would be destroyed. Therefore he must march; there was no alternative. In a mood of great exultation he wrote to Outram (who was still behaving in a most unsoldierlike manner, trying to keep the peace): 'I shall march tomorrow . . . and attack every body of armed men I meet. . . . The troops have Lord Ellenborough's order on their side, and I have delayed . . . till not the eleventh, but the twelfth hour. If men die in consequence of my delay, their blood may be justly charged to my account. . . . I am as sure of victory as a man who knows that victory is an accident can be.'

Even as he wrote, violence erupted in Hyderabad. Eight thousand Baluchis, led by two amirs, attacked the Residency, but it held out four hours under the leadership of Colonel Outram, who, having decided to unsheathe the sword, wielded it to some effect. Finally, however, numbers told, and he and his men were glad to escape up the Indus in two armed steamers. Some days later he reached Napier's camp, though unfortunately the General's comments on this occasion are not recorded. By the 17th February the small force totalling 2,600 men was in motion and marching south towards Hyderabad. Captain John Jacob, the leader of the Sind Horse, had come back the previous day reporting that the Baluchi army, numbering 20,000 men, supported by fifteen guns, was drawn up in a strong position in the bed of the Fuleli river at a place called Miani. Though outnumbered at over seven to one, Napier did not hesitate, and advanced swiftly till he came within striking distance of the enemy.

The details of Napier's battles belong to another story; all that need be said here is that he defeated the amirs at Miani, and soon afterwards, on the 24th March, at Hyderabad. The campaign was virtually over.

After pursuing the routed enemy at the head of his cavalry, he declared, 'I have every reason to believe that not another shot will be fired in Sind.' It is also said—though historians dispute this—that he sent a signal to Ellenborough consisting of one word: 'Peccavi' or 'I have Sind'. Whatever the exact text of the signal,

the result was the same, for a week later he was appointed Governor of Sind. 'Oh! if I can do one good thing to serve these poor people', he wrote on receipt of this news, 'where so much blood has been shed in accursed war, I shall be happy.' More typically he remarked later on, 'The great receipt for quieting a country is a good thrashing first and great kindness afterwards: the wildest chaps are thus tamed.' With ferocious energy, he tore into the job of organising the country, collecting revenues, launching engineering projects, and administering justice. His notions of the latter came into immediate conflict with Sindian ideas of what was proper, and when a great chief was condemned for murder a deputation arrived in Napier's office, pleading, 'She was his wife and he was angry with her.' To this Napier replied, 'Well, I am angry with him, and I mean to hang him.' Later on when there were more wife-murders and therefore more executions he declared, 'I will kill two hundred unless they stop.' Napier's was essentially a military administration, backed by the sword, but it was very effective. Trouble in the remotest village soon brought a troop of cavalry thundering across the desert, and within six months the natives came to look on Napier as a great God, all-seeing, all-knowing, and multi-armed. He was feared, but he was also very much respected; and when the people saw that he was making no attempt to feather his own nest he even enjoyed a measure of popularity. More important still, working and soldiering in the heat for sixteen hours a day, Napier knew that he had fulfilled his destiny.

The morality or otherwise of the annexation of Sind has been argued for over a century now, and it need not be dealt with here. What is important for this narrative is that for the first time British administration was extended up to the North-West Frontier. The border of Sind lay contiguous with the wild unknown territories of Baluchistan, hidden behind the Hala mountains; and it was not long before the border tribes became restive. The Bugtis came down on so many raids that Napier decided that a campaign was necessary to teach them a lesson, and marched north with a force of 2,000 cavalry, 2,500 infantry, 2,000 irregular troops, nine howitzers, and a siege train. Having sent Captain John Jacob ahead to arrange with a neighbouring tribe, called the Marris, for the Bugtis' escape route to be blocked, Napier pushed into the hills with two columns, his plan being that one should head direct for the town of Pulaji,

while the other completed an encircling movement. Swiftly sensing what he was up to, the Bugtis pulled back, then began harrying his communications. Initially they had some success, and a supply column with 500 camels turned and bolted. Napier, however, received news that the chiefs were starving and wished to surrender, so sent a message giving his terms in forthright language: 'Let the khan lay down his arms and be prepared to emigrate with his followers to a district I will point out on the left bank of the Indus. . . . If he refuses, he shall be pursued to death.' To this the khan replied that he wished to surrender, but in fact he did nothing of the kind and launched another massive attack, which stung Napier into retaliation. Pushing his columns rapidly through the hills, he surrounded the khan and his chiefs at a natural fortress called Traki; but even here they would not accept his terms and fighting broke out again. Only after fifty-four days of energetic campaigning were the chiefs captured. The Bugtis, however, were annoyed rather than humiliated and resolved to cut loose again at the very first opportunity.

So the British began fighting on the North-West Frontier of India, and were to continue to do so for another hundred years. At the time of this first expedition, against the Bugtis, their slice of the Frontier extended for only 350 miles, the northern boundary of Sind. But to the north-east of Sind lay the Punjab, with a sector of the Frontier extending no less than 704 miles, from Hazara in the north to Dera Ghazi Khan in the south. And already events were in train which would bring the British to this sector also.

The event which ignited the powder-trail in the Punjab was the death of Ranjit Singh, which, as already noted, occurred on the 27th June 1839. The debauches at Ferozepore, in honour of Lord Auckland, had brought on a stroke, and since late May the ruler had lain supine and speechless, giving his orders by signs. European doctors called to the palace managed to effect a partial recovery, but with the onset of a fever he banished them and summoned native doctors, astrologers, and yogis. These, under the leadership of Fakir Aziz-ud-din, went into prolonged consulations and argued the effectiveness of a wide range of treatments. The cure eventually selected was a majun or compound of pearls and precious stones, which was administered twice daily by the Fakir himself. Despite this, Ranjit

remained lucid enough to convene a meeting of his sirdars, or principal officers, at which he nominated his elder son, Kharak Singh, as his successor, placing the tilaj or mark of royalty on his head. Raja Dhian Singh was appointed prime minister. After these formalities were over, the majun took effect, and Ranjit rapidly declined; no offerings to the gods, not even the scattering of a million pounds of sterling or the gift of 100 tons of cooking fat to religious institutions, could save him. Stretched out on a raised platform in the sight of his nobles, he died silently, and his body, after being bathed and embalmed, was dressed in magnificent robes and ornaments. Four of his ranis and seven slave-girls volunteered to be burned on the funeral pyre with him, in the hope of entering paradise, and their offer was accepted. The body was placed on a decorated bier, shaped like a ship and burnished with gold, and taken in procession towards the funeral pyre. For the first time in their lives the ranis came out of the harem unveiled, and followed the cortège barefoot, while around them swarmed the poor of the city, scrambling for the coins thrown by the sirdars. One of the ranis, who had not been able to distribute all her jewels, had them carried by a retainer, and he handed them to the crowds as he walked along. Each rani was preceded by a servant, who walked backwards holding a mirror, so that she could ensure that her determination to be sacrificed left no mark on her face. After the ranis came the slave-girls, some of them barely fifteen years of age, but they too seemed indifferent to the terrible fate now awaiting them. Dr. John Honigberger, who watched this melancholy event, recorded that his own heart was pounding more than theirs. The funeral pile was constructed of sandalwood and aloe, in the form of a square, and stood six feet high. When the bier had been rested some feet away the priests and gurus recited prayers, after which the body was lifted on to the pile by the sirdars. The ranis then climbed a ladder in order of seniority and lay down by the head of the corpse; the slave-girls, who followed, arranged themselves by the feet. Soon they were all covered with reed mats soaked in oil, after which more prayers were said, to which the ranis, understandably, made no response. Then a large mat was pulled over the whole pile, and on to this jars of oil were poured. As the crowd held its breath, Prince Kharak Singh stepped forward with a lighted torch and ignited the pile at each corner; the flames shot up twenty feet or

more, consuming in a matter of seconds the body of Ranjit Singh, his four ranis, and his seven slave-girls. The wood took longer to burn and it was two days before the ashes of the dead could be removed. By then the new situation in the Punjab was already becoming apparent.

Though the story which follows does not properly belong to the Frontier, it cannot be altogether ignored, firstly because it created the circumstances in which the British reached the Punjab Frontier, and secondly because it brought to the fore many men who were to dominate the scene later on. Briefly, then, Kharak Singh succeeded to the throne, but was poisoned in 1840. On the way home from the funeral his son was killed by a falling archway. Till 1843, Sher Singh, the nominee of the Khalsa army, was head of the state until he was assassinated in September 1843. After this the young Maharaja, Dhulip Singh, ascended the throne, though the real power was wielded by his mother's lover, Lal Singh. But then the Khalsa grew restive and on the 17th November 1845 crossed the river Sutlej to attack the British, so beginning the first Sikh War. Ellenborough was unprepared and his commander-in-chief, Sir Hugh Gough, was one of the most incompetent officers ever put in command of troops. After some ludicrous failures, however, he managed to achieve a victory at Sobraon, and the British Army marched into Lahore to dictate peace terms. By now a Waterloo veteran, Sir Henry Hardinge, had succeeded Ellenborough, and through his leniency the Punjab was not annexed. However, as the war had to be paid for and the Sikh treasury was empty, the state of Kashmir was annexed and then sold to a Rajput of vile and bestial habits, called Gulab Singh.

Though Hardinge was lenient he had no inclination to take undue risks, and laid down that all the main cities of the Sikh kingdom, including Peshawar, should be occupied by British troops. As Resident at Lahore he appointed Major Henry Lawrence, a gunnery officer who had shown considerable gifts for administration and under him worked a picked team, most of them remarkable men who were to become as famous as Lawrence himself: Harry Lumsden, Herbert Edwardes, John Nicholson, and Major Hodson. The Sikh Durbar was kept in being at Lahore, its nominal head

being the Maharani Jindan, the mother of Ranjit Singh's eight-year-old son, Dhulip Singh. Lawrence aptly described her as 'a strange blend of the prostitute, the tigress, and Machiavelli's Prince', and her appetite for sexual adventure was equalled only by her cruelty and her passion for planning assassinations. Eventually she had to be incarcerated, but the political situation at Lahore still remained unstable.

In general, however, the Punjab settled down, and Henry Lawrence's men tore into their work with ferocious energy. In the summer of 1847 Harry Lumsden, who was then assisting Herbert Edwardes at Peshawar, received orders 'to raise the Corps of Guides, on 700 rupees a month'. The arming and dressing of this regiment was left to his own judgment, and the men were recruited from the disbanded Sikh regiments—they used to discuss the battle of Sobraon with him in the friendliest manner, so Lumsden records. The object of this new corps, as he explained it later on, 'was to have trustworthy men who could at a moment's notice act as guides to troops in the field, and collect intelligence beyond as well as within the border'. To do this job the corps included both cavalry and infantry, and enlisted twenty Pathans to act as interpreters. It went into action the moment it was trained, against a village which Lumsden calls 'Babuzai on the Buneyr frontier', the inhabitants of which had refused to pay their taxes. Complete surprise was achieved, and the action was a success; the culprits 'were tied up and secured, and marched off with all their cattle to the open plains without a shot being fired. . . .' Though young and full of gaiety, Lumsden already showed the qualities necessary for the job of raising, training and commanding a regiment. He was strong and tough, and a superb judge of men. His orders, however unpleasant, were always obeyed without question; his command was so sure, in fact, that shouting and blustering were quite unnecesary. He could think and write quickly and lucidly; his *Frontier Thoughts and Frontier Requirements* is a model of military writing. He did not scorn the orthodox, but was never afraid to experiment, and judged every situation as it arose, with a cool common sense backed by exact knowledge. Well before he reached thirty he had become a legend.

In 1848 there came the next explosion in the Punjab, signalled by the murder of two British officers at Multan, a fortress town in the south-west. Strong action was obviously needed, but Lord Gough (as he had now become), who was relaxing among the cool lakes and woods of Simla, had no desire to go campaigning in the hot weather. The new Governor-General, Lord Dalhousie, had not yet obtained a grip on the situation, and Henry Lawrence was back home on leave. Two men who did realise the danger were John Lawrence (Henry's younger brother and a rising power in the Punjab) and Herbert Edwardes, who raised a scratch force of 3,000 Pathans on the Frontier and headed south. By the end of November, when Lawrence was ready to sail from Southampton, rebellion had spread right across the Punjab and the British found themselves with another major campaign on their hands. Unhappily Lord Gough was still in command, despite Dalhousie's efforts to remove him, and in battle after battle thousands of lives were thrown needlessly away. Only when he learned that Sir Charles Napier was on the way to replace him did Gough abandon his lifelong faith in cold steel, and consent to prepare his attacks with artillery.

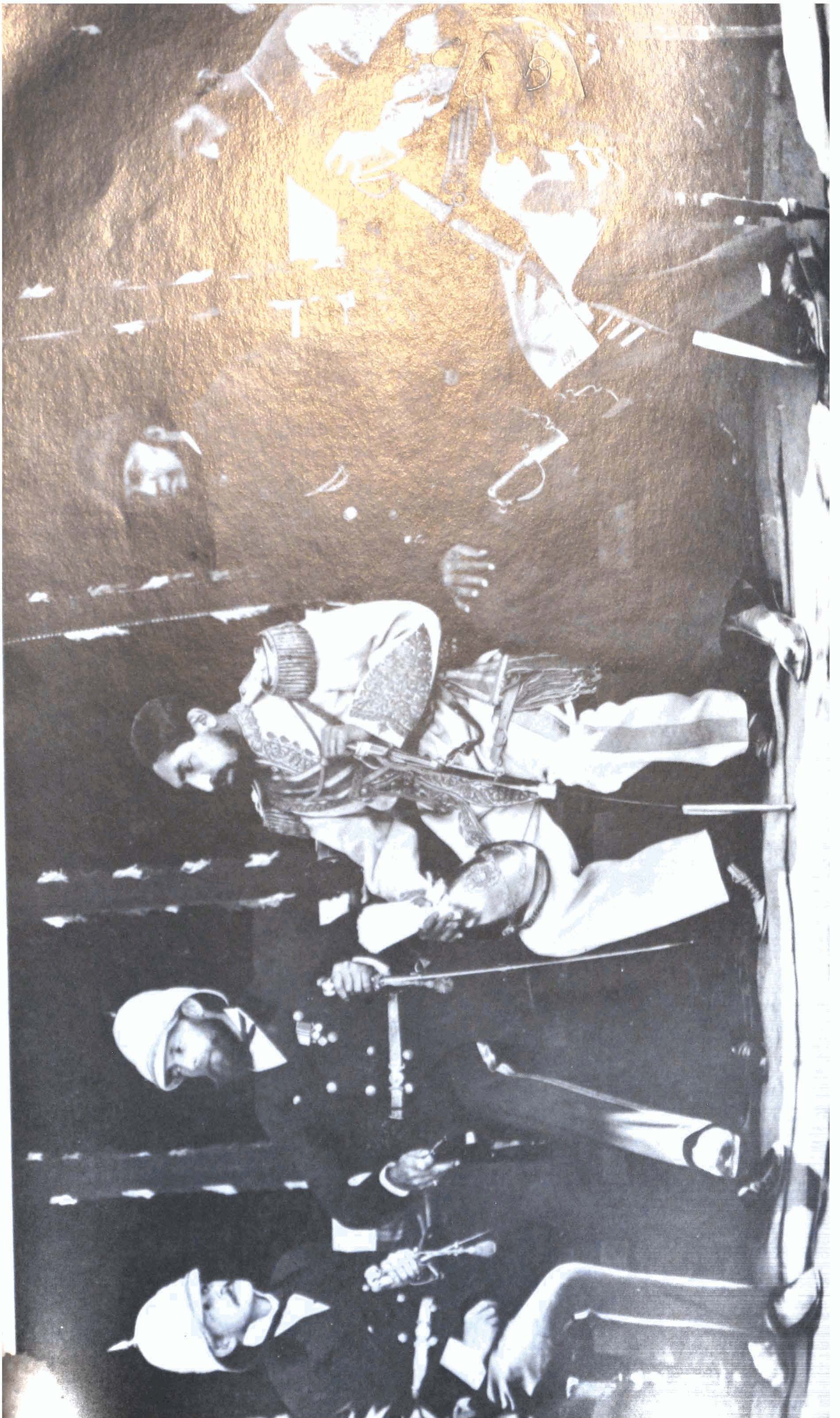
Meanwhile the situation on the Frontier had grown desperate, and it was only the continued exertions of Herbert Edwardes and the young officers around him which saved the day. John Nicholson, an officer of great stature and tremendous authority, and George Lawrence (the younger brother of Henry and John) began raising a corps of Pathans at Peshawar, and arming the Mohammedan peasants in the Hazara hills. One of their great worries was Attock, the crossing point of the Indus, for they knew that if this was captured by the growing Sikh armies under Chatar Singh, then Peshawar would be isolated, and the Afghans would then come storming through the Khyber. In August, as the situation steadily deteriorated, John Nicholson rose from his bed, though in a raging fever, and headed south for Attock with sixty Pathan horsemen, leaving orders for 150 levies to follow him on foot. Riding hard through the night, he reached the Indus with about half his horsemen, in the early hours of the morning, and dashed up to the gate of the fortress. Rousing the garrison from their sleep, he demanded that

the gates be opened for him, and when this was done ordered that the men arrest their mutinous leaders. For some moments the situation looked ugly, and if the Sikhs had set on him Nicholson could not possibly have escaped with his life. But he was of the stuff that great heroes are made (twenty years later mothers in the Punjab would threaten their naughty children that 'Nikal Seyn' would get them) and his language and presence made a shattering impression. The Sikhs were cowed, and did as they were told; Nicholson took over the fort and prepared it for a siege, then, leaving it under a loyal commander, began scouring the countryside with his cavalry, putting down disorder wherever he found it. But with so few men he could not possibly hold the Indus valley, and repeatedly he wrote to Currie at Lahore, urging him to send up an entire brigade. But nothing was done, Gough refusing to weaken the garrison there. By early September Chatar Singh and his army were on the march and Nicholson, far too weak to attack, hung on his flanks and watched his movements.

Chatar Singh's objective was Peshawar, but even before he reached it the troops there mutinied, and George Lawrence had to hand over his wife and children to Dost Mohammed's brother, Sultan Mohammed Khan, who promised to escort them to Lahore. However, he broke his word and soon they were prisoners in his fort beyond the Indus. Nicholson tried to save them but without success; and then George Lawrence himself was taken prisoner by the Sikhs. By now the whole country from the Indus to the Jhelum was in a state of insurrection, and on the 3rd November Chatar Singh took Peshawar. The Frontier lay wide open; and Dost Mohammed, still seeking revenge against the British for the indignities of the First Afghan War, came down to join the Sikhs who promised the return of the Peshawar valley as a reward. The worst fears of the Lawrences, of Nicholson and Edwardes, had been realised.

However, after several months of campaigning and a heavy defeat at Chillianwala, Gough managed to beat the Sikhs decisively at Gujerat on the 21st February 1849. Thousands of Afghan infantry headed back to the Indus and fought a defensive action around the bridge at Attock. Harry Lumsden was after them, however, with his Corps of Guides, and a few days later he reached Peshawar and took over the city until George Lawrence (the third of these

Mule-train on the Khyber Pass



Above: Major Sir Louis Cavagnari with the Amir Ayub Khan. A photograph taken in August 1879 a few weeks before Cavagnari's death. Also in the group are Mr. Jenkyns, a member of the British Mission, General Daoud Shah, the Afghan Commander-in-Chief, and Mustaphi Habibullah Khan

Opposite: General Stewart and his staff, 1879

Below: General Roberts and staff, 1880

Over page: Yukub Khan rides into General Sam Browne's camp near Gandamak, 9th May 1880

Above: The gateway to the Bala Hissar, Kabul

Opposite: The Amir Sher Ali: a portrait taken in 1880

Below: Kandahar, site of Roberts' victory over Ayub Khan on 1st September 1880. In the distance can be seen the Kotal, which marks the centre of the Afghan position

remarkable brothers) could resume his post. The British were back on the Frontier again—and this time they intended to stay.

For a while the future of the Punjab was uncertain; though annexation was being discussed the final word had not been given. Sir Henry Lawrence was against it; the Board of Directors of the East India Company was havering, and the decision would obviously have to come from Dalhousie. How he arrived at it is still uncertain. According to John Lawrence, who met him for the first time at Ferozepore on the 12th March, the latter asked, 'What is to be done? What is to be done with the Punjab now?' To this question, Lawrence replied: 'Annex it now; annex it now; annex it now!' Lawrence's view was the annexation would be easy while the people were still crushed by defeat, but later on it would be more complicated. Dalhousie made all kinds of difficulties, but finally saw the force of Lawrence's arguments and gave way.

This version of the conversation is vehemently denied by Dalhousie's biographer, who points out that Dalhousie had committed his intentions to writing long before the meeting with Lawrence. On the 23rd October the previous year he had written to Sir John Hobhouse that 'all hope of establishing an independent Hindu or Sikh power in the Punjab must be abandoned'. Hobhouse replied that the Board of Control were against annexation, but on the 7th November gave way and wrote: 'It is clear now that you have the right to do what you choose.' Ignoring for the moment the pressure brought by John Lawrence, one important factor leading to Dalhousie's decision was the danger from Afghanistan on the North-West Frontier. On the 24th March 1849 he wrote to Hobhouse: 'I have never felt, more especially since the Afghans came on the stage, the tremor of a doubt, or seen reason to question for a moment the necessity of the policy [of annexation] which I submitted to you.' The North-West Frontier, in fact, could not be defended merely by a chain of forts and frontier posts; what was needed was a stable administration in depth behind it. And with the Punjab as well as Sind in British hands, this could now be achieved.

On the 30th March the deed was done. In the presence of Sir Henry Lawrence, John Lawrence, the faithful remnant of the Sikh Durbar, and the young Maharaja, who took his seat on the throne

of Ranjit Singh for the last time, Dalhousie had the proclamation read out. The East India Company would take over the Punjab and all the properties of the Sikh state 'in part payment of the debt due by the State of Lahore to the British Government, and of the expenses of the war'; the Maharaja Dhulip Singh would be treated 'with honour and respect' and be given a pension of some five lakhs of rupees per annum; and the Koh-i-Noor diamond which had been taken from Shah Shuja by Ranjit Singh would be 'surrendered to to the Queen of England'.

It is no part of the brief of this work to justify the British action in taking over this or any other province, but it may be worth noting en passant that not everyone in the Punjab was sorry to see the change. The following words were written by the Punjab historian, Syad Mohammed Latif, in 1889:

'What does our history disclose? Corruption, degradation and treachery stalked openly through the land. Confusion and disorder of every kind ran riot over the length and breadth of the empire. The country was desolate, and vice, cruelty, extravagance and profligacy overspread its surface. Strife became chronic, and anarchy reared its head everywhere. . . . But is it not now one of the most secure, and has it not become one of the most prosperous and flourishing of the countries of the globe under the fostering care of the English? Witness the gigantic railway projects. . . . Witness the vast public works. . . . Witness the grand schemes of irrigation. . . . Witness the blessings of religious toleration and freedom enjoyed by the meanest subject . . . a state of things unparalleled in any other country under the sun. . . .'

But, as Latif went on to argue, the Punjab is the most exposed to invasion of all the Indian provinces, and never, except for short periods, had it known security on its North-Western Frontier. This security the British were determined it should now have. Rightly or wrongly they took over the old Sikh boundary running along the edge of the tribal lands, though from the experience of the previous years they had some idea of the troubles in store for them. There was no serious suggestion that the Peshawar plain should be abandoned, though John Lawrence was said to be in favour of this course. There was no suggestion either of pushing forward; the disasters of the First Afghan War still burned deep in the mind of every soldier and administrator. The policy for the next twenty-

seven years, in fact, was known as the 'Policy of Masterly Inactivity'. The name is misleading, however, for between 1849 and 1879 no less than thirty-seven expeditions were launched across the Frontier to keep the tribes in check, and the number of smaller actions is beyond counting. These were stirring days, when many of the great frontier names came to the fore: Colin Campbell and Neville Chamberlain, John Jacob and Robert Sandeman. They were busy days, when the defences of the Frontier were organised from Chitral to Baluchistan. They were days of great anxiety, and included the Indian Mutiny. They were probably the best days the British Empire would ever know.

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THE YEARS OF MASTERLY INACTIVITY

For the sake of convenience, the period may be divided into three phases: 1849 to 1856, 1857, the year of the Indian Mutiny; and 1858 to 1876. Some common threads run through all three phases, some developments overlap the Mutiny on either side, but the division is not entirely artificial. After 1857 British attitudes in India changed very considerably; the army was reorganised, and the Bengal regiments were disbanded. Even if the problems on the Frontier were not transformed the vision of the men dealing with them was. Also, many great figures, such as John Nicholson and Henry Lawrence, were engulfed in the Mutiny and the Frontier never saw them again.

In 1849, when the soldiers and political officers began making their way along the Frontier to see what exactly it was they had taken over, they found the whole area studded with forts erected by the Sikhs. Each one of these was occupied with what one official called 'a robber chief' whose private army collected revenues from the surrounding area. The tribes had been at war with the Sikhs and, as they soon made it clear, had no inclination to give up their predatory habits now the British had appeared. Their poverty and their traditions of a thousand years made a sudden change impossible, in any event. So, as Dalhousie and Napier, the new Commander-in-Chief, realised, there must be enough specially trained troops to maintain a constant watch, and launch punitive expeditions when necessary. In June the Guides were increased to three troops of cavalry and six companies of infantry, and a new regiment, to be known as the Punjab Frontier Force, was raised. Its first commander was Captain John Coke, who followed Lumsden's example and recruited men from a whole array of fighting tribes, and like Lumsden he was remarkably successful. When Napier came up to

Peshawar a year later he was very impressed with this new unit and declared he'd never seen anything superior to its drill. Within a year of being raised the Punjab Frontier Force was in action, and its record on the Frontier for many years was a very remarkable one. To back up these specialised units, a force of five infanty and five cavalry regiments was based at Peshawar, and the first district commander, who arrived in November, was Brigadier-General Sir Colin Campbell, soon to win immortality with his 'thin red line' in the Crimea. His command extended along the 700 miles of the Punjab Frontier only; the Sind Frontier was under the command of that remarkable soldier, John Jacob, to whom we shall return later on.

When Colin Campbell arrived, fighting on the Frontier had already started. In October Harry Lumsden, one of whose jobs was that of Assistant Commissioner in Yusafzai territory, reported to Lieutenant-Colonel George Lawrence, now Deputy Commissioner at Peshawar, that some of the villages were refusing to pay their revenues, and threatening war. Lawrence sent on this report to the Government, mentioning that the Sikhs had always sent 1,500 men with about four guns to make the Yusafzai collection, and indicating that the British would have to follow suit. The Government agreed, so on the 3rd December the Guides and the Frontier Force went into action, inflicting twenty casualties on the tribesmen and destroying a village. A few days later the chiefs came down to Lumsden, confessed their sins, and promised to pay up.

This was the first armed tax-collecting expedition, and it was to be followed by many others. Such operations, not to mention the punitive expeditions in reprisal for raids and other forms of disorder, were somewhat an innovation to the British, and soon questions came to be asked as to their ethical basis. In reply the Punjab Government produced a document which argued that there was a point beyond which forbearance could not be carried, and that, as each expedition was sanctioned by the Government (as opposed to the Army), it was 'always in the nature of a judicial act'. It was the delivery of punishment, and as such must be morally justified. 'As a Government it is our bounden duty . . . after exhausting all milder measures, to chastise . . . tribes or sections of tribes who openly and habitually rob and murder our subjects, or violate our territory.' But the trouble about violence is that as an instrument it is not very

precise; and, despite all the care exercised by the troops, there were cases when (so it was alleged) women and children were made to pay for the sins of their menfolk. When Lieutenant-Colonel Bradshaw, who commanded the forces against the Yusafzai villages in the action just described, sent in his report, it so enraged Sir Charles Napier that he wrote: 'It is with surprise and regret that I have seen . . . that villages have been destroyed. . . . I desire to know why a proceeding at variance with humanity and contrary to the usages of civilised warfare, came to be adopted. I disapprove of such cruelties, so unmilitary and so injurious to the discipline and honour of the Army. Should the troops be again called upon to act, you will be pleased to issue orders that war is to be made on men; not upon defenceless *women and children*, by destroying their habitations and leaving them to perish without shelter. . . .'

Napier, it will be remembered, was one of Wellington's officers, and had imbibed this doctrine from his early years of service. He had passed it on to John Jacob, who, during all his years in Sind, managed to combine justice and mercy to a remarkable degree. Bradshaw was so hurt by Napier's reproof that to the end of his career he never allowed another village to be burned.

To some officers, Napier was speaking in ignorance of the realities of Frontier warfare; and certainly, as time went on, the policy grew tougher. But the Bradshaw incident serves to illustrate another problem which has dogged the Frontier since the early days: the relationship between the military and the political officers. As Bradshaw pointed out, the village had been burned by, or under the orders of, the Political Officer with his column, although he personally, as commander, was held responsible. The feeling between the two services was touched on by Harry Lumsden as early as October 1849; when resigning his Assistant Commissionership to concentrate on his command of the Guides, he remarked that he did not want letters from the Board telling him that 'Mr. So-and-So, who had only been out two years in the Civil Service, would not have made the mistake which you have fallen into'. This friction stemmed from the basic problem of whether the Frontier was to be an area in which the military assisted the civil, or the civil the military; and unfortunately the problem was never stated with sufficient clarity. In Harry Lumsden's day the civil held sway; even the Punjab Frontier Force was raised 'for Police and General

Purposes . . . under the orders of the Agent to the Governor-General on the North-West Frontier'. As time went on, however, there was a tendency to regard the Frontier as primarily a military concern; but still lack of definition set up abrasive relations between soldiers and the politicals. Another development resulting from the same lack was that control of the tribes—'the minor problem'—devoured so much time and energy as the years rolled by, that it overshadowed 'the major problem', the establishment of a stable buffer state in Afghanistan, and the defence against invasion from Central Asia.

But, to return to the tribes, it should not be imagined that the British attitude was merely negative; on the contrary, great efforts were made to conciliate and persuade. The hated capitation tax of Sikh days and all frontier duties were abolished; complete freedom of trade was instituted, and commercial intercourse encouraged in every way. The Powindahs, the itinerant merchants, were welcomed when they came down on to the plain to trade; fairs were held; and later on roads were built from the passes to the nearest bazaars. When hospitals and dispensaries were set up, free medical treatment was provided for the tribesmen and their families. Tribal chiefs and councils were encouraged to come across the border to settle their disputes; waste land was colonised and given to families wishing to come across the border to settle. And finally employment was found for such able-bodied men who wanted it, not only in the army but in the police and government service.

From the above it will be seen that the civil power had a very important role to play on the Frontier; but it still remained true that British policy was one of conciliation backed by force. In the early 1850's many people imagined that the former would succeed to such an extent that the latter would diminish, but they were doomed to disappointment. The tribes, declared Sir Richard Temple (one of John Lawrence's assistants), were incorrigible. They took the free medical treatment, then gave asylum to fugitives from justice; they violated British territory, blackmailed and intrigued; they sent agents across the border to murder British subjects. The result was, as one Frontier historian puts it, 'the contumacious attitude of the tribesmen eventually drove the British to resort to reprisals and resulted in a state of chronic warfare for many years'. The warfare was so hot during some periods that many people were driven to the conclusion that Dalhousie had made a major blunder

in occupying the old Sikh frontier; it was too long, too mountainous, too difficult to control, and impossible to defend, they argued. But they argued in vain: the British would stay there as long as they held India, and have to make the best of it.

Now the Powindahs have been mentioned, it may be worth halting the main narrative to introduce them. They are great clans of warrior merchants, Ghilzais and Kharotis as well as Powindahs proper, who for hundreds of years have brought their caravans through the passes from central Afghanistan to the Punjab plain. They paid taxes to the Kabul Government, and grazing tax to local officials, but otherwise preserved their independence and settled their own quarrels. They kept aloof from Frontier politics, but if the tribes on the passes opposed their passage (which was very frequently) they had no hesitation in fighting their way through. In Lumsden's day and for some years to come the Powindahs would only debouch on to the plain after stern battles had raged in the Gomal, Tochi, or Kurram valleys. Though motivated solely by the profit motive, they were an admirable body of men, and remained a colourful feature of Frontier life. Surrendering their arms at the control point as they crossed the Frontier in the autumn, they would remain under British rule for up to six months of the year. Their black camel-hair tents were protected by savage guard dogs, and the women and children remained behind in them while the men-folk took their camel trains to trade in the Punjab villages. Their wares included felt rugs, carpets, dried fruits, fresh grapes, and lambskins, and as these were sold they would acquire salt, tea, hardware, and textiles to take back to Afghanistan in the spring.

The Powindahs, however, did not form the only group regularly crossing the Frontier. There were also Jajjis, Jadrans, and Mangals, who travelled south to trade, and the Ghilzais who went as far as Bengal to hawk cloth. Apart from these, there were the itinerant workmen who spent the winter in India. Altogether it will be seen that these travellers made up quite a large proportion of the Afghan population, and the closing of the passes could be used as a lever by the British Government to bring pressure on Kabul.

British officers serving in Peshawar (or indeed anywhere beyond the Indus) were always in some personal danger, whether in action or merely in the mess. Though the Pathan population of the city was very different from the tribesmen, it still reacted

to troubles in the hills, and its temper was just as uncertain. From the arrival of Colin Campbell a standing order came into force that officers should never move without their arms, and (like all such orders anywhere else) this order was very unpopular. Officers going to social gatherings, such as polo or cricket matches or picnics, hated being encumbered with sword belts or holsters, and sometimes disobeyed the order. One such subaltern was brought before Sir Colin Campbell who grew very angry, and, shaking his fist at him, remarked, 'I'll tell you what it is, young man—you may go without your breeches, but damnit, sir, you shall carry your sword!' Though Peshawar is on the plain, the hills are not very far away to the east, west, and north, and whenever the troops went near them there was always the chance that an occasional bullet would hit the rocks at their feet. The Adam Khel Afridis in the Kohat Pass, some twenty-five miles to the south, were always on watch. On one occasion Lumsden entered the pass on a journey to see Captain Coke of the Frontier Force, who maintained a post near Kohat, and came across a tribesman 'blowing at the match of his matchlock'. When Lumsden asked him what was the matter he merely shrieked, 'Coke! Coke!' Lumsden gave his own name and rode on, but when John Coke came out to meet him, at the far end of the pass, he said: 'He's after you. Nothing but my being able to assure him that I was Lumsden, saved my skin.' Laughing, Coke replied that 'Khok' was the Pushtu word for pig.

By 1850 the Adam Khel Afridis had become such a nuisance that Colin Campbell was forced to lead an expedition against them. The previous year the Government had come to an arrangement with them whereby they would keep open the Kohat Pass in payment of an annual subsidy of Rs. 5,700, but, on the 2nd February 1850, a party of sappers building a road were surprised by a force of a thousand men who killed twelve and wounded six others. Campbell began his advance on the 9th March and entered the pass the following day, the passage of the main column being protected by the 1st Punjab Infantry who picketed the hills. The first objective was the village of Akhor, but before the troops could reach it, a deputation of maliks came out to protest their innocence. George Lawrence, who was accompanying the column as Deputy Commissioner, replied that the villagers had an hour to surrender themselves and their arms. The maliks went away, but returned later on

to inform him that the terms were unacceptable. The Commander-in-Chief, Sir Charles Napier, who was with the column also, ordered Colin Campbell to 'crown the heights round the village', and Lawrence, who had some 1,500 levies under him, set off to do this. In due course, after a concentration from the Horse Artillery, the attack went in and, though the Afridis fought gallantly from behind breastworks, the position was carried. As Napier was around, however, the village was only partially destroyed. The column then pushed on into the pass, and, fighting minor actions en route, reached the Kohat kotal, where it camped for the night. Next morning there was an incident which was to be repeated time and time again on the frontier. Owing to the slackness of an Indian officer the pickets coming downhill after relief were left unprotected for a few moments. So, seeing their chance, the Afridis launched an attack and inflicted a number of casualties, before being driven off by the Horse Artillery. When the column marched back through the pass on the 13th, after completing its punitive task, great care was taken with the movement and relief of pickets, and there was no trouble. As expedition followed expedition, and the tribesmen grew more and more expert at 'reading' the movements of troops, the relief of pickets, and the relative positions of advance and rear-guards, and the main bodies of columns, had to be regulated with absolute precision if trouble were to be avoided. The whole business, in fact, became a 'battle drill'.

No one has recorded his detailed impressions of this first operation in the Kohat Pass, but it is difficult not to believe that in essence it was not the same as any other carried out during the next hundred years, so far as the troops were concerned. There was the wilderness of rock and sand, the heat, the blinding glare from the sun, the stony nullahs, and overlooking all those bare mountains, silent but with a thousand eyes. The attack on the picket was almost exactly the same as an attack described by John Masters, which took place in Waziristan in the mid-1930's: 'One blinding volley—one rush, two seconds of stabbing and hacking, and it was done—six soldiers dead and six left for dead, twelve rifles and six hundred rounds of ammunition gone, one tribesman dead. Another typical Frontier incident.' Typical in 1850; typical in 1935 and (one might add) in all the years between.

The Afridis continued to give trouble, and in 1851 Captain Coke

led another expedition against them; in that year there were also two expeditions against the Mohmands, living north-west of Peshawar. In 1852 no less than four expeditions had to be launched, against the Umarzai Waziris, the Black Mountain tribes, the Ranizais, and the Utman Khels. After these were over, Sir Colin Campbell left the Frontier, as did Harry Lumsden. The year 1853, however, was as troubled as the one which preceded it, for not only were the Shiranis on the Dera Ismail Khan border giving trouble, but the Jowaki Afridis, the Yusafzais, and the Minchi Mohmands. The expeditions against these tribes were routine, and of no special interest, except to the men serving in them; they accomplished their limited aims, but their impact was ephemeral.

But now it is time to look at that remarkable soldier John Jacob, who, with his Irregular Horse, had brought law and order, and peace to Sind. As already indicated, he was a remarkable man, possessing both physical and moral courage to an extraordinary degree. Whatever he thought was right and just he would do it, whether (as sometimes happened) it brought down the wrath of his immediate superior, or the Commander-in-Chief, or the Governor-General. His territory covered an area the size of England and Wales put together, but so great was his authority and so swift his movement that there was no corner of it, not even deep in the wastes or across the blistering sands, which did not quiver at his name. He had very few officers to help him and virtually no one to consult, for long periods; he was solely dependent on his own moral resources. Fifty years later his name would be mentioned as one of the finest men who ever served in India.

The uniform of the Sind Horse had been designed by himself, and at a glance his men looked like troopers for some old Mogul army. The native officers carried double-barrelled pistols and sabres, but no thrusting weapons. Jacob detested the latter, for, as he remarked, 'If you run a man through on the move, you either break your sword or are unhorsed because you can't get it out.' Tunics and breeches were green and in the winter sheepskin jackets were worn over them. Each man wore long English jackboots, and carried three days' supplies for both himself and his horse. Under the belly of the horse, and attached to the girths, was slung a leather mussack containing two gallons of water. By making his men both mobile and independent in this manner, Jacob was able to bring off

some outstanding achievements. Once when a herd of camels had been stolen, he rode straight into the desert after the thieves and, as his men were expert trackers, caught up with them on the second day. The thieves were somewhat amazed, believing themselves quite safe in the desert.

Jacob was not only responsible for the interior of Sind, but its stretch of the North-West Frontier, and over this the Bugtis kept raiding. Though merciful wherever possible, Jacob was resolute in punishing persistent wrongdoers, and in one action against the Bugtis he killed not less than 600 men and took the remainder prisoner. Not surprisingly, the chiefs, fearing his wrath to come, walked in to surrender. In his report on this action Jacob wrote: 'The loss of life has been terrific, but it is satisfactory to know that the men slain were robbers and murderers, who were the terror of all peaceable persons within their reach, and whose cruelties were sometimes fiendish.' With only one regiment at his disposal, Jacob's life was one of continuous action, and he remarks, 'We had literally to lie down to rest with our boots and swords on for many months together.'

But even so, and by some miraculous means, Jacob managed to improve the physical conditions on the Frontier. When he first saw it, he says, 'it was a desert wholly destitute of permanent inhabitants, and a great part of the year without water. The annual rainfall did not amount to an inch per annum. The difficulties to be overcome were great. . . .' Five years later, however, in 1854 he could write that 'On the formerly desert border there are now always supplies for an army. . . . Where there was formerly only brackish water for a squadron of Horse, there are now tanks and wells affording an unlimited supply of fresh water. . . . Roads and bridges have been constructed by me all over the country amounting to 600 miles in length. . . . Peace, plenty, and security everywhere prevail in a district where formerly all was terror and disorder.'

Without in any way diminishing the achievement of John Jacob —as a lone achievement it was astonishing—it is only proper to point out that some things were in his favour. The tribes of Baluchistan, on his sector of the North-West Frontier, were not Pathans, but a mixture, some tribes being descended from Arab invaders of the ninth century, some being of Persian stock, and others showing traces of older peoples such as the Dravidians. They were less

fanatical and aggressive than the Pathans; and they had great respect for their own chiefs. Once the chiefs were won over by the British, the tribes followed as a matter of course. The other factor was geographical; the Baluchistan tribes did not extend very deep into the plains of southern Afghanistan, and behind them were sparsely populated and arid lands which afforded no 'bolt-hole'.

One of the most difficult problems Jacob had to deal with, however, was Kalat, west of Jacobabad and south of Quetta, a wild mountainous area ruled over by a khan who nominally recognised the suzerainty of Kabul. In 1841 Colonel Outram and Colonel Stacy, the Resident at Quetta, negotiated a treaty with the Khan whereby his foreign relations would be controlled by the British, who in turn would guarantee him his dominions and help him to preserve internal order. By 1851 the treaty was a dead-letter, as the British had failed to give the help agreed, and the Khan was now at the mercy of his sirdars. To make matters worse, the northern tribes, notably the Marris, had cut loose and were raiding British territory. Jacob, with the agreement of Bartle Frere, who had now become Commissioner for Upper Sind, proposed that a subsidy of £5,000 should be paid to the Khan, in consideration of his sending a force to deal with the raiders. The Khan, however, was so weak and so at the mercy of his scheming Vizier, that he was unable to do this, and so in 1853 Jacob asked Frere if he could take his Irregular Horse into Kalat and deal with the recalcitrant tribes. 'I would bring down on the Murrees', he wrote, 'every tribe of hill and plain around them and crush them far more effectively than any regular force could do.' But Frere havered and consulted his superiors, and six months later Dalhousie put his oar in. 'I cannot believe in subsidising the Khan . . . to sustain his power', he wrote, and 'With regard to the Murrees, I can't see the reason for attacking them because they have attacked other people, or the justice of attacking them when they have not attacked us.' The recipient of this letter, Colonel Outram, suggested that the subsidy should be paid for one year as a trial, but as to the trouble from the Marris, he added, 'I should confidently rely on the entire success of our military operations if left to Major Jacob's sole responsibility. That officer's prudence and foresight are as remarkable as his gallantry and enterprise.' Dalhousie did not take this good advice, and Jacob, falling into despair, as the situation deteriorated on the Frontier, even

seriously considered throwing up his career and emigrating to Australia.

Unfortunately, this professional crisis coincided with a private disappointment—the news that a valued subaltern had just become engaged. 'It came like a thunderbolt', he wrote. 'It was a crushing blow . . . it involves such a complete overthrow of so many cherished ideas that I seem to be in a dream.' Though the homosexual overtones in this outburst are clear enough, Jacob tried to rationalise his feelings later on, to propound the view that a man may be a soldier or a husband but not both. 'For a soldier who wishes to be active, to work and rise honestly and fairly by his own exertion . . . marriage appears to me to be moral suicide; it paralyses him at every turn, deprives him of half his strength when his power is most required. . . . Often I have felt the crushing effect of [one of our General's] marriage on him. He was frequently shorn of half his force by it.' Though held sincerely, these views no doubt stemmed from Jacob's inability to mix in society and his fear of women, brought on by a pronounced stammer. It was about this time that he wrote: 'I do not mind mentioning to you that *it is impossible for language to express*, or for anyone to imagine who has not felt it, the crushing effect which my defective speech has on me. No amount of bodily deformity could equal or approach this curse. Were the bond unloosed, I sometimes feel I could force my way to anything: as it is, I frequently wish I could hide myself in the earth.'

The parallel between John Jacob and T. E. Lawrence must already be plain, and it is a most remarkable one. Both had a tremendous understanding of native troops, both excelled in guerrilla warfare, both were completely at home in deserts and wild arid places, both could accomplish astonishing journeys and go without food or sleep for long periods, and both were sensitive and intellectual. Lawrence suffered from his insignificant physique, and Jacob from his stammer, and in both men this abnormality may have led to homosexuality. It is extraordinary how often this inversion appears among people, of any race, who achieve a mastery of the desert; both the Arabs and the Pathans have a high proportion of homosexuals. In dwelling for a moment on this trait of Jacob's character, however, there is no suggestion of criticism. He was without doubt a most remarkable soldier whose achievements on the Frontier have almost been forgotten while those of lesser men have been remembered.

In 1854 Jacob got his way. Riding across the mountains with a squadron of his horsemen, he held a long meeting with the Khan and negotiated a treaty which was a model of lucidity. 'No oppression or violence shall be allowed', ran the text, 'whether very great or small. Justice shall be administered to all men.' The Khan agreed to accept the subsidy, and in return to stamp out raids across the Frontier, drawing on any help from Jacob that should be needed. Later on, Jacob was to report that 'the Khan and his officers are doing all that men can do to carry out our wishes'. Belatedly Lord Dalhousie recognised the worth of Jacob's achievement, generously admitted his misjudgment, and showered congratulations. 'Thank God', Outram wrote, 'Lord Dalhousie has had time to judge and learn your true value, and in him you have a real friend.' As it turned out, this atmosphere of mutual regard lasted barely a year, and was abruptly terminated when Jacob set out his views regarding the organisation and training of the Bengal Army, in a letter to the *Bombay Times*. These views ran contrary to the orthodox ideas of the time, and Jacob received a letter of severe censure. Three years later, however, his main criticisms, and especially his stricture that 'a native soldier in Bengal is far more afraid of an offence against caste than of an offence against the Articles of War', were amply justified with the outbreak of the Indian Mutiny.

Before leaving Jacob and his achievements it may be well worth noting his foresight in another matter. By 1854 he had become convinced that the most likely route to be used by any invader would run through Herat, Kandahar, and the Bolan Pass, rather than the Khyber. He therefore advocated that Quetta, lying at the north-western end of the pass, in Baluchistan, should be occupied with a considerable force. A military road should then be built, running back through the Bolan, to connect with the roads in Sind. To base the defences of the whole North-West Frontier on Peshawar, hundreds of miles from the Bolan Pass, and cut off by the lack of lateral communications, he considered to be the height of folly. But his suggestion fell on deaf ears, and even Lord Canning, when he succeeded Dalhousie in 1856, saw formidable drawbacks. The garrison at Quetta (he pointed out) would be isolated 200 miles from their supply point, and with the pass behind them. The tribes along the pass, though not politically hostile, were 'plunderers by profession', and the line of communications would therefore come

under attack. 'Military occupation long continued in such a country', Canning argued logically, 'must vary with it, civil government, and civil government is sovereignty. The red line on the map would again be pushed further westward, and without finding so good a resting-place as now.' Despite all the difficulties, however, Jacob's main contention still held; and the day would come when it must be put into effect.

By then Jacob had long been dead. In 1855 he was appointed to the Commissionership of Sind with the rank of major-general, and though he travelled less, he worked even harder. 'The business I strive to get through daily would be sufficient to overwhelm fifty brains instead of one', he wrote in March 1858. 'I seldom get above three hours sleep in the twenty-four, and the work will kill me which I do not regret: for I have proved and established principles and built foundations on which others will be able to work. . . .' A few days later he died in the presence of Colonel Green, who now commanded the Sind Frontier, and many old troopers of the Sind Horse. When the news reached England there was a spontaneous outburst of praise in the Press, all the more remarkable in view of the abuse it had heaped on him from time to time, while he was alive. *The Times* said: 'The Indian Army has lost a general, and the Indian service a hero. . . .' The *Telegraph* declared: 'Another noble Englishman lies dead in India—the victim of neglect, if not of absolute persecution. Never did a finer soldier step than this gallant sentinel of our Indian frontier.' The *Spectator* went even further, naming him 'a chevalier sans peur et sans reproche, whose death was an irreparable loss to the Empire'.

Jacob himself considered that in many ways his career had been a failure, but his achievement in Sind and the fact that his name remained a legend on the Frontier proves otherwise. To this day he remains one of its greatest characters.

On the 7th December 1856 Dost Mohammed left Kabul on a journey to Peshawar, the Pathan city he had so long coveted, to discuss a new treaty with Sir John Lawrence. Lawrence, who was now in charge of the Punjab administration, encamped with his staff and 300 troops on the plain between Peshawar and Jamrud, the old fort at the mouth of the Khyber, and waited for news of the Amir's approach. It was not till the 1st January 1857 that a message came; this informed him that the Amir was in the pass and

requested that Lawrence, together with Herbert Edwardes (now Commissioner for Peshawar), and two of Dost Mohammed's sons, who had now ridden forward, should go into the pass and meet the Amir there. Though he had no option but to comply, Lawrence was not happy. As his biographer puts it: 'It was indeed an instinct of self-preservation, no less than the stringent orders of the Government which had prohibited Englishmen, however adventurous, from entering the precincts of those dreaded Khyburees. . . . John Lawrence, knowing well the risk he ran, had begged Sydney Cotton to give orders to his troops that, if any firing was heard within the pass, they should at once enter it and rush to the rescue.' In a few hours, however, the party arrived, to be greeted by a salute of guns, which was echoed by a discharge of matchlocks all over the hills. Two days later Dost Mohammed rode out of the pass on to British territory, and the treaty which had been mooted for over a year was signed.

The credit for this meeting and the subsequent treaty should go to Herbert Edwardes, who had first put up the suggestion in 1855. His motives are not quite clear, though he probably realised that there was a definite link between the Frontier tribes and Kabul, and reasoned that the better the understanding with the first, the less trouble there would be with the second. John Lawrence turned down the suggestion flat, but fortunately Dalhousie supported Edwardes, and in March 1855 it was arranged that the Amir's son, Ghulam Haidar, should come down to Peshawar and sign a treaty. This was very short and did little more than reopen diplomatic relations and reaffirm that the British had no hostile intentions towards Afghanistan. The latter for its part pledged that the Amir would continue 'the friend of the friends and enemy of the enemies of the Honourable East India Company'. It is doubtful if this treaty was regarded with undue solemnity by either party, but by a curious trick of fate the good faith of one signator was soon to be tested. In October the following year the Persians seized Herat, and the British, declaring this much disputed border province to be 'an important element in the defence of British India against the possible machinations of Russia', promptly declared war on Persia. This was the last thing the Shah wanted to happen; and giving his armies orders to withdraw, he instructed his diplomats to open negotations for a treaty. It was quickly drafted and quickly signed,

and Persia promised never to interfere with the independence of Afghanistan again. In these circumstances it is not surprising that when Edwardes suggested to Dost Mohammed that the treaty of 1855 should be enlarged he accepted without hesitation. The new treaty, signed on the 26th January 1857, stipulated that the Amir was to receive a subsidy of £10,000 a month during the war with Persia (the formalities of the peace would not be concluded for another two months), and for this would maintain sufficient troops to defend his country. He would also permit a party of British officers to go to Kandahar to ensure that the money was spent in the agreed manner. Lawrence and Edwardes, quite naturally, wanted a mission in Kabul also, but Dost Mohammed's advisers, remembering what had happened the last time the British were in that city, argued strongly against the proposal, which eventually was dropped.

The articles of agreement were signed at 4 p.m. on the 26th January in the Amir's tent, and one can only wish that a photographer had been on hand, so many men were present who were to play important roles in the story of the Frontier. Apart from Dost Mohammed's party, which included his son Azim Khan, and his brother, there were, on the British side, John Lawrence, Herbert Edwardes, Harry Lumsden, Brigadier-General Sydney Cotton, and Brigadier-General Sir Neville Chamberlain, Colin Campbell's successor and one of the great Frontier soldiers. When Dost Mohammed had signed the document he lay down his pen and said so that all could hear, 'I have now made an alliance with the British Government, and, come what may, I will keep it till death.' Four months later, with the outbreak of the Mutiny, these words were recalled with great relief, for, as Harry Lumsden put it, 'had it not been that the minds of the Afghans were in a measure prepared for the Amir's non-interference, he could not have prevented a general rush down the passes, which must have added greatly to our embarrassment at Peshawar and along the frontier'. But even with the treaty and Dost Mohammed's promise, things were still desperate.

The Mutiny, which would be more accurately described as the Sepoy's Revolt, began on the 10th May. Some sepoys at Meerut refused to accept the new cartridges (which rumour said were greased with pig fat) and were promptly put in irons. On Sunday morning other sepoys released them, while the Europeans were at

mattins, shot their officers, and made for Delhi. There were no British troops stationed here, so the sepoys seized the city, with the enthusiastic support of the garrison, and elected the eighty-two-year-old Emperor Bahadur Shah as their leader. The causes for the Mutiny were many and complicated, and they have often been described in detail. There is, therefore, no need to repeat them again here; but to understand the situation as it applied to the Frontier, a word is necessary on the general organisation of the Army. In 1857 the total military strength wielded by the East India Company was 238,000 men, of which 38,000 were Europeans. Each presidency had its own army, and the largest, the Bengal Army, numbered 151,000, of which 23,000 were Europeans. Unlike the Bombay and Madras armies, the Bengal Army recruited a large number of high-caste men, Brahmins and Rajputs, who were always (as John Jacob had pointed out) more difficult to control. It was the Bengal Army which mutinied, and the other presidencies experienced very little trouble. However, in northern India, once news spread that the sepoys had seized Delhi, the flame of insurrection spread rapidly, the garrisons at Nasirabad, Nimach, Lucknow, Cawnpore, and Benares rising and shooting their officers, and massacring European women and children. By mid-June British authority had ceased to exist from the borders of Rajputana to Patna in Behar.

News of the Mutiny had reached the Frontier on the 11th May, when a signal from Delhi came into John Nicholson's office in Peshawar: 'The sepoys have come in from Meerut and are burning everything. Mr. Todd is dead and we hear several Europeans. We must shut up.' Nicholson was standing in for Edwardes, who happened to be away from Peshawar that day, but when he came hurrying back it was to find that Nicholson had rapidly worked out a plan to save the Punjab and break the back of the Mutiny. This was that a Movable Column should at once be formed with the object of travelling rapidly from one area to another, as the danger showed itself. At the same time it would also prevent the mutineers from uniting their forces into a large army. Nicholson's next suggestion was that a strong irregular force of Multani Horse should be raised in the southern Punjab to be led by himself.

There was no need for Nicholson and Edwardes to remind each other of the key position they were again holding at Peshawar: they

both realised with startling clarity that unless the Frontier were kept under control, then the whole of the Punjab would rise, and following it the rest of India. The Afghans would then come pouring down through the passes and the British would be wiped out. There were about 2,000 British troops in Peshawar and these could deal with any insurrection among the sepoys, but should the 50,000 Pathans in the city rise also, then the situation would be desperate. To make sure that no such thing happened, therefore, action had to be swift and decisive; and it was fortunate that both Edwardes and Nicholson were in their thirties, and men of rapid decision. Sydney Cotton was sixty-five—not an unusual age for a brigadier-general in those days—but he was still very active, and Neville Chamberlain, commanding the Punjab Frontier Force, was only thirty-seven.

But, apart from deciding broad lines of action, there were immediate practical steps to be taken. Edwardes rode to Cotton's house to confer with him on the question of the Indian regiments. Should they be trusted, or should their arms be taken from them? Meanwhile Nicholson strode round the British officers' messes, gave the news of the Mutiny, and warned that it must be kept from the sepoys as long as possible. Having done this, Nicholson joined Edwardes, and they galloped to the post office, where all correspondence was seized. Awaiting for delivery, they found, were a number of newspapers containing cryptical, but nevertheless unmistakable, messages for the sepoys, and it soon became obvious that every Indian regiment in Peshawar was implicated. The following day, the 12th May, General Reed, the Divisional Commander, arrived, and summoned a meeting at his house for the next morning. Nicholson, Edwardes, Cotton, and Chamberlain were all there, and a subaltern called Frederick Roberts, of the Horse Artillery, later to become the famous 'Bobs' and Commander-in-Chief, India. Though the situation was grave, Roberts recorded that Edwardes and Nicholson remained calm and took a wide view of the situation. They had just received a telegram from the Chief Commissioner for the Punjab, John Lawrence, approving the general course of action suggested by them. But the first consideration was obviously the Frontier. Nicholson and Edwardes stated that in their view all friendly tribal leaders must be trusted, and efforts made to persuade their men to side with the British. Also, Irregular levies should be recruited along the Frontier, as they had been in 1848. General Reed and the other

soldiers agreed enthusiastically, and the idea of the Movable Column was then discussed. The trouble was that everyone wanted to command it, and so the decision had to be referred to John Lawrence, who was now at Rawalpindi. Within a few hours the reply came: Chamberlain was to command the column, which was to be formed at Jhelum. For his staff officer, Chamberlain chose Roberts, and so this young officer was given his first chance to distinguish himself.

Meanwhile, however, Roberts had to compose his record of the meeting and the decisions arrived at, and send off a number of signals. But before he had completed this task Nicholson came to him in a towering rage and accused him of leaking information concerning the meeting. Roberts hotly denied the charge, and so Nicholson suggested that they should both go along to the telegraph office, to see if the leak could have occurred there. The signaller proved to be little more than a boy, and under Nicholson's powerful interrogation he soon broke down and confessed. A friend had asked him how the British intended to deal with the situation, he said, and so he had told him. This admission cleared Roberts; but it meant that the news was now over the whole city, and had undoubtedly reached the sepoys. Attention now centred on the 64th Native Infantry (already implicated by the newspaper messages) and Nicholson advised Cotton that the men should be marched out of their cantonments and sent to garrison forts along the Frontier. This was done, the pretext being that an attack was expected from the tribes, and the mutiny was nipped in the bud.

Soon after the meeting at Reed's house, Edwardes was called for consultation by John Lawrence, and Nicholson remained in charge at Peshawar. For a few days it looked as if his prompt action had saved the Frontier, and on the 16th he was able to write his mother that all was quiet. Three days later, however, the situation changed as some Indian cavalry stationed at forts along the Frontier became restive. A native newspaper had published a story that sepoys had mutinied in the hills, and then a fakir was caught with a message on him which asked sepoys from the outposts 'to come in with a few officers' heads and join in a rising on the 26th May'. When the newspaper editor had been imprisoned and the fakir hanged, Nicholson approached the tribal chiefs to recruit men for the levies, but they had heard the news from Delhi and were 'sitting on the fence'. One of the chiefs told Nicholson brutally that the

sahibs had better look to their own salvation. The warning was quite clear: if the Punjab went, the whole Frontier would become a sheet of flame.

The Commander-in-Chief, General Anson, realised that the focus of his counter-offensive must be Delhi, and, at his headquarters at Ambala, began organising a force to march against it. This force was not to have much luck: Anson died from cholera soon after it got under way, and his successor, General Barnard, died of the same fever not long afterwards. When the force reached Delhi it was too weak to attack, and was for some time more besieged than besieging. The situation could only be restored when British troops arrived from Bombay and Madras, and they would take some time.

Meanwhile throughout the Punjab and along the Frontier things steadily deteriorated. When Edwardes arrived back at Peshawar on the 21st May he at once joined Nicholson in his attempt to raise levies from the Frontier villages, but even their joint effort was completely unsuccessful. The horizon was now so dark and the sense of impending danger so strong that they dared not even take off their clothes to sleep, and lay down armed where they were. No native regiment could be relied on, and it was little surprise when at midnight a telegram arrived to say that the sepoys at Nowshera, only thirty miles to the east of Peshawar, had mutinied. Calling for their horses, Edwardes and Nicholson galloped in the darkness to Cotton's headquarters, and put the situation to him: as soon as the sepoys in Peshawar heard the news they would mutiny also, and the only course, therefore, was to disarm them at first light. It will be realised that both Edwardes and Nicholson (though soldiers by profession) were both employed as Political Officers, and therefore could not order Cotton to take the necessary action—they could only urge. Many commanders would have promptly told them to mind their own business, but Cotton was a man of great intelligence, and recognised the stature of the officers he was dealing with. Without hesitation he sent off messages to the commanding officers of the native regiments and summoned them to his room. Here, to their horror, he told them of his decision, and a painful scene followed. According to Edwardes: 'The commandants of those regiments . . . unanimously and violently declared their implicit confidence in their men. One advised conciliation and another threatened us that his men would resist and take the guns.' Quite naturally the colonels

felt that the disgrace to their regiments must reflect on themselves, and, unlike Cotton, they resented the intervention by the 'politicals'. Nicholson, who had anticipated this reaction, handed the colonels a packet of letters, remarking, 'Perhaps these will interest you.' The colonels examined the letters, which gave ample proof of their men's complicity in the mutiny, but their minds were closed to reason, and they went on repeating their assurances like parrots. In the end, when he realised that argument and vituperation would lead nowhere, Edwardes cut in decisively, remarking, 'The matter, gentlemen, rests entirely with Brigadier-General Cotton.' For a moment there was silence as the officers turned towards the old soldier. Fortunately he didn't hesitate; just said quietly but firmly: 'Gentlemen, the troops will be disarmed. Those are my orders, and I must have them obeyed.'

By now it was six o'clock and within an hour the regiments were paraded in their cantonments. At either end of these were posted two British regiments with artillery support, close enough to intervene but not close enough for provocation. When the sepoys were formed up in line Edwardes and Cotton rode past them from one flank, while Nicholson approached from the other, escorted by some wild-looking tribesmen from the Multani Horse. The command 'Pile arms!' was given, and for a few moments the strain was considerable, as the British officers waited to see if it would be obeyed. Fortunately, however, the sepoys had been caught completely by surprise, and after a moment's hesitation they began to carry out the familiar drill. Edwardes wrote later: 'It was a painful and affecting thing to see them putting their own firelocks into the artillery wagons —weapons they had used honourably for years. . . . The officers of a cavalry regiment, a very fine set of fellows, threw in their own swords with those of their men, and even tore off their spurs. It was impossible not to feel for and with them.'

The disarming of the regiments had an immediate effect. As Edwardes and Nicholson rode back from the cantonments, the tribal chiefs who had treated them with disdain a few days earlier now came up and offered their services; and soon levies poured in from the villages. The town of Peshawar, which had been on the brink of insurrection, so Edwardes was soon reporting, had suddenly become 'as quiet as a Bayswater tea-garden'.

With Peshawar safe, the next task was to stamp out the insur-

rection at Nowshera. Unfortunately news was soon received that the mutineers there had marched off to join the main body of their regiment which was stationed at the fort at Mardan; also that the commander at Mardan, Colonel Henry Spottiswoode, was so horrified that his troops should have mutinied that he had blown his brains out. At dawn on the 24th May the column left Peshawar under Colonel Chute, who was accompanied by John Nicholson as Political Officer. The reaction of the sepoys, once they saw the dust from the column rising across the plain, was to seize all the money and ammunition they could carry and head for the hills of Swat. This hurried retreat so disappointed Chute, who, like his men, was hot and thirsty after a long march, that he decided to give up the chase and make camp. But Nicholson was made of sterner stuff, and, collecting a squadron of Multani Horse and some mounted police, he galloped in pursuit of the sepoys. Now this extraordinary soldier was in his element, and (to quote his biographer) 'the man of action, who had so long been cramped by official duties, could at last express his personality with absolute abandon. . . . At the head of his small force, mounted on a big grey charger, he fell upon the main body of sepoys, who turned to receive him, broke under the shock and scattered in every direction. He hunted them out of the villages, grappled with them in ravines, chased them over hills.' Hour after hour beneath the blistering sun the hunt went on, and Nicholson did not give up till he had fought and galloped for over seventy miles, and 150 dead sepoys had been counted. Later that night he returned to Mardan with 120 prisoners and the regimental colours.

Inevitably the prisoners were condemned to death, but Nicholson put in a plea for the Sikhs and young recruits. 'Blow away all the rest by all means', he wrote Edwardes, 'but spare boys scarcely out of their childhood, and men who were loyal and respectful up to the moment when they allowed themselves to be carried away in a panic by the mass.' Edwardes referred the matter to John Lawrence, who was against blowing 120 men from the guns. 'On further reflection . . .' he wrote, 'I do not think that we should be justified in the eyes of the Almighty in doing so.' As a compromise, he suggested 'destroying from a quarter to a third of them'. Cotton, who perhaps did not have the views of the Almighty so firmly in mind, chose forty men—an exact third—and these were condemned to suffer the terrible death of mutineers.

The sentence was carried out on the 10th June on the parade ground at Peshawar. The whole garrison was formed up on three sides, the fourth side being occupied by the guns. All around were thousands of Pathans who had come not only from the city itself but the surrounding countryside, and there was a low murmur as the culprits were marched on to the parade ground and bound forcibly to the mouths of the guns. When the last man had been secured, the gunner officer reported to Cotton, and was asked to carry on. There was a roar and a flash and then a pall of smoke. When it had cleared the mangled remains of the sepoys were cut away, and the horrified troops marched back to their barracks.

Nicholson was not present at this occasion; after delivering the prisoners he had rejoined Colonel Chute's column which was now marching from fort to fort along the Frontier. Each of them was garrisoned by a detachment of the 64th Native Infantry, and evidence soon came in that these sepoys were trying to suborn the Frontier police and men from the Punjab Frontier Force. Early in June Nicholson obtained permission to disarm all the detachments from the 64th, and on the 10th he rejoined Edwardes at Peshawar. Here the news was that, apart from the Frontier, things were still going badly. More and more mutinous regiments were marching into Delhi to swell its garrison, and the British force sent to lay siege to the town could not stop them. Faced with this situation, and the urgent appeals from the generals, John Lawrence was sending all the troops from the Punjab that could possibly be spared. To replace them Edwardes and Nicholson set to and trained thousands of tribesmen, working against the clock from morning to night. There were Afridis, Mahsuds, Waziris, Ghilzais, and cut-throats and wild men of no known designation. Probably never in all history has anyone tried to make an army out of such riff-raff; and it is doubtful if the job could have been done at all if Nicholson hadn't been in command. But the fact which kept beating in his brain was that the Frontier had to be held, and these were the only men available to hold it. Already, as he knew, messages had been sent from the mutineers to Dost Mohammed, pleading with him to strike, now the British had their backs to the wall. So far, Dost Mohammed had temporised; had kept his word to the British; but whether he would continue to do so, no one could tell. Nicholson, with his detestation and mistrust of the Afghans, was not optimistic.

Then on the 10th June a bolt arrived from John Lawrence. It was in the form of a long letter addressed to Edwardes and ran as follows:

'I have done all I could to urge vigorous and prompt action at Delhi, and only stopped when I perceived that I might do more harm than good. . . . If Delhi does not fall at once, or if any disaster occur there, all the Regular army, and probably all the Irregular Cavalry will fall away. . . . I think we must look ahead and consider what should be done, in the event of a disaster in Delhi. My decided opinion is that, in that case, we must concentrate. All our safety depends on this. If we attempt to hold the whole country we shall be cut up in detail. The important points in the Punjab are Peshawar, Multan, and Lahore. . . . But I do not think we can hold Peshawar and the other places also, in the event of disaster. We could easily retire from Peshawar early in the day. But, at the eleventh hour, it would be difficult, perhaps impossible.'

Lawrence went on to make the astonishing suggestion that Dost Mohammed should be invited to come and take over the city, arguing that 'Peshawar would accomplish his heart's desire, and would do more to make the Afghans friendly to us than anything else. . . .' Edwardes' initial reaction was that his great chief, the 'Titan of the Punjab', had gone out of his mind, but the letter was too logically phrased and argued to admit this. The only possible reason, therefore, must be that the situation in general and the continuing bad news from Delhi had over-taxed his strength, and induced a mood of profound pessimism. Hurriedly Edwardes called in Nicholson and Cotton, and, as he expected, they both agreed with him: Peshawar must be held; the North-West Frontier must not be abandoned. On the 11th Edwardes wrote to Lawrence:

'My dear John, We are unanimously of opinion that with God's help we can and will hold Peshawar, let the worst come to the worst, and that it would be a fatal policy to abandon it and retire across the Indus. It is the anchor of the Punjab, and if you take it up the whole ship will drift to sea. . . . As for a friendly transfer of Peshawar to the Afghans, Dost Mohammed would not be a mortal Afghan—he would be an angel—if he did not assume our day to be gone in India, and follow after us as an enemy. Europeans cannot retreat—Kabul would come again.'

But John Lawrence saw the situation as a case of alternatives:

either the British must relinquish Peshawar or they must abandon the siege of Delhi. There was no other solution. This view he communicated to the Governor-General, Lord Canning, and repeated it in letter after letter to Herbert Edwardes. 'Peshawar is not India', he argued, 'though it is natural that you should write now as if it were.' He did not agree that Dost Mohammed would follow the British across the Indus. 'Even if he had the will, he would not have the power. The difference between the trans-Indus Mohammedan and his co-religionist on this side is the difference between a demon and a human being. . . .'

For some weeks, while the argument went on, the fate of Peshawar hung in the balance. As Lawrence kept reminding Edwardes, the siege of Delhi was still going badly, and General Reed, who was now in command there, was still screaming for more troops from the Punjab. Edwardes, convinced that any pusillanimity where Reed was concerned would only bring on disaster, wrote angrily to Lawrence on the 26th June: 'You must not go on throwing away your resources in detail by meeting General Reed's demands for reinforcements. If he cannot take Delhi with eight thousand men, he will not take it with nine thousand or ten thousand. Make a stand! Anchor, Hardy, anchor!' It was not until the 7th August that the matter was finally resolved. On that day Lord Canning took the initiative and signalled Lawrence: 'Hold on to Peshawar to the last.' Though the rebels in Delhi still held out, India was saved.

By the time this signal was received, Edwardes was on his own, Nicholson having left to command the 'Punjab Movable Column', in place of Chamberlain, who was wanted as Adjutant-General to the army before Delhi. However, he still remained calm and confident, and his chief worry was the rumour circulating that Sir Henry Lawrence had been killed during the siege of Lucknow. Unfortunately the rumour proved to be true. 'He was our master, friend, example, all in one . . .' Edwardes wrote, 'a father to us in the great earnest public life to which he led us forth . . . our feeling was ever that of the old Cavaliers, who looked for the day when "the King shall enjoy his own again".' To Edwardes, Nicholson, and indeed to everyone who had worked for him, Henry Lawrence was incomparably the greatest man they had ever known. Beside him John, for all his success and many achievements, was a mere pygmy. They had never forgiven John for ousting his elder brother from

the Punjab; neither did Henry until he lay dying. Then he was heard to murmur, 'I forgive everyone—I forgive my brother John.'

The campaign to reduce Delhi is another story which cannot be told here, but perhaps it is worth mentioning that it was a man from the Frontier, the now legendary John Nicholson, who became the hero of the hour. Anson and Barnard had died in the field, and Reed broke down after six weeks. Nicholson, who had proved such a success with the Punjab Movable Column, was called in, and (to borrow Edwardes' phrase) 'soon raised the mercury'. A bumbling general called Wilson was nominally in command, but Nicholson gingered him along, and then took charge of the final assault. It went in on the 12th September against an impossibly hot fire from the walls. Nicholson was badly wounded, but his example had communicated itself to the men, and after days of fierce fighting they triumphed. On the 20th September, when he heard the news, he murmured, 'My desire was that Delhi should be taken before I die and it has been granted.' Soon afterwards he passed away.

With the fall of Delhi, the back of the Indian Mutiny was broken. In November Sir Colin Campbell, who had now become Commander-in-Chief, finally relieved Lucknow, then pressed back the remnants of the rebel force into the Terai bordering Nepal. Pockets of resistance still held out, though, especially at Jhansi and Gwalior, and it was not until the 8th July 1858 that Lord Canning was able to announce that India was at peace again. But things are never the same after any major conflict, and the sub-continent was now to enter a new phase. The Mutiny had shown that rule by the East India Company could not possibly continue; and on the 1st November a proclamation was published under Queen Victoria's signature stating that the Crown had taken over. As a result of this great constitutional change, Indians would now be trained for government service, and the native Army would be completely reorganised.

It should be mentioned that though the new Indian Army became the direct responsibility of the Crown, units of the British Army continued to serve in India. As time went on it became customary to brigade together Indian, British, and Gurkha battalions, and Royal Artillery batteries served alongside their counterparts in Indian Army formations. This arrangement worked well both in

war and peace, and survived triumphantly the major conflicts of the twentieth century.

The North-West Frontier was still quiet, but with John Lawrence still in office its future lay undecided. In 1858 and again in 1859 he reiterated his view that Peshawar should be handed over to Dost Mohammed. In July 1859 he even sent Palmerston a document entitled 'Arguments for Transferring Peshawar and Kohat Districts to Dost Mohammed'. In this he stated: 'We cannot hold this Tract [i.e. the trans-Indus Frontier strip] without maintaining a large body of British troops in the Peshawar Valley. Its climate, however, is so insalubrious in the summer and autumn months that the annual mortality among these soldiers is very large. . . . In the crisis of 1857, out of some 2,500 British soldiers, those fit for duty seldom exceeded 1,100.' Apart from keeping the army healthy, there were other advantages, Lawrence considered, in drawing back. 'In our present position we are brought in close contact with the Afghans and other races of a highly fanatic and restless nature; men of predatory habits, careless and impatient of all control.' But once we were safely on the south bank of the Indus, contact with the tribes would be broken and the treasury would save the £500,000 spent annually on border affrays. Even more important, the Amir would be better disposed towards the British, which in turn meant that the North-West Frontier would be more securely protected. Anticipating the inevitable criticisms, Lawrence concluded: 'Those who oppose this policy consider it a confession of weakness. . . . To this it may be replied that our position in India is weak and our true policy is to recognise that weakness; and set about remedying its defects.' Across the back of this document Palmerston wrote: 'An instance of the follies of the wise', then scrawled a single word which looks like 'Absurd'. The 'back to the Indus' policy made no headway either with soldiers or statesmen, and there was never any serious chance that it would be implemented. Lawrence's other policy, of 'masterly inactivity', was continued, however, by Lord Canning and then by Lawrence himself, when he returned as Viceroy in 1864. From time to time, soldiers and Frontier administrators would suggest a change, and Lumsden in a report submitted in September 1867 argued that in view of the complete inability to 'bring our direct influence to bear . . . in support or otherwise of the de facto Government ruling in Kabul', the Government of

India should annex the Kurram and Khost valleys. To this Lawrence replied curtly that such a policy would court misfortune and calamity. 'The Afghan will bear poverty, insecurity of life; but he will not tolerate foreign rule. . . . Whether we advanced into Afghanistan as friends or foes, would, in the end, make little difference; the final result would be the same. The Afghans do not want us; they dread our appearance in their country.' If anyone doubted this opinion, Lawrence added, they should study the history of the First Afghan War.

When the question of Quetta came up again in 1866, Lawrence still stuck to his guns. It will be remembered that the suggestion that this town at the entrance to the Bolan Pass should be occupied was first put forward by General John Jacob in 1856, and rejected by Lord Canning. The man who revived it was Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Henry Green, the Political Superintendent of Upper Sind, who was anxious about the Russian advances across Central Asia. A force at Quetta, he argued, would be on the flank of any Russian advance through Afghanistan towards the Khyber; it would also block the Bolan Pass. Green was supported by Sir Bartle Frere, the Governor of Bombay, but the Commander-in-Chief, Sir W. R. Mansfield, was against the plan and Lawrence would not even consider it. If a clash came with Russia, he argued, 'The winning side will be the one that refrains from entangling itself in the barren mountains which now separate the two Empires.' Sir Henry Durand, the veteran of the First Afghan War, argued that the first requirement for any improvement in the defences of the North-West Frontier was the completion of the railway system in the Indus valley, which would enable troops not only to be brought to the Frontier but moved laterally to any danger point. But at the same time he warned that Quetta might have to be taken over in the future.

It was at this time, however, that, so far as the local tribal problem of the Frontier was concerned, the first breach in Lawrence's policy was made. The Sind sector of the Frontier was administered by a different method from the Punjab sector, and in the Dera Ghazi Khan district, where they met, certain anomalies occurred. The Marris and Bugtis, for example, who overlapped both sectors, received allowances from the Punjab but not from Sind. Also they owned land on both sides of the Punjab administrative boundary,

but in Sind this was not permitted. In the Punjab tribal customs were recognised, but in Sind—following the firm tradition laid down by Napier—they were not. Men committing murder in a blood-feud or killing their wives for unfaithfulness were still being hanged. In 1866 Captain Robert Sandeman (later to become famous for his pacification of Baluchistan) was posted to Dera Ghazi Khan, the district adjoining Sind, and found the villages beset by raiders. He therefore took a small party of Baluch guides and walked across the boundary and into the hills, where he entered into direct negotiations with the tribal chiefs. In a remarkably short time the whole district was pacified, and the effectiveness of Sandeman's action was recognised all along the Frontier. The 'Closed Border System'—the name given to Lawrence's policy by the Frontier administrators—gradually decayed; and in its place there arrived what came to be called the 'Forward Policy'. And this was to generate more heat, more controversy, more bitterness, than any other Indian policy in the nineteenth century.

Though there were many expeditions on the Frontier during this period, against the Khudu Khels, the Waziris, the Mahsuds, the Utmanzais, and the Black Mountain tribes, the only major action occurred in 1863. This was the Ambela campaign, under Brigadier-General Sir Neville Chamberlain, which turned out to be a very desperate affair indeed; it cost the British and Indian regiments nearly a thousand casualties, half the losses sustained between 1849 and 1890, in forty-two expeditions.

The trouble had started around Ambela many years previously when a Mohammedan fanatic called Sayyid Ahmad returned from Mecca with a hundred followers and began preaching in the Yusafzai villages along the northern Peshawar border. By 1829 he had enlisted so many devotees, bent on jehad, or holy war, that he was able to capture the city of Peshawar from the Sikhs. Two years later a strong army was dispatched from Lahore which threw him out, and in the pursuit towards the hills Sayyid was cut down together with a thousand of his men. The survivors found their way eventually to Sitana, a village at the foot of one of the spurs of the great Mahabun mountains, which stand on the west bank of the Indus, some forty miles north of Attock, and seventy-five north-

west of Peshawar. It was a wild, inaccessible area with narrow passes, and peaks running up to nearly 15,000 feet, which had almost broken the hearts of the police trying to control it. 'It would take the whole of the Hazara force one day to search one mountain', wrote a despairing Commissioner, 'and at the end they would be quite knocked up and useless.' The village of Sitana belonged to Sayyid Akbar Shah, a lieutenant of the slain prophet, and he welcomed the fugitives from Peshawar, and allowed them to settle on his land. So there was formed another fanatical colony, the members of which came down to loot and plunder and raid the trade caravans, holding their merchants to ransom. In 1852 things became so serious that Colonel Mackeson crossed the Indus from Hazara with a force composed of irregulars and levies and expelled the fanatics from Fort Kotla, near Sitana. However, he failed to burn their headquarters (no doubt aware that Sir Charles Napier's eye was upon him), so it was not long before the Sitana fanatics were back again, and the raids continued just as before. During the Mutiny they kept open house for any sepoys coming their way, and by 1858 their stock of arms and ammunition was so great that they were able to come down from the hills in force. The result was that Sir Sydney Cotton marched against them with 5,000 men, and, in a brisk campaign, burnt their villages, blew up their forts, and chased them right out of Sitana. The fanatics then retired to Malka, on a northern spur of the Mahabun, and here they set about repairing their fortunes. By 1860 they had managed to organise a widespread conspiracy against the British, with a headquarters at Patna in Bihar, and an efficient mail service. They even went to the trouble of inventing an elaborate code in which, for example, a battle was called a 'lawsuit', remittances were called 'rosaries', and God was known as 'the law agent'. Recruits were marched for hundreds of miles across north-west India, and along the routes chains of hospices were established. The organisation was of a very high order, and standards of security were such that the Indian Government had no idea that a widespread conspiracy existed. In 1861 the fanatics came down the mountainside and fortified a peak just above their old haunt, at Siri. The reaction of the British was to blockade the tribes which had allowed them free passage, and so by July 1863 the fanatics were back again at Sitana, and raiding on a bigger scale than ever. In September they even mounted an attack on the Guides

camp at Topi, and the Government was stung into action. But, as was immediately realised, it was no use merely driving them from Sitana as Cotton had done; the village must be attacked from the north, so that there would be no bolt-hole into the hills. The fanatics must either be slaughtered or driven across the Indus so that the troops in Hazara could deal with them.

Neville Chamberlain had no desire to lead the expedition. At forty-three he was prematurely aged, tired, racked by malaria, and suffering from many wounds, and he wanted to go home, or at least to find a pleasant station where he could relax. Also, he was feeling rather disgruntled, and when news of the proposed expedition reached him, he wrote his brother, Crawford, 'It looks as if my last days inthe frontier are to be spent in fatigue and exposure. If "duty" *really* requires the sacrifice I cannot repine, but after the neglect shown to my recommendation in the last expedition, I have no wish for active service. . . .' Though dogged by a reputation for being somewhat hot-headed, Chamberlain was one of the most interesting of the Victorian generals, and certainly one of the most efficient. He had seen a vast amount of service, and, in fact, one can barely open a book about the building of the British Empire in India without his name popping up. He served in the First Afghan War (where he was wounded four times), the Sikh Wars, the Mutiny, and numberless actions on the Frontier. Curiously, for a soldier, he was a keen yachtsman and undertook a number of long voyages. He was also a gargantuan letter writer, and his eyewitness accounts of battles are probably the finest of his time. Even between fighting and being wounded time and again in Afghanistan he was able to send home long detailed letters of over a thousand words each. In his youth he had been immensely high-spirited, but time and suffering had saddened and exhausted him. 'I want to turn my sword into a shepherd's crook,' he said in 1863, but it was not to be. Lord Elgin, who had now succeeded Canning as Viceroy, insisted that he should deal personally with the Malko situation and, with an admirable sense of duty, he stopped arguing and went.

His base of operations, so he soon decided, should be the Chamla valley, which lay in territory where the tribes were thought to be friendly. But to reach this valley the expedition would have to cross a belt of mountains which extended from the Gooroo mountain to the south-western spurs of the Mahabun. To accomplish this

feat, three passes were available, the Daran, the Ambela, and the Kanpoor, but knowledge of the latter was entirely lacking at the time. The Daran had been explored by Sir Henry Cotton, who recorded that it was impassable by artillery, and inhabited by very unfriendly tribes. The only hope, therefore, was the Ambela Pass, and it was thought that the fanatics' stronghold at Malka could be reached via this in a forced march of two days. The snag was, however, that the Ambela was claimed by the Bunerwals, a warlike tribe who lived on the other side of the Gooroo mountains. If they were to intervene, then the expedition would have a very difficult task on its hands indeed. Fortunately, so Chamberlain was advised, the Bunerwals had no sympathy with the fanatics, and no trouble was therefore expected from them. On this premise he decided to advance with two columns. The Hazara column, which would protect the Indus line and overawe the tribes in that area, and the Peshawar column, under Chamberlain himself, which would move up to Nawakili, about six miles from the Daran Pass. The object of the latter move was to trick the fanatics into believing that the column intended to enter the hills by the route Cotton had used five years earlier, but, instead, it would suddenly change direction and head for the Ambela Pass sixteen miles away. Once safely through, it could reach Malka on the third day.

But things went wrong from the start. Once the fanatics got wind that an expedition was on the way, they guessed its destination and route immediately, and sent holy men to make overtures to the Bunerwals. If the latter permitted the British a free passage through the Ambela Pass, the holy men argued, their territory would be seized, then permanently annexed by the British, as was the custom of those infidels. Not surprisingly, the Bunerwals succumbed to this argument and agreed to fight. Meanwhile, the expedition itself had run into supply problems, and when Chamberlain arrived at his base camp on the 19th October—the politicals had asked him not to join until the last moment 'in order not to alarm the frontier tribes'—he found chaos reigning. 'Some of our guns and 5½-inch mortars have to be sent back as useless. . . . Our 1st L.F. Batteries have to be stripped to make the Half Battery R.A. efficient. But go we must, delay would be very prejudicial . . . to the object we have in view.' In fact, the column got under way at 9 a.m., the Guides Cavalry in the lead, followed by the 11th Bengal Cavalry, the

Guide Infantry, the 5th Punjab Infantry, and then the 20th (Punjab) Native Infantry. Soon a junction was effected with the troops sent to guard the Daran Pass, and the advance column halted at the entrance of the Ambela Pass. Three hours behind it came the main body, the 71st Highland Light Infantry, the 101st Royal Bengal Fusiliers, and three regiments of Punjab Infantry, supported by a Half Battery of guns. 'The hills on either side', wrote Chamberlain, 'grew higher and closer together, and masses of rock had to be worked round or scrambled over.' There was no road. However, by 2 p.m. Colonel Wilde and the advance guard gained possession of the head of the pass, where they camped on some open ground, and a few hours later Chamberlain came up with the main body. His original intention had been that the force should now descend three miles into the Chamla valley and camp near the village of Ambela, but soon word came that the guns could not arrive before dark. He therefore camped on the crest of the pass, overlooked by the Gooroo mountain. Even though he had the cares of the campaign on his mind, Chamberlain still found time to record his observations in detail, noting that 'The sides of the Gooroo mountain were clothed with fir-trees of large growth, interspersed on the lower slopes with the wild fig and date-tree—a remarkable mixture of the vegetation of a cold and a tropical climate. . . . A range of hills much lower than the Gooroo was on the right. . . . To the rear, but far below, was seen the plain of Yusafzai.'

The next morning Colonel Taylor, R.E., and Lieutenant Robert Sandeman (who was soon to transfer to the Political Service, as already recorded) rode forward with a cavalry escort, provided by Lieutenant-Colonel Dighton Probyn, V.C., to carry out a reconnaissance. They met with no opposition, but as Taylor passed the Kotal or saddle-back leading to Buner, he noticed that the tribesmen had occupied it in force. Then, as he returned to camp, he found that the tribesmen were also taking up positions in some broken ground covering the mouth of the pass. Probyn led a charge and the positions were captured, to be occupied later on by two companies of infantry. This action so infuriated the tribesmen that they put in a night attack, and according to Colonel John Adye there was a wild shout of 'Allah! Allah!' then—'The matchlocks flash and crack from the shadows of the trees; there is a glitter of whirling sword-blades, and a mob of dusky figures rush across the open

space and charge almost up to the bayonets. Then comes a flash and a roar, the grape and canister dash up the stones and gravel, and patter among the leaves at close range. The whole line lights up with fitful flashes of sharp file-fire, and, as the smoke clears off, the assailants are nowhere to be seen; feeble groans from the front and cries for water in some Pathan patois, alone tells us that the fire has been effectual. . . . High up on a little knoll we see the tall form of the General . . . looking intently into the darkness before him. . . .'

If the attack had failed, it had left Chamberlain in no doubt as to the temper of the tribes, and next morning he set about strengthening his position. On the left, towards the Gooroo mountain, a fortified post called 'Eagles Nest' was prepared, while to the right on the lower hills a string of posts were sited, the chief being called 'Crag Picket'. Wisely Chamberlain allocated a commander to each flank, Colonel Luther Vaughan taking Eagles Nest and Colonel Wilde, Crag Picket. To support the infantry, guns from the Peshawar Mountain Battery were dragged up the rocky slopes, and by the afternoon of the 25th were ready for action. It came at dawn next morning, large numbers of the enemy rushing down the steep slopes to attack, sword in hand. Despite a concentration from the guns, the forward pickets were overrun and three companies had to be thrown into a counter-attack. Later on the Bunerwals attacked the Eagles Nest position, and were only beaten off after forty casualties had been sustained.

On the 27th October the Bunerwals were invited to come and remove their dead, and did so. Some of the chiefs took the opportunity to have a talk with Chamberlain, and admitted freely that their casualties had been heavy. However, they made it clear that their resolution to oppose the British advance had not been shaken; they would attack again at the first opportunity.

As Chamberlain was to observe in the days which followed, the forces of the enemy were increasing steadily, and eventually they contained all the tribes between the Indus and Kabul rivers—some 15,000 men. The situation was becoming grave, but, typically, Chamberlain put on a bold front and signalled on the 27th:

'All goes well, and I entertain no fear as to the final result if supported by more infantry and kept in supplies and ammunition. Tribes losing men and will tire first . . . I recommend your sending

trans-Indus as many troops as can be spared from below. Any backwardness now might cause great inconvenience. . . .'

But the basic fact was that Chamberlain and his force were trapped in the mountains, and the tribes held the initiative. On the night of the 29th October a group of Malka fanatics infiltrated into the brushwood before Crag Picket, then launched a ferocious attack, about half an hour before daylight. Within minutes the men of the 1st Punjab had been killed or pushed off the position, and it was only a determined flanking movement, laid on quickly by Major Keyes, which restored the position. But the job was not done easily; the fanatics got their backs to the rock face and fought on till every man had been killed or badly wounded. Some idea of the ferocity of this encounter can be gauged from the fact that Keyes was wounded, and fifty-four of his men became casualties; two subalterns called Pitcher and Fosbery were awarded the Victoria Cross.

By the 31st October the situation had deteriorated even further and Chamberlain signalled:

'I now have to report that the Akhund of Swat . . . has joined the Buners, and that he has brought with him upwards of 100 standards, each representing probably from 20 to 30 footmen . . . he has summoned the people of the remote country of Bajour, the Mullazyes of Dher, and other distant tribes. . . .'

All these, so Chamberlain added, had agreed to forget their difference and fight under the Akhund as a single army. He continued:

'It is necessary that I should place the state of affairs thus distinctly before His Excellency, in order that he may understand how entirely the situation has altered since the force entered the Ambela Pass. . . . I feel sure that His Excellency will approve of my not making an advance into the Chamla Valley with my present force, in the face of the above coalition.'

In the early days of November the tribesmen contented themselves with keeping up a steady fire against the breastworks which now surrounded the British positions, and made no attempt to attack. Chamberlain used this respite to start building a road running back from the right of his position, over the slopes of the Mahabun, which would by-pass the Ambela Pass and therefore improve his line of communications. He also began constructing a rough path down one

of the rocky spurs of the Mahabun, leading into the Chamla valley; this would be needed when his force eventually succeeded in advancing towards its objective.

But any advance was out of the question for some time to come. The working parties—though strongly protected—were harassed by the tribesmen; then, on the night of the 12th November, Crag Picket, which was now garrisoned by 160 men, was attacked again. Major Brownlow, the commander of the picket, has left a detailed account of this action.

'About 10 p.m. their watch-fires showed us that the enemy were in movement, and descending in large numbers to the hollow in our front. . . . Their surpressed voices soon broke into yells of defiance, and they advanced in masses to attack, their numbers . . . at least 2,000. I allowed them to approach within a 100 yards, and then opened a rapid and well-sustained fire from our front, which I believe did great execution, and soon silenced their shouts and drove them under cover.'

In half an hour, however, they rallied and came on again, but now the shells from the Mountain Battery were chasing them and breaking up their formations. Though the assaults were renewed again and again for six hours, the early fire had gone out of them, and when daylight came Brownlow's men were relieved by a detachment of the 1st Punjab under Captain Davidson. Two hours later, however, the tribesmen attacked in even greater numbers, and the ferocity of their rush brought them right up to the breastwork of the picket. After cutting down two men with his sword, Davidson received a spear wound in the forehead and soon the Punjabis were overwhelmed and came streaming down the hill. Major Keyes, commanding a support position, saw what was happening, and ordered two of his subalterns, Young and Pitcher, to lead a counter-attack. Gallantly they did so, scaling the almost perpendicular rocks against a withering fire, but soon Pitcher was wounded, and most of the men, and the remainder took what cover they could find. Fortunately, Chamberlain was on hand, and he ordered the 101st Royal Bengal Fusiliers to re-take the picket; this was an almost impossible task, as the tribesmen not only kept up a hot fire but rolled great boulders down the slopes, which crushed any man they chanced to hit. But the Fusiliers went on, and after more savage and hand-to-hand fighting, bayonet against sword, the position was regained.

Again there was a lull in the fighting for some days. During this time Chamberlain was able to re-route his line of communications down the newly constructed road, and so withdraw the troops from the Gooroo mountain, to the left of his position. His force was now concentrated and therefore well in hand, but as the enemy kept attacking in vastly superior numbers, its difficulties inevitably increased. On the 19th November Chamberlain was forced to signal:

'The troops have now been hard worked both day and night for a month. . . . We much need reinforcements. I find it difficult to meet the enemy's attacks and provide convoys for supplies and wounded sent to the rear. If you can give some fresh corps to relieve those most reduced in numbers and dash, the relieved corps can be sent to the plains and used in support. This is urgent.'

Before any action could be taken on the signal, however, the tribesmen attacked Crag Picket yet again. By now it was being known by the Indian troops as Kutl-ghar—the place of slaughter; and on the 20th November it certainly lived up to this name. By 3 p.m. great hordes of tribesmen overran the 20th Punjab, who lost two officers and two-thirds of their men in the savage fighting. Neville Chamberlain ordered the 71st Highland Light Infantry and the 5th Punjab and the 5th Gurkhas to put in a counter-attack, supported by the howitzers and the Light Field Battery. The job was a difficult one, and Chamberlain decided that, to give the men heart, he must walk along the line and talk to them, then lead the attack himself. Up the rocky path he scrambled, followed by the cheering troops, and had almost reached the crag itself when a bullet struck him in the forearm. But still he went on, and did not relinquish command until the position had been taken and the troops were into positions where they could meet any counter-attack.

While Chamberlain was in action, the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab was in conference with Henry Durand at Lahore. The signal of the previous day had been received, and, recognising the urgency of the situation, the Lieutenant-Governor decided not to wait for confirmation from the Viceroy, Lord Elgin, but to order up three regiments to the Frontier: the 7th Royal Fusiliers, the 24th Punjab, and the 93rd Highlanders. When Sir Hugh Rose, the Commander-in-Chief, reached Lahore a short time afterwards news of Chamberlain's wound was received, and Rose promptly ordered

that not only the three regiments already detailed but all available forces should be hurried to the Frontier. It was fortunate that Rose did not hesitate in his decision, for on the 20th November, the day that Chamberlain was wounded, the Viceroy died at Dharamsala. This melancholy event, added to the continued bad news from Ambela, so shattered the members of the Supreme Council that on the 26th they ordered the withdrawal of Chamberlain's force 'as soon as it could be done without the risk of military disaster or without seriously compromising our military reputation'. Learning of this decision, Sir Hugh Rose wrote angrily to his colleagues at Calcutta, forcibly pointing out that they were talking nonsense; *any* withdrawal must mean a loss of prestige. He had already received a report from Major James, Commissioner of Peshawar, who had been up to Ambela and spoken to Chamberlain, now lying seriously ill. Chamberlain was still resolutely opposed to any withdrawal; the object of the expedition, he considered, must still be completed.

It was necessary, however, to obtain more detailed information of the situation, and so Rose dispatched two officers with orders to investigate and report: they were Colonel Adye and the young Major Frederick Roberts, v.c. Chamberlain, when they reached him, was seriously ill, and in great pain, but he was still able to describe the actions fought by his men and impress the two officers with the gallantry shown by all ranks, both British and Indian. Not one man from the Indian regiments had deserted. In due course Adye reported Chamberlain's view that as soon as his successor, General Garvock, arrived with reinforcements, an advance should be made into the Chamla valley. This course was then approved by Sir William Debison, the Governor of Madras, who was standing in as Viceroy, when he arrived at Calcutta on the 2nd December. Four days later, on the 6th, all the reinforcements detailed for Ambela had safely made their way into the camp.

Chamberlain, however, was upset and aggrieved. The Government, he considered, and especially Sir Robert Montgomery, had completely failed to respond to his appeals for reinforcements, and had even indicated their displeasure at his failure. Montgomery, he complained, couldn't even understand that a force sufficient to deal with the Malka fanatics and the Bunerwals was quite inadequate to deal with the whole confederacy of tribes which later confronted it. 'I do not think . . .' he wrote uneasily to his mother, 'that you need

fear my being blamed . . . as more light becomes thrown upon the subject, it will be fully conceded that I had no other course than that I adopted.' Unfortunately, in his distress Chamberlain did not realise that his old friend Sir John Lawrence had been appointed Viceroy and was already on his way back to India. On the 9th December Lawrence sent a message to Chamberlain's mother, who was then living at Versailles, 'had anyone but Neville been in command, I should have the greatest fears as to what might happen, but I have immense confidence in Neville . . . because he has character'. But Lawrence did not arrive in India till the 12th January 1864, and by that time the Ambela campaign was over.

The last phase had begun on the 15th December, when General Garvock broke out of the position near the pass with two columns, the left under Colonel Wilde and the right under Colonel Turner. Turner's first objective was a village called Laloo, which lay two miles beyond Crag Picket, on a conical hill, and after a heavy artillery concentration Colonel Adye records:

'5,000 men rose up from their cover, and, with loud cheers and volleys of musketry, rushed to the assault—the regiments of Pathan, Sikhs, and Gurkhas all vying with the English soldiers as to who should first reach the enemy. From behind every rock and shrub at the foot of the conical peak small parties of mountaineers jumped up and fled as the advancing columns approached them. It took but a few seconds to cross the open ground, and then the steep ascent began, our men having to climb from rock to rock. . . . Nothing could withstand the impetuosity of the assault; and though many of the enemy stood their ground bravely and fell at their posts, their gallantry was of no avail; and ere many minutes had elapsed the peak from foot to summit was in the possession of British soldiers.'

Roberts, who was watching the action from a gunner battery, was considerably relieved to see the tribesmen rushing down the far side of the hill, and then to hear the cheers of the 7th Fusiliers as they swarmed over the captured hill-top.

Wilde's column had been formed up on the right flank and had to deal with large parties of tribesmen who came streaming in from Ambela village, but by 2 p.m. went on to the offensive. On the 16th the whole of Wilde's column debouched into the open country of the Chamla valley, driving the tribesmen before it. Before Ambela village, however, it struck a heavily defended ridge, and General

Garvock decided to put in a left hook. While this was being mounted, he sent Roberts with a message to Colonel Turner, telling him that he must cut off the tribesmen's retreat line towards the Buner Pass. Wilde therefore moved up his forward elements to within 800 yards of the pass, by which time Roberts saw that the cavalry had already set fire to Ambela village. It was at this moment that a party of Ghazi tribesmen noticed that Wilde's left flank lay unprotected, and put in a swift counter-attack. This achieved a local success, and was only halted when Roberts and a staff officer called Wright gathered every available man from the Pioneer units and led them into action. After some close fighting the Ghazis were repulsed, but it had been a ticklish situation; the Pioneers had suffered almost ninety casualties. Before evening, however, the tribesmen were in full flight, and as they streamed across the valley, the field guns still harassed them. At 4.30 p.m. all firing ceased.

General Garvock must have felt relieved, for, as it soon transpired, by launching his offensive he had disobeyed the orders of the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Hugh Rose. This veteran soldier had signalled that nothing should be done until he had personally placed himself at the head of the army; but Garvock, quite rightly, judged that the critical moment had arrived, and allowed his Political Officer to persuade him to attack. So Rose, another Napier by the sound of him, was robbed of his last chance of glory. What he said to Garvock when they finally met was unfortunately not recorded.

On the morning of the 17th December a deputation arrived from the Buner tribes, asking what orders General Garvock had for them. Garvock now had to decide whether the fanatics' stronghold at Malka should be destroyed by his own forces, or by the Buner tribesmen; and after discussion with his staff he chose the latter course. So two days later a group of British officers rode out with an escort from the Guides Cavalry, and after two days' journey in bad weather covered the twenty-six miles to Malka. According to Colonel Adye, it proved to be 'a handsome village, recently built of pinewood, standing high on a northern slope of the Mahabun, whose snowy crests rose precipitously behind it, whilst in its front a vast panorama of mountains stretched away as far as the eye could reach'. On the 22nd the village was burned by the Buner tribesmen in the presence of the British officers.

It proved a dangerous mission for the latter; of the 2,000 Bunerwals who should have protected the party, only seventy had appeared, and the local tribesmen did not hesitate to show their disgust at the proceedings. As their numbers increased and their demonstrations grew angrier, Frederick Roberts began to wonder whether the whole mission would end in disaster. But then, as fists were raised and swords came clattering from their scabbards, the Bunerwal chieftain forced his way through the ranks of the tribesmen and shouted: 'You are hesitating whether to let these English go back unmolested. You can, of course, murder them and their escort; but if you do, you must kill us Bunerwals first, for we have sworn to protect them and will do so with our lives.' To Roberts' relief, the tribesmen drew back. But their mounted squadrons shadowed the British party all the way to the camp at Ambela.

It so happened that on the day of the burning Roberts' wife was staying at Sir Hugh Rose's camp, on her way to Peshawar. Hearing that General Garvock had sent the group of officers to Malka with only a small escort, Rose burst out, in her hearing: 'This is madness! Not one of them will come back alive!' By Christmas Day, however, Roberts was united with his wife at Peshawar and all the regiments from Ambela were safely back again.

It had been a costly affair, which, for the next forty years, was quoted as a solemn warning by the 'back-to-the-Indus' school. The moral drawn by the soldiers, of course, was that one should never embark upon an expedition until quite sure that sufficient troops were available. Certainly there was no disengagement from the Frontier so far as the British were concerned; and when the 1870's arrived, events in Moscow, Kabul and Westminster were to resolve themselves in such a manner that the proponents of the 'Forward School' were to hold sway for some years. The North-West Frontier was to witness yet another great crisis.

140

6

THE POET IN SIMLA

While the powder trail leading to a major conflict may be clearly definable, it is seldom easy to determine where it began. However, with the war which was now to send great armies surging over the North-West Frontier, the point which suggests itself more forcibly than any other is the death of Dost Mohammed. He died, it will be remembered, in 1863, and, unfortunately for his kingdom, left sixteen sons. Five years earlier he had nominated his third son, Sher Ali, to be his successor, thereby passing over the two eldest sons Afzal and Azim, whose mother was of low rank. Initially, they accepted the position, but within a year both were announcing their intention to revolt. A war of succession was now inevitable, the other members of the royal family backing one contender and then another. Soon a young man called Abdur Rahman, the son of Afzal, was to come to the fore, but when Sher Ali summoned him to Kabul to swear his allegiance he fled to Bokhara. In 1866, however, he returned, and having beaten Sher Ali in battle near Kabul, installed his father on the throne. These events occurred during John Lawrence's term as Viceroy, and his unswerving policy remained one of non-interference. Whichever Afghan prince succeeded in grabbing the throne, even for a short period, received his best wishes, if nothing more. As he put it in a dispatch, about this time, 'Our relations should always be with the de facto ruler of the day, and so long as the de facto ruler is not unfriendly to us, we should always be prepared to renew with him the same terms and favourable conditions as obtained under his predecessor.' Lawrence had no great opinion of Sher Ali, of whom he remarked: 'He has considerable defects; there can be little doubt that he has alienated most of the influential chiefs. His conduct towards his brother, Afzal Khan, whom he treacherously imprisoned after the most solemn

promises and oaths of full security, shows that no faith can be placed in him.' But experience proved that Afzal was even worse, and no sooner was he installed in Kabul than he devoted his entire energies to drinking himself to death. Passionately, Abdur Rahman pleaded with his father to nominate him as successor, but Afzal would not move without his brother Azim, who was in Kandahar, and died within months, leaving the matter undecided. This was Sher Ali's chance, and in June 1868 he advanced with an army from Kandahar, and a fortnight later had taken the fortress of Ghazni. Azim and Abdur Rahman immediately marched out of Kabul to give him battle, only to find that some of Sher Ali's supporters had seized the Bala Hissar in Kabul, behind their backs, and, worse still, Sher Ali himself had slid into the city and had been proclaimed Amir with great enthusiasm. There was no alternative but for Abdur Rahman and Azim to flee the country, which they did with great rapidity. They did not, however, give up their ambitions, and having reached Bokhara, made contact with the Russians, and begged for help. News of this action soon reached the British, who immediately offered Sher Ali a subsidy, which he was delighted—like most amirs before him—to accept.

Sher Ali's first contacts were with Lord Lawrence (as Sir John had now become), but by the beginning of 1869 the old 'Titan of the Punjab' had been replaced by a warm-hearted Irishman Lord Mayo, who, at an early opportunity, suggested that Sher Ali should come down through the Khyber for a conference at Ambala. This took place in March, against a background of great magnificence, reminiscent of the days of Lord Auckland, and Sher Ali appeared very impressed with the sincerity and warmth of Mayo's greeting. What he wanted, so it slowly transpired, was a treaty of alliance with the British; but the great shadow of John Lawrence still lay over the Government of India, and the request was politely declined. However, Mayo was able to give the Amir a letter which assured him of the friendship and support of the British Government, and expressed the hope that on his return the Amir would be able 'to establish your legitimate rule over your entire Kingdom, to consolidate your power, to create a firm and merciful administration in every province of Afghanistan. . . .' To support the letter, or sweeten the refusal of an alliance, the Amir was also given two batteries of artillery, and some small arms, which impressed him so much that

he wrote to Mayo: 'If it pleases God, as long as I am alive, or as long as my Government exists, the foundation of friendship and goodwill between this and the powerful British Government will not be weakened.' These were brave words, but events were soon to make a mockery of them. Friendship and goodwill were to be replaced by anger and violence; and Sher Ali was to die ten years later, broken-hearted, penniless, and deserted.

To what extent was this tragic destiny brought on by his own defects of character? Apart from Lawrence most statesmen having to deal with him found him difficult and unstable. The Durranis were like the Stuarts, and Sher Ali was no exception; he was emotional and impulsive, and needed a great deal of understanding. Lord Lytton was to call him 'a savage with a touch of insanity', but this was unjust; Sher Ali behaved like a savage when he was treated like one. If Lord Mayo, with his patience, and understanding of Eastern peoples, had remained alive, it is just possible that the tragedy would have been averted. But Mayo was assassinated by a criminal on the 3rd May 1872, and from then on Sher Ali had no personal link with the British whatsoever.

If Sher Ali was unfortunate in the death of Mayo, he was doubly unfortunate, so far as relations with the British Government were concerned, that his rise to power had coincided with the rise of Russophobia. The march of the Russian armies across the deserts and wastes of Central Asia has already been mentioned; but in the 1860's it began exciting great interest in the capitals of Europe. In 1864 the Imperial Chancellor, Prince Gorchakov, set out his country's aims and objects in a document as remarkable for its clarity as its frankness. Unless Russia's frontiers were to be delivered over to disorder and considerations of security were to be abandoned, the Prince argued, Russia must go on devouring the rotting khanates. Her position was not unique. 'The United States in America, France in Algiers, Holland in her colonies, England in India—all have been inevitably drawn into a course where ambition plays a smaller part than imperious necessity, and the greatest difficulty is knowing where to stop.' The Prince was undoubtedly right; but where would the Russians stop? The only great physical barrier between their Empire and the British Empire in India was the Hindu Kush—the backbone of Afghanistan. If that were to become the Frontier, then the British would have to move forward again through the Khyber

Pass, and accept the danger, the expense, and the casualties that such a move would inevitably entail. To many people the outlook was hazardous in the extreme.

Still the Russians went on. In June 1865 they annexed Tashkent, and, three years later, Samarkand was devoured too. In 1869—a few months after Sher Ali's meeting with Lord Mayo—the ruler of Bokhara was reduced to the status of a vassal, and Russian influence therefore extended to the banks of the Oxus, the northern boundary of Afghanistan. But the Russians weren't satisfied with influence alone, and in 1873 General Kaufmann, the 'Russian Napier', as Disraeli was to call him, took over Khiva. He was an arrogant, vicious character, and, as his own pronouncements indicated quite frankly, his goal was India.

The man who, perhaps more than any other at this time, aroused England to the Russian menace, was Sir Henry Rawlinson, a soldier (he had served in the First Afghan War), scholar, explorer, politician, and acknowledged authority on Central Asia. His campaign opened in October 1865 with a series of articles in the *Quarterly Review*. By 1866 a group of Conservative M.P.s, who came to be dubbed 'the Russophobists', was supporting his views in the House; and two years later the leaders of his Party asked him to raise the whole Central Asian question in a major speech. Unfortunately, the speech could not be delivered, but it was committed to paper as a memorandum and formally presented to Sir Stafford Northcote, Secretary of State for India, on the 28th July 1868. Arguing forcibly that Russia's occupation of Bokhara would give her a pretext for interfering in Afghan affairs, and so challenge Britain's Asiatic supremacy, Rawlinson went on to ask:

'With this prospect before us, are we justified in maintaining what has been sarcastically . . . called Sir John Lawrence's policy of "masterly inaction"? Are we justified in allowing Russia to work her way to Kabul unopposed, and there to establish herself as a friendly power prepared to protect the Afghans against the English?'

More significantly, he maintained that Lord Auckland's doctrine of 'establishing a strong and friendly power on our North-West Frontier' was the right policy for India. Dost Mohammed's successful regime, he added, was in great measure due to British aid, and went on to plead that as we had helped the father, now we should help the son, Sher Ali. 'Another opportunity now presents itself. The

fortunes of Sher Ali are again in the ascendant; he should be secured in our interests without delay.'

When a copy of Rawlinson's memorandum was received by the Government of India it found little favour with them, and John Lawrence (now reaching his last days in office) disputed it on a number of grounds. In a dispatch dated the 4th January 1869 he again stated his violent opposition to any internal interference in Afghanistan; that there would be no end to the expense such a move would entail. But in a remarkably short space of time, this policy was modified and Lawrence was writing to Sher Ali, forwarding the sum of £60,000, and suggesting that he should come to India 'for a personal meeting in order to discuss the best manner in which limited support might be accorded'. Five days after this, in a farewell letter, Lawrence was expressing the hope that Sher Ali's salary would 'be established on a solid and permanent basis', and promising a further £60,000 within a few months. As already recorded, when Sher Ali came to Ambala, two months later, it was to meet Lawrence's successor, Lord Mayo. But, according to Lord Roberts, the change in policy was undoubtedly brought about by Rawlinson's memorandum. However, its greatest impact, as the next few years were to reveal, was not on the Indian Government but on the Conservative Party; and once it returned to power, the lessons learned from Rawlinson were to dictate its Asian policy.

But the change of government was a few years off, and meanwhile Russian pressure on Afghanistan increased. By 1870 General Kaufmann had entered into correspondence with Sher Ali, and the latter, alarmed at this approach, sent on the letters to Lord Mayo. Three years later, when Kaufmann had taken over Khiva, Sher Ali sent an envoy post haste to Simla, with the task of asking Lord Northbrook (Mayo's successor) for a definite statement of Britain's course in the event of Russian aggression. Northbrook, a cold banker with a mien resembling Dickens' Mr. Dombey, and no talent for understanding Asians whatsoever, merely passed on the terms of an agreement which had recently been reached between the Russians and Mr. Gladstone's Government. Under this, the Russians were to respect the northern boundaries of Afghanistan, which followed the Oxus from its source in the Pamirs to a point called Khwaja Salar, and thence south-west to the Persian border. Furthermore, the Russians conceded that Afghanistan was com-

pletely outside their sphere of influence. This agreement, Northbrook purred comfortably, should remove all the Amir's worries; but, as good diplomatists recognise, one's emotional state depends a great deal on one's geographical location. When Sher Ali received his envoy's report he was bitterly disappointed, and wrote immediately to Northbrook, demanding a definite statement. Northbrook drafted a reply, stating that if the Amir unreservedly accepted British advice on all external relations they would 'help him with money, arms and troops if necessary to expel unprovoked invasion'. But the Duke of Argyll, who had now taken over as Secretary of State, recoiled with horror from a promise conflicting with the pure Lawrentian doctrine he had imbibed for so long. Northbrook therefore lamely informed Sher Ali's envoy that 'the question is . . . of such importance that the discussion of it should be postponed to a more suitable opportunity'. But, as Sher Ali realised only too clearly, the danger to his country called not for vague statements and delays but for urgent action. If therefore the British were unwilling to act, then he would have to do so himself; and his first step must be to make contact with the Russians. So, by September 1875 General Kaufmann, now Governor of Russian Turkestan, was sending the first of a succession of envoys to Kabul. These did not deal with the Durbar, but with Sher Ali in person, and the result of their discussions was therefore never divulged. All the British agent in Kabul (a native, no Englishman being allowed there) could do was watch frustrated from the streets and pick up such gossip as came his way. 'The meaning of these frequent communications from Russia', he wrote, 'is obviously to establish friendly relations with the Afghans, and gain them over to an alliance with Russia.' Meanwhile, in Simla, the Duke of Argyll reached new depths of unpopularity and Northbrook was heard murmuring, 'I told you so. . . .'

As it happened, events in Kabul coincided with events in London, for in February 1874 the Gladstone Government fell, to be replaced by a Conservative administration under Disraeli, who appointed Lord Salisbury as Secretary of State for India. Salisbury was a firm disciple of Sir Henry Rawlinson, and had just finished studying his most recent work, a book called *England and Russia in the East*. The forthright doctrines propounded here made an immediate impact on him, and before long they were being translated into instructions

drafted for the benefit of Lord Northbrook. The Viceroy, he urged, should persuade Sher Ali to sanction the dispatch of British agents to Herat, who would set up a listening-post for events in Central Asia. Northbrook and the Government of India, however, did not warm to this idea at all, and pointed out that the Amir's assent was so unlikely that it would be wiser not to approach him. But Salisbury intended to have his way, and so there was nothing for it but for Northbrook to resign, which he did in January 1876. Almost his last words before quitting office contained a warning to Salisbury and the British Government. 'The Amir's attitude is consistent with loyal adherence to the interests of the British Government . . . it would be a great error to urge on him the establishment of a British agent at Herat and Kandahar.'

But the Conservative Government was in no mood to listen to Northbrook, or to anyone else propounding the old Lawrentian doctrine. Their new catchword was the 'Forward Policy', and in April they announced the name of the man to implement it: he was Edward Robert Bulwer Lytton, a minor diplomat and poet, and son of Bulwer Lytton, the novelist.

Even now Lytton is a difficult man to assess. Not only his politics but his table manners aroused violent passions, and his oddities of character sometimes left a greater impression than his major virtues. In Simla he shocked society with his vile habit of smoking between courses; and many people had the uneasy feeling that there was no convention he might not break, if given to some private whim. While some men thought him brilliant, the opinion of others could be summed up in the witticism later applied to Michael Arlen—'less brilliant than brilliantine'. Lytton's early experience in the diplomatic service had been gained by acting as an unpaid secretary to his uncle, Lord Dalling, whom he followed to Vienna, Lisbon and Madrid. Later he was to obtain paid employment, and from 1872 to 1874 worked as secretary to the embassy in Paris, before returning to Lisbon, where he was serving when the call came from Lord Salisbury. As a poet, Lytton is usually considered to have written gracefully and with polish, though most of his work was in imitation of Tennyson or Browning. However, he took it very seriously, and by 1875 was on the point of retiring, to devote himself to literature. But whatever the merit of Lytton's work, it did bring him into close contact with writers and scholars—he was a friend of

Dickens—and among his close acquaintances was Sir Henry Rawlinson. Rawlinson, no doubt finding Lytton an avid listener to his Russophobic theories, put his name forward as a possible Viceroy; and such was Rawlinson's influence with the Conservative Party, and Lord Salisbury in particular, that it was accepted without hesitation.

Lytton reached Calcutta on the 12th April 1876, and after a hurried session with the Council, at which he mentioned his secret instructions from Salisbury but did not disclose them, he hurried off to Simla, where it had been arranged that he should meet the Commissioner for Peshawar, Sir Richard Pollock. The object of the meeting was to dispatch a Mohammedan Rissaldar-Major with a message to Sher Ali, enquiring after his health, and intimating that it was Lytton's intention to send Sir Lewis Pelly as a special envoy 'to discuss with your Highness matters of common interest to the two Governments'. Sher Ali's reply to this communication was to send a letter just received from General Kaufmann (giving a narrative of events in Khoqand, which the Russian troops were now threatening), and a courteous refusal to receive Sir Lewis Pelly or any other British envoy. The grounds for this refusal were firstly that he could not guarantee their safety, and secondly that the reception of a British envoy in Kabul would lead to a request for similar facilities by the Russians. To this Lord Lytton replied swiftly that the Russians were debarred from making any such request by the agreement of 1873 in which they had acknowledged that Afghanistan was outside their sphere of influence. But still Sher Ali demurred and it was not until the whole year had been spent in correspondence that he reluctantly agreed to send a minister, Sa'id Nur Mohammed, to meet Sir Lewis Pelly in Peshawar.

The consultations were not a great success, though they went on from the 30th January to the 19th February 1877. Sa'id Nur Mohammed was violently anti-British, and the first three meetings were occupied by a recital of his grievances. Then, at the fourth meeting, he stated bluntly that Sher Ali considered that the British were bound to give him as much military support as he might require, and therefore saw no reasons for new negotiations. As to the request that British officers should enter Afghan territory, the Amir would still not consider this at all. Pelly, in view of this attitude, came to the conclusion that he was wasting his time, and negotiations were broken off.

Lytton took Sher Ali's attitude as a token of his general hostility to the British, but the truth was that he was merely acting in his own interest. He was still convinced that by his verbal agreement with Lord Mayo he had every right to decline any suggestion of a British mission in Kabul. Lord Mayo had understood his reasons—that the Afghan chiefs still remembered 1839 only too vividly, and any reception of a British envoy by the Amir would prejudice his own internal position. Also, Sher Ali was naturally uneasy about the negotiations going on between Major Sandeman and the Khan of Kalat; and he doubtless knew of the resolution now before the Government of India that a Baluchistan agency should be constituted, with its headquarters at Quetta. Altogether, it was becoming quite clear to him what the 'Forward Policy' was to mean in terms of the tribal areas of the North-West Frontier: that the British were nibbling away at the land, and soon would have two large forward bases, with Quetta near the Bolan Pass, as well as Peshawar near the Khyber. In these circumstances Sher Ali's attitude was at least understandable. But Lytton would have none of it and concentrated rigidly on obeying Salisbury's instructions. Sir Lewis was commanded to write Sher Ali (via Nur Mohammed, who was still in Peshawar) that unless he agreed to receive British officers there could be no improvement in relations; that a refusal would brand him as an unsatisfactory neighbour, and lead the British to repudiate all obligations, save those in the treaty of 1855. They would respect the integrity of Afghanistan, but they would undertake no liabilities on behalf of the Amir without guarantees. However, if Afghanistan refrained from acts of aggression, the British would be prepared to respond to an appeal for assistance should she be attacked.

By the time this letter was put into final draft and handed over it was already March, and Nur Mohammed had been taken ill. Three weeks later he died without being able to reply, and Lytton was informed that a new envoy would soon be arriving to take his place. The Viceroy's limited patience, however, was now exhausted and he gave instructions that the remaining members of Nur Mohammed's mission should now return to Kabul. His main excuse for such precipitation was the news recently received that Sher Ali was increasing his army and 'massing troops on various parts of the Frontier; that he was publicly exhorting all his subjects and neighbours to make immediate preparation for a religious war,

apparently directed against his English rather than his Russian neighbours. . . .' These rumours were either untrue or grossly exaggerated; Sher Ali had enough troubles on his plate without engaging in a war against the major power in the East. But Lytton believed them: he wanted to believe them. Irresistibly, reading his papers at this period, one is reminded of Lord Auckland and the demons which dragged him towards the North-West Frontier; also of Fraser-Tytler and his dictum that 'There is a fate about this restless frontier which has been too strong for mankind. . . .' Was the fate tugging at Lytton? A good deal of the evidence seems to suggest that it was; it blinded his judgment, warped his assessment of events, and cast a paranoic glow across the entire Anglo-Afghan scene. 'The Amir . . .' he wrote, 'displayed a marked hostility towards the British Government' throughout the whole conference. The Amir did nothing of the kind, not even being there. Lytton's advisers had warned him that Asians needed patience; Sir William Muir, a member of his Council, Sir Henry Norman, and Sir Arthur Hobhouse had all pleaded with him not to treat the Amir's refusal as a sign of discourtesy or hostility; they had told him that his course would seriously weaken and embarrass British relations with Afghanistan. But he would not listen. And many people both in India and in England came sadly to the conclusion that he would only be satisfied with war.

But war did not come immediately, and Lytton devoted a good deal of his energies to the question of administration in the North-West Frontier. In a detailed memorandum written in April 1877 he stated: 'It is not necessary for me to dwell again on the growing importance of our frontier politics—their gradual merging into one great Central Asian question, and so into the Imperial policy of the British government.' This growing importance, he thought, should be reflected in the unifying of the area under a separate Frontier Government. This would include the six frontier districts of the Punjab and the trans-Indus portion of Sind, so that 'The Indus would thus form the boundary of the new Government along almost the entire length of its jurisdiction. . . .' At the head of the Frontier Government should be a 'Chief Commissioner of the North-Western Frontier'; and the Punjab Frontier Force and the Sind Frontier Force should be merged into one 'Frontier Force' and placed under the orders of the Commander-in-Chief. Police and

military functions on the Frontier, he considered, had become completely muddled, and should now be sorted out. Regarding the tribes, he argued that we should now 'aim to cultivate more direct and frequent intercourse than at present. . . . For this I propose the appointment of a Chief Commissioner at Peshawar, invested with exceptionally high powers, who can represent to the Native mind more directly and personally than either the Lieutenant-Governor at Lahore, or the still more distant Viceroy at Calcutta, the embodied power and dignity of the British Government.' Lytton went on to attack the system of punishment by expeditions, and pointed out that the Punjab system was much more barbarous than that operated on the Sind Frontier, where the rules of ordinary civilised war were observed. He added:

'I object to it because it perpetuates a system of semi-barbarous reprisal, and because we lower ourselves to the ideas of right and might common to our barbarous neighbours, rather than endeavour to raise them to our own ideas, because it seldom touches the guilty, and generally falls most heavily on the innocent; because its natural tendency is to perpetuate animosity rather than lead up to good relations; because, as a rule, it leaves no permanent mark. . . .'

For this observation Lytton was roundly attacked by a member of his Council, Sir E. C. Bayley, who argued that this punitive system had been forced on the British when they took over the old Sikh Frontier. 'It is not to be forgotten', he wrote, 'that, under Sikh rule, some of what are now frontier villages near Peshawar were actually held by a yearly tribute of so many human heads taken from their neighbours across the border.' Lytton's general answer to this was that 'our object should be either to support and enforce tribal responsibility to the utmost . . . or to reduce tribal cohesion to a minimum where no recognised authority can be found. . . .' He also advocated the gradual disarmament of the population along the Frontier. 'One of the first steps towards civilisation and social progress is the separation of the military from the agricultural and trading classes. . . .' Within a few months, however, Lytton was forced to sanction an expedition against the Jowakis, and later reported to Lord Salisbury that it had been 'an unprecedented success', deluding himself that a local problem had been solved. Needless to say, most soldiers and the administrators on the Frontier

detested Lytton and all his works; they did not co-operate with any enthusiasm.

One development should, however, be listed to Lytton's credit. On his first tour of the Frontier he found that 'officials were profoundly ignorant of the geography of the country five miles beyond their border. No map of it existed.' He gave orders that surveying should commence at once, and in time large sections of the Frontier were mapped in detail.

'In the month of March 1877 we left Jacobabad and marched to Quetta, and nothing very eventful occurred en route. After passing through the Dasht-i-be-daulat, Major Sandeman sent me on in advance to select a site for the civil camp. I well remember dismounting on the top of a small hillock on the Seriab Road and having a good look round. I selected a plot close to an orchard about half a mile from the Quetta fort—in fact, the piece of ground which is now the Residency garden—and there we pitched the civil camp.' This matter-of-fact account of a momentous event on the Frontier was written by Richard Bruce, then a Political Agent in Baluchistan. The step advocated long ago by John Jacob had now come about, and the British were establishing a military garrison at the northern end of the Bolan Pass. Direct negotiations were begun with surrounding tribes, such as the Raisanis, Kurds, Satakzais, Mengals, Kuchaks, and Pughs, and levies were recruited. 'Further', says Richard Bruce, in his delightfully flat style, 'I planned and laid out the central principal streets of the present town of Quetta, and the main roads connecting the Residency with the fort and town. One of these was named the Sandeman Road and another the Bruce Road. . . .' Those familiar with Quetta may be intrigued to learn, that Bruce's sole professional advisers for this great task were two subalterns of the Royal Engineers, Hewson and Kunhardt. Before long, with its cantonments and barracks, its Residency, and its houses for military commanders and officials, Quetta became another Peshawar, but with a better climate and lovelier surroundings. Despite some early excitements generated by the Brahuis (instigated by agents from Kabul) the atmosphere was more relaxed, too. Within eighteen months the tribes had been pacified throughout the whole area.

This achievement belonged to Robert Sandeman who was now

entering his great days as an administrator. His story, one of the most remarkable to be recorded on the Frontier, is too long to be told at length in this work, but its salient features must be noted. Sandeman was born in Perth, the son of a general in the East India Company's forces, and after education at Perth Academy and St. Andrews University, was commissioned to the 33rd Bengal Infantry in 1856. Soon, however, he transferred to Probyn's Horse and saw action with this unit during the Mutiny in 1857, being severely wounded on two occasions. Later he was sent with dispatches to Sir John Lawrence, who, recognising his intellect and drive, gave him an appointment in the Punjab Commission. The year 1866 saw Sandeman working in Dera Ghazi Khan, a trans-Indus district of the Punjab and, as recorded on page 127, opened negotiations with the border tribes. Though the area was pacified, Sandeman's unorthodox methods infuriated his superiors, and it was fortunate that the Punjab Government supported him, and, later on, the Government of India, which accepted his views. In 1876 Sandeman opened negotiations with the Khan of Kalat, the ruler of Baluchistan, and later signed a treaty which led to the British occupation of Quetta, just described. Sandeman was now gazetted agent to the Governor-General in Baluchistan, a post he held till his death fifteen years later. During this period his hold over the tribes became quite astonishing, and Roberts was to remark that there was no tribal leader with whom he was not intimately acquainted and no village, however remote, which he hadn't visited. When the winds of revolt blew south across the Afghan border, it only needed Sandeman's presence for order to be restored again. Only two regular garrisons were maintained, at Loralai and Fort Sandeman, and for the rest, local levies and the police took charge. As time went on, Sandeman opened up roads in the unknown territories between the Gomal river and the Marri hills, and these were as safe to travel on as roads in India. Everywhere his calm, pacifying influence seemed to be felt. Baluchistan was, of course, still nominally under the rule of the Khan of Kalat, whom the Government of India paid a large annual subsidy in silver rupees. These he stored in wells, as did his successor, right up to 1914. With the outbreak of the First World War, however, there was a great shortage of silver, and the Government asked the Khan if he would disgorge his treasure in return for credits and securities for the same amount,

and after some persuasion he agreed. Eventually 200 camels appeared in Quetta, under the escort of an Indian battalion, and a joint commission of the Khan's officials and British officers unloaded them and began opening the boxes. To the general amazement many of these were found to be full of bricks instead of rupees, though who had committed the robbery and when, it was never discovered. Sadly the Khan conceded that wells, however deep and closely guarded, had their limitations as safe deposits and opened a bank account.

Before leaving Sandeman and his great work in Baluchistan, it is worth noting that the tribes he dealt with were far less intractable than those along the Punjab Frontier; and when his disciple, Richard Bruce, tried to apply the Sandeman system here he failed miserably.

But to return to Quetta and the occupation in 1877. Sandeman worked fast and it was most fortunate that he did, for a bare eighteen months later, in November 1877, General Biddulph arrived with his column, en route for Afghanistan. The Second Afghan War had broken out.

Events had moved swiftly in 1877. In the spring, after the Peshawar negotiations had ended, Lytton was remarking that he proposed to 'let the Amir (if I may use a coarse but expressive phrase of Prince Bismarck's) stew for a while in his own gravy'. But then came news that Russia had now swallowed Khoqand as well as Khiva; and later that she had gone to war with Turkey. The control of the Dardanelles now became a major international issue; Lytton received an urgent request from the British Government to send troops to Malta, and then learned that a British fleet was steaming towards the Golden Horn. For six months the Russian armies and the British warships lay growling at each other, while the issue of war and peace hung in the balance. Then peace was signed between Turkey and Russia and the tension began to relax; and in June 1878 the major powers met at the Congress of Berlin, where Disraeli was able to declare to the British people that he had achieved 'Peace with Honour'.

But even while the Congress was still in session, Russia began moving troops towards the Afghan frontier, and dispatched a mission from Samarkand, under General Stolietov. When the latter

reached Kabul, he handed Sher Ali a letter from General Kaufmann, setting out the political implications, so far as Afghanistan was concerned, of the dispute in Europe. But by now the Congress of Berlin had come to its triumphant conclusion, leaving Stolietov suspended in mid air. However, the fact that he was in Kabul at all was enough to enrage Lord Lytton; on the 3rd August he wrote to Lord Cranbrook, who had now succeeded Salisbury at the India Office, pointing out bluntly that what he had warned a year ago (when he incurred a sarcastic snub from the India Office) had now come to pass. 'We were told that our warnings were witless; our anxieties nightmares; our calculations, the crude excursions of an untutored fancy; our conclusions, airy fabrics, raised by unreasoned fears. . . .' But—'Within the year now closing, Russia . . . has made greater strides towards India than were then "dreamed of in our" repudiated "philosophy". . . .' In view of these developments, Lytton went on to argue, we must now review the question of *what really constituted our North-West Frontier*. The present line, based on the 'outer *débouches* of the passes leading to India' was hopelessly inadequate. 'The great natural boundary of India . . . is the range of the Hindu Kush and its spurs; and that range . . . ought to be our ultimate boundary.' If the Government recognised this fact, Lytton went on, there were only three courses open; to secure an alliance with Sher Ali of such a character that it would exclude all Russian influence from Afghanistan, or (if this were impossible) to break up Afghanistan and install a more amenable Amir, or to conquer as much of Afghanistan as might be necessary 'for the permanent maintenance of our North-West Frontier'. The third course, he considered a definite pis aller, and the first, quite hopeless. Only the second course was left; and, as a first step towards implementing it, Lytton proposed to send a mission to Kabul demanding the right to station officers both there and at Herat.

He could not take this step, of course, without the formal consent of the British Government, and therefore asked that this should be granted without delay. When the Cabinet met, it was obvious that, unless there was to be a split, Lytton must have his way, and, having recently come to power, Disraeli had no wish to divide his party. One cannot help wondering though, if he considered the irony of the course he was now sanctioning, which must inevitably lead to the invasion of Afghanistan. Thirty-five years before in the

debate following the disasters of the First Afghan War, he had argued that, if the British would only leave it alone, Afghanistan would constitute the finest possible barrier against invasion. 'The soil is barren and unproductive. The country is intersected by stupendous mountains . . . where an army must be exposed to absolute annihiliation. The people are proverbially faithless. . . . Here then are all the elements combined that can render the country absolutely impassable as a barrier, if we abstain from interference.' But interference there must now be, in a vain attempt to achieve precisely the same objects that had been sought in 1839.

Lytton received permission to go ahead on the 8th August, and six days later he wrote Sher Ali, informing him that General Sir Neville Chamberlain would be leaving immediately for Kabul to discuss certain urgent matters with him. (This old Frontier veteran, now recovered from his wounds, had returned to India as Commander-in-Chief of the Madras Army.) Lytton had chosen him as an envoy because of 'his striking presence and address' and his personal acquaintance with Sher Ali. On the 7th September a special meeting of the Viceroy's Council was called at which Chamberlain was briefed, and five days later he assembled with his mission at Peshawar. It was intended that the party should leave on the 16th and arrive in Kabul when the Ramazan feast would be over; meanwhile Major Cavagnari would begin negotiating with the Afridi chiefs for a safe conduct through the Khyber Pass as far as Ali Masjid, where the party would meet officials from the Amir. It so happened, however, that the commandant of the Amir's forces at Ali Masjid, Faiz Mahommed, had summoned the chiefs, so that no negotiations could begin. And later on, news arrived that the Amir was angry, and considered that the mission was proceeding by force. On the 20th September Chamberlain signalled to Lytton: 'The Khyberees agree to escort the Mission to Ali Masjid, or to any nearer point when we come into contact with the Amir's authorities. They do not hold themselves responsible for what may then happen. . . .' The following day, after the Mission had reached Jamrud, at the mouth of Khyber, Major Cavagnari with an escort of Guides Cavalry rode on to within a mile of Ali Masjid. Here he was warned by a party of Afridis that if he came any further, he would be fired on. At this moment Faiz Mahommed arrived and Cavagnari pushed through the Afridis and rode through a stream to

meet him. After courtesies had been exchanged, the two men dismounted and the following dialogue took place:

> CAVAGNARI: We are both servants; you of the Amir of Kabul, I of the British Government. . . . I only came to get a straight answer from you. Will you oppose the passage of the Mission by force?
>
> FAIZ: Yes, I will. And you may take it as a kindness and because I remember friendship, that I do not fire on you. You have had a straight answer.

After this the two men mounted their horses, and Cavagnari rode back to Jamrud to report to his commander. That night Chamberlain wrote Lord Lytton: 'The first act has been played out; and I do not think that any impartial looker-on can consider any other course has been left open to us consistent with dignity than to openly break with the Amir.'

This was the reply that Lytton was waiting for. It came as a siren song, drawing him towards the Hindu Kush.

But, for the moment, the initiative was held in London, where strong pressure was being exerted on the Russians. The latter proved to be surprisingly amenable, and gave assurances that their Kabul mission was only temporary, and that with the improved Russo-British relations, its raison d'être had vanished. Further notes assured Lord Salisbury (now Foreign Secretary) that all engagements between Russia and Britain, with regard to Afghanistan, remained in force. The Russians even went so far as to make an offer of mediation between Britain and Afghanistan; an offer which, needless to add, was swiftly parried.

In Kabul Sher Ali, realising that the storm would soon be upon him, wrote asking General Kaufmann for military aid against the British; but Kaufmann bluntly refused, reminding the Amir that the passes across the Hindu Kush were blocked with snow. Growing desperate, Sher Ali sent for General Stolietov, and pleaded with him to espouse his cause. But Stolietov was already packing up to leave Kabul . . . and when, on the 22nd December, Sher Ali got news that the British armies were on the march, he decided to go too. As a regent, during his absence, he appointed his son, Yakub Khan.

Lytton had sent his ultimatum on the 2nd November demanding an answer by the 20th. None arrived, so on the 21st November Lytton wrote to Cranbrook 'Jacta est alea!' ('The die is cast!') and signalled the three generals commanding the Khyber, Kurram, and Quetta columns, respectively Browne, Roberts, and Biddulph, ordering them to cross the Frontier at daybreak. General Sir Sam Browne's orders were to capture Ali Masjid, expel the Afghan garrison, and occupy Landi Kotal and such points as he might select at the head of the pass. Roberts' orders were to occupy the Kurram valley. Sir Donald Stewart was to join Sir Michael Biddulph at Quetta and head for Kandahar. None of the generals had a force in good fighting trim, and the number of sick among the troops was almost crippling. However, the orders from Simla had to be obeyed, and by 6 a.m. the columns were in motion. Sir Sam Browne's force numbered 10,000 men, and Roberts' about 6,500. Biddulph commanded a force about the same size as Roberts', though this would be increased considerably when Donald Stewart arrived with his division from Multan. Taken together, the three columns formed by far the biggest army which had yet crossed the North-West Frontier.

By noon on the 21st, Sam Browne's column came under fire from the guns at Ali Masjid, by which time he had lost communication with two brigades launched on a right flanking movement. A frontal attack on the Afghan position had to be abandoned, but next morning it was found that the flanking movement had produced the desired effect, and the Afghans had retreated. Swiftly Browne pushed on towards Jalalabad, worried only by a few skirmishes, and the Afridis' attacks on his line of communications, which was protected by General Maude and the reserve division.

Meanwhile Roberts was pushing up the Kurram valley, which he found to be about sixty miles long and three to ten broad. 'On every side', he wrote, 'rose high and magnificent wooded mountains, those on the north and east being the most lofty and precipitous, while on the north-west projects the spur which runs from Sika Ram, the highest peak of the Safed Koh Range. This spur forms the boundary between Kurram and Afghanistan and is crossed by the Peiwar Kotal.' (In this sense the word 'Kotal' means pass; and Peiwar Kotal was the pass across Peiwar Ridge.) On the 28th Roberts received a report that the Amir's forces had abandoned

their guns at the foot of the Kotal and retreated in disorder, but a reconnaissance in force, carried out by Colonel John Gordon of the 29th Punjab, showed this to be quite erroneous. In fact, the Afghans had taken up a position on the Kotal, concealed by a high range of pine-clad hills and precipitous cliffs, which was almost impregnable from the front. Also their guns had been dragged into a position to support them. Faced with this situation, Roberts determined to turn the position by a flanking movement, and ordered a series of detailed reconnaissances on the spurs running up to the Kotal, and the approaches to the Spingawai Pass, which crossed the ridge about a mile and a half to the north of the Peiwar. The latter task was carried out by Captain Carr, a cavalry officer, who gave such a favourable report on the route that Roberts decided to use it for his main attack.

On the Sunday morning, 1st December, church parade was held, just outside the range of the Afghan artillery, and nearly all the British officers took the holy sacrament. Then, at 10 p.m. Roberts himself led a column of 1,300 men on the right flanking movement, leaving orders to Brigadier Cobbe that he was to advance at 6 a.m. on the following day 'to be in position to storm the Peiwar when the enemy's left flank had been sufficiently shaken'. Tents were left standing, and camp fires burning, and the flanking move was carried out with little fuss and as quietly as possible; many people in the camp did not realise Roberts had left. In the column were a wing of the 72nd Highlanders, the 2nd and 29th Punjab Infantry, and the 5th Gurkhas, supported by four guns of the Royal Horse Artillery, and a Mountain Battery. The track ran due east for two miles, then turned north through a wide gorge at the bottom of which ran a mountain stream. Roberts recalled later that: 'The moonlight lit up the cliffs on the eastern side of the ravine, but made the darkness only the more dense in the shadow of the steep hills on the west. . . . A bitterly cold wind rushed down the gorge, extremely trying to all, lightly clad as we were in anticipation of the climb before us. Onwards and upwards we slowly toiled, stumbling over great boulders of rock, dropping into old water channels, splashing through icy streams, and halting frequently to allow the troops in the rear to close up.' Now and then Roberts struck a match to see how the time was going, as he hoped that by ten o'clock the column would have progressed far enough to allow

the troops to snatch an hour or two's rest. But as always, in mountain country, the distance proved longer than it appeared on the map, and before long Roberts realised that the march was falling behind schedule. Apart from this, he became dissatisfied with the manner in which the leading unit, the 29th Punjab, was pushing on, and made his way towards the head of the column to find out what was happening. Here it became apparent that the troops were straggling, so, summoning John Gordon, the commanding officer, Roberts told him sharply to get them under control. At this moment some shots rang out, and Gordon confided to Roberts that he suspected treachery among his Pathans. The situation immediately became fraught with anxiety, for, if the Afghans heard the shooting, all chance of surprise would be lost. Quickly, Roberts sent back a message ordering the Highlanders and the 5th Gurkhas to the head of the column, and arranged for a strict watch to be kept on the Pathans.

Soon the first streaks of daylight appeared on the mountains, and almost at the same time the forward parties of Afghans opened fire. Immediately Roberts deployed the Highlanders and the Gurkhas, and gave the order for them to fix bayonets and charge; then told Captain Kelso of the Mountain Battery to find a position and give support as fast as he could. A few seconds later Kelso was shot dead and a subaltern had to take over. Meanwhile, the Gurkhas went swarming up the mountain, and quickly cleared the outlying trenches. From now on they were guided by the flashes of the enemy (who were firing from the main position higher up the slope) and, joined by the Highlanders, they swept on for 200 yards and took the next position. Ahead of them now was the third and main defence work, commanding the head of the pass, and though a hot fire poured down from 400 Afghans, nothing could stem the advance, and soon the Spingawai was won. In the confusion which followed, some of the enemy, with uniforms very much like that of the Gurkhas, tried to carry away the Afghan guns, but fortunately they were spotted by Colonel Galbraith, who gathered a scratch force together and attacked. Seventy of the enemy were shot down and the rest fled.

When the sun came up, Roberts looked around to take his bearings, and noted that 'the pass lay across the shoulder of a mountain (9,400 feet above the sea), and through a magnificent pine

forest. Its approaches were commanded by precipitous heights, defended by breastworks of felled trees. . . . Had we not been able to surprise the enemy before the day dawned, I doubt whether any of us could have reached the first entrenchment.' But though Roberts had gained his first objective, he was still some distance from the main body of Afghans on the Peiwar Kotal; and he now determined to launch his second attack at once. The troops formed up on a grass plateau, then advanced through thick pine forests. After two hours they reached the edge of a deep hollow, at the further side of which, some 150 yards off, there was a strong enemy position from which a hot fire was coming. Roberts now asked for his 'orders group' to give out his plan for an attack, only to find that, apart from some men of the 29th Punjab, there were no troops behind him. Anxiously he dispatched one staff officer after another, and even his padre, in an effort to find the column, but it had obviously taken a wrong turning and disappeared into the jungle. Detesting inaction, like any good commander, Roberts talked to the men of the 29th Punjab, suggesting that they should wipe out the slur on their name by putting in an attack. But although the Sikhs were willing enough, the Pathans maintained a sullen silence, so there was nothing for it but to employ the Sikhs on their own. A reconnaissance, however, soon showed that nothing but a major attack could deal with the enemy position, and Roberts appeared to be faced with an indefinite delay. Then in a moment the situation changed: the padre, Mr. Adams, hurried up to report that he had found the column and even the elephants carrying the mountain guns. Before it could arrive though, the Afghans launched an attack against the 72nd Highlanders on the left, and for a while the situation looked ugly in the extreme. Then at noon the elephants lumbered forward with the guns, which very soon came into action in support of the infantry, now moving into position for a frontal attack. Roberts did not want to rely on this entirely though, and gave out orders for a flanking movement. On the left was a sheer precipice, but on the right there was a hill via which it seemed possible to reach a position behind the enemy on Peiwar Kotal itself. This was obviously the route to take. Meanwhile, Colonel Perkins of the 5th Punjab arrived with the news that he'd found a spur from which the guns could command the Kotal position from a range of only 1,100 yards; and Roberts ordered that they should

be rushed forward at once. Soon the combined pressure of the shelling and the flanking movement began to tell, and the Afghan infantry showed signs of breaking. By now Roberts had established contact with General Cobbe (who was moving with his column from the main camp in the valley) and ordered him to make for the enemy's main position. Cobbe pushed ahead rapidly and soon his leading troops had reached a point less than a mile from the head of the Pass. Here they were halted by a ravine, but poured down fire on to the Afghans on the far side. In due course the Afghans, now being plastered by the guns, harassed by the right flanking movement, and threatened by Cobbe's men, began to retreat. Then, to their horror, they found how far Roberts' men were behind them, and the retreat became a rout. Colonel Drew, taking over from Cobbe (who had been wounded in the thigh), decided to push on to the Kotal, supported by the guns of the Royal Horse Artillery, and Colonel Hugh Gough, V.C., with the 12th Bengal Cavalry. Gough ran into a volley from the retreating enemy, and, ordering his men to dismount, led the way towards the head of the Pass. He wrote: 'Arriving at the summit we found the entire camp abandoned —eighteen guns in position, helmets, accoutrements, supplies, ammunition, everything left. All was silent; not a sign of friend or foe except in the dead and wounded lying about.' Roberts was still some way down the slope and decided to camp there for the night. He says: '. . . just before daylight had quite gone I could make out with the aid of my telescope a large body of Afghans moving towards the Shutargardan, which made me quite satisfied. . . .' About 10 p.m. he was awoken by a messenger from Gough saying that the Kotal was in possession and the enemy there had fled, leaving their guns. Receiving this good news, Roberts thanked God, thought of his wife, and rolled himself up in his cloak. That night there were twenty degrees of frost, but Roberts lay on the ground, like his men, and slept as soundly 'as I had ever done in the most luxurious quarters, and I think others did the same . . . no one I could hear of suffered from that night's exposure'. His losses in the day's fighting had been two officers and eighteen men killed, and some eighty wounded; for such a victory they were very small.

Next morning the column pressed on, and by the 9th had reconnoitred a route to the top of the Shutargardan Pass. This was 11,000 feet above sea level, and once Roberts had ridden up, he found that

it commanded a fine view of the Logar valley. If a route could be found for the descent on the far side, the road to Kabul would be open.

On the 13th, after a pause during which various supply problems were dealt with, and alternative routes reconnoitred, Roberts led his advance guard towards the Pass, leaving at 2 a.m. to make sure that he would be well clear before dark. His supplies were being carried by a mixed collection of mules and camels, and the latter found the going very hard. The path was rugged, steep, and slippery, as a mountain stream had flowed over it then frozen, and it was 11 a.m. before all the animals were over the Kotal. On the far side, the route dipped 3,000 feet in two miles, down what Roberts called 'a ruined staircase with the steps missing at intervals'. Then there came a gorge five miles long, the walls of which 'narrowed in places to but a few yards, overhanging the path till they seemed to meet and make a gateway or tunnel through which the road passed'. From time to time, tribesmen could be seen squatting on the rocks above the heads of the column, and though they made no effort to intervene, Roberts naturally became anxious, and detailed two companies of the Pioneers 'to crown the first height that could be crowned, with orders not to come down till the rearguard had passed'. Meanwhile, the six companies of Pioneers were to push on with the mules, tents, kit, and ammunition. Soon after midday, when the gorge began to widen, Roberts became concerned that the Mountain Battery should be clear of the defile before dark, and ordered that it should come forward in charge of four companies of the 72nd Highlanders. Roberts pushed on with the head of the column till a suitable point had been found to make camp; but as the tents were being pitched firing was heard, and word arrived that the tribesmen were attacking the baggage party and the 5th Gurkhas, which formed the rearguard. Though outnumbered, however, the Gurkhas kept their heads, took what cover they could find among the boulders, and kept up a stiff resistence till help could be sent back. The animals and the baggage were saved, but it had been a close thing.

Roberts was later on severely criticised for this action in the Manjiar Defile. In his memoirs he states that he pushed on with four companies of the 23rd Pioneers as 'It was important to secure the exit from this gorge without delay. . . .' Curiously enough he

made no mention of this motive in his dispatch of the 18th December, and it has been alleged that in rushing ahead he risked his rearguard. Certainly this wasn't one of Roberts' tidiest operations; but luck was with him, and again his losses were very small. Colonel Hanna, the military historian of the late nineteenth century, even attacks Roberts for dealing with the Peiwar Kotal at all. The first consideration, he argues, 'should have been to facilitate the advance of the Khyber force by keeping the largest possible number of the Amir's troops at a distance from Kabul . . . military science demanded that General Roberts should have manœuvred to draw down the Afghans, as Lord Kitchener drew the Dervishes from their stronghold at Omdurman'. It is difficult to be patient with Hanna in this instance. Roberts was advancing into a hostile country and, like any other commander, had no wish to leave a large army in his rear There was no guarantee that the Afghans (who were much wilier than the Dervishes) would consent to be drawn. Also, if Roberts had kept advancing, they could have headed north to oppose Sir Sam Browne and the Khyber column. In war, as in the culinary arts, the proof of the pudding is in the eating; and the fact was that for the loss of about 100 men, Roberts had routed a large enemy force, and captured its guns and equipment. There is evidence that this and other attacks on Roberts, which extended over a number of years, were motivated by personal spite. After the Afghan War (in which he fought with great gallantry) was over, Hanna applied to Roberts, now Commander-in-Chief India, for the post of Quartermaster-General of the Indian Army but was not selected. He eventually returned home an embittered man.

The Quetta column, under Sir Donald Stewart, had a long and arduous but uneventful journey, and when it reached Kandahar on the 8th January 1879 met with a civil if unenthusiastic reception; the merchants, hearing tales from their fathers of the money to be made from feeding troops, hurried in to secure contracts; and even the local chiefs were not averse to qualifying for subsidies.

On the 20th December Sir Sam Browne reached Jalalabad, where news reached him that Sher Ali had fled with the last of the Russian mission. In the New Year envoys arrived from the Regent, Yakub Khan, and Major Sir Louis Cavagnari, Browne's chief Political Officer, informed them that the British were prepared to negotiate a peace. By the time this message was delivered, Yakub Khan's

sirdars had begun deserting him, and he therefore came to the decision that he must travel to Browne's camp in person.

The British position, now that the armies were established in central Afghanistan, was set out by Lord Lytton on the 10th January. 'The primary condition of a strong independent Afghanistan is a strong independent Afghan ruler. Granting a perennial supply of such rulers, it is improbable that an able, energetic Asiatic prince of independent character will be free from ambition. The ambition common to all energetic Asiatic princes is of a military, territorial, and not very scrupulous character. Would the aspirations of such a ruler be in harmony . . . with our own position and policy in the East?' Having posed the vital question, Lytton made no attempt to answer it. But obviously the only Afghan voluntarily knuckling under to the British would be a puppet; and a puppet could not possibly be 'a strong independent ruler'. However, Lytton went on to explain that 'we cannot close the Afghan War . . . without an Afghan Treaty; we cannot get an Afghan Treaty without an Afghan Government willing to sign, and fairly able to maintain it'. The Afghan Government, such as it was, had accepted the regency of Yakub Khan; but not fancying him as a ruler, Lytton contemplated negotiating with the even more unlikely Wali Mohammed Khan, Sher Ali's brother. However, when Cavagnari received a courteous letter from Yakub Khan, expressing his willingness to treat, the picture miraculously changed; and it became clear that whatever Lytton's theoretical desiderata for the Afghan ruler, Yakub Khan he would have to be.

Initially, the terms for the treaty laid down by Lytton were as follows: Renunciation by the Amir of the Khyber, and authority over the independent tribes in the area; the continuance of British control in the Kurram valley, from Thal to the crest of the Shutargardan; control of Afghanistan's foreign policy; and permission to accredit British officers to the Kabul Government. Later on Lytton sweetened the pill, by agreeing that if the Amir accepted the third clause, Britain would guarantee support against foreign aggression. However, in February and March, while Roberts launched punitive expeditions against the Mohmands and Shinwaris, negotiations hung fire, and Lytton became anxious.

He had good cause. Since news of the war had reached London, in a mendacious statement by Disraeli's Government, there had been

wide public unease. In a stormy debate in the House of Lords on the 9th December, John Lawrence had been on his feet, thundering against the breach of the North-West Frontier. Viscount Halifax had supported him, declaring: 'The old policy gave us thirty-five years of peace; thirty months of the new has plunged us into war.' Regarding the Russian menace, he argued, 'Can there be greater insanity on our part than to alienate the Power which would be our best ally against her? We ought to abandon all notion of permanent occupation beyond our present frontier; we ought to satisfy the Afghans that we covet no part of their territory.' In the House of Commons there was a stormy debate, in which the Opposition attacked the Government for its duplicity. The only true foundations for international relations were truth and justice, Gladstone argued, and the Conservatives were jeopardising the just and honourable name of Britain. Sir William Harcourt, speaking at Oxford, condemned the Government's 'Forward Policy', the notion that by occupying Kabul and Kandahar we could establish what was known (in the new political catch-phrase) as 'a Scientific Frontier'. Referring to Lytton personally, he added: 'The Viceroy declared at the outset that we had no quarrel with the people of Afghanistan, but only with Sher Ali. Sher Ali is gone, and now we are waging hostilities against a people with whom we have no quarrel . . . whose homes we have invaded and whose territory we have annexed; and when they resist, we find it necessary to cut their throats and exterminate their villages.' Not all the opposition came from politicians; some of the clergy raised their voices also. Preaching in St. Paul's Cathedral, Dean Plumptre asked, 'Shall we smite with the sword?' and reminded his congregation that 'those who sow the wind of aggressive ambition, must look to reap the whirlwind of disaster'. The Bishop of Manchester asked if the rectification of the North-West Frontier was sufficient reason, in the eyes of God, for 'plunging into the unspeakable horrors of war'.

But apart from the reaction in England, Lytton had other worries. The whole of the North-West Frontier had been thrown into a ferment by the invasion, and Sir Sam Browne was having great trouble in keeping open his line of communications through the Khyber. Cholera had broken out in the Peshawar valley and might soon reach the town itself. And finally, the whole military operation had devoured so many men that it was necessary to ask Lord

Cranbrook for a special vote to increase the size of each Native Infantry Regiment by 200 men. If news of this leaked out, as Lytton realised only too well, he would be in very hot water indeed.

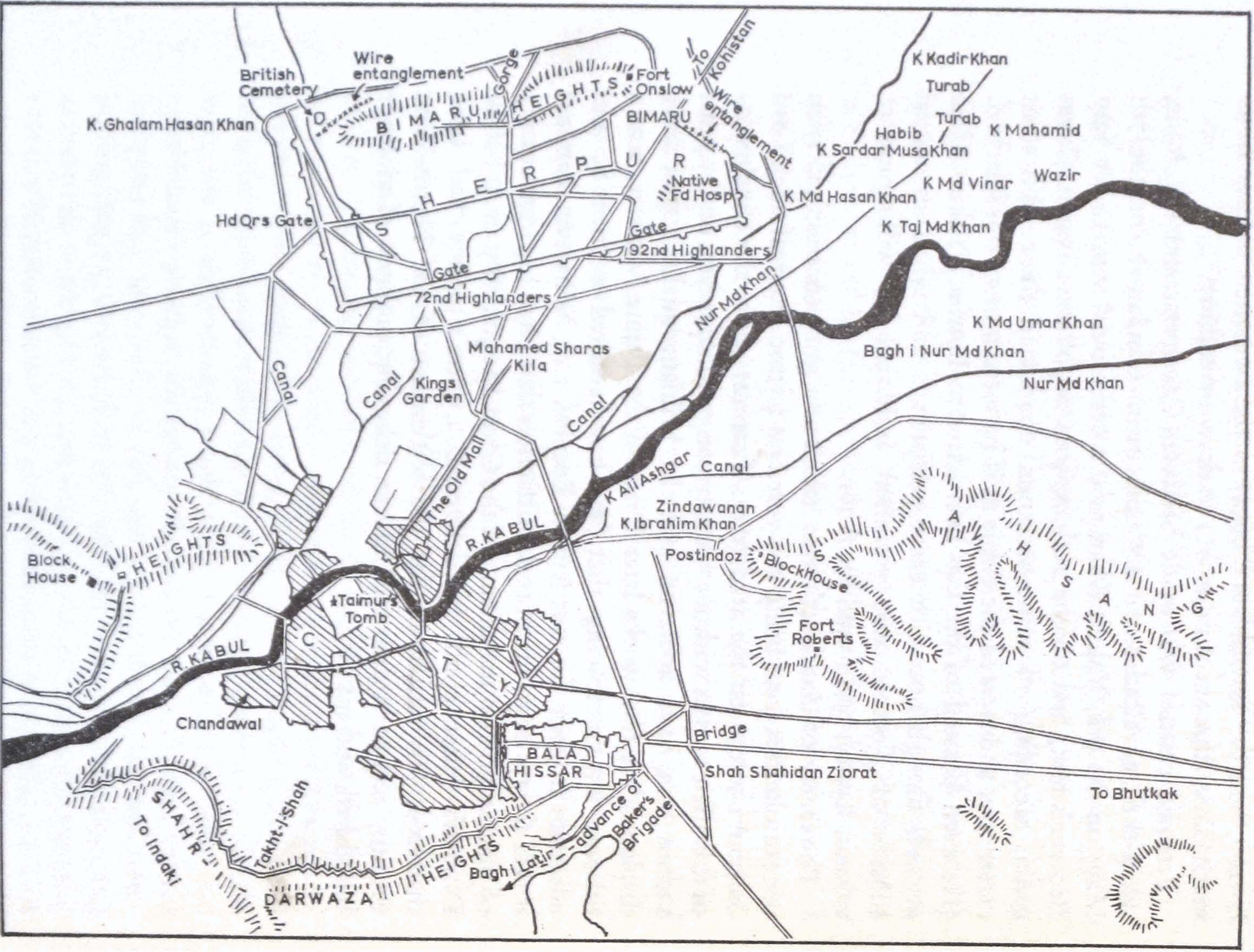
Then on the 24th Cavagnari, who was now at Gandamak, received a letter from Yakub Khan that he would come in person to negotiate the treaty at the beginning of May.

Cavagnari was of mixed British and French blood, his father, Adolphe Cavagnari, having been one of Napoleon's generals. Lytton had met him soon after his arrival in India and noted his 'open-mindedness and intellectual quickness'. Soon Cavagnari, now a major, was appointed to the post of Deputy-Commissioner at Peshawar; and Lytton accepted his advice during the negotiations with Sher Ali. Later on, it will be recalled, Cavagnari accompanied General Neville Chamberlain on the abortive mission into the Khyber. Most people who met him agreed that Cavagnari had great charm and ability; he was picturesque, mercurial, but tireless. Concerning his basic character, however, there is a good deal of disagreement. Sir Robert Warburton, who served under him for several years on the Frontier, wrote: 'Cavagnari was a beau-ideal of a chief, and it was a great feat and honour to serve under such a man. He never forgot a junior who had once served him well, but would do all in his power to push him on whenever the chance came his way. In this wise he made himself loved by his subordinates and his memory is still cherished. . . .' Warburton also tells the story of how Cavagnari would spend the whole day in the saddle, chasing raiders, and having got back to his office, 'without having taken or made any notes, he would sit down and write his report of ten, fifteen, twenty pages of foolscap, all in the best English, in a most beautiful clear hand, without a single blot or erasure. . . .' Others were less complimentary, condemning Cavagnari as shallow and opportunist—another Alexander Burnes, in fact. Colonel Hanna castigates him as 'a man of rash and restless disposition and overbearing temper, consumed by the thirst for personal distinction, and as incapable of recognising and weighing the difficulties, physical and moral, which stood in the way of the attainment of his ends. . . .' This attack undoubtedly goes too far. But certainly one must recognise that there is a distasteful quality in some of Cavagnari's dispatches; a kind of smirking ruthlessness. Just as Burnes had acquired a marked influence over Auckland, so Cavagnari was to influence

Lytton, and the resemblance between the two men became quite marked. As time went on it was to draw even closer.

Personal contact was made between Cavagnari and the Amir, when their cavalcades met six miles from Gandamak, on the 7th May; on the 9th, Yakub Khan paid a ceremonial visit to Sir Sam Browne's tent; and on the 10th, serious negotiation began. Cavagnari, according to some accounts, conducted these with scant ceremony, and treated the Amir as if he were a mere border chief. (He even boasted of the fact in a letter to Lytton.) Yakub Khan argued, though not with great persistence, and when an annual subsidy of £60,000 was promised, indicated his willingness to submit. Lytton had found his Amir.

The treaty of Gandamak was hailed as a great success; and soon congratulations were being showered on Lytton from all sides. Lord Salisbury wrote on the 23rd May: 'I cannot allow the conclusions of this affair to pass without warmly congratulating you on the great success you have achieved and the brilliant qualities you have displayed.' A few weeks later Disraeli, the Prime Minister, sent a fulsome letter, crowing that 'we have secured a scientific and adequate frontier for our Indian Empire. . . . Whatever happens it will always be to me of real satisfaction that I had the opportunity of placing you on the throne of the Great Mogul.' But even before Disraeli's letter could be delivered, Lytton's policy had been shattered. His ambitions for the settlement of the North-West Frontier had been destroyed in one sickening outburst of violence bloodshed, and murder.



Kabul City and outlying areas

7

ENGLAND FINDS A HERO

The man who had remained unhappy about the treaty of Gandamak, who had argued that it was still too early to think about a treaty at all, was General Roberts. Even before Yakub Khan had arrived, he warned Colonel Colley, Lytton's private secretary, that the Afghans were still defiant and regarded themselves as undefeated in action. Colley explained, however, that the pressures in England against the continuation of the war were so strong, that Lytton had no alternative. Later on, when Yakub Khan arrived and the negotiations went through so smoothly, Roberts was even more worried. The Amir, he considered, had been much too facile; and Roberts, perhaps more than anyone at that time, understood the peculiarity of Afghanistan which history had illustrated time and again; the peculiarity pointed out by the Duke of Wellington in 1840, after Auckland's forces had triumphantly installed Shah Shuja on the throne of Kabul: that the main troubles did not come during the fighting, but after the peace.

However, in May 1879 all was sweetness and light at Gandamak, Simla, and Westminster. One of the clauses of the treaty laid down that a British representative with a suitable escort should reside at Kabul, and the man inevitably chosen was the recently knighted Sir Louis Cavagnari. He was to ride north towards the end of July, while Sir Sam Browne's column, less two brigades, withdrew to India via the Khyber Pass, and Sir Donald Stewart prepared to withdraw from Kandahar via Quetta and the Bolan on the 1st September. (Roberts' force was to stay where it was.) Cavagnari rode into Kabul on the 24th July and immediately signalled Simla

'Embassy entered city and received most brilliant reception. Four miles from city sirdars with some cavalry and two elephants met us. We proceeded on the elephants with a large escort of cavalry.

Outside the city two batteries of artillery and nine regiments of infantry were drawn up in column . . . their bands playing the British National Anthem. Large crowd assembled and was orderly and respectful. Amir enquired after Viceroy's health and Queen and Royal family. Amir's demeanour was most friendly.'

The atmosphere in Kabul, according to some reports, remained tense, but if this was so, it is certainly not reflected in Cavagnari's further signals, which were more concerned with non-political matters. On the 31st July he signalled: 'Cholera has occurred during the last two days.' And on the 1st August: 'All well. Violent earthquake last night.' On the 30th August he wrote a long letter to Lytton, stating that 'My principal anxiety up to the present has been regarding the amnesty clause. The Amir has done nothing and will do nothing opposed to the letter of the Treaty, but he shows no disposition to conciliate . . . those persons who had communications with us during the war.' A minor worry was that the Afghan sentry at the outer gate of the Residency was making a list of all callers and noting the exact time that they spent with Cavagnari. But, on the whole, 'I have nothing to complain of on the part of the Amir or his ministers. . . .' The chief disappointment in life, so far as Cavagnari was concerned, was that *The Times* took no notice of the entry of the Embassy into Kabul, though it printed the telegram from the Indian Office. 'I am afraid there is no denying the fact that the British public require a blunder and a huge disaster to excite their interest.' Three days later Cavagnari was to illustrate this point most graphically with his own death.

On the 2nd September his telegram merely said: 'All well'. But early on the morning of the 5th, General Roberts, who had gone back to Simla, was awakened by his wife, soon after one in the morning. There was a telegraph messenger outside, she told him, and when Roberts had scrambled into some clothes he went downstairs to take the telegram. It was from Captain Conolly, the Political Officer at Alikhel, and it told Roberts what he had been fearing to learn for some weeks:

'One Jelaladin Ghilzai, who says he is in Sir Louis Cavagnari's secret service, has arrived in hot haste from Kabul and solemnly states that yesterday morning the Residency was attacked by three regiments who had mutinied for their pay, they having guns, and being joined by a portion of six other regiments. The Embassy and

escort were defending themselves when he left about noon yesterday. I hope to receive further news.'

Roberts' first action was to awaken his A.D.C. and send him with the telegram to Lord Lytton; then, as he hurriedly finished dressing, a secretary arrived from the latter, with a message calling him to an emergency meeting of the Council. A few minutes later Roberts was informing this that he had signalled Captain Conolly: 'Lose no time and spare no money to obtain reliable information of what is going on at Kabul and keep me constantly informed by urgent telegram.' After some discussion it was agreed that (should Conolly's report prove true) troops must march at once to Kabul 'to avenge, or, if happily incorrect or exaggerated, to support the Mission'. Orders were sent to Brigadier-General Massy, who was in temporary command of Roberts' force, to move troops to the Shutargardan, where they were to entrench and await further orders. Stewart, meanwhile, was ordered to stand fast at Kandahar.

During the day further telegrams were received, making it clear that Conolly's report was only too accurate. The Amir himself signalled via Conolly: 'Confusion reached height beyond control; people from city and surrounding country poured into Bala Hissar, began destroying artillery park and magazine. All troops and people attacked Residency. I, Amir, sent Daud Shah to help Envoy. He was unhorsed at Residency by stones and spears: is dying. I then sent . . . my own son with Koran, also Mullah, to troops, but no use. Disturbance continued till now, evening; confusion is beyond conception.' A second message ran: 'Much life lost both sides; at evening they set fire to Residency. All yesterday up to now, I, with five attendants, have been besieged. Have no certain news of Envoy. . . .' And a third, sent the same day: 'My kingdom is ruined. After God I look to the Government for aid and advice; my true honesty of purpose will be clear as daylight. By this misfortune I have lost my friend the Envoy, and also my kingdom. Am terribly grieved and perplexed.'

Whether the Amir's account of the affair was accurate; whether he had, in fact, instigated the murder of Cavagnari and made no real attempt to rescue him, could not yet be known. But, whatever the truth of the matter, the first necessity was to send troops. On the 10th September Cranbrook telegraphed Lytton: 'The early occupation of Kabul is a necessity, and the advance upon it should be

immediate. You may rely upon the support of Government for most vigorous action.' Two days later Lytton replied that Roberts was on the way with 6,500 men; that a force of a further 6,600 men would be marching north from Peshawar to reinforce the garrison in the Khyber; and that there would also be columns on their way to Jalalabad and Gandamak. What he did not mention was that, owing to a major act of stupidity on his part, the transport collected together and organised for the advance into Afghanistan the previous year had now been disbanded. General Roberts, with less than half the transport he needed, would have to push on as best he could.

In Kabul there was still chaos. The sirdars were urging Yakub Khan to raise the green flag and proclaim jehad, or holy war, but he had no stomach for such a course. News of Roberts' advance had already reached him, and he decided to send off two envoys, Habibullah Khan and Mahommed Lhan, to make contact. They succeeded in doing so on the 23rd September and made it quite plain that, although the Amir would do whatever the British wished, he hoped there would not be indiscriminate revenge. He hoped also that Roberts would delay, in order to give him time to disarm the regular troops and himself punish Cavagnari's murderers. What he wanted to avoid, the envoys said, was a general rising against the British. But Roberts, though wishing to give the impression that he was advancing with the Amir's consent, flatly refused to delay. He knew that the rival contenders for the throne, Abdur Rahman and the sons of Azim Khan, were just across the borders in Turkestan with 25,000 men and fifty-six guns, waiting their chance to swoop down on Kabul. So, informing the envoys that the British people would never be satisfied till the city was in his hands and Cavagnari's body had been recovered, he invited them to spend the night in camp as his guest. They accepted, but when they were preparing to return to Kabul the following day, news arrived that Yakub Khan had ridden into Brigadier-General Baker's camp, a few miles away at Kushi; he was accompanied by 300 cavalry, the bulk of which immediately returned to Kabul, and was without tents or equipment of any kind. He was a fugitive, he announced, and wished to throw in his lot with the British.

Roberts was impatient to break through the ring of administrative problems encircling him and get on, but it was the 2nd

October before his force (now known as the Kabul Expeditionary Force) succeeded in concentrating at Zargan Shahr. Here he found that his total baggage train consisted of 750 camels, 100 donkeys, and 650 bullocks, a collection so inadequate that his force would have to be split in two, each half marching on alternate days. However, on the 4th October, the advance guard got under way and began marching across the scrub-covered plain. Immediately it became evident that the Afghans were gathering to oppose the advance; and on the 6th an action had to be fought at Charasiah. Losses were not heavy on either side, Roberts losing less than 100 killed and wounded, and the enemy some 300, but the terrain was difficult, and for some time the issue hung in the balance. Roberts was worried, too, about the safety of his stores and his followers. But luck was with him, and before nightfall the Afghans were fleeing the field, and the road to Kabul lay open.

The following day he advanced towards it and camped on a plateau near the confluence of the Logar rivers, less than a mile to the east of the Bala Hissar. This was a moment of some emotion to Roberts, and later on he wrote: 'At last I was at Kabul, the place I had heard so much of from my boyhood, and had so often wished to see! The city lay beneath me, with its mud-coloured buildings and its 50,000 inhabitants, covering a considerable extent of ground. . . . So far our success had been complete: all opposition had been overcome, Kabul was at our mercy. . . .' Both his men and his horses were exhausted, and many of the latter had died in harness, but fortunately merchants came out of the city with food, which they were glad to sell to the troops. Roberts now had confidence that he could solve any military problems; and the political and diplomatic problems would have to be dealt with 'by common-sense and a sense of justice'.

Lytton's instructions, as Roberts recorded, were 'very general in their character', as action must depend on the state of affairs now discovered in Kabul. A priority, however, was that Afghan troops should be disarmed, and indeed the whole civilian population. Also supplies would have to be collected, so that the army (or sections of it) could move swiftly to deal with any emergency along the line of communications. Meanwhile, the safety of Yakub Khan had to be secured, and those responsible for Cavagnari's murder rounded up and punished.

On the 11th October Roberts relates: 'I went to the Bala Hissar, and wandered over to the scene of the Embassy's brave defence and cruel end. The walls of the Residency, closely pitted with bullet holes, gave proof of the determined nature of the attack and the length of the resistance. The floors were covered with blood-stains, and amidst the embers of a fire were found a heap of human bones. ... I had a careful but unsuccessful search made for the bodies of our ill-fated friends.'

One difficult problem, to which Roberts still did not know the answer, was the course to be taken with Yakub Khan. In his view, 'though no absolute proof was forthcoming of his having instigated the attack upon the Embassy, he most certainly made not the slightest effort to stop it . . . he showed himself to be, if not a deliberate traitor, a despicable coward'. Unfortunately, Lytton had told Roberts to think very carefully before he broke with Yakub Khan as 'it was very possible that he might become a very useful instrument in our hands . . .'. To complicate matters even further, reports kept arriving at Roberts' headquarters that Yakub Khan might contemplate running away and raising the whole country against the British. Roberts was still undecided when early on the 12th October Yakub Khan walked into his tent (even before he was dressed) and asked for an interview. Offered the only available chair, he sat and announced quite simply that he intended to abdicate. According to Roberts: 'His life, he said, had been most miserable, and he would rather be a grass-cutter in the English camp than Ruler of Afghanistan.' Roberts' response was to place the tent at his disposal and order breakfast for him. Then he advised him to think the matter over till 10 a.m., when a second meeting would take place. But Yakub Khan did not change his mind, and so Roberts telegraphed Simla, requesting instructions.

Meanwhile, he had arranged to read a proclamation to the people of Kabul, in the Bala Hissar, and at 10 a.m. arrived there with a large body of troops. The proclamation announced that although the British would be justified in razing the city to the ground, they would refrain from doing so, and would destroy only such buildings as were necessary to make room for the troops. The city would pay a fine; and anyone proved guilty of the attack on the Embassy would be punished. After reading the proclamation Roberts dismissed the people, then told the Amir's ministers that he intended to take them

prisoner, pending investigations. The following day, he says: 'I made a formal entry into the city, traversing all its main streets, that the people might understand that it and they were at our mercy. . . . I hoped the martial and workmanlike appearance of the troops would have a salutary effect.'

It may have done, but the people certainly weren't cowed; and on the 16th October the powder magazine in the Bala Hissar, all 250 tons of it, was blown up.

Soon afterwards Roberts received a message from Lytton that, on the recommendation of the Commander-in-Chief, he was to be given the rank of lieutenant-general and placed in command of all the troops in eastern Afghanistan. One of his first actions in this appointment was to dispatch Yakub Khan to India.

Winter was coming on, and Roberts had to begin energetic measures to house his troops and protect them from the intense cold; the fate of Elphinstone's army was clear before him, and he had no intention of letting history repeat itself. Sher Ali had built some defensible barracks at Sherpur, under the Bemaru Heights, to the north of the city, and these were put into habitable condition. Also, food stocks were brought in from the surrounding villages; supplies had not yet arrived from India, and no one could be certain when they would do.

A year previously Lytton had said that Afghanistan needs 'a strong independent ruler' who would work with the British; but the only man available was Yakub Khan, and now even he had gone. It was hoped that in due course, through consultation with the sirdars, a successor could be found, but no one was optimistic. Any Afghan willing to rule as Britain's puppet would be slaughtered the moment the army left, just as Shah Shuja had been.

Meanwhile Roberts did his best. The Mayor of Kabul, who, so it was learned, had paraded in triumph through the streets with Cavagnari's head, was executed, as were two other officials and fifty of the mutinous troops. But this solved nothing; and in December Roberts learned that the tribes were riding under Mohammed Jan of Wardak, and left Kabul on the 8th December to give battle. His initial plan was to use Macpherson and Baker with their brigades in a pincer movement, but so great was the size of the enemy's forces discovered in the valleys, that this was thrown out of joint. On the 11th Macpherson took a route other than that

ordered, and nearly brought on disaster. Brigadier-General Massy, with a much smaller column, met the main brunt of the attack, and only Roberts himself saved the day. He records:

'I galloped across the Chardeh valley as fast as my horse would carry me, and on gaining the open ground beyond Bhagwana, an extraordinary spectacle was presented to my view. An unbroken line, extending for about two miles, and formed of not less than ... 10,000 men, was moving rapidly towards me, all on foot save a small body of Cavalry on their left flank—in fact, the greater part of Mohammed Jan's army. To meet this formidable array, instead of Macpherson and Massy's forces, which I hoped I should have found combined, there were but four guns, 198 men of the 9th Lancers, 40 of the 14th Bengal Lancers, and at some little distance Gough's troop of the 9th Lancers, who were engaged in watching the enemy's cavalry.'

Roberts' first action was to secure his line of retreat, via the gorge at Deh-i-Mazang, then he sent a message to Macpherson, ordering him to push on with all speed. But the situation was desperate, and, as Roberts admitted, 'If Mohammed Jan could close with and overwhelm our small force, Kabul would be his.' To begin with, it looked as if he would succeed, and a message came in from Massy warning 'that the enemy were close upon him, and that he could not keep them in check'. Roberts' reply was that he should pull back his guns, covering their movement by a cavalry charge. The order was carried out across difficult ground, intersected by nulas, and against overwhelming odds, and inevitably it failed. In desperation Roberts ordered two of the guns to halt and keep firing till the last possible moment; but one of these got bogged down, and had to be spiked and abandoned. The column was now scrambling back in disorder into the village of Bhagwana, the inhabitants of which began firing from the roofs of their houses. Roberts was even attacked by the headman, and was only saved by Mazr Ali, a soldier in the 1st Bengal Cavalry, who happened to be on the spot, having had his horse shot from under him. This experience had happened to a good many of the cavalry, who came lumbering back awkwardly in their long boots, their swords dangling between their legs. Ian Hamilton, later to command an army at Gallipoli, was an A.D.C. to Massy in this action, and found himself detailed to lead a charge by a troop of the 5th Punjab Cavalry. Of this action, he wrote:

'Nearer, nearer, every stride nearer! Those dust clouds of the Chardeh Valley, flecked here and there with a flicker of moving colours, the foot-hills speckled with puffs of white smoke. Wonderful! A big jump and I nearly fall off. My horse has leaped over a dead tribesman. Then in the thick of it. Afghans in little knots, or else lying on their backs whirling their big knives to cut off the legs of our horses, a hell of a scrimmage in fact, until the sowars got to work in couples, one with sword up-lifted, the other pulling his carbine out of the bucket and making the enemy spring to their feet and be cut down or be shot as they lay. Dust, shouts, shots, clash of steel . . . only a nameless little skirmish and yet it is a favourite picture amongst the many that come back to me in my dreams.'

The chaotic affair in the Chardeh valley was to change Hamilton's whole career, as it brought him into contact with Roberts for the first time and led to accelerated promotion.

Mercifully, the Afghans imagined that Bhagwana was defended by infantry, so delayed their attack for a few minutes, giving Roberts time to reorganise his cavalry and make a planned withdrawal. Then, fortunately, Macpherson turned up, and his advance guard began pressing on the Afghans' rear. Magically the picture changed; the 72nd Highlanders ran into the village, and began pouring their fire into the massed Afghans from the cover of walls and houses. Eventually, as Macpherson's infantry increased their pressure, the Afghans turned and fled. Kabul was saved; and when Roberts got back to his headquarters there, he found that the streets were quiet.

During the 12th and 13th there was more fighting, and on the 15th Baker took on a great mass of 20,000 tribesmen in an effort to clear the Asmai Heights. Macpherson meanwhile signalled from his headquarters: 'The crowds of Afghans in the Chardeh valley remind me of Epsom on Derby Day.' Up to now, Roberts' plan had been to keep the Afghan forces from concentrating and try to deal with them piecemeal. But now this was obviously hopeless. Having received Macpherson's signal on the heliograph, he says: 'This decided me; I determined to withdraw from all isolated positions, and concentrate my force at Sherpur, thereby securing the safety of the cantonment and avoiding what had now become a useless sacrifice of life.' As he realised, with 6,500 men he was facing

100,000 Afghans. The parallel with 1842 was becoming uncomfortably close.

In the days that followed it became even closer. As the outlying detachments retired, the Afghans pressed on triumphantly, and on the night of the 15th occupied the city of Kabul and the Bala Hissar. Roberts and his men were isolated in their cantonments at Sherpur. On the 17th and 18th the Afghans, with Mohammed Jan at their head, put in an attack, though without pressing it home; then Jan—with memories of Elphinstone and 1842—offered Roberts a safe conduct to India. Roberts ignored him. His first action, once the gates of the cantonment had been closed, was to telegraph Lord Lytton that there was no danger to the troops, as he had supplies for his men amounting to four weeks, and for his horses amounting to six weeks. There was also an abundance of firewood and medical supplies, and enough ammunition. Roberts still hoped that he would be able to restore the situation without more troops, but asked that, if this proved impossible, reinforcements should be sent from India. To help with his immediate situation, he ordered Brigadier-General Charles Gough to advance on Kabul from Gandamak.

Though his position was far from comfortable, Roberts must have congratulated himself that, during his first days in Kabul, he had given so much thought to the strengthening of Sherpur as a defensive position. Towers and artillery emplacements had been built, trenches dug, and the sections of wall left unfinished by Sher Ali raised up with logs and protected by wire entanglements. Though the enemy shells fell inside the perimeter, they did little damage, and all supplies were well protected.

The weather, however, was unfriendly, and for four days, as the clouds hung overhead, Roberts was unable to signal to the communication post at Lataband. However, on the 18th there was a burst of sunshine, and a signal came through saying that Gough had only reached Jagdalak, twenty-one miles from Gandamak, and did not consider his force big enough for an advance on Kabul. The whole country was up, he added. Enraged by this refusal, and considering Gough's force of 1,381 quite capable of moving, Roberts sent him a strongly worded order; and later on, news came back that he was on the move.

Meanwhile on the 22nd the Afghans could be seen moving out of Kabul in large numbers, and making for the forts to the east of

Sherpur, which they were soon occupying. The troops lining the perimeter now began steeling themselves for the decisive attack; but fortunately Roberts was in possession of Mohammed Jan's plan which had been brought in by spies early that morning. It was that scaling parties were to make a demonstration against the cantonment's southern and western faces, but that the real attack would come against the gap in the eastern wall. The signal for the attack was to be a beacon on the Asmai hills, lit by the rebel mayor of Kabul, Mushk-i-Alam.

An hour before dawn the troops got silently under arms, and, according to Colonel Hanna: 'In strained expectation, confident of ultimate victory, yet conscious that a life-and-death struggle lay before him, every man's eyes were turned towards the east, watching for the predicted signal; yet when it came, so dazzling was the light . . . that for an instant, men's hearts stood still with astonishment and awe.' The light lasted for three minutes, after which the scaling parties advanced for their dummy attack, and there was musketry fire along the walls. Then the gunners began throwing star shells into the dense masses of the enemy who were now pouring across the plain. 'Allah il allah!' Shrieking at the tops of their voices, wave after wave hurled themselves at the cantonment defences. Those who were not hit by the hail of bullets found their bare hands sliding off the brickwork, and none was able even to begin the climb. The night turned to dawn, then the sun came up, but still hour after hour the great hordes of tribesmen pressed on. At 9 a.m. some of them managed to gain a firm lodgement in the village of Bemaru, which lay dangerously near the eastern end of the Heights, and Hugh Gough signalled headquarters for reinforcements. Unfortunately, however, every available man was already engaged, as the enemy were now making frantic attempts to escalade the southern wall. Later on, troops were sent but not in sufficient numbers to regain the village. At 10 a.m. there was a slight lull in the assaults round the perimeter, and when they were renewed an hour later, some of the tribesmen's determination seemed to have evaporated. Roberts therefore began laying on a flanking attack into the village, but luckily it proved unnecessary. The Afghans had had enough, and were soon streaming back in disorder. Roberts at once launched the cavalry to cut them up on the plain and block the lines of retreat. 'That night', says Colonel Hanna, 'every man in Sherpur

knew that the siege was at an end. . . . The tribes had staked their all on one cast and lost. . . .' Roberts estimated that no less than 3,000 Afghans lay dead on the field.

The position in January 1880 was that the military problems had been solved, but the political problems were no nearer solution than they had been before Lytton gave the orders for the advance in November 1878. As Roberts put it: 'What was to be done with Afghanistan now we had got it?' And, even more important, where was a new ruler to be found? Roberts' view was that in the absence of any candidate comparable in stature to Dost Mohammed the country should be carved up; Kandahar should become a separate state under British protection, and Herat should be offered to Persia. On the 7th January Lytton sent a proposal on these lines to the Secretary of State, commenting that they were very much in accord with the object he had at heart—the safety of the Indian Empire and the tranquillity of the North-West Frontier. Lytton was now anxious that matters should be pressed on with all speed: private letters were reaching him from England that Disraeli's Government might well slip from power; and the General Election, if it came, would be fought on the Afghan issue. But even if Afghanistan were to be dismembered it still needed a ruler of some kind. The only name occurring to Roberts was Abdur Rahman, son of the Amir Afzal Khan, who for years had been exiled in Russian Turkestan. Unfortunately, he had no means of making contact, but then in February a message arrived from Sir Donald Stewart to say that Abdur's mother was living in Kandahar, and she had heard from him. Before Roberts could make contact, however, Lepel Griffin arrived in Kabul, as chief of the political staff, with urgent instructions from Lytton that Abdur Rahman should be placed on the throne as soon as possible. This, Lytton added, was the only course to save the country from anarchy.

So the offer was made to Abdur Rahman. His reaction was favourable, as was that of the Russians, the latter reasoning that as the new Amir had enjoyed their hospitality for thirteen years, he would consider their interests before those of the British, who had twice invaded his country. In February Roberts learned that Abdur had crossed the river Oxus at Rustak, and that the local chiefs were

all rallying to his support. On the 1st April Lepel Griffin wrote him: 'It has become known that you have entered Afghanistan, and consequently this letter is sent to you by a confidential messenger in order that you may submit . . . any representations that you may desire to make to the British Government with regard to your object in entering Afghanistan.' The messenger was ordered to supplement this message verbally, indicating that Abdur Rahman's long association with the Russians did not prejudice him in British eyes; on the other hand, the letter wished him well, and hoped that in his own interests he would enter into correspondence.

When Abdur Rahman consulted the chiefs with him they advised him to send a strong threatening letter; but very wisely wrote of the disgrace brought to Afghanistan by the folly of Yakub Khan, and the necessity for his country to dwell at peace between the great empires of Russia and Britain. After this promising opening, however, things hung fire for some months; Abdur Rahman wanted his country complete, Kandahar and Herat included, and reasoned that a waiting game would pay dividends. On the 30th April Lepel Griffin was still begging him to come to Kabul, and Abdur was still asking for some indication of the British terms. By now General Stewart had marched from Kandahar with his army, and, as he was senior to Roberts, had taken command of all the troops in northern Afghanistan. This move coincided with another major development in the drama: on the 28th April Disraeli's Government fell, and Gladstone and the Liberals came to power. Lord Cranbrook was replaced as Secretary of State for India by the Marquess of Hartington; and Lord Lytton resigned.

Though he put a bold face on things, the Forward Policy and the general situation in Afghanistan had already blown up in his face. His cherished dream, outlined in the eloquent dispatch of August 1877 in which he spoke of maintaining the North-West Frontier on the Hindu Kush, was now reduced to ashes. The costs of even a temporary occupation of Afghanistan were spiralling fantastically, and, like Lord Auckland thirty-six years earlier, he longed for any excuse to get out of the place. Roberts' suggestion that the country should be dismembered and Abdur Rahman invited to rule seemed the only solution likely to preserve him from a major disaster, and he clutched at it eagerly. He even persuaded himself that the occupation of Kandahar would still preserve the essential

basis of the 'Forward Policy'; and this notion he clung to, even though it had become perfectly obvious that *unless Kandahar were abandoned* Abdur Rahman would not even come to Kabul and talk.

Abdur Rahman at this time was about forty, a man of middle height, and rather stout, and Europeans meeting him found his brain active and his manners courteous. His conversation was lively, and his comments were shrewd. He was utterly ruthless; later on, when a mullah reviled him as a kafir, or unbeliever, he pursued him to a shrine and killed him with the sword, declaring that such an impious dog should not pollute the world. When 400 of his sepoys mutinied he had no hesitation in having their eyes put out; the official blinder, in fact, became an important official at his court. Thieves and highwaymen had their hands cut off. But Abdur Rahman was not merely an Asian despot; he greatly appreciated the benefits of Western medicine, technical skill, and civil engineering. Though no one could foresee it at this stage, he was to prove a very successful ruler.

Lord Hartington, on his appointment in May, soon cut to the heart of the situation. In his first dispatch he wrote that 'as a result of two successful campaigns, of the employment of an enormous force, and of the expenditure of large sums of money, all that has yet been accomplished has been the disintegration of the State which it was desired to see strong, friendly and independent. . . .' The ironical repetition of Lytton's phrase leaves no doubt as to what Hartington thought of him.

Events now moved swiftly. On the 14th June Lepel Griffin gave Abdur Rahman the assurance he needed: that since Russia and Persia had disclaimed any intention of interfering with Afghan affairs, Kandahar would be relinquished by the British. This latter procured the desired effect, and (though all the generals doubted Abdur's good faith) he arrived at Charikar, north of Kabul, on the 20th July. Roberts at once summoned a Durbar of chiefs and he was proclaimed Amir on the 30th July.

But though assurances and goodwill abounded at Kabul, the British were still not out of the wood. In May Sher Ali (a relative of the dead Amir) had been installed as Wali (that is, ruler) of Kandahar, in the presence of the British garrison, and the political representative, Colonel St. John. Speeches were exchanged, and a sword of honour

was buckled round the Wali's waist in the best Sandhurst tradition. This moved him to such an extent that he was heard to exclaim that 'I trust I may have an opportunity of showing my readiness to draw it in the cause of the British Government.' In July Ayub Khan (a son of the late Amir, Sher Ali) moved south from Herat, crossed the Helmand river, and advanced on Kandahar with an army of fierce Durrani, tribesmen of Zamindawar. When the Wali's own forces deserted to him the situation became serious, and Brigadier-General Burrowes was dispatched from Kandahar with a brigade group, to bring Ayub Khan to book. To his horror, Burrowes discovered that the enemy now totalled some 25,000 men and was therefore over seven times the size of his own forces. However, there was no escaping action and a battle was fought at Maiwand. Burrowes was decisively defeated, losing a thousand men killed, apart from the wounded. 'This lamentable story . . .' says Roberts, 'almost took my breath away.' How it would affect relations with Abdur Rahman it was impossible to tell; and the indications were that when the news reached the tribes on the Frontier they would cause trouble in the passes.

What could be done to retrieve the situation? The Indian Government signalled Stewart that it favoured sending a force from Quetta to restore the situation, being loth to weaken the army at Kabul. But, as Stewart and Roberts were in discussion, reports arrived that the forces in Baluchistan were too weak. Realising instinctively that only he could do the job, Roberts sent a telegram to the Viceroy, via the Commander-in-Chief India. A thoroughly efficient force was ready and willing to start from Kabul, he said, and urged that it should be sent immediately. This telegram was sent on the very day that Abdur Rahman was proclaimed Amir, and before negotiations had been finally concluded with him. Action had to be taken swiftly, as rumour would inevitably magnify the size of the British defeat, and might even bring on yet another general rising. Already that evening Roberts had noticed the crowds of armed tribesmen congregating excitedly in the Kabul bazaar.

Fortunately, the new Viceroy, Lord Ripon, did not delay his decision, and on the morning of the 3rd August his telegram arrived, authorising the dispatch of a force to Kandahar and directing that Roberts should command it. Stewart, as the senior general, could, of course, have led the column himself, but with a gesture

of great generosity he gave the chance to Roberts. The operation was not the most difficult or dangerous that he had conducted, but it was certainly the most important, and likely to catch the public eye. People in England and India were heartily sick of the Afghan imbroglio; they wanted matters settled quickly and decisively, and the man who could do this would obviously become the hero of the hour. Roberts' position was therefore perfectly clear: he had to reach Kandahar before it fell, then defeat Ayub Khan and his fanatical Durranis in battle. No half-measures would serve.

Quickly he set about organising his relief column, intending to form it round the troops which had originally accompanied him from India. Three Indian regiments, however, thought they had served long enough and were anxious to get home. These were replaced, and the final composition of the force became:

The Cavalry Brigade under Brigadier-General Sir Hugh Gough.
An Infantry Division under Major-General J. Ross, comprising:

- 1st Infantry Brigade, under Brigadier-General Macpherson
  - 92nd Highlanders (Gordons)
  - 23rd Pioneers
  - 24th Punjab Infantry
  - 2nd Gurkhas
- 2nd Infantry Brigade, under Brigadier-General Baker
  - 72nd Highlanders (Seaforth)
  - 2nd Sikhs
  - 3rd Sikhs
  - 5th Gurkhas
- 3rd Infantry Brigade, under Brigadier-General McGregor
  - 60th Rifles
  - 15th Sikhs
  - 4th Gurkhas
  - 25th Punjab Infantry

With the detachments of Royal Engineers and the Royal Artillery (eighteen guns) this gave Roberts a total of 9,987 officers and men, and 7,820 followers. His baggage was to be carried by 2,800 ponies, 4,500 mules, and 950 donkeys.

Fortunately, under Stewart's orders the loading and unloading of the baggage animals (a process which can take an unconscionable time) had been practised for some weeks. Also, Stewart was able to give Roberts the benefit of his experiences on the Kandahar–Kabul

march two months earlier. The baggage scales were worked out meticulously, each British soldier being allowed thirty pounds, including his kit and camping gear, his greatcoat and his waterproof. Each Indian or Gurkha soldier was allowed twenty pounds; each British officer was allowed a mule for his own kit; and there were to be 'mess mules' at the rate of one per eight officers. No wheeled vehicles of any kind were to be taken, and Roberts had to leave the heavy guns behind, relying solely on the Mountain Artillery, with its 'screw guns', which were taken to pieces for carriage on mules.

On the 11th August Roberts was up and dressed before daybreak and, just as he was leaving his tent, a messenger rode up with a telegram. It had been posted by his wife in a small Somerset village and congratulated him on his command and wished him God speed. Having read the telegram and slipped it in his pocket, he mounted his charger and rode off towards the waiting troops. The order was given to march, and the great adventure of his career began.

The route through the Logar valley had been chosen because, despite its greater length, the going was easier and supplies were plentiful. Roberts resisted the temptation, however, to push his men and animals too hard, and in the first four days they covered the moderate distance of forty-six miles. What limited his rate of march, apart from exhaustion and the terrain, was that every day food had to be drawn from the surrounding countryside and distributed to the men. The daily routine for the march, designed to use the day as efficiently as possible, was as follows: 2.45 the bugles sounded the 'rouse'. By 4 a.m. tents had to be struck, baggage loaded, and the troops paraded ready to march. The cavalry usually kept about five miles ahead, and after them came two brigades of infantry, each with a Mountain Battery. After them came the field hospitals, the engineer parks, and the baggage. Then came the rearguard, consisting of a brigade, supported by two troops of cavalry and the third Mountain Battery. Every hour there was a halt of ten minutes, and at eight o'clock there was a twenty-minute break for breakfast. During this Roberts used to fall fast asleep, awakening himself the moment it was time to go on.

One of the duties of the rearguard was to make sure that none of the followers lagged behind, as the column was shadowed by parties of Afghans ready to loot at the first opportunity. As the days wore on this duty grew steadily harder, as the wretched followers became

exhausted and their feet a mass of blisters. Some of them hid themselves in ravines, preferring death at the hands of the Afghans to further marching.

The climate was trying in the extreme. At night it was freezing and at noon the thermometer soared to 110 degrees. There were dust-storms, and even when they had died down the dust raised by the column was almost suffocating. Water was short, and had to be rationed. Each night Roberts had health reports brought to him from every unit.

On the 12th the column crossed the Zamburak Kotal at 8,100 feet. On the 15th it reached Ghazni, ninety-eight miles from Kabul. Yarghati . . . Ahmedkhel . . . Chardeh . . . the march went on. At Chardeh a messenger arrived from Kandahar, informing Roberts that the town was closely invested but had supplies for two months. On the 23rd Kalat-i-Ghilzai was reached. There was a garrison here, commanded by Colonel Tanner, who had received more news from Kandahar and told Roberts that there was no danger of its falling yet. Roberts therefore decided to rest his column for a day—to the great relief of men and animals. They had now marched 225 miles across mountain and desert, and the strain was beginning to tell. Many of the followers were in the last stages of exhaustion, and some hundreds lay dead on the track behind.

Roberts dispatched several messages to the Government of India, and to General Phayre, at Quetta, whom he hoped would be marching north to join him at Kandahar; but none got through, and, having no line of communications, he was entirely cut off from the world. This, more than anything, was what caught the imagination of the British public. Here was a swiftly moving, lightly armed column, moving towards one of the crucial battles of the British Empire. Would it survive the journey? Would great hordes of Afghans swoop down and destroy it to a man, like the Ghilzais had destroyed Elphinstone's army? Would it die of thirst or hunger? Would it arrive at its destination too weak and exhausted to fight? The whole country was consumed with anxiety, with curiosity. Funnily enough, General Stewart's march from Kandahar to Kabul had gone almost unnoticed, though in some ways it was more perilous, and some major battles had been fought en route. But the phrase 'Kabul to Kandahar' tripped off the tongue . . . it was resonant with romance, with mystery. It plucked the heart-strings

of millions who did not know where Afghanistan was or what the British were doing there.

It was at Kalat-i-Ghilzai on the 23rd August that Roberts sent off the first message to reach its destination. In it he assured the Government that all was well. 'We have met with no opposition during the march, and have been able to make satisfactory arrangements for supplies, especially forage. . . . The Cavalry horses and Artillery mules are in excellent order. . . .'

On the 25th the column covered the seventeen miles to Jaldak, and pitched camp close to the river, on ground intersected by nalas, all filled with the skeletons of the camels that had perished in Stewart's advance. On the 26th another seventeen miles were covered, and Roberts arrived at Tirandaz, where he received a message from General Primrose, the commander at Kandahar. This gave the news that two days earlier Ayub Khan had raised the siege, and was now entrenching himself at Mazra, a place beyond the Baba Wali Kotal, in the Arghandab valley.

On the morning of the 27th Roberts awoke to find himself suffering from an attack of fever. The heat during the last few days and the long exposure to the sun had proved too much for him, and now he had to continue the march in a dhoolie, which, as he remarks, was 'a most ignominious mode of conveyance for a general on service; but there was no help for it; I could not sit on a horse'.

However, Roberts did not lose his grip on the situation, and kept well in mind the fact that he must vary his own movements to those of the enemy. So, from the dhoolie, he gave orders to Hugh Gough that he was to make a forced march of thirty-four miles to Robat, contact General Primrose by heliograph, and obtain up-to-date information. Detailing the 3rd Bengal and the 3rd Punjab Cavalry, Gough spurred ahead, taking with him Lieutenant-Colonel E. F. Chapman, Robert's chief of staff. They reached Robat soon after midday on the 28th, and, choosing a suitable position, began flashing the heliograph. Soon their signals were picked up by the garrison at Kandahar, and a message was flashed back from Primrose. The Afghans, he said, were still in the position they had taken up on the 25th; there was no sign of their intending to advance against Roberts or loop past him, towards Ghazni.

Receiving this intelligence, Roberts abandoned a plan he had

worked out for heading off Ayub Khan's forces and pushed directly ahead to Robat with the main body. By now the sick and footsore had swollen to large numbers, and some hundreds had been left behind at Khel-i-Ahmud. One of the chief complaints was diarrhoea, and an officer wrote at this time that this, 'added to poor food, reduced the men so that I do not think the Force could have reached much further than it did'. On the 29th, because of the sickness in the column, and to give time to the rearguard to catch up, Roberts halted for a day. The time was not wasted, however, as the cavalry pushed out patrols, and parties foraged the surrounding countryside. Hugh Gough and his men came across a herd of 3,000 sheep, which he immediately took charge of. Later he said: 'I shall not readily forget the baaing and bleating that nearly maddened us, or the hullabaloo of the owners who followed the sheep! We just paid the price and regaled ourselves on muttons and melons!'

Other and more momentous events happened on the 29th also. A letter arrived from General Phayre, saying that he had only just reached the Khojak Pass, fifty miles north of Quetta, and there was therefore no hope of his joining Roberts before the battle. There was also a letter from Ayub Khan stating that the battle at Maiwand had been forced on him. 'Early in the morning, when my troops were marching to Maiwand, the English army came and began to fight. What was preordained came to pass. I have given you the particulars and this is the real truth.' He also asked Roberts to tell him in a friendly way what was his best course to pursue in order that 'affairs might be settled in an amicable manner'. To this Roberts replied: 'I can only recommend you to send in the prisoners in your power to Kandahar, and submit yourself unconditionally to the British Government.'

Though he was only twenty miles from Kandahar, Roberts ordered that the distance should be covered in two marches, so that the men should arrive as fresh as possible. He also suspected that Ayub Khan, on receipt of the reply he had sent, might retire to Herat, in which case the column would be faced with another long journey. So on the 30th the column moved on to Mohmand, and Roberts sent a message to Simla declaring that 'Should I hear that Ayub Khan contemplates flight, I shall attack without delay. If, on the contrary, he intends to resist, I shall take my own time. The country he is occupying is extremely difficult, and each separate

advance will require careful study. . . .' The next day, the 31st, the column marched into Kandahar at 8.30 a.m. having covered the 313 miles of the journey in twenty-one days.

The scene was more chaotic than triumphant. Roberts was unable to ride the whole ten miles, but struggled out of his dhoolie and mounted his horse in time to meet General Primrose, General Burrowes and General Nuttall, who had ridden out to greet him. Roberts records that 'the whole garrison turned out and gave us a hearty welcome; officers and men, Native and British, crowded around us, loud in their expressions of gratitude for our having come so quickly to their assistance'. Primrose had undertaken to provide breakfast for the troops and grain and water for the animals, outside the Shikapur Gate, but the arrangements broke down, and, according to Colonel McGregor, 'a scene of the most indescribable confusion' developed, 'as all the baggage had cut in and surrounded the troops'. Before things could be sorted out, 'the sick were slowly driven in by the Baluchi Regiment. . . . They certainly numbered five hundred wretched creatures and cripples, mounted on refuse transport, or in dandies or dhoolies. . . .' The total number of sick, according to the Deputy Surgeon General, amounted to no less than a thousand.

If the relief column was in no great shape the garrison seemed much worse, and, in fact, Roberts was furious at their demoralised condition. 'They seemed to consider themselves hopelessly defeated', he wrote, 'and were utterly despondent; they never even hoisted the Union Jack until the relieving force was close at hand.' When he explored the walls of Kandahar and found them then thirty feet high and fifteen thick he was even more incensed. 'For British soldiers to have contemplated the possibility of Kandahar being taken by an Afghan army showed what a miserable state of depression and demoralisation they were in.'

After a short rest Roberts ordered two brigades to take up a position west of the city, and by 10 a.m. the move was completed. Through his glasses he had seen large numbers of the enemy on the Kotal, and constructing trenches along the crest of the ridge on either side. The ridge of hills, which the Kotal divided, ran in a straight line from north-east to south-west, the nearest point at the Kotal being about two miles north-west of Kandahar. It did not take Roberts long to decide that a frontal attack on the Kotal would be too costly, and the best hope was to put in a left flanking movement.

At 1 p.m. he launched Gough and the cavalry into a reconnaissance in force, and, from the information brought back, became convinced that the Afghan position could be turned. He therefore laid on his battle for the following day, ordering that breakfast should be taken at 7 a.m., and brigades should be in their positions by 8 a.m. The critical moment of Roberts' career was now at hand, but he was confident and ready for it. Despite his fever he slept soundly.

He was up early next morning, and by 6 a.m. was giving out orders to his subordinate commanders. His plan, briefly, was to threaten a frontal attack on the Kotal, then put in a close flanking movement round the end of the hills, while the cavalry carried out a wide sweeping movement to cut off Ayub Khan's retreat. Before the main action could be joined, however, two villages which the Afghans had fortified between the hills and the walls of Kandahar, Gundigan and Gundi Mullah, had to be dealt with. From an early hour fire was pouring from these strong-points, and Roberts began wondering if the Afghans might launch an attack from them. It didn't come, however, and at 9 a.m. his artillery opened fire on the Kotal. After a stiff fight the Gurkhas cleared the village of Gundi Mullah, while Baker, with his 2nd Brigade, threaded 'its way through walled and loop-holed enclosures, and the narrow lanes of Gundigan'. The fighting was desperate here, the bayonet charges of the 72nd Highlanders and the 2nd Sikhs alternating with the wild dashes of the Afghan swordsmen. However, though they lost their commander, Colonel Brownlow, the Highlanders went on, and the Afghans went streaming back over the plain towards the Kotal. Having slipped through this, they joined their comrades in an entrenched position on the far side, which faced south-west, and protected Ayub Khan's camp. This was the position which the brigades carrying out the flanking march would strike in due course. Roberts, seeing there was now no chance of a counter-attack, ordered MacGregor with the 3rd Brigade to join the two brigades already on the march, then rode forward to lead the assault himself. Once Ayub Khan appreciated what he was up to, he switched his guns (which had been covering the Kotal) to meet the assault, and then the guns from his camp in the rear of the entrenchments opened up in support. By the time Roberts arrived in a forward position, his mountain guns were in action, and the 92nd Highlanders were deploying for a charge. Some men from the 2nd Gurkhas were

there too, and this combined force gave a wild cry and headed for the Afghan trenches with the bayonet. The enemy broke, and the Highlanders swept on a mile further to Ayub Khan's camp. Here they—and the rest of the brigades who quickly joined them—found the tents all standing, just as the troops had left them at daybreak. One officer wrote: 'All the rude equipage of a half-barbarous army was left at our mercy—the meat in the cooking-pots, the bread half-kneaded in the earthen vessels, the bazaar with its ghee-pots, dried fruits, flour and corn.' The guns were there, too, all deserted by their crews. Unfortunately, the infantry were too exhausted to pursue any further; and the cavalry were worn out by the great heat and the canals they had encountered en route. As for Ayub Khan and his bodyguard, the only sign of them was a cloud of dust in the direction of the caravan route to Girishk. His losses amounted to 1,200 dead, and his army was irretrievably smashed. Roberts' losses were 40 killed and 228 wounded—very small for such a decisive victory. Of this moment of triumph he writes:

'Utterly exhausted as I was from the hard day's work and the weakening effect of my late illness, the cheers with which I was greeted by the troops as I rode into Ayub Khan's camp and viewed the dead bodies of my gallant soldiers nearly unmanned me and it was with a very big lump in my throat that I managed to say a few words of thanks to each corps. When I returned to Kandahar, and threw myself on the bed in the little room prepared for me, I was dead-beat and quite unequal to the effort of reporting our success to the Queen or to the Viceroy.'

An hour later, however, he managed to pull himself together and composed a message beginning: 'Ayub Khan's army was today defeated and completely dispersed with, I hope, comparatively slight loss on our side. . . .' When this message reached England, Roberts became a national hero. One of the great legends of the British Empire sprang into being.

Roberts' active days on the Frontier were now over, though for the next twenty years he was to be regarded as the leading authority whenever its problems were debated. Where does he rank as a soldier, as a Frontier fighter? In his own day he was idolised, and with Sir Garnet Wolseley towered head and shoulders above any

other soldier of the Victorian era. His modesty, loyalty, complete devotion to duty, and his unobtrusive faith in the Christian religion, appealed to both troops and the public alike. His courage and energy were immense; and when one considers his bandy legs and stunted physique, apart from the fact that he possessed only one good eye (no modern army would have considered him for a moment), his achievements seem little short of miraculous. The number of campaigns, battles, and frontier forays he took part in must run into the hundreds. His constitution was as extraordinary as his powers of survival. There can be no doubt as to the quality of his personality; he impressed himself on most men he met, especially young men. Sir Francis Younghusband, for example, who met him as a young subaltern, records: 'He had that wonderful buoyant way of carrying you along with him and livening you up—making you feel that all things were possible . . . he was a man of intense vitality, interested in things and men—especially men. He had the capacity of endearing himself to the men under his command, and interested himself personally in their careers and affairs.'

Like all successful men, however, he did not lack critics and enemies; he has been accused of being too soft-hearted with the troops, and too ruthless when leading punitive expeditions. He has been accused of sacking subordinates who failed because he gave them stupid orders. (Brigadier-General Massy, whom he sacked after the Chardeh valley affair, was reinstated after the personal intervention of the Duke of Cambridge.) His operation plans have been torn to shreds by strategists; and certainly, it must be admitted, he did take some considerable risks. But, on the other hand, he knew how to take charge of a battle when things were going wrong, and snatch victory from defeat. His gift of popping up at the right moment never deserted him on the long road from subaltern to field-marshal. He was human, like all men, and could hate as well as love. His feud with Wolseley split the Victorian army in two, and ambitious officers were forced to ally themselves to one of the two 'Rings'. Roberts and Wolseley, said Ian Hamilton, could not even 'breathe the same atmosphere'. Compared with military giants like Marlborough, Wellington, or Slim, both of them seem like minnows. Though Roberts could handle a small force, his experience in the Boer War seems to indicate that large-scale command baffled him. He had not learned to delegate. It is senseless, however, to

denigrate him, as some have done, as a mere conqueror of native armies. A soldier is powerless to choose his enemies or his wars and must go where he is sent. It should not be imagined either that fighting native armies in difficult terrain, and with vastly outnumbered forces, is any simple task; some excellent European soldiers have failed when faced with it.

Altogether, Roberts was probably the most distinguished soldier who fought on the North-West Frontier in the nineteenth century. And it would be many years before he was rivalled.

Once more the military problems in Afghanistan appeared to be solved; and it was the turn of the political problems. The war had not halted the Russians nor diminished their threat in any way. It was very doubtful if Abdur Rahman would consider British interests any more favourably than Sher Ali had done. And the Afghan people were bitter in the extreme, as was only to be expected. As a buffer between the great empires of Russia and Britain, Afghanistan was probably less effective than it had ever been.

The key question now was: should the British evacuate Kandahar? Certainly the evacuation had been one of Gladstone's election pledges, but the whole issue of the North-West Frontier and its security was political dynamite, and he could not risk any charge from the Conservatives that he had toyed with it for political ends. So advice was taken on all sides, from both soldiers and politicians. Sir Frederick Roberts was for the retention of Kandahar; so were the Duke of Cambridge, Sir Henry Rawlinson, Lord Lytton and Lord Napier of Magdala. Sir Garnet Wolseley was for evacuation, so were several members on the Council of the Secretary of State for India, also some members of the Viceroy's Council, notably the Hon. Evelyn Baring, later to become Lord Cromer. One of the most able arguments for evacuation came from Wolseley, who wrote: 'To occupy a point so far from our frontier would be a serious financial burden even in times of profound peace, and in times of any great trial its possession would be a white elephant, capable of ruining our Indian Empire by the cost . . . of supporting it. . . .' Against this, the prophet of the 'Forward Policy', Sir Henry Rawlinson thundered: 'If a foreign army ever descends upon the Indian frontier, it will be by way of Herat and Kandahar . . . and not

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through the sterile and difficult passes between Kabul and Peshawar.' So the argument went on, becoming one of the most bitter of the Victorian era. In the Speech from the Throne in January 1881 there was a statement that Her Majesty had been advised to abandon Kandahar; a few days later, however, during a debate in the Lords, Lytton strongly attacked this proposed reversal of his policy. 'If the abandonment of Kandahar is right,' he argued, 'then the Afghan War was wrong.' He did not know what the motives of the Government were now, though he presumed that they did not include the exclusion of foreign influence from Afghanistan. 'But I know what the effect [of evacuation] will be . . . in every native bazaar, at every Indian court, along every Indian frontier, it will display to Her Majesty's subjects . . . the unaccustomed and bewildering spectacle of the most violent and most inexplicable oscillation in the policy of their Rulers.' If the House asked him where he would draw the line, Lytton went on, he could reply without hesitation that he would draw it at Kandahar. If the Government would abandon its policy and hold on to Kandahar, he declared, 'you may look on the permanent security of the North-West Frontier of India as a question practically closed. I will not say for ever . . . but closed . . . for a period of time so long that the present generation need no longer be practically concerned about it.'

This vain and sweeping prophecy was attacked by the Duke of Argyll, who tore Lytton's policy to shreds. A friendly Amir, Sher Ali, had been pushed off the throne, and the weakling, Yakub Khan, installed in his place; and when *he* abdicated, who did Lytton invite? Abdur Rahman—a man who had been a pensioner of the Russians for ten years! Incensed, Lytton interjected, 'He was not invited!' but Argyll swept him aside, remarking that the matter 'turns on a nice distinction between that word and some other word which I do not know'. Lytton had lied and the whole House knew it. Concluding his speech, Argyll exploded the mystique of 'the Scientific Frontier'. 'One year we were told by the late Viceroy that the Scientific Frontier was the triangle of Jalalabad, Kabul and Girishk, on the river Helmand, with a hold over the passes of the Hindu Kush. . . . Then the Scientific Frontier was to consist of isolated positions in the Khyber Pass, the Kurram valley, and in the neighbourhood of Quetta. Further events have happened and the Scientific Frontier has changed again!'

Afghanistan

The controversy raged on till March, but then the Government had its way. The British marched out of Kandahar for the last time in their history, and Abdur Rahman marched in.

But the Frontier was now much changed. Apart from Quetta, in Baluchistan, the British held Pishin, thirty miles to the north. They excluded the Afghans from the Kurram valley (which later on they were to occupy) and they secured a permanent advance into the Khyber Pass. Relations with the tribes in this sensitive area would obviously have to be put on a new basis, and the negotiations through middlemen brought to an end. The man chosen to inaugurate the new regime was Colonel Robert Warburton. He was of mixed blood, his father being a British officer and his mother a niece of Dost Mohammed, whom he had met during the first British occupation of Kabul in 1839. He had a magnificent command of Pushtu, and, quite naturally, a great sympathy with and understanding of the tribes. Soon he was able to open up the Khyber Pass and travel freely through it, under an escort of tribesmen.

For the next ten years there were no more advances, though the tribal problem was no nearer solution, and expedition succeeded expedition.

As for the fear of Russia, which had motivated the Second Afghan War, this grew steadily. Four years later the pressures it generated on the North-West Frontier brought the world to the brink of war.

197

8

THE CLASH AT PANJDEH

Coming events cast their shadows before them, and the shadow of Panjdeh was a long one. It fell initially in June 1879 when the Russian General Lomakin reached Gok Teppe by the Akhal oasis, south-west of Khiva. Here he was set on by large forces of Turkmen, and scuttled back to his base on the Caspian Sea, losing 12,000 camels and most of his baggage in the process. But this reverse—like many others which had preceded it—in no way deterred the Russians, and a new commander, General Skobelev, a hero of the Turkish War, took over. He saw immediately that one could not defeat the Turkmen without an adequate supply system, so began constructing a railway running east from the Caspian port of Krasnovodsk and across the Asian desert. In January 1881 he attacked the Turkmen at Gok Teppe and beat them decisively; the Akhal oasis passed into Russian hands, and the local tribes came in to offer their submission. Now there remained a single oasis between the Russians and the Afghan border: the Merv oasis. And no one had any doubt that this would soon be in their hands also.

The Russian advance had been accelerated by the British advance in the Second Afghan War, it being considered in Moscow that the Hindu Kush would inevitably become the frontier of the British Empire in India, with Herat as its western-most bastion. But just at the precise moment that the Russians finished consolidating their hold on the Akhal oasis, and began considering their advance on Merv, they learned to their astonishment that the British had performed an 'about turn' and were evacuating Kandahar. The need for any violent hurry had disappeared; but preparations for the advance still went on, despite assurances from Moscow to the contrary. Then on the 14th February 1884 the Russian Government announced that the Merv oasis had been annexed, and a request

from the local Turkmen to become subjects of the Tsar had been graciously accepted.

Merv lies only 130 miles from the Afghanistan border; and, to make matters worse, this particular sector was not well defined. While the Turkmen had remained independent, it did not matter that their grazing grounds straddled the Frontier, but now there was a new and explosive situation.

The reaction in Britain to the Russian announcement ranged from the humorous to the fanatical. In a hurriedly arranged debate in the Lords the Duke of Argyll accused the Government of suffering from 'Mervousness'. In the Commons a member declared passionately that Moscow should be told 'in the clearest manner that if they attacked Afghanistan in any way, if they intrigued with the Amir at Kabul, such action would be detrimental to the interests of this country and that it would be a casus belli'. This speech was greeted with laughter; but, as time went on, many people began to wonder if the member wasn't right.

On the diplomatic front the Russians continued to play things smoothly, and, a few days after the debate in the Commons, their Ambassador in London spoke to Lord Granville, the Secretary of State, about 'the great difficulty which both Russian and English statesmen had always acknowledged to exist for a civilised Power to stop short in the extension of its territory where uncivilised tribes were its immediate neighbours'. This was a clear echo of Prince Gorchakov's memorandum of November 1864, already quoted, in which he remarked that 'the greatest difficulty is in knowing where to stop', and pointed to parallel situations in America, India and Algiers. The main Russian thesis, that imperial necessity demanded a stable frontier, could not be gainsaid. Also, it had to be conceded that, while the British had pushed forward into the fertile, heavily populated areas of the Punjab, the Russians had merely been absorbing the rotting khanates of the Central Asian desert, where law and order, or civilisation in any form, was lacking. But that was not the whole story: there were generals in Turkestan who lusted after military conquest, just as Napier had lusted in Sind. There was Skobelev, for example, who was roaring: 'Our position in Turkestan is most formidable, and the apprehensions of the British are not groundless.' Russia had only to fling a column of 15,000 men across the Hindu Kush, he added, and India would rise in rebellion; the

Indian Army would be so absorbed in keeping order that the passes of the North-West Frontier would be left wide open. If we were successful in our enterprise, we should entirely demolish the British Empire in India; and the effect on this in England cannot be calculated. . . . Competent English authorities admit that an overthrow on the frontiers of India might even produce a social revolution in England. . . . In a word, the downfall of the British supremacy in India would be the beginning of the downfall of England.' Some time later he declared: 'The stronger Russia is in Central Asia, the weaker England is in India and the more conciliatory she will be in Europe.' Unlike his previous pronouncement, this was undoubtedly true, and the British Government knew it. No diplomatic smooth talk, not even the agreement regarding the Afghanistan boundaries, reached in 1873, could blind them to reality; to the fact that the jousting with Russia in Central Asia, 'the Great Game' as it was called in the press, was fast reaching its climax.

Faced with this desperate situation, the British Government hurriedly suggested to the Russians that each side should send out a Border Commission to meet on the spot, with full powers to delimit a mutually acceptable frontier line. This, it considered, should take into account the legitimate rights of the Amir, Abdur Rahman, and ensure that 'no obligations are imposed on [him] that he would be unwilling to assume or could not in practice adequately fulfil'. But the Russians did not care a fig about the Amir or his rights: what they demanded was that their outposts should be stretched across the desert from Merv, as near as they could get them to Herat. They were also determined that all the Turkmen, even the Sariks of Panjdeh, should come under their sway. And Panjdeh, it should be mentioned, lies only thirty miles from the Afghan Frontier.

In an atmosphere of increasing strain and vituperation the respective Commissioners were appointed: General Peter Lumsden for the British, and General Zelenoi for the Russians. In the summer of 1884 Lumsden left London to take up his appointment, but meanwhile—and before he could arrive—land grabbing and minor frictions began to develop. Distrusting the whole idea of a Commission, Abdur Rahman had pushed some troops into Panjdeh, and threatened to send 'a big force'. This infuriated the Russian commander, General Komarov, who began pushing forward his

troops to face the Afghans. When Lumsden arrived in November the situation was somewhat tense; and to his annoyance he found that his opposite number would not arrive till the spring of 1885. This, as Lumsden suspected, was a deliberate ploy, giving Komarov time to manœuvre his troops into a favourable bargaining position. The Russians lost no time, and began pushing forward posts up the east bank of the Hari Rud, and sending patrols south from Merv towards the province of Badghiz, where the slopes of the Paropamisus mountains run down into the sands of the Kara Kum. The sight of these patrols brought the Afghan swords clattering from their scabbards, and Lumsden had a difficult job keeping the two sides apart. In a report to London he gave it as his opinion that Badghiz was Afghan territory, and quoted evidence from the seventh century onwards. As for the Panjdeh oasis, his view was that if it belonged to anyone it was to the Amir, to whom the local Turkmen had paid tribute from time immemorial.

However, in November such observations became strictly academic, for the Russians pushed down the Hari Rud to a place called Pul-i-Khatun, which lay twelve miles from the Afghan outposts in Panjdeh. This action raised the temperature even further; and then a Russian colonel wrote to the Afghan commander, General Ghaus-ud-din, calling him a liar and a coward. Ghaus-ud-din wrote back calling the Colonel a liar, a coward, and a thief. Lumsden reproved these gallant officers for using impolitic language, but the Russian troops still kept edging forward. By March 1885 their action had caused some heated correspondence between London and Moscow, and for a while it looked as if there might be a complete rupture of diplomatic relations. On the 14th March the British Ambassador, Sir Edward Thornton, warned Monsieur de Giers, the Foreign Minister, that a Russian attack on Panjdeh might have the most disastrous consequences. On the 28th March he warned that any approach towards Herat would be equivalent to a declaration of war between Britain and Russia, and would be taken as such by Her Majesty's Government. These warnings produced a pained reply from Monsieur de Giers, who assured Sir Edward Thornton that he had no information whatever of any plan to attack Panjdeh; and as for Herat, there had never been the slightest suggestion that Russia should move against it.

But while de Giers talked, Komarov acted. On the 30th March

his patrols sent back reports that the Afghan forces, which consisted of 900 cavalry, two battalions of infantry, and a few hundred matchlock men, supported by eight guns, had crossed to the debatable left bank of the Kushk river. Komarov immediately ordered them to withdraw, and when the Afghans refused, launched his entire force into the attack. This totalled 4,000 men and eight guns, and its infantry was well armed with breech-loading rifles; the Afghans, however, had only muzzle-loading guns, which were very much affected by the damp weather, and the result did not long remain in doubt. The Afghans found themselves out-fought and out-manœuvred, then, to their horror, saw the Cossacks come charging against them across the plain. Some hundreds of Afghans were cut down, and the rest streamed back across the river in great disorder. The Russians called this border foray the Battle of Murghab, and made the most of their victory. Inevitably they occupied the Panjdeh oasis.

In Moscow the Press was jubliant. One of its leading journals, *Novosti*, urged that Russia should go on and seize Herat, thus obtaining a window to the south-east. From here she could advance towards the Indian Ocean, thus fulfilling her historic destiny. In Britain reaction was just as swift. Gladstone strode down to the House of Commons and asked for a vote of credit for war against Russia. Urgent telegrams went from Westminster to Calcutta, ordering the Government of India to mobilise two army corps. Sir Frederick Roberts, who was put in command, was greatly hampered by the fact that the railway line to Quetta, started in the Second Afghan War, had been discontinued, and his troops had to march towards the Bolan on foot. Thus the line of communications became crowded and chaotic, and, during the months that the Cossacks were expected hourly in the passes, India shivered with apprehension.

In the general anxiety no one seemed to notice that, of all the causes of war there had ever been, Panjdeh was the most unlikely. It was small, remote, inaccessible; it had no strategic or financial value; its few inhabitants were poor, barbarous nomads. All that counted was its geographical location. It was the very last step towards the North-West Frontier that the Russians could take without a world conflict.

For some time it seemed that this conflict must come about; that

absolutely nothing could save it. Hurriedly Sir Peter Lumsden dispatched engineers to Herat, to put its defences in order. Such was the Amir's alarm that he not only consented to this move but welcomed it; and the officers when they arrived were given an enthusiastic reception.

Then, almost before anyone realised it, the position changed. The Russians, while manœuvring into the best possible bargaining position, had no intention of going to war over Panjdeh. And when they saw that the British were now utterly determined they stopped all forward movement. Their ploy now was to consolidate their position, while lowering the international temperature; and they found a new approach to Gladstone's Government met with a civil reply. Quickly a compromise was arrived at, in which the question of which side had violated the agreement not to move from positions held on the 16th March was to be referred to 'the judgment of the head of a friendly state'. Negotiations regarding the general line of the Frontier should then be transferred from Panjdeh to London.

When the news reached Sir Peter Lumsden he was naturally incensed, and wrote angrily to the Secretary of State that his position was now invidious and his valuable time was being wasted. He had only one desire and that was to get away from this arid corner of Central Asia and come home. The Secretary of State agreed, and in due course Lumsden handed over to Colonel West Ridgeway, who sat around idly while the statesmen pored over maps in Whitehall. Eventually it was agreed that the Russians would exchange Zulfiqar on the Hari Rud for Panjdeh, and that the Frontier line would start at the Zulfiqar Pass, which was the most southerly point they had reached. On the 4th May 1885 these terms were sent to Abdur Rahman, who accepted them without argument, and on the 10th September Lord Salisbury (who had now taken over the Foreign Office, after a change of government) signed the protocol, as did Monsieur de Staal, the Russian Ambassador. The immediate crisis was over.

Had Britain sustained a diplomatic defeat? Sir Peter Lumsden thought she had and made no bones about it, and his opinion was shared by many others. But it had to be remembered that her bargaining position was weak; she had no troops on the Hari Rud, while the Russians had. Had they so decided, the Cossacks could

have been in Herat before the Indian Army even reached Kandahar. In Moscow, curiously enough, some of the generals thought that the agreement should have been more favourable towards Russia, and as the tedious business of marking out the Frontier on the ground went ahead, their views had a marked impact.

In September 1886, when it was discovered that the British definition of the frontier opposite Bokhara did not correspond with the line agreed between the Afghans and the Bokharans, the Commission reached a deadlock. In September 1886 it broke up altogether, leaving a gap of about fifty miles, from Dukchi to the Oxus, still not dealt with. The eventual solution was again to remove negotiations from the Frontier, but this time they were resumed in St. Petersburg. Here, after a bout of prolonged haggling, it was agreed in July 1887 that Afghanistan should take the fertile Oxus district in return for some territory near Panjdeh. By now the Russians were cursing themselves for ever making the agreement with Britain in 1873 over territory they had at that time not even seen; suddenly they realised that the Oxus lands were rich and fertile, and would have made a most welcome addition to the Russian Empire. They realised also the strategic importance of the northern glacis of the Hindu Kush. The result was that after the agreement had been made, but before the protocol embodying it had been signed, the Russian generals, no doubt stimulated by Skobelev, tried to sabotage the whole Commission. If only the talks could be broken off, they argued, the forces of General Komarov could swoop down into the rich lands of Balkh and Badakshan in northern Afghanistan. The situation was therefore uglier than it had ever been. Fortunately, however, the Russian Foreign Minister, de Giers, did not want war with Britain and placed the whole matter before the Tsar. The result was that he personally brought the generals to heel, and the protocol was signed on the 22nd July 1887.

Colonel Sir West Ridgeway (as he had now become) did not, however, view the future with any marked optimism. In his final report to the Secretary of State he warned that the Turki-speaking peoples on the northern watershed of the Hindu Kush detested and feared the Afghans, and would exploit any chance to break away. Ridgeway argued that the frontier between Russia and Afghanistan was so fragile, and the pressures on the North-West Frontier were so great, that, whether the British liked it or not, the partition of

Afghanistan was inevitable. For some years pessimism seemed justified, as rumour and counter-rumour swept across Central Asia. In 1888, when Abdur Rahman visited his northern provinces to quell a rebellion, there were alarmist stories that he intended to annex Kerki on the Oxus. When General Komarov went sniffing along the Panjdeh boundary in 1889 the reaction was so great that the British Ambassador in St. Petersburg gave a stern warning to de Giers that British determination had not diminished in any degree: a move towards Herat would still mean war.

The framework of stability in Central Asia had undoubtedly been constructed; and, fragile as it was, it somehow lasted from year to year. But suspicion and mistrust remained on both sides, and in Britain Russophobia grew and found itself a great new prophet.

In this atmosphere of apprehension and unease the importance of the North-West Frontier continued to impress itself on the minds of soldiers and statesmen. The Indian Defence Committee, which had been formed in 1885, got down to the job of looking closely at the Frontier as a defensive line, then began fortifying it. Their basic plan was to create a system which could be held, even if Afghanistan were crushed or went over to the enemy. The principal area of resistance was sited on the Quetta plateau and strong-points were built at Rawalpindi (on the main road between Peshawar and Lahore), with the object of threatening any invader who essayed the well-watered area to the north.

It would be many years before the invader came. But meanwhile things were not inactive along the Frontier, and, in fact, some of the great adventures were already in the wind.

Before passing to them, however, it is necessary to deal briefly with a major event which occurred in 1893. The Amir Abdur Rahman, who had watched the forward moves in the last few years with increasing anxiety, especially the completion of the Khojak tunnel and the occupation of the Kurram, approached the Indian Government for a formal demarcation of the border. His plan, he said, was for a conference to be held at Kabul, and he would like 'two British officers of high position, such as Members of Council' to attend. The Indian Government agreed, proposing the name of Sir Mortimer Durand, the Foreign Secretary, and he headed a mission which arrived in Kabul on the 2nd October. Discussions went on regularly till mid-November, but by this time, so the Amir

noted in his diary, 'The misunderstandings and disputes which were arising about these Frontier matters were put to an end, and after the boundary had been marked out . . . a general peace and harmony reigned which I pray God may continue for ever.' A formal agreement was signed on the 13th November 1893. It delineated the boundary from Chitral to Peshawar, and from there to the junction of Persia, Afghanistan, and Baluchistan. The Amir renounced all claims to Chitral, Bajaur, Swat, Buner, Dir, Chalas, Kurram, and all other areas south-west of the line. From the signing of the treaty a Joint Commission worked for two years, setting up pillars along the thousand miles of the Frontier. The Durand Line has been criticised for having few advantages and many defects: Fraser-Tytler asserts that 'It is illogical from the point of view of ethnography, of strategy, of geography . . . it splits a nation in two . . . it even divides tribes. . . .' It was certainly an ill-defined frontier, and in many cases the boundary pillars were so far apart that it was possible to travel long distances without knowing whether one was in British tribal territory or in Afghanistan. Salients and re-entrants following the curve of the hills made the situation even more difficult; and as the tribesmen knew little about the line anyway, a steady stream of complaints issued from Kabul in the years to come. Nevertheless, despite all its shortcomings, the Durand Line was a remarkable achievement and its importance grew with each year that passed. Today it still holds.

Before finally leaving the Panjdeh affair, and the fear of Russia which it generated, it is worth touching briefly on one major development of this period—the construction of trunk railways. The vast distances of India, the scale of the obstacles to be overcome, and therefore the expense, had delayed the railways till almost half a century after their completion in England, but now it was recognised that something must be done. However, civilian and industrial requirements were firmly subjugated to the defence of the Frontier, the broad strategic plan being that the trunk lines should be designed to move troops rapidly from the three ports of Karachi, Bombay, and Calcutta. Sir G. L. Molesworth had surveyed the Bolan for a railway in 1879, but it was some years before the Indus was even reached. However, in the 1890's the line crept north-west and ran up to Peshawar, and then a lateral line was constructed across the Indus plain. Numerous loops were constructed, too, all uneconomic

in commercial terms, but necessary for the Army in a state of general emergency. In the 1920's a line was begun through the Khyber Pass. But still the main strategic plan was not forgotten and even in 1925 General Molesworth (grandson of Sir G. L. Molesworth), then a staff officer in the Mobilisation and Transportation branch at G.H.Q. Delhi, was called on to provide tables for moving 800,000 men to the Frontier, together with animals and equipment, in thirty days. This plan was still in operation when the Second World War broke out in 1939.

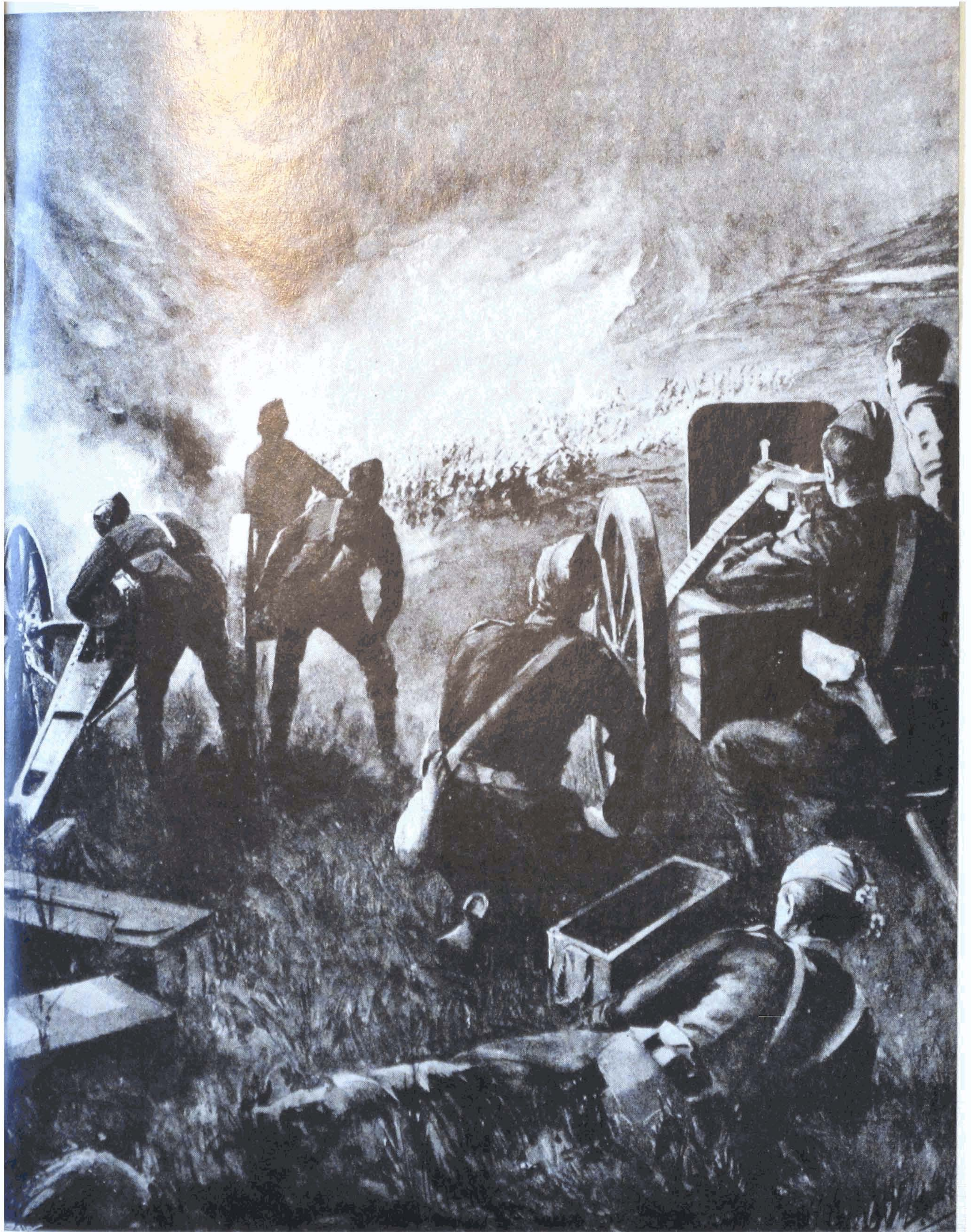
'Since Lord Roberts made his famous march from Kabul to Kandahar the Indian Army has perhaps taken part in no campaign so rapid, brilliant, and successful as the operations which resulted in the relief of the sorely pressed garrison at Chitral. No element was wanting to call forth the keenest instincts of the soldier, or to arouse the anxious interest of those who watched with breathless suspense. . . .' This passage was written by Captain George Younghusband, who took part in the operation, and few would choose to disagree with him. In this adventure there was danger, there were formidable natural obstacles, remote, romantic-sounding, and unexplored territories, and a frantic race against time. If only there had been a blonde, or at least a lady, in the fort the story would have been dramatised and fictionalised ad infinitum. Unfortunately there was not, but it is still worth retelling.

Chitral (the name applies to the state as well as its capital) lies towards the northern end of the Frontier, some 200 miles above Peshawar. It is a big territory, about the size of Wales, hemmed in by mountains running up to 20,000 feet; there are glaciers, fantastic gorges, precipices, icy torrents, and vast acres of arid hills where the ibex and the markhor find a precarious subsistence. In the deep valleys nature is much kinder; here flourish willows and plane trees, and in the spring the almond trees suddenly come into blossom, only a week after the snows have gone. In 1895 Chitral was a primitive country which few Europeans had visited; there were no roads, and wheeled transport was therefore quite useless; all baggage and stores were carried on pack animals. The population was thought to be about 80,000. The Chitralis are a non-Pathan people of mixed races and unknown origin; they may have come from Wakhan and the Pamirs, they may bear the blood of Mongolian invaders. There is

also an Indo-Afghan strain in them; and like the Pathans they are Muslims. Colonel Algernon Durand, who saw them for the first time in 1888, wrote: 'It was impossible not to be taken with the Chitralis. Putting aside their avarice . . . their cruelty and treachery amongst themselves, their nobles were pleasant men to meet, fond of sport, courteous, and hospitable. . . . The people were bright, cheery, impervious to fatigue, splendid mountaineers, fond of laughter and song, devoted to polo and dancing.' Though in India, Chitral lies only forty-seven miles from the great watershed of the Hindu Kush, which divides the waters flowing down to India from those which find their way into the Oxus, and thence to Turkestan and Central Asia. It was therefore at the extreme limit of the territory over which the British held sway; and, when war with Russia seemed imminent in 1885, a mission was dispatched to make contact with the Mehtar, or hereditary ruler, Aman-ul-Mulk.

Relations proceeded smoothly till 1892 when Aman-ul-Mulk died; then his sixteen sons fought each other tooth and nail for the Mehtarship, and a good many of them were murdered. In 1893 one of them, Nizam-ul-Mulk, temporarily won the contest, and was recognised as Mehtar by the British. On the 1st January 1895, however, he was shot dead by the orders of his half-brother, Amir-ul-Mulk, a nineteen-year-old boy whom everyone detested, and chaos returned again. When the British agent in Chitral, Lieutenant Gurdon, delayed recognition of the self-proclaimed Mehtar, while matters were referred to the Government, the latter entered into negotiations with a Pathan called Umra Khan. He was the ruler of a neighbouring state called Jandul, and, seeing his chance, mobilised his force and invaded Chitral.

Faced with this situation, Gurdon sent a message to his superior, Surgeon-Major George Robertson, who was stationed at Gilgit, some 220 miles through the mountains to the east. Robertson left immediately with a military adviser, and, on arrival, contacted Amir-ul-Mulk, who demanded recognition. He also sent Umra Khan an ultimatum, threatening that if he did not leave Chitral the British would help the Chitralis to throw him out. But the situation soon fragmented. Sher Afzul, one of the warring princes, first demanded that Robertson evacuate the fort at Chitral and retire to Mastuj, then went over and joined Umra Khan. On the 28th February all the Chitralis followed suit, and three days later the



Night attack on the Frontier. A war artist's impression of an incident during the Pathan revolt of 1897. The gunners are using star shells for the first time

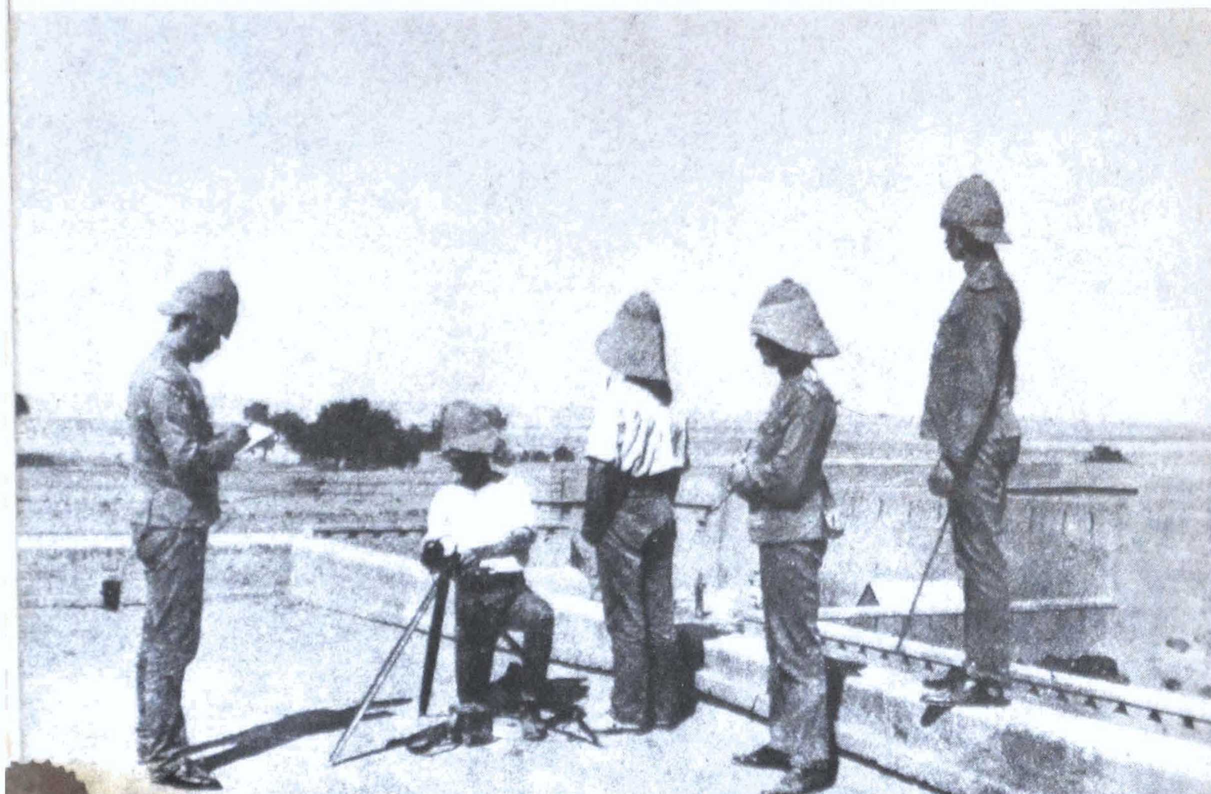
The Russians attack the Afghans on the Khushk river near Panjdeh, 30th March 1885. A war artist's drawing

Saving the guns at Maiwand, 1880. A contemporary painting

Above: Big gate of Fort Jamrud, Gordon Highlanders on guard, 1897

Previous page: Cavalry on the march near Landi Khana during the Third Afghan War, 1919

Below: Heliographing from Hari Singh to Fort Jamrud, 1897



The attack on Peiwar Kotal from the painting by V. M. Hamilton

Over page: Mohmand and Tirah Expedition dictating terms to Orakzais: 12th November 1897

combined force now came swirling towards the fort, which Robertson had now occupied with 400 men. His military adviser, Captain Colin Campbell of the Central India Horse, who had now taken command, decided to make a reconnaissance in force to ascertain the strength of the enemy, and an action was fought round a village, some miles off. This achieved very little for the loss of twenty-three officers and men killed, and thirty-three wounded, including Campbell himself; the survivors had to conduct a difficult retreat back into the fort. The bulk of the men engaged were the Kashmir Infantry, who were horrified at the loss of so many men, and began the siege with no stomach for fighting at all. The garrison was now comprised as follows:

Surgeon-Major Robertson, British Agent.
Captain C. V. F. Townshend, Central India Horse, commandant.
Lieutenant Gurdon, Assistant to Agent.
Lieutenant H. K. Harley, 14th Sikhs.
Surgeon-Captain Whitchurch, 24th Punjab Infantry.
Captain Campbell (who lay badly wounded).
99 men of the 14th Sikhs.
301 men of the Kashmir Infantry.

There were also 11 followers and 27 servants, apart from clerks, messengers, commissariat and transport personnel, and 52 Chitralis, making a total of 543. Supplies—if the whole force went on half-rations—would last about two and a half months. There were also 300 rounds per gun of Martini-Henry ammunition for the Sikhs, and 280 rounds per gun of Snider ammunition for the Kashmiris.

Chitral fort was about eighty yards square, with walls about twenty-five feet high and eight feet thick. At each corner there was a tower, rising twenty feet above the wall. Outside the north face there was a fifth tower to guard the way down to the Chitral river, fifty yards away. On the east face there was a garden which extended for about 140 yards, and some forty yards from the south-east tower there was a summer-house. On the north and west faces there were stables and other outhouses.

The walls were made of stone, but were not bonded by cement or mortar, and it was fortunate that there was a cradlework of wooden

beams, placed longitudinally and transversely, which kept them together.

As Robertson and the garrison soon found, the fort was no ideal place for defence, even if the enemy were without artillery. Round it on all sides were giant trees, from the tops of which snipers could fire down into the interior. This necessitated the construction of bullet-proof barriers behind the men at the fire-slits, and, for this purpose, planks, doors, mule saddles, boxes, and sacks of earth were employed. When materials for cover from fire ran out, tenting, carpets, and curtains were hung up to give cover from view. It was also necessary to construct a covered path down to the river, as there was no well in the fort itself.

The first attack developed on the night of the 7th, and its object proved to be the waterway. The attacking force included several hundreds of Umra Khan's Jandulis, who had spent most of their lives attacking similar forts, and it was invariably their practice to begin with the water supply. Fire was opened from the trees to the north-west of the fort, then a party rushed forward to effect an entry into the water-tower. This they succeeded in doing, then a second party rushed forward with faggots which they set fire to. Meanwhile the garrison brought a heavy fire to bear, the sections firing in volleys, and the attackers were driven off. By now the fire was blazing and the whole tower was in danger, but Townshend had detailed a party with buckets, and when this came into action the flames were brought under control. The garrison were not unsatisfied with themselves.

Though they could not know this, it was on the 7th that news of the revolt reached Peshawar. Here preliminary arrangements were taken, in case an expeditionary force should be required, but such was the confidence among the generals that Robertson and his men would hold out, that it was another seven days before any positive action was taken. This consisted of a final warning to Umra Khan that unless he retired from Chitral the Government of India would compel him to do so.

Meanwhile the siege went on without developing any great vigour at this stage. Townshend's chief worries were fire, and possible defection by the Chitralis. Pickets and patrols were organised all round the clock, and comprehensive sanitary arrangements were made. Parties were also detailed for demolishing buildings outside

the fort to improve the field of fire, for water carrying, and all kinds of maintenance work. Townshend even set a few men to the task of making hand mills to grind the corn. All the time, however, he impressed on his men the fact that in due course relief would come.

The next major attack developed on the night of the 13th when the enemy came in large numbers against the east face of the fort. First there was a call on a bugle, then a good deal of shouting and beating on tom-toms, and finally the assault parties came in, under covering fire from the trees. Robertson relates that 'We threw down a fireball and responded with volleys which reverberated through the fort. Our bugles blew the cease fire at half past eleven, but the rifles rang out again, independently, from time to time until midnight.' When daylight came the motive of the attack became apparent: about 150 yards along the river bank and upstream the enemy had built a sangar—that is a breastwork made of fascines (bundles of green branches) piled on top of each other. On the two nights following, using this sangar as a base, they made two more, much closer to the fort. The obvious tactic in reply was for the garrison to make a sortie and destroy the sangars, but they were too weak in numbers, as only the Sikhs could be completely relied on. Also, there were so few British officers that Townshend didn't want to reduce their numbers still further by casualties. All the garrison could do was keep a sharp look-out for any attacks developing from the sangars.

It may be of interest to add a word about the fireball, which proved so effective on the night of the 13th. Robertson had been engaged on an expedition against the Nagars in 1891 and observed their use of this device. On enquiry he discovered that it was made of chips from a certain kind of pine tree, which contained natural turpentine. So, seeing that large quantities of pine wood were lying about the fort, he set about experimenting. To the chips straw was added, and then the mixture was rolled into a canvas-covered ball, about a foot across. The ball was then soaked in kerosene immediately before use. When the first ball was thrown it brilliantly illuminated the east tower for about half an hour, to the delight of the troops, who were able to pick off their attackers. After this the demand for fireballs remained steady right through the siege.

On the 14th, about 6 p.m., when it was beginning to get dark, a

solitary figure made its way towards the fort under a flag of truce. This proved to be an old woman bringing a message from Sher Afzul, which informed Robertson that if he would go back to Gilgit the writer would make arrangements for his journey. All the troops and their stores would be given a good conduct also. To impress on Robertson the urgency of the matter, the old woman told him that the rebellion against the British was spreading, and even the tribes around Gilgit had risen. Robertson told her there was no reply, and she shuffled away into the darkness.

That night the garrison opened the gates of the fort and drove out some of the animals which could no longer be fed. The tribesmen imagined that a sortie was being launched, so firing broke out on all sides. When two fireballs were tossed over the ramparts, and it became obvious to both sides that neither was moving, things quietened down again.

On the 15th there came yet another letter from Sher Afzul. This assured Robertson that he wanted peace, if only his terms were granted. He also mentioned that he had in his possession a letter from a British officer captured at Mastuj. Robertson thought that this was merely a bluff, but the next day the message was handed over: it came from a Lieutenant Edwardes, who gave the news that an ammunition column under Captain Ross had been ambushed and sustained many casualties. Edwardes was being held with another officer called Fowler.

Robertson was naturally most anxious to get in touch with these officers, but realised that unless he played his cards skilfully both would be shot by the Pathans. He therefore wrote Sher Afzul, intimating that his gesture of handing over the message was accepted as proof of his friendliness, and suggesting that there should be a three-day truce while terms were discussed. Robertson had no intention, of course, of retiring from the fort, and warned Townshend that such a move would mean certain death; the truce was merely a method of buying time to save Edwardes and Fowler.

Though the truce went on for the agreed time, the negotiations conducted between a Chitrali, who was allowed out of the fort, and Sher Afzul, proved completely abortive. Meanwhile, the garrison waited, aware that the weather was daily growing colder, and watching the heavy falls of snow. Robertson writes of this time: 'Often no sound would break the heavy stillness, because . . .

with the exception of the keen-eyed sentries crouching on the towers, all the garrison were asleep or resting. Sometimes this unnatural silence was so oppressive that an outbreak of rifle-fire came as a relief. . . .' During this inaction the troops began to think of their ills, and the numbers with fever and dysentery increased alarmingly. To make matters worse, it was found that the Indian doctor had left most of his medical supplies outside the fort when the gates were shut at the beginning or the siege.

On the 19th it turned to rain. And a message was received from two of Umra Khan's henchmen, saying that the garrison might now retire to Peshawar by the direct route through Jandol. Robertson declined the invitation.

One of the things which preyed on the minds of the garrison was the lack of all news from India; they had no means of knowing if help were on the way, in what strength, and from which direction. All they knew was that the more it snowed, the harder it would be for the relief column to negotiate the passes. However, had they realised, they would have been flattered by the hubbub their plight had created. The name 'Chitral' had been flashed across the world, and the public realised at once that here was a drama very much to its taste. The sound of the word (like that 'Kabul to Kandahar') vibrated with mystery and romance. Somewhere in the mountains there were half a dozen young Englishmen with their native troops, and they must be saved. The affair became so inflated that the phrase 'British prestige' came to be used, and there was even talk of 'a serious military reverse'. To universal delight on the 19th March there came the news from Peshawar that the 1st Division of the 1st Army was being mobilised from its base at Nowshera. This force, it was carefully explained, would not be encumbered with a heavy baggage train; it would be light and swift-moving, every officer being limited to forty pounds, and every man to ten pounds. No tentage would be allowed, even though ice and snow were to be faced. Even so, 28,000 pack animals had to be collected, and fodder brought in from the surrounding depots. The troops, of course, were spread over a wide area along the Frontier, and had to be concentrated, but they used the single-track railway line, which had now been constructed. As there was no properly organised railhead with all the necessary installations and depots, however, the whole affair, if swift, was rather scrambled.

The Division, which was to be commanded by General Sir Robert Low, was to consist of three Infantry Brigades, each of four battalions, two regiments of cavalry, four batteries of Mountain Artillery, and detachments of sappers and miners. There would also be three battalions of infantry to protect the line of communications. The chief of staff would be Brigadier-General Bindon Blood, and the brigade commanders would be Kinloch, Waterfield, and Gatacre. On the 1st April the Division was ready to advance.

But what was to be its route? No one had yet travelled direct from Peshawar to Chitral, and a good deal of the country remained unexplored. All that Low knew was that there were three passes to the Swat valley, the Mora, the Shahkot, and the Malakand. All three were reported to be about 3,500 feet up and very difficult, with only rough footpaths for pack animals. The Mora, however, was said to be inhabited by very hostile tribes, so only two passes were left, and even these might be heavily defended. To try to avoid trouble, therefore, Low sent messages to the people of Swat, telling them that the British Government had no hostile intentions towards them, and merely ask for the right of way through their territory. This, the messages added, would be paid for liberally.

But the tribes weren't interested in the money, and soon intelligence reports came back that the passes were heavily guarded, especially the Shahkot. Low's plan to meet this situation was to threaten the Shahkot and Mora Passes, then launch a full-scale attack against the Malakand. All day on the 1st April his troops moved forward.

Though confident that Low and his force would get through, the Government of India were worried in case the terrain and the opposition from the tribes should delay him beyond the date that Robertson could hold out. It was therefore decided that a second column should be launched from Gilgit. This station, as already mentioned, was 220 miles to the east of Chitral, and the road was difficult and mountainous all the way. A hundred and thirty miles from Gilgit it crosses the Shandur Pass at 12,400 feet, and here, as everyone knew, the snow would be deep. And apart from the Shandur, there were numerous defiles, with the river running along at their feet, which would yield excellent defensive positions for the tribesmen. It was known that they had risen, as news had already

come through that the small post at Mastuj, some seventy miles from Chitral, was under siege.

The officer commanding at Gilgit was Colonel J. G. Kelly, and the only troops available for him to take were 400 men of the 32nd Pioneers. This was a unit trained as infantry, but normally employed on road-mending and construction jobs. Kelly decided to split his force into two detachments, the first under Captain Borrodaile, who had two subalterns, Bethune and Cobbe, to assist him, and the second under two subalterns called Petersen and Cooke. With the second detachment marched a section of the Kashmir Mountain Battery with two guns, under a fire-eating Irishman, Lieutenant C. G. Stewart. It was a pitifully small force for such a task, but Kelly was an old Frontier veteran who knew what he was up against; and his subordinate officers were a remarkable bunch of young men. Lieutenant William Beynon, from the 3rd Gurkhas, who went along as the Column Staff Officer, later became a general.

The column got on the move on the 22nd March, and for the first two days the rain came down, thereby giving the lie to a Government of India booklet which declared that rainfall was unknown in this area. Nevertheless, there was almost a holiday atmosphere in the column, and the Agency surgeon, a man called Luard, marched in a Norfolk jacket. The day began at 7 a.m. with a breakfast of eggs and bacon, Kelly believing the old adage that 'a cooked breakfast stays by you'. In the afternoon, when the column made camp, there would be tea and chapatties; and then there'd be whiskies in the mess before dinner. The officers had managed to take their camp stools, and the mess had taken tables, so, as Beynon remarks, 'we were in the height of luxury'. But this happy state of things did not continue indefinitely, and on the 31st March the column crossed the snow-line near Ghizr, some 10,000 feet up. The green snow-goggles issued to everyone were now put on, and the men trudged upwards in the slush. Soon they were joined by a company of the Hunza and Nagar levies, a welcome addition to the strength.

On the 1st April the troubles began. After the column had got on the move at 6 a.m. Beynon noticed that 100 coolies who had been carrying the food supplies had vanished with their ponies. Hurriedly, he collared the nearest pony, threw its load on to the ground, and galloped along the column till he found Kelly. At once

the column was halted and a party dispatched after the coolies, who mercifully were seized and hauled back. From then on a careful guard was placed over them. Slowly the column struggled on, now across an exposed plain with deep snow on it; this formed the early stretches of the Shandur Pass. Before long the animals began floundering and everyone was brought to a halt. Reconnaissances were carried out to right and left, but on neither flank could a viable path be found, so there was nothing for it but to go back to Teru, a village three miles away, and spend the night there.

This order given by Kelly, though inevitable, came as a bitter disappointment to the young officers with him. Trudging back they cursed and swore and declared that everyone would get to Chitral before they did.

That evening Kelly gave orders that Borrodaile and Cobbe, with a party of sappers under Oldham, were to go forward next morning and force a way over the Pass. They would then seize Laspur, the highest village on the other side. All the coolies were to be sent forward with Borrodaile, who would send them back to Kelly, once he had succeeded.

But would he succeed? That was the question. It snowed hard that night, and all the 3rd, and there was no let-up when Borrodaile marched off on the morning of the 4th April. Ahead of him he sent levies who knew the way, and in whose tracks the Pioneers and coolies would carefully follow. The Shandur Pass is really a mountain plain, its highest point being situated just above Langar. The air is cold up there, and when the wind blows it is lethal. However, the small column pushed on, with Cobbe in the lead. With tremendous exertion he succeeded in reaching the highest point, but then realised that only half his men were with him, and the rest were floundering in snow up to their chests. Borrodaile and Browning-Smith, a surgeon-captain who had joined the column, now came forward, and, by encouragement rather than threats, brought these exhausted, men back on to the path. The struggle went on for ten hours, but then Laspur came in sight, and the levies who had taken up covering positions on the heights above it. Immediately, spirits were raised, and the column streamed into the village, just as a deputation came out begging that the inhabitants should not be shot.

Back at Teru, the gunners were experimenting with various means of getting their seven-pounder guns over the Pass; they had

already rejected sledges as being useless, and various carrying devices were being tried. On the morning of the 5th in a bitter wind the guns and carriages moved off with nine coolies to each load. The task was a frightful one, for the coolies had no snow-glasses, their clothing let in the cold, and the wind blistered their faces. By the time they reached Langu most of them were suffering from snow-blindness and frost-bite. Their sufferings from thirst were great also; they had tried eating snow, but this brought no relief, and when Surgeon-Captain Browning came to look at them he found their condition pitiable.

But even now the advance guard and the guns were across, the main body still had to come, with the rest of the coolies and ponies, carrying food and ammunition. The sooner these arrived the better, for patrols sent out by Borrodaile were bringing back information that the Chitralis were gathering among the mountains ahead. However, on his own initiative, on the 6th April, he took some men and captured the village of Gasht, twelve miles on; and here he impressed thirty villagers as coolies, and took twelve of their ponies. That night he returned to Laspur to find that Kelly and Beynon had arrived with fifty levies. But such was the general exhaustion that it was decided that the 7th would be devoted to rest. On the 8th the whole column would move on again, its objective being Gasht.

Now it is necessary to leave Kelly for a while and return to Sir Robert Low and his column. On the 1st April the 1st Brigade camped near the Shahkot Pass, while a party of cavalry pushed ahead towards the Mora Pass, with the object of stirring up the dust to deceive the enemy, in accordance with Low's plan. Meanwhile, the main body moved up towards the Malakand Pass, reaching a point about twenty miles from it on the afternoon of the 1st April. Low intended that the column should march to a forming-up position next morning, then attack in the afternoon, but Bindon Blood argued that it was unwise; the Malakand was a strong position, and should be attacked by fresh troops on the morning of the 3rd. Low would not listen to this argument, however, maintaining that the important thing was to get on; but that night there was a violent storm which blew down all the tents, and made the horses stampede. A delay was therefore inevitable, while the troops sorted themselves out and dried their clothing; and Bindon Blood

remarked cheerfully to his commander, 'Isn't it fortunate that the Almighty intervened?' Low was not amused.

'The Malakand', wrote Winston Churchill, who was to fight in a battle there two years later, 'is like a great cup, of which the rim is broken into numerous clefts, and jagged points'. It was a very strong position, one of the reasons being that it was impossible to concentrate enough troops in the area at the bottom of the cup, and those that could be fitted in were in full view of the surrounding heights. Low's plan to cope with this situation was to launch two battalions against the extreme right of the enemy position, under cover of a concentration by twenty mountain guns. The infantry from the next brigade would then advance up the spurs towards the enemy's main position, on as broad a front as possible.

The operation went like clockwork. The detailed artillery programme allowed for a moving curtain of shrapnel, ahead of the infantry, and this was so heavy and so accurate that the tribesmen were completely unable to concentrate. Small parties of them came charging down the hillside, but these were soon dealt with by the infantry, who had kept their formation as on parade and fired devastatingly in volleys. Two battalions were now concentrating on the main positions, while two more pursued the enemy round a flank into the Swat valley. Soon they were joined by the cavalry, and then the guns raced forward, across tracks quickly prepared by the Sappers, and peppered the tribesmen as they ran.

By 2 p.m. it was all over. Two thousand tribesmen were killed or wounded, and 10,000 were dispersed. The road into the Swat valley was now open.

On the 4th April the Division moved into the valley, but soon it was observed that large numbers of tribesmen were gathering—probably those who had been guarding the Mora and Shahkot Passes. In the afternoon they came down from the hills in a spirited charge, but the Guides Cavalry had been moved into position for just such an action, and, drawing their swords, galloped across the valley to catch the tribesmen in the open. Large numbers were killed, and the rest streamed back to the hills as fast as their legs would carry them.

On the 5th Bindon Blood rode forward with a covering party to reconnoitre the next obstacle—the Swat river. Though this was fordable in several places, the current, so he discovered, was strong,

and it would be necessary to build a bridge so that ammunition and supplies could get across. Next day Brigadier-General Waterfield took his brigade forward to force a crossing, and did the job neatly and economically. Engaging the enemy at long range with his artillery and infantry, he sent the Guides Cavalry and 11th Bengal Lancers, supported by the 11th Sikhs, round a flank to cross at a little-known ford. The water was deep here, and the men had to half swim and half wade across. However, they were eventually formed up on the farther bank, and began their move on the tribesmen's flank. The latter, seeing they had been outwitted, began streaming from their posts, and a body of horsemen, which included Umra Khan's brother, galloped hard towards the hills. He got away, but 400 of his followers did not, and when the cavalry rode back every man had one or two swords picked up from fallen tribesmen. While this action was going on, Waterfield's main body crossed at Chakdara. To the east of this position, at Ramora, was sited a large stone fort built by Umra Khan, which dominated the whole Swat valley, and attempts were made to blow this up. However, it withstood both explosives and artillery, so had to be left.

On the 7th the enemy retired to the north. Low's next obstacle was the Panjkora river, for beyond that lay Jandol and Umra Khan's stronghold at Munda.

But now it is necessary to return to Robertson and the garrison, who were still struggling on without news from the outside world. By the 22nd March they had eaten the last of the geese, and had to start killing their ponies for food. Two days later it began raining in torrents, and after some hours there was a subsidence in the western wall of the fort. This obviously had to be repaired before nightfall, and great hulks of timber were lifted into position and secured. The whole garrison was wet and miserable at this time, and especially during the two days which followed, with the rain still continuing. The only thing to cheer them was a story from some of the sepoys that they had heard distant artillery fire, but, when the officers listened and heard nothing, spirits drooped again.

On the 27th there was a good deal of firing, but no attack materialised. The 28th was the Mohammedan feast called Eed and the besiegers were otherwise occupied. On the 29th the garrison hoisted the Union Jack. It hadn't been hoisted before, as Robertson had left

his British Agent's flag behind at Gilgit, and was superstitious that its absence would bring bad luck. Also, as he remarks rather prissily, 'It seemed almost improper, not to say illegal, to fight without the Union Jack over our heads.' So (in the best British traditions) a committee was formed, and a Sikh soldier was found who admitted to skill with the needle. Scraps of red, white, and blue cloth were assembled together, and then the Sikh cut and stitched for some days, working to the small picture of a flag on an empty tobacco tin. In an excess of enthusiasm the Sikh embellished the flag with a crescent and cross-swords which Robertson sharply ordered him to remove. At night the flag was then attached to the mast and run up to the head; and when the troops paraded for stand-to next morning there it was fluttering in the breeze. Robertson relates that 'a smile of confidence, one might almost say a smile of adoration . . .' accompanied the action of saluting the national symbol.

On the 29th March an ammunition check showed that the garrison was down to 29,000 rounds; and the parade state the following day showed that only 343 men were fit for duty. The grain stocks were now 45,000 pounds, which would last for seventy-four days, or up to the 13th June.

On the 3rd April, while Low and his division were fighting the battle at Malakand Pass, and Kelly's men were struggling in the Shandur Pass, the garrison's only recorded activity was negotiating with Sher Afzul. The latter was now threatening to drive into the fort all the families of the Chitralis who were there. He added that as Robertson apparently liked quarrels, and would not respond to even the most reasonable suggestions, the siege would now be pressed home. Nothing happened, however, till the morning of the 5th when the army bugle made a reappearance, and firing broke out all around the fort. This was to cover the occupation of the summer-house which was situated only forty yards from the south-east corner of the fort. The garrison's reply was to start loopholing the tower facing this, and they were soon able to keep up a steady fire against the summer-house.

The next major development came at 5 a.m. on the 7th when the tribesmen opened up a heavy fire from the trees. Under cover of this they launched an attack against the covered way to the river, but the Sikhs were ready for them, shooting steadily in volleys. Soon the attack broke up, and the survivors fled. But then a glaring light

was spotted by the gun-tower on the south-east face. What had happened was that the enemy had succeeded in rushing across huge faggots and blocks of wood, and placing them at the foot of the wall. In a matter of moments the tower was on fire, and the flames shot up several feet. Robertson relates: 'Running and shouting as I ran . . . every unarmed man except the Chitralis were quickly collected in the lower storey of the gun-tower and on the promenade which led to it. Marvellously quickly each fell into his place, as though he had been carefully drilled for such an emergency. Lines of men were organised . . . and passed buckets, pails, or pots of water from hand to hand. . . .' For some time the fire seemed to thrive on the water rather than be douched by it, and the roar and crackling was immense. And apart from the dangers of the fire, smoke, and falling masonry, there were the bullets coming through the gaps in the walls. Gurdon and his men tried to keep down this fire by firing from the walls, but the tribesmen were well protected and nothing could stop them. Towards daylight the situation was becoming so serious that Townshend asked Robertson if he thought that a sortie would be advisable, but the Agent was against it. The enemy were in great force, he argued, and just waiting for such a move. Robertson was undoubtedly right. Though occasional gusts of wind set the fire going again, it was gradually brought under control, and then finally put out. The damage was great, but not fatal to the defences of the fort, and only nine men had been wounded.

To guard against any repetition of the fire in any other tower, Townshend arranged for boxes of earth and buckets and jars of water to be sent up to the parapets. He also had piles of large stones collected which could be dropped over the parapet if a sentry heard a noise. So ended the fifth week of the siege.

On the evening of the 8th April, when his column reached Gasht, Kelly sent forward Beynon with a party of levies to make a reconnaissance of the enemy's position at Chokalwat, a few miles ahead. Army officers who knew this spot in the past had declared it to be impregnable if held in strength, and after taking one look at it, Beynon knew what they meant. The river crossed from side to side in the narrow defile, while the rock walls on either flank climbed steeply. The far bank of the river, where the enemy had built their sangars, was precipitous, and protected on its right flank by a snow

glacier. Beynon stayed long enough to sketch the position in detail, then returned to Kelly who rapidly made his plan. This was that Beynon would start at 6 a.m. the next morning with the Hunza levies and carry out a flanking movement which would bring him above and behind the enemy's left. The main body would start at 9 a.m. and attack from the front.

Next morning Beynon left as ordered, but found the climb up into the hills progressively harder, and on several occasions was brought to a complete halt. However, by careful reconnaissance he kept finding a way round the precipices and other obstacles, and by 8 a.m. he was almost in position. Going forward to find a suitable position overlooking the enemy sangars, he was surprised by a party of tribesmen, and their bullets kicked up uncomfortably close. Soon, however, they were dispersed, and Beynon led his men down a steep snow-covered slope. Kelly and the main body were now in position, and, as Beynon watched, their battle began. 'First we saw the advance guard get on to the plain and extend, and presently they were joined by the main body, and the whole formed up for attack; then the firing line extended and the advance commenced. Presently we saw the sangars open fire, answered by volleys from our men. Then came a large puff of smoke and a murmur from the men around me, as a shell pitched across the river and burst over a sangar. It was as pretty a sight as one could wish for, and I felt as if I should have been in a stall in Drury Lane.' After an hour, when their sangars had been knocked about by the guns, and the supporting fire from the infantry began inflicting casualties, the tribesmen began to waver. When the parties detailed for the assault went scrambling up the precipitous bank of the river, they were already in full retreat.

By 10.30 a.m. Kelly's whole force had re-formed and was advancing. Seven hours later it had reached Mastuj, where the small garrison, under Lieutenant Moberley, was still holding out in the fort. Here Kelly rested his men during the 10th and the 11th; and on the 12th Beynon went forward to reconnoitre the position taken up by the tribesmen at Nisa Gol. This was very similar to Chokalwat, except that the river ran straight along the left side of the valley, and the enemy sangars were therefore not protected by steep banks. But the floor of the valley was a mile wide and the rock walls soared up almost vertically. The old

Mehtar of Chitral had often shown the place to British visitors, explaining how it had been used by successive forces during the centuries; he considered it absolutely impregnable.

It was not, however, impregnable to Kelly, although the Chitralis were led by a famous chief called Mohammed Isa and had assembled 1,500 men behind their sangars. As before, using a flanking attack to disconcert the enemy before his frontal attack went in, Kelly scattered them in an hour, and took a heavy toll of casualties. The sangar positions, though strong in themselves, had no way of retreat behind them, a fact which the tribesmen were to realise too late. Beynon relates:

'That sangar was a death-trap to its garrison—their only line of escape was across some open, shaley slopes within four hundred yards of our firing line, and the Levies were now working along the hill, and would catch them in the sangar if they didn't clear out. The result was like rabbit shooting. You'd see a man jump from the sangar and bolt across the shale slope, slipping and scrambling as he went; then there would be a volley, and you'd see the dust fly all round him—perhaps he'd drop, perhaps he wouldn't; then there would be another volley, and you'd see him chuck forward amid a laugh from the sepoys, and he'd roll over and over till he'd fetch up against a rock and lie still. Sometimes two or three would bolt at once; one or two would drop at each volley, and go rolling, limp and shapeless, down the slope, until they were all down, and there would be a wait for the next lot. An old sepoy lying near me declared as each man dropped that it was his particular rifle whose aim had been so accurate, until Borrodaile called him sharply to order, and told him to attend to business.'

After this great success Kelly's column pushed on again, and the following day reached Drasan.

Meanwhile there had been a clash between Low's column and Umra Khan. On the 12th April the sappers managed to fling a rough footbridge, made of logs and telegraph wire, over the Panjkora river, and the Guides infantry advanced across it to the western bank. During the night, however, and before more troops were able to join them, the bridge was swept away. Major Fenton Aylmer, V.C., R.E., now came forward with a suspension bridge, which, so he warned Low, would take forty-eight hours to erect and tow into position. While the work was going on the Guides were

ordered to move forward and destroy some enemy positions a few miles ahead. When they attempted this task, however, they came under a heavy rifle fire from Umra Khan's men and had to retire. Fortunately Low had put some infantry into a position from which fire could be brought down on the enemy's flank and the Guides escaped without heavy losses. But, to their great sadness, the commanding officer, Colonel Battye, was killed while conducting the withdrawal.

On the 13th an important decision was taken: to send a small force on a flanking movement via the Lowarai Pass (which lay some twenty miles to the west of Panjkora) to the Chitral valley. This would move swiftly, while the main column dealt with Umra Khan's forces at Munda, about seven miles away. To Blood's annoyance, Low referred this plan to his superiors in Peshawar, who considered it far too risky to be carried out by regular troops. As a compromise, it was arranged, therefore, that the Khan of Dir (the friendly ruler of a small state between the column's present position and Chitral) should carry out the move with 1,000 men. Once through the Lowarai Pass, he would spread rumours that he was the advance guard of a force which had already defeated Umra Khan and when these rumours reached the tribesmen besieging Chitral, so it was hoped, they would decamp in great haste.

The column left, once the suspension bridge was safely in position across the Panjkora, on the 17th. At the same time, Bindon Blood rode forward, with an escort of Guides cavalry and the Lancers, to reconnoitre Umra Khan's fortress at Munda, in the Jandol valley. There was not a soul around as the walls of the fort began to show among the hills, and the first person Blood caught sight of was a man ploughing his fields near the village of Miankilsi, over to the left. Blood halted his escort and greeted the man, who replied courteously. Blood then asked:

'Could you tell me where the Sardar Umra Khan is?'

The man indicated: 'The Sardar is at Munda Fort. His army is at Miankilai.'

'Would you take a letter to the Sardar for me?'

The man agreed, saying he would be back in half an hour.

Blood summoned a staff officer, who to his dictation wrote a letter telling Umra Khan that he would be wise to surrender. The main column would be arriving in two hours, and then he would

have to decide whether to fight and be destroyed, surrender himself, or escape over the Afghan border. If he took the first or third courses his life would be short; if he took the second, however, Blood would see that he was well treated.

The ploughman ran off towards the fort; Blood planted his lance bearing a Union Jack in the ground, and his escort dispersed to find whatever shade was available. Meanwhile, Umra Khan's men came streaming out of the village and took up a position about half a mile away, behind a small river. Here they shouted a lot but made no move to attack.

An hour later, as he had promised, the ploughman returned with a letter from Umra Khan. This conveyed his compliments to Blood, and added that he would be glad to surrender, but the cut-throats around him wouldn't permit this. 'You too I notice are accompanied by those cut-throats of yours,' he continued, referring to the Guides. 'Assuredly no quiet conversation can take place under these circumstances. Now I would propose that you send away your cut-throats and I will send away mine, and then you and I can have our conference alone in the field.'

This seemed quite friendly, but, looking up, Blood could see that the tribesmen were moving forward to extend their position and were already threatening his cavalry on the flanks. Any meeting now was obviously out of the question.

It was at this stage that Brigadier-General Gatacre arrived with his brigade, the 11th Bengal Lancers, and the Derajat Mountain Battery. Blood asked him if he would make a frontal attack on Umra Khan's forces, while he personally led the cavalry in a wide sweep to cut off their retreat to the north and east. The Brigadier, however, who was senior to Blood, thought the plan too risky and refused to co-operate. An argument ensued—Blood was no great respecter of seniority or rank—and before it was over Low had ridden up with the remainder of the column. The two respective viewpoints were put to him, and to Blood's fury, he supported Gatacre.

In the event, once the Mountain Battery opened fire, Umra Khan's men retired hurriedly, and Gatacre followed them up till evening. By then they were far away in the Nawagai valley. Next morning, when Low and his staff rode forward, they found the Munda fort abandoned; and spies came in reporting that Umra Khan

himself had crossed the Afghan border with his personal escort and eleven mule loads of gold, silver, and jewels. But, as Blood had predicted, he was going to his death. A detailed examination of the fort, which was in considerable disorder with papers and personal possessions littering every room, revealed some interesting documents. One of these was written by a mullah seated at the head of the Malakand Pass and watching Low's force camped below. He said: 'We see the infidels, the sons of pigs, encamped down in the plains below us. There are very few of them and we shall easily send them all to Hell.' There was also correspondence from a Scottish firm in Bombay offering to supply Umra Khan with anything he required by way of arms or ammunition. 'Our price for Maxim guns is Rs. 3,700 each and our revolvers are Rs. 34 a piece.' These documents were dispatched immediately to Peshawar; and it was heard a few weeks later that the firm had decided to transfer its headquarters to Cairo.

On the 17th April, the day that Umra Khan fled across the border, Kelly forded the Chitral river, which was breast-high at this point and with a swift current. The sepoys linked hands, making a human chain, and so managed this difficult operation without loss, but when it came to getting the coolies across it was a different matter. Beynon relates:

'Most of the coolies found the stream too strong to stem alone, and so they crossed in parties of a dozen or more, holding hands; but now and then a man would try by himself, generally with the result that half-way across he would get swept off his feet, and go floating down the stream, vainly endeavouring to regain his footing. Then there would be a rush of two or three of the levies, the man would be swung on to his feet, and his load fished for. One man I thought was bound to be drowned; he had somehow tied his load on to his head, and, being washed off his feet, his head was kept down below the water, while his legs remained waving frantically in the air. The load, being light, floated, and in this manner he was washed down stream, till two levies reached him, and, swinging him right side up, brought him spluttering ashore.'

That afternoon the column negotiated the narrow paths clinging to the sides of the great precipices, then dipped down into the village of Barnas. Beynon, with the column, searched the area ahead to make sure that none of the enemy were around, then told

his levies to start searching for food. He then selected his camping ground which was 'a nice garden and orchard, with big shady mulberry trees, and a stream flowing down the centre'. During the afternoon Kelly arrived with the main body, and at 5 p.m. the rearguard fetched up. There was still no news from the garrison at Chitral, but Kelly hoped to reach there in two days.

Just as Kelly had no news of Robertson, Robertson had no news of him. However, he still remained confident that help would come sooner or later, still held on, dealing with each day's problems as they arose. On the evening of the 16th the Pathans began tom-tomming in the neighbourhood of the summer-house, and the noise was so loud and so prolonged that Robertson and Townshend came to the conclusion that it must be a cover for some offensive activity. They were right; soon after midnight a sentry reported he could hear the noise of picking. Townshend, who was hurriedly summoned, failed to hear anything, but at 11 a.m. the next morning the noise was heard again by a Sikh non-commissioned officer. This time there was no mistake, and Townshend realised that the enemy was mining and had reached a point about twelve feet from the walls of the fort.

What was to be done? Townshend discussed the problem with Robertson, who had now joined him, and both agreed that there was no time to dig a counter-mine. The only remedy was a quick raid and the destruction of the mine by explosives. The officer detailed to lead the raid was Lieutenant Harley, and all he would have with him was a company of men with rifles and bayonets. There would be no covering fire, no preparation of any kind, and his only safety lay in speed.

So at 4 p.m. the gate in the east face was silently slid open and Harley dashed out at the head of his men. There were eighty yards to go and they covered them in under ten seconds, but still men on either side of Harley were shot down. When he reached the summer-house there were thirty Pathans inside who bolted down the garden wall, to take up fire positions behind heaps of fascines. Harley ordered a few of his men to return their fire, while he searched for the entrance to the mine-shaft. This proved to be a few yards behind the summer-house, and thirty or more Chitralis, frightened by the firing, were already scrambling out of it. Harley's men quickly bayoneted them, then followed him down into the shaft, some

carrying sacks of powder. By now the main forces of the enemy had woken up to what was happening and began forming up along the river bank for a counter-attack. As Townshend knew only too well, this would have to be broken up, before it gained momentum, and so he ordered every available man up on to the parapet. Soon a devastating fire was brought to bear on the enemy, and the counter-attack was delayed. But still parties could be seen working their way round under cover, and it would only be time before they reached the summer-house. Urgently Townshend sent off messages telling Harley to hurry up. But exploding a mine is a difficult job, and by the time Harley had cleared out the dead bodies of the Chitralis, made his way to the head, put his powder sacks in position, and secured the fuse, nearly an hour had gone by. Harley worked swiftly but surely; he knew that if he fluffed the job, there would be no second chance. When Townshend's messages kept arriving, therefore, he ignored them, refusing to be hurried or flurried. However, when it began to look as if his small force must be overwhelmed by the Pathans, Harley ran out the forty-foot length of fuse, then took a match and ignited it. Quickly he and his men scampered out of the mine, and took refuge in the summer-house. Then with a roar and a flash and a great crashing of earth and timber, the mine went up. Before the smoke cleared, Harley and his men were already dashing back to the fort. They had left eight of their number dead in the summer-house area, and carried thirteen wounded with them. Harley and some eighty men had remained unscathed.

At first Robertson thought that the mine was not properly destroyed, but some hours later it was seen that the roof had fallen in along almost the entire length. What was left now was an open trench, with its end only ten feet from the base of the walls. That night was a happy one for the garrison, and, as Robertson recalls: 'What a cheery dinner we had. . . . Even the famished smokers suffered less than usual. Our tobacco had long been exhausted, while cloves, chopped straw, and the bark of the plane tree proved wretched substitutes for the gentle narcotic . . . we talked more and more of the Savoy and other tantalising thoughts.'

During the night the Pathans could be heard dragging away their dead. Soon after midnight there were two bursts of cheering, though what they could mean the garrison had no idea. Next morning, however, when Robertson questioned two Chitralis whom

Harley had captured in the mine and brought back, they gave him the news that Mastuj had been relieved and a column from Gilgit was fighting a battle at Nisa Gol.

So help was coming . . . it might not be far away. Immediately a great thrill of excitement surged through the garrison. But Robertson kept his own feelings well under control; he knew Nisa Gol only too well. The relieving column, he feared, might be held up there for days—it might even fail to break through.

Altogether, the 18th passed quietly. Then a couple of hours after dark a man crept up towards the Sikh sentry on the west side of the fort, shouted something, and ran away again. Townshend berated the sentry for idleness in not having shot the man. Later on, though, the voice again cried out in the dark, and this time the message was clear enough: 'Your besiegers have fled! And I, Futteh Ali, Shah's brother, the bearer of good tidings, am waiting here to be admitted!'

'Enter, O bearer of good tidings!'

The cry went up around the parapets, and the postern in the gate, was opened. Taken before Robertson and Townshend, the messenger confirmed that Sher Afzul had fled with the two Bajaur Khans who were supporting him. Mohammed Isa, after his defeat at Nisa Gol, had intended to join a force of 2,000 Pathans promised by Umra Khan, in a final onslaught against the fort. But after Harley's success on the 17th the Pathans were so discouraged that the plan was abandoned. And finally, the messenger said, the Colonel and his column were only two marches away.

Though now accepting that deliverance was at hand, Robertson and Townshend forbade any relaxation by the garrison, and sentry posts were manned as usual. But, as Robertson says, 'Nobody wanted to sleep. One or two made the attempt, but soon gave it up and fell to talking again. The reins of our tongues were loosened.' Next morning Gurdon marched out with a company to reconnoitre the surrounding area, and found that the good news was indeed true. Not a sign of the invading Pathans or the Chitralis was to be seen. Then some Bajauri traders arrived with groceries and found a ready market. They gave the garrison news of Low and 'his irresistible army marching from Peshawar'. Looking up Robertson noticed that the sky was blue, that there was a cool breeze blowing, and down in the Chitral valley the barley and wheat were waving gently.

On the 19th a message arrived from Kelly to say that he would be arriving the following day. So, relates Robertson, 'We were all up betimes. For breakfast we had eggs and fresh milk and a skinny chicken, and could hardly eat for admiration of such delicacies.' So the morning wore on slowly, and then: 'At two o'clock, Kelly's advance guard was descried crossing the bridge, their bugles sounding the old familiar tune. With the exception of Campbell, who could not be carried about safely, we all went outside to see them arrive. . . . There were no extravagant greetings. . . . All I could see were the dark-complexioned, sturdy Maxbis, looking admirably well and much travel-stained. Officers passed me, but I only really saw two—Oldham, because he was wearing a turban and Kelly, who waved a walking stick from the Chitrali saddle on a sturdy little pony. My mind was weary. . . .'

A few days later Brigadier-General Gatacre arrived, and he was followed by Low and his staff. The garrison was then paraded in a hollow square while the General congratulated it on sustaining the long siege, and Kelly and his men on reaching Chitral against such enormous odds.

When the news reached India, and then England, even more fulsome tributes arrived. The Commander-in-Chief India declared that Townshend and his men had 'greatly added to the prestige of the British arms'; their gallantry would elicit the admiration of all. The Viceroy, Lord Ripon, endorsed this tribute, and spoke of 'the cheerful endurance of all the hardships of the siege . . . the gallant demeanour of the troops . . . the conspicuous example of heroism . . . this glorious episode in the history of the Indian Empire and its army'. Queen Victoria then said her piece. Robertson was knighted. Campbell was given the D.S.O., as were Gurdon and Harley. Surgeon-Captain Whitchurch was awarded the Victoria Cross. Meanwhile, the ebullient Townshend was made a Companion of the Order of the Bath and promoted to a brevet majority. When he arrived in England it was to find himself a national celebrity. Twenty-one years later he was to command another garrison under siege, at Kut el Amara in Mesopotamia, and here events were to turn out very differently. It is often said that his success at Chitral gave him an overblown idea of his military talents, and there is probably some truth in this. With his banjo and his passion for musical comedy he became a curious figure as the years went by.

As Robertson remarked, Chitral was a very small siege. But it produced the kind of adventure story that the British public always has a taste for. It also gave a bunch of talented young men the chance to show considerable resource and gallantry. And it had a very happy ending.

10

THE PATHAN REVOLT

In July 1897 a bearded holy man was progressing from village to village in Upper Swat. He had burning eyes and a persuasive tongue, and his message was one of war—holy war against the infidels. During the past few months his fame had spread far and wide, even to the Khyber and on to Kabul. Among ignorant people wild rumours spread fast, and by now there was no end to the powers attributed to the mullah. A group of men and boys had been following him for weeks, sleeping in the open and eating whatever food people would give them. But in this frenzied excitement, food and drink meant little; they knew, everyone knew, that something big and wonderful was soon going to happen. With the mullah there was a thirteen-year-old boy, who, so he declared, was the sole surviving heir to the throne of Delhi. And as the prayers, the singing, the fanatical exhortations, and the liberal potations of bhang went on, none of the tribesmen could doubt that soon the boy would be where he belonged. All it needed was for the mullah to speak, to proclaim his full powers to the multitudes.

On the 26th July the mullah spoke. He could work miracles, he said. The heavenly hosts were on his side, and with their aid he would sweep the British from the forward post at Chakdara, and then from the Malakand Pass. After that it would be a matter of weeks before they were swept from the whole frontier. This prophecy was made in the village of Aladaud, from which the post of Chakdara was plainly visible. Within an hour the frenzied tribesmen had seized their swords and rifles, thronged in their thousands, and waited the signal to advance.

The mullah's progress during the past few months had not been unknown to the British, and indeed reports on him had been flooding into the frontier posts. In these he was always referred to as

'the Mullah of Swat', or, more frequently, 'the Mad Mullah'. He'd been born in Swat, it was said, but some years previously had settled in Mazar-i-Sharif, in Afghan Turkestan. Then at the beginning of 1897 he had visited Kabul, before travelling through Bajaur and Buner, preaching jehad, or holy war. It was thought also that he was in touch with other fanatics, notably the Mullah Powindah, the evil genius of Waziristan, and the Mullah of Hadda. Whether the Mad Mullah had created the sense of unease on the Frontier, or whether he was merely exploiting it to his own ends, was not known, though most Frontier officers believed the latter. The 'Forward Policy' of the 1890's had been growing increasingly unpopular with the tribes, and there had been many signs that all was not well. In June a Political Officer and his escort had been treacherously attacked at the village of Maizar in the Upper Tochi, deep in Waziristan.

But not only local influences were at work on the Frontier; as so often, it vibrated to international conflicts. In the recent war between Greece and Turkey, Britain had abused the latter, to the fury of the Sultan Abdul Hamid II. Now his agents were on the Frontier, spreading inflammatory rumours among the mullahs. One of these wrote to the Mullah Sayyid Akbar, 'Aden, a seaport which was in possession of the British, has been taken from them by the Sultan. The Suez Canal, through which the British forces could reach India in twenty days, has also been taken possession of by the Sultan. . . . The British forces now take six months to reach India.' But not only the Sultan was stoking the furnace, the Amir was lending a hand also. He was displeased with the Durand Line, which had formally delimited the Afghan boundary a few years previously, and did not welcome statements by recent Viceroys which indicated their intention to bring the Frontier tribes increasingly under British control. Some time in 1897 he addressed a meeting of mullahs from the Frontier and all parts of Afghanistan, and urged on them their duty to wipe out the infidel. At the same time he assumed the title of Zia-ul-Millat wa ud-Din, the 'Light of the Nation and Religion', and published a *Taqwim-ud-Din*, that is a Catechism of Religion, which dealt with the question of jehad. It could be argued that in normal times such a book would bear no sinister significance; but these were not normal times, and the Frontier mullahs interpreted the Amir's thoughts as justification

for their own ambitions. The message carried back to their villages was that in the coming jehad the tribes would not only have the approval of the Amir, they would have his moral support too.

The officers stationed at Chakdara could feel the coming storm from early July, as rumours drifted down from Swat about the Mad Mullah and his magical powers. Several sepoys went to their company or battalion commanders and warned them. Major Deane, the senior Political Officer, was receiving warnings too, but thought that, as frequently happened on the Frontier, they were somewhat exaggerated. He did not believe that the troubles in Swat were part of a widespread conspiracy, and his views found general agreement among both Politicals and soldiers. However, on the 23rd July things seemed serious enough for an order to be put out, instructing maximum precautions to be observed, though even this wasn't taken too seriously. According to Winston Churchill, who was there at the time, 'everybody doubted if there would be a rising, nor did anyone imagine that even should one occur, it would lead to more than a skirmish. The natives were friendly and respectful. The valley smiled in fertile prosperity.' So, for the next few days, things went on normally; the officers dined in mess and played polo in the afternoons.

It's worth pausing for a moment here to explain how the posts at Chakdara and Malakand had come to be occupied, for, as it will be remembered, when General Low pushed his column through the Pass two years previously, his proclamation had stated that the British had no intention of permanently occupying the territory or 'interfering with the independence of the tribes'. Once Chitral had been relieved, however, Lord Rosebery's Liberal Government had to make up its mind whether to occupy Chitral or abandon it. The Government of India had no doubts as to the correct course, and wrote home asserting that Chitral must be held, and that to supply its garrison the road over the Malakand must be kept open. On the 13th June 1895 Rosebery replied that 'no military force or European agent should be kept at Chitral, that Chitral should not be occupied, and that no road should be made between Peshawar and Chitral'. In other words, the British Government intended to reverse the policy pursued since 1876, and would leave Chitral to stew in its own juice. Then, as so often happens in the history of the Frontier, Party politics at Westminster intervened; Lord Rosebery's Liberal

Government fell, to be replaced by Lord Salisbury's Conservative administration. Just as the Union Jack was about to be hauled down from Chitral fort, a letter arrived from England stating 'the policy . . . continuously pursued by successive Governments ought not to be lightly abandoned unless its maintenance has become clearly impossible'. So the British hold on Chitral was retained; and the road was pushed through. The Indian Government negotiated subsidies with tribes en route, who were happy to maintain and protect it; the Khan of Dir, for example, who guarded a stretch of seventy-three miles in his own territory, received an annual payment of 60,000 rupees, and maintained a force of 400 irregulars. For two years this arrangement worked perfectly. The supply columns travelled freely between Peshawar and Chitral, with barely a shot being fired. Wheeled traffic could reach the village of Sadu, some thirty-five miles beyond Malakand, after which the camel trains completed the second stage of the journey to Dir; here mules took over from the camels for the last sixty miles to Chitral.

Though the route was long and tenuous, and places for ambush were frequent, there were only two posts manned by the regular Indian Army—those mentioned, at Chakdara and Malakand. The first of these held the crossing over the Swat river, and the second guarded the passage to the mountains. If either were lost, Chitral would inevitably be cut off again.

On the afternoon of the 26th July the young officers of the Malakand garrison went to play polo at Khar, and here they were joined by a Lieutenant Rattray from Chakdara. There were several groups of villagers around the pitch, taking a keen interest in the game as usual, and when it was over they quietly watched the officers ride away to their quarters. The syces, however, stayed behind to see to the ponies, and, to their surprise, the villagers came up and urged them to get back home at once. There was going to be fighting, they said.

Major Deane didn't play polo that afternoon. He was at his office at Malakand, and here a message reached him that the Mad Mullah had raised his standard, and thousands of tribesmen had gathered round it. An attack was imminent. Deane at once saw Brigadier-General Meiklejohn, the garrison commander, who telegraphed Mardan, urging that the Guides should be sent up as reinforcements immediately. Soon after 7 p.m. another report

reached Deane: that the tribesmen were advancing down the valley. He again saw Meiklejohn and recommended that the Amandara Pass, four miles away, should be held. This suggestion was adopted; and Lieutenant-Colonel McRae was ordered to leave at midnight. The remainder of the brigade under Meiklejohn would march to reinforce him at 3 a.m.

At 9.45 there was a message from Chakdara—the last before the line was cut—and this warned that large forces of Pathans were moving towards the camp. Fifteen minutes later a jemadar of the levies galloped in with a message which informed Meiklejohn that (to quote the official dispatch) 'The Fakir had passed Khar and was advancing on Malakand, and that neither Levies nor people would act against him, and that the hills to the east of the camp were covered with Pathans.'

When this message came through, the officers were sitting down to dinner in their polo kit, having been so busy since their return that there was no time to change. At ten o'clock they were still in the mess, eagerly discussing the fight ahead and wondering how it would develop. Then at ten o'clock a bugle sounded the 'Assembly' and everyone suddenly leaped to his feet. Sword belts were hurriedly grabbed from their hooks and buckled on, though some officers, still imagining that the call was a warning for the movable column to fall in, paused to light a cigarette. Then from all around the camp firing began, and there was calling and shouting and the noise of running feet. Quickly the officers drew their swords and ran out into the night. The Pathan revolt had begun.

To begin with the chaos was considerable, as it would be in any camp subjected to a night attack without warning. But fortunately the man on the spot kept his head; he was Lieutenant-Colonel McRae, and, collecting eight Sikhs of the quarter-guard, he sent them under Major Taylor to a cutting at the southern edge of the camp, with orders to try to check the enemy while reinforcements were brought forward. McRae collected another dozen men himself and the combined party raced to the cutting which they reached just in time. Not far away was a force of about a thousand tribesmen, armed with swords and knives, and they were in the act of creeping stealthily on the camp, hoping to massacre its inhabitants before they could even leave their huts. McRae gave the order to fire, and his small party poured volley after volley into the dense mass before

them. The Pathans shrieked and cursed, then parties of them began climbing a hill to the left. Once in position here they began hurling down rocks and stones at the Sikhs who had no option but to retire slowly. At this point Taylor was mortally wounded, several of his men were wounded also, and the situation began to look desperate. McRae (though wounded himself) cried out to the men to keep up the good name of their regiment, of 'Rattray's Sikhs', and to hold the position till either the rest of their unit arrived, or they were killed. The response was a loud shout—the Sikh war-cry—and the dwindling band fought on for twenty minutes. Then help came in the form of a Lieutenant Barff and his platoon, and McRae ordered them to go and deal with the Pathans up on the hill to the right. Barff did the job quickly, but, even before he had finished, the rest of the regiment came charging down the road from the camp and the situation was saved.

Meanwhile, as McRae and his men could hear, there was fighting over on the graded road to the right. A great mass of Pathans here had managed to sweep aside the picket of the 24th Punjab and swarmed into the camp. Fighting, close desperate fighting, Pathan sword against Punjab rifle and bayonet, now developed over the whole area; there was fighting in the bazaar, on the football pitch, and around the huts and buildings, in the commissariat lines, and in the field engineers' park. Also tribesmen who had taken up positions on the surrounding hills poured down a steady fire into the camp.

After some hours Meiklejohn decided to call on reinforcements from the fort, and a subaltern called Rawlins volunteered to try to get through with a message. Though he was attacked en route and suffered a bad sword wound in his wrist, he somehow succeeded, and a hundred fresh troops streamed out to join in the fight. But the worst was over now. The tribesmen had lost so heavily that about 3.30 they began collecting their dead and wounded, and at 4.15 the fire slackened. When dawn came only the snipers could be heard, letting off occasional rounds from the hills.

On the 27th there was great activity on all sides. The North Camp was evacuated. In the afternoon the Guides Cavalry rode in, followed at 7.30 p.m. by the infantry. The 11th Bengal Lancers, the 38th Dogras, and the 35th Sikhs were already on their way.

In the hills, as evening approached, thousands of white dots could be seen in movement. Then the flames shot up from the North Camp, and hundreds of gaily coloured banners fluttered in the hills. Crouching in the weapon-pits or behind sangars, the soldiers of the Indian regiments waited for the attack.

It came in at eight o'clock and with tremendous fury. Line after line of swordsmen charged the perimeter, to go down in heaps. Though the fighting went on for hours, however, the perimeter held, and all assaults were beaten off. On the 24th Punjab front the Pathans attacked under covering fire from a party armed with Martini-Henry rifles, and set great rocks hurling down the slope. The Punjabis finally decided that in these circumstances the best method of defence was attack, and (to quote Winston Churchill again) they 'drove the enemy from point to point, and position to position, pursuing them for a distance of two miles'. When daylight came Malakand still held.

The garrison had no cause for great optimism, however. Already, as they could see, tribesmen were joining the revolt from as far away as a hundred miles. Apart from the Swatis, there were now Bunerwals, Utman Khels, Mohmands, and Salarzais. It would need a whole division with artillery to deal with the situation, and, unless action were taken swiftly, even that would not be enough.

On the morning of the 29th Meiklejohn managed to get into touch with his forward post at Chakdara for a few minutes. In this time he learned that the defences still held, and all attacks had been defeated with heavy loss. Food and ammunition were running short, however, and help was needed badly.

Meiklejohn could do nothing to help at the moment; he had insufficient troops, and his own supply position was not very happy. But in the afternoon things improved rather with the arrival of the 11th Bengal Lancers; and there was news also that the 35th Sikhs and the 38th Dogras had reached Dargai, at the foot of the Pass. They had marched thirty-five miles in the most appalling heat, and twenty-one men had actually died of heat-stroke.

At 2 a.m. the Pathans attacked on both flanks with great fury, and at some points succeeded in breaking into the breastworks. Here savage hand-to-hand fighting ensued, but fortunately McRae was on hand and his Sikhs did not let a man escape. Though the garrison did not know it at the time, the attack was being led by the Mad

Mullah himself, and at 2.30 a.m. he was wounded. How he explained to his followers that such a thing could happen in the face of his magical powers it isn't known, but certainly when he ran from the field the attack petered out. It had cost the Pathans several hundred dead, and they now recognised that their chance of taking the Malakand had gone. Their decision was to focus the attack on Chakdara.

On the morning of the 30th the Dogras and Sikhs marched into the Malakand camp; and at Simla the Viceroy, Lord Elgin, sanctioned the formations of the Malakand Field Force. It was to consist of Meiklejohn and his brigade, a 2nd Brigade under Jeffreys, and divisional troops. The force commander would be Sir Bindon Blood, who hurried from Agra and arrived at noon on the 1st August. He writes:

'When I rode in I saw a string of litters bringing in the casualties and everybody looked rather melancholy. I knew exactly what I intended to do, from the notes I had made eighteen months earlier; so after a rapid look at one place, I rode up to the Fort, where Colonel Meiklejohn was holding a meeting of his officers. I assumed command at once, cleared everybody out of the office, and had the orders out in less than an hour, for a sortie at daylight next morning. The plan of operations was quite simple, and quite obvious to everyone after they had been told it.'

The enemy, about 12,000 strong, so Blood considered, was strung out in a semicircle to the north of his camp. The key to their position, however, was a rocky peak, high up to the right, which commanded the spur running down to the valley on their side. Blood detailed a force of 300 infantry with two mountain guns to take this, while his main column attacked the enemy centre, before turning right. The operation would be launched the following morning.

All that afternoon Blood rode round his units to make their acquaintance, to greet old friends, and to assure everyone that all would be well. He then ordered that all the infantry taking part in the assault should bivouac on the start-lines, so that no time would be lost. As it happened, the Pathans launched an attack at 3 a.m. but this did not interfere with the arrangements, and at 4.30 a.m. the troops got under arms as silently as possible. When there was enough light to see, Colonel Goldney, who had been detailed to capture the

peak on the right, moved off, and his party was soon followed by the infantry and cavalry of the main columns.

Goldney's attack went in brilliantly, and his men were among the Pathans and bayoneting them before they were properly awake. Very little shooting was necessary, and the position was taken with no loss whatever. Observing the success signal, Blood ordered the guns forward, then scrambled up himself to join Goldney. To his delight he found that 'we not only had complete command of the spur along which the road ran, but also of the enemy's main bivouac, so we were able to interfere seriously with their attempts to assemble. They made one or two futile attempts to advance against us, until they realised that our main column had them in flank, when they soon began to give way and then Adams was instantly on them with his cavalry.' Winston Churchill has described what happened now:

'The enemy utterly surprised and dumbfounded . . . were seen running to and fro in the greatest confusion: in the graphic words of Sir Bindon Blood's dispatch, "Like ants in a disturbed ant-hill". At length they seemed to realise the situation, and, descending from the high ground, took up a position near Bedford Hill in General Meiklejohn's front, and opened a heavy fire at close range; but the troops were now deployed, and able to bring their numbers to bear. Without wasting time in firing, they advanced with the bayonet.... The enemy, thoroughly panic-stricken, began to fly, literally by the thousands, along the heights to the right. . . . The way was open. The passage was forced. Chakdara was saved.'

It was the Guides which reached there; and meanwhile the Bengal Lancers began ruthlessly chasing the tribesmen up the valley. There was no quarter, no taking of prisoners; every Pathan who was caught among the rice-fields or the rocks was speared or cut down with the sword. Long before noon the whole area was littered with their corpses.

During the next few days the maliks of Lower Swat came to make their submission, and were allowed to return to their villages. Many of them seemed amazed that the British had been able to bring up reinforcements: the Mad Mullah had told them that once the troops at Malakand had been defeated there would be no others barring the way to India. Now he had gone, and they were left with a bitter pill to swallow.

The tribesmen of Upper Swat, however, believed themselves safe in their mountain fastness, which no white man had set foot in since the days of Alexander the Great, and sent envoys asking what terms the Government would offer. When the reply was not to their satisfaction they grew restive, and it was decided that Blood should lead an expedition into their territory. He intended to advance on the 8th, but heavy rain held him up and it was the 16th before his force, which now included three brigades, each of four battalions, reached Thana, a few miles up the valley. His plan was to attack the 'Gate of Swat' the following day with a blow at the enemy's right, along a ridge running up to the main hills. Simultaneously, to mask this attack, the Royal West Kents were to keep the enemy occupied in front, and the cavalry were to hold themselves in readiness to pursue the enemy, once they broke from the ridge.

The assault was prepared by a heavy artillery concentration and the Royal West Kents began driving the tribesmen from a ruined temple in advance of their main position. Once this was taken, the 7th Mountain Battery galloped forward and came into action at once. The heavy shells from the 10th Field Battery astonished the tribesmen, who had never been subjected to such a concentration before, and many of them went streaming back before the infantry had crossed their start-lines. Many more took shelter on the reverse slopes behind their sangars. The flank attack was led by Meiklejohn, and steadily the troops sweated up the hill towards the junction of the ridge and the main hill. When they arrived, the tribesmen down below realised that their line of retreat was being threatened, and moved up to launch a counter-attack. But the fire from Meiklejohn's men was too hot, and before long there was nothing for it but to retreat. This the tribesmen did with great speed and before either Meiklejohn or the cavalry could catch them. Many, however, were caught by the guns as they fled, and the Royal West Kents, who had now moved forward, harassed them with long-range rifle fire. The next day Blood advanced into Upper Swat, and on the 25th, as he says, 'I went to the top of the Karakar Pass and had an excellent view of the Buner country, which had not been invaded since the Pathans took possession of it nine hundred years ago.' In fact, he signalled Peshawar requesting permission to advance and teach the Buners a lesson. The request was put to Lord Elgin who havered then ordered

Blood to return. By now the positioning was deteriorating all along the Frontier, and his force was wanted elsewhere.

In Peshawar rumours that the attack on the Malakand was part of a wider movement were discounted until the 9th August. Two days earlier the Mullah of Hadda had descended the Gandab valley with 5,000 men, and, after burning the Hindu village of Shankargarh, attacked the post at Shabkaddar, only fifteen miles to the north of Peshawar. The Hindu residents of the village had already moved away, so that only two of them were killed. When Sir Richard Udny, the Commissioner of the Peshawar Division, heard of the impending attack he immediately asked that troops should be sent. On arrival they found that the police force had held out with great gallantry, inflicting heavy losses on the tribesmen. On the 10th August the Mullah and his followers were driven back into the hills beyond the fort, and then subsequently right across the Frontier.

In mid-August rumours reached Peshawar that the Mad Mullah was also in touch with the Mullah Sayyid Akbar, who had been charged with raising the Afridis and Orakzais. But still all remained calm; officers travelled on duty about their territories, men came and went on leave, and the Peshawar Vale hunt still went after jackals. On the 17th August Sir Richard Udny signalled the Government of India: 'Everything quiet. Reliable sources indicate that Afridis are unaffected.' No sooner had the signal gone off than a malik of the Kuki Khels arrived with the news that an Afridi lashkar 10,000 strong and led by 1,500 mullahs had left Tirah the previous day. Its objectives were the Khyber posts from Landi Kotal downwards and it was expected to reach them on the 18th. Having just sent a telegram that all was well, Udny now had to compose another in very different terms. In the next few days, events happened just as the malik predicted, and the Khyber defensives were swept away by a great tide of Afridis. By an unhappy chance, Sir Robert Warburton, who had kept this great Pass for eighteen years, was away in Lahore, and no one else could command the tribesmen's loyalty. What the British were faced with now, as he says, was 'what I had laboured all my years and by every means in my power to avert—a great Afridi war'. The loss of the Landi Kotal was a great blow to Warburton and the Indian Army; in fact, the 25th August has often been described as the blackest day

in the history of the Frontier. It was vividly described in Sir Richard Udny's report:

'The Landi Kotal garrison consisted of five native officers and 370 men of Khyber Rifles, including 25 recruits, Munshis, etc., who were unarmed. Of these 120 belonged to miscellaneous classes, principally—Peshawaris 40, Shilmani Mohmands 25, Adam Khel Afridis 28, from Kohat Pass and neighbourhood. Of the remaining 250 men, 70 were Lwargai Shinwaris, in whose limits Landi Kotal stands, while the other 180 were pretty evenly divided between three tribes, namely Zakha Khel Afridis, Malikdin Khel Afridis and Mullagoris. These 250 men formed the main strength of the garrison and seem to have behaved very well on the 24th when they inflicted severe loss on the enemy by volley firing; but on the morning of the 25th, after the Shinwari Subadar Jawas Khan had been wounded, the Shinwari sepoys made a sudden bolt of it by jumping down off the northern wall of the post towards their own villages, and the rest of the garrison were so disgusted at their desertion that they fired after them as they fled, killing three or four of them. A little later some Shinwari tribesmen and Zakha Khels of the Bazar valley managed to scale the wall of the post at its north-east corner near the officers' bungalow, but were promptly met by a party under Subadar Mursil and driven back over the wall after a smart little fight in which Mursil was shot through the head and killed on the spot. On his death the defence fell to pieces: the sepoys on the walls began to exchange greetings with their fellow-tribesmen outside the post, the gate was treacherously opened from inside and the ghazis of all tribes swarmed in. The Mullagori sepoys and probably the Shinwaris too then made their escape over the wall with their rifles, as the Shinwaris had done before, while the Zakha Khel and Malikdin Khel sepoys ran under the flags of their own clansmen in the lashkar, and joined in the general loot of the post. The 28 Adam Khel sepoys also joined the Ghazis, and, like the Zakha Khel and Malikdin Khel sepoys, retired with the lashkar when the sack of the post had been completed. Of the 40 Peshawaris, six are known to have been carried off prisoners, but the rest seem to have been allowed to escape, of course without their rifles, though only a few have yet arrived at Jamrud. After the looting of the post, the lashkar withdrew to China in the Bazar Valley, and, in spite of the remonstrances of their Mullhas, the men

are said to be fast dispersing in order to carry home their dead and wounded. It remains to be seen how many of the Mullagori and Shilmani sepoys will turn up with their rifles, but it is not improbable that a good many of them will rejoin sooner or later, and it is even possible that some of the Zakha Khel and Malikdin Khel sepoys, though not likely to rejoin in person, may send in their rifles when the excitement has subsided.'

But the revolt did not stop at the Khyber and spread in further south where news was received that tribes were firing at Fort Lockhart on the Samana Range. On the 20th a heliogram from the Sadda post gave the news that the Delmarzai-Massuzai Lashkar had started and that all the Massuzais were growing restless. There had even been raids on villages in Kurram.

As usual the Government of India was quite unprepared for action on a major scale. Even though it had ruled the Frontier for nearly fifty years, communications were still quite inadequate. To quote Sir William Barton, 'Peshawar was the only border station linked by rail with India. There was no road through the Kohat Pass connecting Kohat and Peshawar. The Indus was crossed by ferry in the summer months on the way to Kohat and Dera Ismail Khan; in winter there were bridges of boats. It was over a hundred miles from the railhead to Bannu. As a result in an extensive border campaign transport difficulties were enormous.' As was now realised, it would need an army corps, some 50,000 troops, to deal effectively with the rising, and again the primitive Mogul-type baggage trains were brought into being. Bullocks, mules, ponies, and camels were seized promiscuously all over the Punjab, and pushed north across the Indus in charge of their owners. The latter had no proper clothing or equipment, and were alternately frozen and roasted; hundreds of them died from pneumonia. Thousands of their beasts died too. When General Sir William Lockhart arrived to take command of the punitive expedition which had now been decided on, he discovered that barely half the pack animals needed were available. However, on the 16th September he advanced into Mohmand territory, between the Kabul and Swat rivers, and climbed in fearful heat on to the plateau.

It would be a very devoted military historian indeed who could arouse any great interest in Lockhart and his campaigns. He was no doubt efficient; he drove the tribesmen from their strong points and

burned their villages; he imposed fines and made sure they were collected; and though from time to time his columns were ambushed, his dispositions were always sound enough for the situation to be retrieved. But from this distance in time, he seems irremediably dull, as do his subordinates, Westmacott, Kempster, Palmer, and Symons. As Sir Olaf Caroe complains, the later one gets in the nineteenth century, the smaller become the men on the Frontier. No figures leap from the pages of the history books, like Nicholson or Lawrence, Edwardes or Colin Campbell. There is no panache, no colour, and no great individuality. The goal on the Frontier had become professionalism; an in-bred desiccated professionalism. Soldiers seem to have given up the habit of writing long detailed letters home concerning their experiences; there were certainly few Lumsdens and Chamberlains. Perhaps the increased attention to military security may have discouraged the practice; or perhaps the art of letter-writing in general had begun its fatal decline. Even the dispatches of the Reuter correspondent, Lionel James, are inordinately dull; his euphemisms for 'death' must run into several dozen. It is probably true to say that of all the soldiers engaged on Mohmand and Tirah Expeditions only two are still remembered: Winston Churchill and Ian Hamilton. Unfortunately, Hamilton fell off his horse and broke a leg before his column had made contact with the enemy; and Churchill stayed with Blood's column which did not penetrate Tirah. However, his comments on the surrender of the Mohmands are well worth recalling:

'The next day the first instalment of rifles was surrendered. Fifteen Martini-Henrys taken on the 16th from the 25th Sikhs were brought into camp, by the Khan of Khar's men, and deposited in front of the general's tent. Nearly all were hacked and marked by sword cuts, showing that their owners, the Sikhs, had perished fighting to the last. Perhaps these firearms had cost more in blood and treasure than any others ever made. The remainder of the twenty-one were promised later, and have since all been surrendered. But the rifles as they lay on the ground were a bitter comment on the economic aspect of the 'Forward Policy'. These tribes have nothing to surrender but their arms. To extort these few had taken a month, had cost many lives and thousands of pounds. It had been as bad a bargain as was ever made.'

As for the policy of disarming the Frontier, which was now being

advocated in some quarters, Churchill warned that this 'would be about as painful an undertaking as to extract the stings of a swarm of hornets, with naked fingers'.

With this token surrender of captured weapons, negotiations began with the Mohmand maliks. When asked why they had attacked the posts at Chakdara and Malakand so ferociously, they blamed the young men of the tribe, and said it was the fear of annexation which had started the revolt. At the same time, they did not understand why the British should have punished them so severely. On the 11th October a full Durbar was arranged; the tribal leaders sat on three sides of a square, and into the fourth rode Sir Bindon Blood and his staff, Major Harold Deane, his Chief Political Officer, and an escort of the Guides Cavalry. After formal greetings were over, the tribesmen expressed their regret for the revolt, agreed to expel the followers of Umra Khan from their valley, and gave security for the rifles which had not yet been surrendered. Blood then informed them that as their punishment had already been severe, no further fines would be imposed. With this, the maliks stood up, lifted their hands on high, swearing to abide by the terms agreed and to keep the peace. The Durbar, which had lasted fifteen minutes, was over.

The next day Bindon Blood led his column out from the valley en route for India, and Winston Churchill relates:

'The tribesmen gathered on the hills to watch the departure of their enemies, but whatever feelings of satisfaction they may have felt at the spectacle were dissipated when they turned their eyes towards their valley. Not a tower, not a fort was to be seen. The villages were destroyed. The crops had been trampled down. They had lost heavily in killed and wounded, and the winter was at hand. No defiant shots pursued the retiring column.'

The troops in Blood's column had not much cause for satisfaction either; out of a total strength of 1,200 they'd lost 33 officers and 249 men in killed and wounded.

While Blood's column was retiring, Sir William Lockhart and his two divisions were heading towards Tirah. This was the sacred fastness of the Afridis which no white man had ever seen, and the tribesmen fought tooth and nail to block the army's passage. On the 18th October there took place the battle for the Dargai heights, a steep ridge ending in a precipice. This feature marked the end of

the Samana Range and covered the road to Tirah. It was a difficult feature with a narrow, exposed approach, but, supported by the mountain batteries, the Gordon Highlanders captured it before noon with great dash and the Orakzai tribesmen who were holding it streamed down the far side. It was now that the appalling lack of staff work in Lockhart's column let down the troops. No supply arrangements had been made and so the Gordon Highlanders had to come down to Shinawari, 5,000 feet below and lost fifty men in doing so. Observing the withdrawal, an Afridi lashkar, which had made camp in the Khanki valley beyond, swarmed up on to the heights and the troops could see their standards silhouetted on the skyline. The next day they remained there, their numbers increasing, and so there was nothing for it but to recapture the position on the 20th.

Sir George MacMunn was a gunner subaltern in this action and has left a vivid account of it. The Gordons and the Gurkhas of Brigadier-General Kempster's 3rd Brigade led off in single file before daylight, followed by three mountain batteries. Kempster's plan was to sweep along the spur leading from the Kotal to the Dargai heights and to swarm up them as the troops had done on the 18th; four mountain batteries were to be in support. MacMunn relates:

'It was to be a bagatelle, and while Kempster held the ridge and the Heights on the left side of the descent, the rest of the force, with its transport, would defile peacefully behind the leading brigade in the valley below. But the race is not always to the swift. The tribal standards waved on the troops and defiant cries were wafted down and re-echoed in the gorge. Soon after 8 a.m. the mountain batteries on the *kotal* and that high on the Sukh opened fire on the crest. Colonel Travers led his first few scouts across easily enough to some cover under overhanging rocks. Then the defenders awoke to what was in progress. The remainder of the Gurkhas, attempting to join their colonel in extended order along the narrow neck, encountered a tremendous fire, chiefly of Martini bullets aimed by the best marksmen on the frontier. Every expert in the clefts above had two or three loaders. Hardly a shot missed its billet. The men, dribbling over, were hit time and again, and rolled down the slopes on either side or lay on the fairway. Colonel Travers had hoped, as soon as a fair clump of men joined him, to begin pushing up the goat tracks where there appeared to be occasional cover from rocks. But his

party did not increase. The accurately aimed fire swept off all who ventured to join him. Then, after some time had elapsed, General Kempster ordered the Dorsets to try, and a similar fate awaited them. It seemed impossible to get over that fire-swept neck. Then some of the Derbyshire Regiment were ordered to make the attempt—a futile proceeding. There were already crowds of men and stretchers behind the little ridge and in the depression. More men only added to the confusion. All the morning long, this impasse grew. The brigadier was impatient, but could not get the rush over the neck.'

Increasingly worried by the slaughter of his troops, Kempster asked General Yeatman Biggs if the action must be continued. The reply was that it must be; the heights must be carried at all costs. The Gordons now went into action again but were bowled over just as the Gurkhas and Dorsets before them. Bodies spread like a thick writhing carpet; and what depressed the troops and their officers was that even if they could get this feature, the ground beyond it looked even worse. But then the commanding officer of the Gordons showed his mettle. As MacMunn continues:

'Then occurred the inspiriting operation of which so much was written at the time. Colonel Mathias ordered officers and pipers to the front. The swagger with which the pipe major threw his plaid and his drones well over his shoulder was magnificent. The Colonel strode out in front, and the pipes set up "Cock of the North". And out on to that narrow ridge scrambled a mass of some six hundred cheering Highlanders. The artillery redoubled their supporting fire, and though many men fell, the mass, as the Colonel expected, got over, and in their train came Gurkhas, Sikhs and the men of Dorset and Derby. Piper Findlater, lying wounded in the neck, played his pipes as the men rushed on, a gallant incident that was to make him famous.

'The neck crossed, the companies set themselves in some confusion to scramble upwards along the slopes and goat paths and among rocks and crevices. It was a matter of at least three hundred difficult feet, and every one thought it would be the worst, but no! the heavy rifle fire soon died away, and the leading files gained the top at various parts almost unmolested. The tribesmen had seized their standards and had gone.'

The Gordons had lost 300 men in this action which should never

have been necessary, and the Gurkhas and Dorsets suffered heavily also. But again the staff work let the troops down, and they were forced to bivouac in the open as best they could. The supply convoys waited on the road six or seven miles away and in the following confusion none of the animals was watered. Thousands of them died with their loads still strapped on them and thousands more died on the difficult descent into the Khanki valley. The whole operation was now delayed while fresh beasts were brought up from India. Some officers like MacMunn began to wonder whether the Indian Army would ever learn how to take the field in strength.

Lockhart detested Westmacott and now had no great warmth for Kempster. The latter was detested by the troops and 'to be kempstered' came to be a catchphrase throughout the army. It even provided a military swear-word, and 'I'll be kempsterised if I do' became a common expletive throughout the rest of the campaign.

On the 2nd November there followed the battle for the Arhanga Pass, which was swiftly taken by the Gurkhas, and then General Gaseley and his staff climbed up to see the Valley of the Tirah Maidan—the first non-Afridis to do so. It occupied, they estimated, about a hundred square miles and was flanked by pine-clad slopes. The floor of the valley was broken by ravines and nullahs which stretched upwards towards the Safed Koh, but every available inch seemed to be cultivated. There were terraced fields, sprinkled with groves and copses, and houses were dotted all about them. Closer examination showed that these were two-storeyed, the bottom half being made solidly of boulders, and the upper half being erected on wicker frameworks plastered heavily with baked mud to make them bullet-proof. Each family seemed to distrust its neighbour and the houses were built for all-round defence. It was autumn at the time of Gaseley's arrival, so no crops were growing, but the houses seemed to have ample stocks of Indian corn, beans, barley, honey, potatoes, walnuts, and onions. All the livestock had been driven to the hills and the population had left with it.

There were no roads in the valley, merely bridle paths from house to house, and the easiest way of progression was along the dried-up nullah beds. It was along these that Gaseley's brigade reached Bagh, the tribal centre and parliament ground.

Here orders had been given by the jirga that war should be made against the British. A few miles away Gaseley found the Akbar

Mullah's mosque, an insignificent-looking building with a mud roof supported by wooden pillars. It was sited at the junction of three streams, in a grove of walnut and Himalayan oak trees. Inside the troops found some copies of the koran, and the floor was strewn with rare grasses. It was all quiet and peaceful, quite different from how it must have been a few months earlier when the mullah was preaching jehad to the tribesmen. Having for some curious reason ringed the trees, the troops left the mosque undamaged.

During the next few days Sir William Lockhart and the rest of the column arrived. The Afridis, apart from ambushing any small parties of troops they could find (detachments of both the Dorsets and the 36th Sikhs had been massacred), remained silent and unseen. With their wives and children they crouched shivering in the hills, watching the movements of the troops down below. On the 21st, as no tribal leaders had appeared to open negotiations, Lockhart decided that punishment would be carried out forthwith. Under his orders the troops deployed across the valley to begin burning the homesteads and chopping down the groves, and by noon hundreds of smoke columns were rising towards the sky. So many, in fact, that for large areas the sun was blotted out. This cruel treatment, however, had the desired effect, and soon the tribal leaders came down to parley—the Khumber Khels, Aka Khels, Malikdin Khels, and Kamrai Khels. Brought before Lockhart and his political adviser, Sir Richard Udny, they were told their punishment: the surrender of 800 serviceable rifles, 50,000 rupees in cash, and the restitution of all stolen property. They were also informed that the British had no intention of occupying Tirah permanently. Looking round the group of maliks Lockhart was surprised to see that many of them had served in the Indian Army; one man had no less than five campaign medals on his chest, including those for service in Burma and Egypt. After some bargaining the terms were sullenly agreed to; the very notion that the Afridis were repentant or had any intention of mending their ways was obviously quite ludicrous. By the time the campaign was over, their suffering was considerable. Every valley of Tirah had been traversed; those in which the tribes failed to surrender or pay their fines had been burned from end to end. For four months the people throughout the whole country had been deprived of their homes, and the women and children suffered just as severely as the men. But the Government of India was still

not satisfied, and announced that unless an unconditional surrender was forthcoming from all the tribes it would mount a new expedition in the spring of 1898. However, the threat was an empty one, and the Afridis weren't deceived for a moment. From now on their hatred of the British was more intense than ever.

If the campaign had been costly to the Afridis, it had also proved a great burden to the British. Several million pounds had been spent and some 800 casualties lost. As the rearguards stubbornly fought their way out of Afridi territory, some officers were already beginning to ask what precisely had been achieved and whether the effort had really been worth while. Many of them considered that it had not.

The Pathan revolt of 1897 triggered off another round in the political controversy over the 'Forward Policy', and perhaps the most ferocious of all. This time not only the strategic and military problems of the Frontier were examined but the basic structure of the administrative system. Was there any sense, people began to ask, in trying to administer the Pathans of the plains as if they were Europeans, while the Pathans in the hills remained in a primitive tribal state? Was it any use disarming the former so that the latter could come down out of the hills to loot and plunder? Was the British judicial system, with what Sir Olaf Caroe has called 'its lawyers and its appeals and its European crime scale of values', doing any good whatsoever in the administered areas? Its main effect was to emphasise the charms of the freer life up in the hills. As Caroe points out further, 'The Pathan customs require the satisfaction of the aggrieved rather than the punishment of the aggressor. . . . The Pathan in fact treats crime as a kind of tort.'

Another administrative device called into question was the payment of muwajib, or allowances. These, it will be remembered, were offered from the early days in an attempt to persuade some of the warlike tribes to refrain from attacking their neighbours. Some allowances were paid too for road maintenance or protection or other special services. But now the question came to be asked: were the allowances what they pretended to be, or were they a form of disguised blackmail? And if the whole Frontier could go up in flame, were they effective?

Some men considered that not only was the quality of the men on the Frontier declining, the spirit governing the whole administration was declining too. It was too rigid, too paper-bound, too complex altogether. An official could not make even the smallest decision without referring to several hundred regulations, some of them vague and many of them contradictory. Initiative, personal judgment, and lively sympathy with the individual tribesman therefore tended to vanish. No one was more bitter about the circumstances which allowed the Afridi insurrection than Sir Robert Warburton, the 'uncrowned king of the Khyber'. Soon after the uneasy peace had returned he wrote:

'In the first years of our rule on the North-West Frontier of the Punjab our district officers do not appear to have complained of overwork and want of time to mix with the people and learn their customs. The system of procedure in those days was exceedingly simple and brief, and the work was done quickly, satisfactorily to the people, and without those endless appeals which the natives regard as an evil in these times. Then came the Mutiny, which unhinged for years the civil system of the province. When that catastrophe was tidied over, and more peaceful times came in, then the lawyers commenced to pour in codes, enactments, procedure rules etc. to torment the heart and mind of the Frontier official. . . . When your work is of a nature that keeps you occupied from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. and often up to midnight, there is little time left to interview and mix with the people under your charge or to associate yourself with their feelings.'

In the early 1850's John Nicholson had written to Henry Lawrence: 'I feel I am little fit for regulation work, and I can never sacrifice common-sense or justice, or the interests of a people or the country, to red-tape.' Once a friend even found him cheerfully kicking a bundle of regulations around the floor. 'This is the way I treat these things,' he remarked. In the 1890's Nicholson would have been sacked, and even Herbert Edwardes with his liberal interpretation of the law would not have survived.

But in Warburton's view the greatest evil which had grown up in Frontier administration was the use of the Arbab or middleman. He had been the cause 'of nearly every disagreement and much of the bloodshed between the British Government and the savages of the Independent Hills'. It was inevitable, with the power he could wield,

that intrigue and corruption would result, and the sins of the Arbab would be held against his employer. But unhappily the linguistic qualifications of most Frontier officers were such that they could not make a speech before a tribal jirga or carry on a fluent conversation with its members. Many officers had spent years in the interior of the Punjab where Hindi was spoken, and had no time during a limited spell on the Frontier to learn another language. So they continued to rely on the middlemen; and their relations with the men they were administering grew inevitably more remote.

In March 1898 the 'Forward Policy' again formed the subject of a debate in the House of Lords, which was opened by Roberts (now created Lord Roberts of Kandahar). In a major speech he pleaded that the Frontier should be removed from the arena of Party politics, and that the basic realities behind the Forward Policy should be recognised. He continued:

'The Forward Policy—in other words, the policy of endeavouring to extend our influence over, and establish law and order on, that part of the Border where anarchy, murder, and robbery up to the present time have reigned supreme . . . is necessitated by the incontrovertible fact that a great Military Power is now within striking distance of our Indian possessions, and in immediate contact with a State for the integrity of which we have made ourselves responsible.'

Having made this logical (if arguable) statement, Roberts spoke of the 200,000 fighting men of the tribal areas, and gave illustrations of their remarkable fighting powers. Then he added:

'The all-important question is by what means can we ensure that this enormous military strength may be used for us, and not against us. The opponents of the Forward Policy tell us that this can only be done by . . . letting the tribesmen alone, no matter what atrocities they commit, so long as they do not interfere with us, and, when their conduct necessitates punishment, recurring to the punitive expeditions which have already cost such a vast expenditure in blood and money, and inflicted such cruel misery on the innocent families of the delinquents. Burning houses and destroying crops, necessary and justifiable as such measures may be, unless followed up by some form of authority or jurisdiction, mean starvation for many of the women and children . . . and for us a rich harvest of hatred and revenge. . . .'

This new doctrine, that the 'Forward Policy' would obviate the

necessity for punitive expeditions, was utterly specious, and Roberts put forward no evidence to support it. He then declared: 'The Forward Policy must . . . be gradually and judiciously and steadily pursued until we obtain political control over the robber-haunted No-man's Land which lies on our immediate frontier . . . up to the boundary of our ally, the ruler of Afghanistan.' When this stupendous task had been achieved, then we should push ahead with roads and railways, at the same time, doing all in our power 'to enter into closer relations with those tribes through whose lands the roads and railways will have to run . . . they could not be made through a hostile country'.

Was this great plan practical in any way? Or had the grand old soldier lost touch with reality? Many of his hearers felt the latter must be the case. For how, they asked themselves, could the Afridis be persuaded to let a railway be pushed through Tirah Maidan? Or the Mahsuds to permit a railway through Waziristan? And who could guarantee that the Orakzais, the Yusafzais, the Mohmands, or the Ghilzais would be any more amenable? As some of the noble lords pointed out, the process would have to be very gradual and very judicious indeed. . . .

However, so perverse were the emotions raised in the House at the very mention of the North-West Frontier, that logic and reality had little currency. The 'Forward Policy' won the day. And within a year it was announced that the greatest of all the Russophobists, the arch-disciple of Sir Henry Rawlinson, was to proceed to India as Viceroy. He was thirty-nine years old and his name was George Nathaniel Curzon. He was the most extraordinary man ever to hold that high office.

255

11

THE END OF THE GAME

Sir Harold Nicolson has suggested that 'most of Curzon's basic convictions, the articles of his faith, were absorbed before he left Eton in 1878', and certainly this is true where Russia and Central Asia were concerned. On the 7th May 1877 he had spoken in a debate in the Reverend Wolley Dod's House, on the motion 'Are we justified in regarding with equanimity the advance of Russia towards our Indian frontier?' According to the report which he entered in the Minute Book, Curzon's own view was that 'He did not for a minute imagine that the Russians would invade India . . . but . . . a question of diplomacy might arise in Europe in which the interests of England were opposed to those of Russia. It might then suit Russia to send out an army to watch our Indian frontier.'

For a schoolboy, this remark showed astonishing perception; and his view was not to change with the years, even though by the late 1880's his experience of Asia was considerable and his knowledge of her history and ethnology encyclopaedic. In his great work *Russia in Central Asia*, published in 1889, he wrote: 'The Russians' . . . object is not Calcutta, but Constantinople; not the Ganges but the Golden Horn. To keep England quiet in Europe by keeping her employed in Asia, that, briefly put, is the sum and substance of Russian policy.' This book was written after his celebrated journey along the Transcaspian Railway, in which he visited Bokhara, Samarkand (the final resting place of Tamerlane), and Tashkent. Six years later he had travelled to the source of the Oxus, which he reported to be a huge glacier at the eastern end of the Wakhan Pamir; and from the Pamirs he had reached Chitral, where he stayed with George Robertson, who was to achieve fame in the siege. Later he stayed in Kabul, as a guest of the Amir Abdur Rahman, then

followed the route taken by Stewart and Roberts, to Kandahar. No Viceroy in history could compare with him as a traveller.

But Curzon did not merely travel, in the sense of covering the ground; he observed, he questioned, he probed, he noted. Nothing escaped his purview, from the sayings of General Skobelev to the remarks of minor Russian diplomats and the import and export figures of Bokhara. He even had time to note the comparative figures for branch offices of the Russian Imperial Bank and the Central Asian Commercial Company in 1885, as opposed to 1873. His industry, his drive, his intellectual energy were incredible. Despite a back injury, which caused him almost incessant pain, his physical endurance was incredible too.

He was a complex character about whom volumes have been written, and will no doubt be written in the future. Naturally proud and aristocratic, he had an almost divine sense of mental and moral superiority over anyone he might encounter. Usually the superiority was a fact. But for all his astonishing gifts, he could be mean, capricious, and unpredictable. He could make astonishing misjudgments both of men and events, and one such error was to terminate his Viceroyship. He often seemed incapable of realising that other men were as sensitive as he was and could be hurt when he attacked them; he somehow did not understand that in politics personalities often count as much as policies. He had a habit of viewing problems in the abstract.

However, the Viceroyship of India was what he had dreamed of and planned for; and when he arrived to take office in January 1899 he was not unlike a prince coming to claim his inheritance. No one who knew him could doubt that his impact would be considerable.

So far as the Frontier was concerned, the Government of India was still desultorily digesting the lessons of the 1897 revolt; trying to make up its mind what was wrong, and how it should be put right. The echoes of the Tirah expedition had barely died in the passes, and already the Afridis in the Khyber were demanding the allowances which they had forfeited by their own treachery. Ten thousand British troops were isolated in forward posts beyond the administrative border, still unconnected by lateral communications and therefore in danger of being destroyed piecemeal. In most places the garrisons were too weak to make sorties, even if called upon, and merely provided a cause of irritation among the tribesmen.

If the military situation was unsatisfactory, so was the administrative situation. From 1897 onwards, bickering had been going on between Lord George Hamilton, the Secretary of State for India, and Lord Elgin. Before the revolt had been crushed, the former had given it as his opinion that 'the conduct of external relations with the tribes on the Punjab frontier should be brought more directly than heretofore under the control and supervision of the Government of India'. To this Elgin replied that 'very little is said of the grounds on which this opinion is based', adding that the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, Sir Mackworth Young, challenged the whole basis of the assertion. As to the idea of a special Frontier Service, which such a development would entail, Elgin thought this would bring about insuperable difficulties with regard to promotion. He then continued, in a style which Hamilton must have found frustrating in the extreme: 'What is wanted on the Frontier is personal influence, but not necessarily the influence of the individual. No doubt instances could easily be quoted where a strong and sympathetic individuality has dominated the ruder natures with which it has been brought in contact. But we cannot predicate characteristics like these for all frontier officers, and it is only too probable that an officer, set down in a remote district for the best years of his life, will imbibe prejudices from his surroundings, or perhaps tend to fossilise. . . .' Any administrative reforms would obviously have to wait till Elgin had retired, but meanwhile Hamilton exerted increasing pressure on him to withdraw troops from the tribal areas. Interference should be avoided, he wrote in January 1898, regular forces should be concentrated, and the Khyber should be maintained as a secure artery of trade and communications. In place of the regular troops, he wrote later on, there were to be 'militia recruited from the tribes of the country, disciplined and equipped to a certain extent upon military models, and usually commanded by British officers'. This development took time, but gradually the Mohmand Militia, the Kurram Militia, the Tochi Scouts, the South Waziristan Scouts, the Chitral Scouts, and other irregular bodies came into being. These collaborated with the Frontier Constabulary, an efficient armed police force, located on the border of Administered Districts.

But despite these developments in the military field, a political decision had to be taken as to who should control the Frontier in the future; and Curzon was determined, from his first weeks in

office, that it should be taken as swiftly as possible. On the 5th April 1899 he was pointing out that 'in ordinary times the Punjab Government does the Frontier work and dictates the policy . . . but in extraordinary times the whole control is taken over by the Government of India through agents who are not its own; while the Punjab Government, dispossessed and sulky, stands on one side, criticising everything that is done'. If he imagined, however, that this quixotic situation would be resolved without friction, he was sadly mistaken; by the summer a broadside had been fired by Sir Mackworth Young, who viewed the possible reduction of his powers with resentment and alarm. But Curzon gave him short shrift and by November was writing: 'I cannot expend hours in wordy argument with my Lieutenant-Governors as to the exact meaning, purport, scope, object, character, possible limitations, conceivable results, of each petty aspect of my Frontier policy. If they deliberately refuse to understand it, and haggle and boggle about carrying it out, I must get some fairly intelligent officer who will understand what I mean and do as I say.' Later on he loosed another broadside: 'The Government of India . . . has placed between itself and the Frontier the Punjab Government which often knows less and which for twenty years has been an instrument of procrastination and obstruction and weakness.'

In addition to the composition of explosive missives, however, Curzon got down to the more serious work of drafting detailed plans; and by September 1900 these were submitted to Lord Hamilton. The only solution to the Frontier problem, Curzon argued, was 'the construction of a new Agency or province, to be under the immediate control of the Government of India'. As he freely conceded this was not a new idea; it had been put forward by Lytton in 1877. But Lytton had contemplated a huge trans-Indus province, stretching from Hazara to the Indian Ocean, and including the regions of Baluchistan and Sind, as well as the Punjab. Such a province (even if desirable) would now be impossible, as Baluchistan had its own administration, and, as had now come to be recognised, the problems of Sind were very different from those of the Punjab. Curzon's new province, as he put it, 'would consist . . . of the whole of the Trans-Indus Districts of the Punjab as far south and including Dera Ismail Khan'. Its chief would be 'a Chief Commissioner and agent to the Governor-General, who should be

appointed by . . . the Government of India. He would reside at Peshawar. . . .'

Faced with such powerful and lucid dispatches, the British Government decided to let Curzon have his way, and on the 20th December 1900, Lord George Hamilton was writing that after full consideration they endorsed his plan as the only scheme which 'will avoid the evils of the present system'. The North-West Frontier Province could now be born.

The delivery was not an easy one. With typical insensitivity Curzon did not consult Mackworth Young before sending off his final minute to London, and the latter was naturally incensed. Such a course, he declared, was contrary to all common usage, and wrote accusingly to Curzon: 'You have not cared to consult me about forming a new Administration out of the territory which I have received a commission from her Majesty to administer.' The breach between the two men became open and bitter; and Mackworth Young was not without supporters. The Commissioner of Delhi, Herbert Fanshawe, resigned in protest; and Sir Olaf Caroe has related that fifteen years later, when he joined the Indian Civil Service, many senior officers still inveighed against Curzon. Though time and experience proved that Curzon was undoubtedly right, it should not be imagined that Mackworth Young did not have a coherent point of view. Any severance from the Punjab, with its great traditions, he argued, would be for the worse; the cadres for the new administration were too small; there must inevitably be a fall in standards. But this did not happen, in fact. The attractions of Frontier service drew good men not only from the Punjab but from other Indian provinces, and those who proved to have a real flair for the work were able to stay there for a greater part of their careers.

Another argument deployed by Mackworth Young was that Punjab officers who had spent long periods on the Frontier knew much more about tribal affairs than Curzon could possibly do, after such a short period in office. To this Curzon replied that not many of them had spent long periods there; which was the cause of their shortcomings. Pointedly he contrasted them with the giants of the past; with John Lawrence, John Jacob, Nicholson, Edwardes, Mackeson, Warburton, and Sandeman. The results of inexperience, which the Frontier was now suffering from, were, he thundered,

'departmental irresolution, dissipation instead of concentration of responsibilities, and long and injurious delays'. If the Punjab officers had been affronted before, now they were deeply wounded; Sir Lepel Griffin, for example, wrote in April 1901:

'He asserts that I never served on the Frontier before I was appointed Chief Secretary. The truth is that I was in camp at Dera Ghazi Khan on the border when I was first appointed to officiate as Chief Secretary, and that for several previous years . . . I have received a singularly exhaustive frontier political training. There was no frontier district which I did not know; no outpost or pass from Hazara to Sind which I had not visited, nor was there a single chief, Baluch or Afghan, with whom I was not personally acquainted.'

Though Curzon had been undoubtedly unjust to individuals such as Griffin, this did not affect the validity of his case; and, as some officers pointed out at the time, civil servants are not paid to create policy, but to carry it out. Despite private bitterness, most of them got down to the job with a will.

The first Chief Commissioner was Lieutenant-Colonel Harold Deane, whose staff included not only officers of the Political Department of the Government of India, but (to quote Collin Davies) 'members of the provincial and subordinate civil services, police officers, and officers specially recruited from the Militia, Engineering, Education, Medicine, and Forestry Departments'. The civil and judicial administration of the new province was very much the same as elsewhere in British India, and each of the five districts was placed under a deputy commissioner. The separation from the Punjab did not prove in many ways as painful an operation as had been predicted, for the trans-Indus regions (see Chapter 1) had never been part of it historically or geographically, and the Pathan tribes had their own language and ethnic background. The Punjab still remained a vast country in its own right, some 15,000 square miles bigger than the United Kingdom and the Irish Free State put together. As Curzon pointed out, it had lost only one-fourteenth of its area, one-fifteenth of the revenue, and one-eighteenth of its population.

Sir Olaf Caroe considers that the main purpose served by the creation of the Frontier Province was a recognition of the Pathan conception of oneness. It provided 'first an administrative, and

later a political, soil in which this idea could take root, and, carefully nurtured, grow into active life. It laid out this area at a time when the allegiance of the Frontier people was uncertain and groping. . . . At the same time, by arranging for a greater concentration of effort and expertise at the decisive point, it did something to draw together the districts and the tribal territory. . . . Not entirely consciously, Curzon had provided a focus for Pathan self-esteem, and so done much to consolidate a firm frontier.'

Certainly it was not for another nineteen years that there was to be a major conflict; and despite all the efforts by Turkey and Germany the Frontier did not fragment during the First Great War of 1914–18. But if it was 'firm' it was certainly not tranquil. In 1900 Curzon taunted the Punjab Government with having failed to provide a barrier against aggression on the Frontier, pointing out that from 1850 onwards at least forty expeditions had been launched against the tribes. His own policy, the creation of a new province forming the 'Key to the Frontier Arch', he asserted, would bring about a rapid improvement; and in September 1905, when he spoke at the United Services Institution, he was able to boast:

'. . . for seven years we have not had a single frontier expedition, the only seven years of which this can be said since the frontier passed into British hands . . . in the five years 1894–9 the Indian taxpayer had to find 4½ million pounds sterling for frontier warfare, [but] the total cost of military operations on the entire North-West Frontier, in the last seven years has only been £248,000, and that was for the semi-pacific operation of the Mahsud blockade.'

The facts were accurate so far as they went, but the boast was vain. Already the Zakka Khels who lived in the Bazar valley, to the south of the Khyber, had begun raiding in force, and by 1908 great gangs of them were descending on Peshawar. Sir Harold Deane reported that in the last seven years 'no less than 32 British subjects have been murdered, 29 wounded, and 37 kidnapped and held up to ransom by members of this tribe'. So a punitive expedition was launched, notable solely for the fact that it provided the baptism of fire for the future Field-Marshal Wavell, then a young subaltern. The pattern which had prevailed for so many decades on the Frontier reasserted itself; and so far as the bulk of the tribes were concerned, the creation of the North-West Frontier Province seemed to make very little difference.

Sir Kerr Fraser-Tytler, who first went to India in 1910 and, after long service on the Frontier, eventually became the British Minister to Afghanistan in 1935, supports this view. 'I cannot help feeling some doubt [he writes] whether Curzon ever really appreciated the fundamental issues of the whole frontier question. His policy certainly did not put an end to the punitive expeditions, nor did it protect the settled districts from trans-border raiders. . . . Life in the little frontier cantonments was anything but secure in the days before barbed wire when the firebrand of the Mahsud tribe, the notorious Mullah Powindah, was sending down his fanatical emissaries from across the border to murder a white man if they could get one and so secure certain entry into Paradise. And always there were the raids, the sudden alarm, the long dust-choked ride through the stifling heat of a July night, clattering out on to the stony glacis of the frontier hills. The Curzon policy advanced our relations with the tribes not one whit, and broke down altogether under the strain of the Third Afghan War when British control of the trans-frontier area vanished in a few days at the approach of an Afghan force. . . .' Whether more frequent expeditions would have been necessary if the Frontier had not been reorganised is a matter for debate. But they certainly were needed with distressing regularity for the next forty years.

Perhaps it would be fair to point out here that Curzon was never really able to put into effect the new version of the 'Forward Policy' that he had in mind on arrival in India. In June 1899 he was writing that 'It is of course inevitable that in the passage of time the whole Waziri country up to the Durand Line will come more and more under our control. No policy in the world can resist or greatly retard that consummation. My desire is to bring it about by gradual degrees and above all without the constant aid and pressure of British troops.' What he was referring to, of course, was the new irregular forces now coming into being, though how they could implement such a policy no one was quite clear. Some doubted if Curzon was clear himself. However, the non-involvement policy laid down by Lord George Hamilton would obviously not brook any forward movement, except in the form of punitive expeditions, and Curzon's initial policy disappeared in the tumult caused by his major reforms.

Apart from the creation of the North-West Frontier Province,

Curzon was indirectly responsible for another great change. Early in his term of office he had asked the British Government if Kitchener, at that time regarded as the greatest soldier in the Empire, could come to India as Commander-in-Chief; and in November 1902 he arrived. His early impressions of the Indian Army were unfavourable, to say the least, and already on the 30th December he was writing to his confidante, Lady Salisbury: 'The idea that pervades everyone in India is that the Army is intended to hold India against the Indians. . . . I think this is a wrong policy.' All officers and men, he argued, should look to the North-West and hold it their highest duty to prevent external aggression. Regiments in southern India, he discovered, were in a state of decay and held in such contempt by most British officers that they would do almost anything to avoid serving in them. The bulk of the army, so Kitchener recorded, was 'scattered all higgledy-piggledy over the country, without any system or reason whatever'. His immediate remedy was to reorganise it into corps and divisions; and, by reducing garrisons to a minimum, he found that nine divisions could be put into the field, as opposed to the four he had inherited. These nine divisions were now deployed on the two main axes meeting at Peshawar, the northern axis with five divisions, running from Peshawar to Lucknow, with the southern axis facing Afghanistan with three divisions. One division was held forward at Quetta. This reorganisation meant that every unit would spend some time on the Frontier, and so (in Kitchener's view at least) the Frontier Force became unnecessary. Even before Elgin left India, it will be remembered, the irregular Frontier Corps were coming into being, and by now they were fully operational. So the Frontier Force, which had rendered such great service for many years, was broken up. This action, quite naturally, caused great bitterness in the Indian Army, and the consequent furore took some years to die down; even in 1935 it was raging in the London press. However, Kitchener dragged the Indian Army into the twentieth century; the great pity was that not even he could solve its transport problems.

While he was still grappling with problems on the Frontier, Curzon was compelled to keep a sharp weather eye on Kabul where events were not marching to his advantage. In 1901 Abdur Rahman was succeeded by his son Habibullah, and for once there was no prelude of bloodshed to a new reign. Habibullah lacked the domi-

nating ruthless character of his father, however, and could never quite rid his court of its more unruly elements. His brother Nasrullah headed a strong anti-British faction, and with the Russians increasing their pressure, it became obvious to Curzon that Afghanistan's status as a buffer state was becoming jeopardised. To rectify the situation, he proposed a meeting between himself and Habibullah at which the undertaking between the Indian Government and Abdur Rahman could be renewed. Habibullah was too nervous to leave Kabul, however, and was probably frightened by Curzon too; he courteously refused the invitation while expressing his desire to remain on the friendliest of terms with the British. Eventually, when he could see that there was no chance of a personal meeting with the Amir, Curzon dispatched Sir Louis Dane to Kabul, and discussions began at the end of 1904.

They were not very productive. The Amir and his advisers were so impressed by the recent Japanese victories over Russia that they urged Sir Louis that the British should join them in an attack on Russia at once. They also suggested an elaborate defence scheme involving the construction of a railway into southern Afghanistan, and British co-operation in the defence of Kandahar. As Fraser-Tytler puts it, 'this was forward policy with a vengeance, and was completely at variance with the trend of British relations with Russia'. Dane had no option but to turn down the proposals, and soon the Afghans' attitude changed from cordiality to suspicion and resentment. The situation was now worse than it had been before he left Peshawar.

When the news of this development reached Curzon he acted hastily and suggested to the British Government that Dane should be recalled. Fortunately, however, wiser councils prevailed in London, and the Secretary of State pointed out that Habibullah was still offering Britain control of his foreign relations, just as his father had done. Finally on the 21st March 1905 a treaty was signed which confirmed this right in return for a subsidy of £160,000 a year and permission for the Amir to import munitions through India. In 1907 (after Curzon had left) the Amir found himself able to visit India where he was courteously received by Lord and Lady Minto; and he returned to Kabul determined that a policy of friendship towards Britain should be firmly maintained.

It should not be imagined that, with these weighty matters con-

fronting him, Curzon for a moment relaxed his mental grip on Russian affairs. Between 1899 and 1903 they did not march to his advantage either, and for a while it seemed that even the wildest of Russophobic fears might be realised. Immediately on his arrival in India Curzon became conscious that Russian influence in Persia was increasing again, and suggested to London that a hint should be dropped that the latter should be divided into spheres of influence. Unfortunately, England was just launching herself into the Boer War, a conflict which severely damaged Anglo-Russian relations (and foreign relations in general), and no rapprochement was possible. The Boer War lasted till 1902, but well before it was over the Russian Government expressed its intentions of establishing direct relations of a non-political nature with Kabul, and an ugly situation developed. Should foreign political or diplomatic agencies become established in the Afghan capital they would reduce to absurdity the British right to control the Amir's foreign policy; and the whole precarious balance of power in Central Asia would be seriously disturbed. Somehow the British Government were able to delay the realisation of the Russian threat, and in 1901 the death of Abdur Rahman brought discussions to an end. But the Russians still clung to their plan, and in October 1903 the British Chargé d'Affaires in St. Petersburg advised his chief in London that 'Russia has notified her intention of sending, when she pleases, her agents into Afghanistan'. On receipt of this information a strong note was drafted and sent to the British Ambassador in St. Petersburg; but before this could be delivered the Russian Ambassador in London suddenly appeared at the Foreign Office and opened discussions in such a conciliatory manner that it wasn't necessary.

Why this sudden volte-face should have occurred one may still speculate. Some authorities consider that the benevolent personage of King Edward VII had been moving behind the scenes; others that the chief credit should go to the Russian Ambassador, Count Benckendorf, who was a declared Anglophil. It may be, however, that personality had very little to do with the matter, and that the growing power of Germany led the Russians to consider whether Britain would be more useful as a friend than an enemy. Certainly, in 1906, when Russia's prestige had been shattered by the defeat at the hands of the Japanese, the Tsar expressed a wish to see King Edward. In fact, the meeting did not take place at this time, but,

instead, the British Ambassador, Sir Arthur Nicholson, opened formal negotiations with the Russian Foreign Minister, Mr. Isvolski. Anglo-Russian relations with regard to Persia, Afghanistan, and Tibet were discussed amicably and at length; and in August 1907 a Convention was signed in St. Petersburg covering all major points of difference. Persia was divided into spheres of influence; the Russians declared Afghanistan as outside her sphere, and agreed not to send agents to Kabul. All her dealings with the Amir would be passed through the British Government. On their part, the British undertook not to annex or occupy any part of Afghanistan nor to interfere in the internal administration of the country.

The Great Game was over.

By this time Curzon had been back in England two years. In 1905, after losing his titanic struggle with Kitchener (the cuckoo he had brought into the nest), he left India for good, having made enemies on all sides and even alienated his friends. His growing stubbornness, his perverted sense of pride, his absolute refusal to change a decision, even if events proved it wrong, had dragged him down from the great heights of viceregal splendour to squalid intrigue. By 1905 his judgment was warped, his energy was almost exhausted, and his vision was tinged with paranoic phantasmogorias. Early that year he broke down and wept like a child before Kitchener. Then on the morning of the 16th August 1905, when he was still at breakfast, a bearer brought him a dispatch from London. It was from the King and, to Curzon's amazement, announced that his resignation had been accepted.

So Curzon's term as Viceroy ended in stark tragedy; it almost broke his career and undoubtedly broke his heart. The rest of his extraordinary career comes outside this work, but so far as the story of the North-West Frontier of India is concerned, he bears an important and not unhonoured name. The fact that in many respects he failed must surely not be held against him: in this complex arena so has every other statesman and every other soldier. And Curzon certainly accomplished more than most.

267

12

INVASION FROM THE NORTH

As is only too evident from episodes already recorded, crises on the North-West Frontier of India develop with alarming speed, usually when they are unexpected and almost invariably at the worse possible moment for those whose duty it is to defend the passes. Macnaghten, it will be remembered, signalled that all was well, the day before he was murdered; Cavagnari sent a similar signal; and in 1897 Sir Richard Udny, Commissioner for Peshawar, signalled that all was quiet on the Khyber, only a few hours before news was received that the Afridi lashkars were marching. As Lord Curzon once put it, 'No man who has read a page of Indian history will ever prophesy about the Frontier.'

The Third Afghan War, one of the most difficult campaigns fought on the Frontier during the entire century that the British occupied it, could not have come at a worse time. It was May 1919. The Great War had dragged to its bloody conclusion only a few months earlier; the Empire had lost a million dead and several million wounded. The nation was utterly exhausted and longed for peace. In India many of the British troops were due for repatriation and impatiently waiting for the day when they would march to Bombay and board the ships. Some battalions were composed of Territorials who were over-age for active service. The Indian Army had been strained to the limit also and had sent more than a million men overseas during the last four years. Its depots, its training establishments, its officers and men were weary. The last thing any regiment wanted was to be hurled over the Indus into a hot-weather campaign against the Afridis. But this was to be their fate, and, in fact, no less than 750,000 British and Indian troops were to be engaged, not to mention 450,000 animals, before the crisis was brought to an end.

To trace the causes for the war it is necessary to go back to the year 1901 when the Amir Abdur Rahman died and was succeeded by Amir Habibullah Khan. The latter was a crafty, unreliable character who had great trouble in controlling his subjects and turned alternately for help to the British and Russians, according to which side apparently offered him most. With the rise of Pan-Islamism he inclined to Turkish influence and accepted a Turkish military mission, and later on military equipment. In 1915 a Turco-German mission arrived in Kabul, to the annoyance of the British, who, by the treaty of July 1880, controlled the foreign relations of Afghanistan. Indeed, the Amir was prohibited from having any relations with foreign powers except through the Government of India. The Turco-German mission stayed from October 1915 to May 1916 and was a complete failure in so far as its aim of severing Afghanistan from British influence was concerned. However, its leader treated the Amir as the head of a sovereign state and drafted a treaty in which Afghanistan was recognised as an independent nation. This gesture undoubtedly had its effect on the Afghan Nationalist Party and on the Amir himself. On the 2nd February 1919 he wrote to the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, demanding recognition at the Versailles Peace Treaty and of the 'absolute liberty and freedom of administration and perpetual independence of Afghanistan'. Chelmsford's reply to this demand was that seats at Versailles were limited to the belligerents, and he included no offer of recognition or any expression of thanks for Habibullah's maintenance of a neutral position in the war. Whether the Amir's brother Nasrullah, his son Amanullah, and their party heard of this correspondence, and feared that Habibullah might win peacefully what they and their party could only achieve by force, may still be debated. However, on the 20th February, when the Amir was on a shooting trip in the Laghman valley, he was brutally murdered. In the camp were Inayat Ullah Khan (his eldest son), Nasrullah Khan (brother) and Nadir Khan (the Commander-in-Chief), who were all members of the War Party. Inayat Ullah was a weakling, and Nasrullah immediately proclaimed himself Amir. At this time the third son, Amanullah Khan, was in Kabul where he held the position of Governor; and his immediate action was to assemble the tribal chiefs and have himself proclaimed Amir on the 28th February. Meanwhile the regular troops at Jalalabad, incensed by the murder

of their sovereign, arrested Nadir Khan, and Nasrullah was forced to acknowledge Amanullah. The new Amir, however, was immediately beset by more problems that he could comfortably handle. The loyalty of the army was doubtful, and he was forced to raise the soldiers' pay; at the same time Nadir Khan was removed to a remote garrison at Khost at the head of the Kurram valley. But, as it became increasingly evident, the troops still suspected the new Amir of complicity in Habibullah's murder, and it was necessary to distract their attention by some major diversion. Amanullah therefore turned to the War Party and embarked on the hazardous project of invading India.

Amanullah has been described by General Molesworth as 'a man of strange character, conceited, arrogant and with a somewhat empty precocious mind'. What his precise military objective was it is not quite clear, but he may have had in mind the recovery of Peshawar and the areas in the Derajat up to the river Indus. Alternatively, his motives may have been purely political, founded on a belief that even a moderately successful campaign would force the British into recognising his independence. In his proclamation on ascending the throne, he had declared that the Government of Afghanistan should be 'internally and externally free'.

From the start he realised that, to have any chance of success, his attack would have to be supported by all the forces which were disaffected by British rule. It so happened that in Kabul at this time there was a group of Indian revolutionaries calling themselves 'the Provisional Government of India'; they included a Muslim fanatic known as Obaydulla, a weird philosophical anarchist called Mahendra Pratap, and a political agitator called Barkatulla. The latter two had been attached to the Turco-German mission and had stayed on. The extent of the contacts of this Provisional Government and the exact nature of its links with India are still matters of some doubt; after a long correspondence with Pratap, the present author has failed to elucidate many facts of the matter. But there is no doubt that the group had close links with Kazi Abdul Wadi, the Afghan postmaster in Peshawar, who was a leader of the Peshawar Union Committee, a joint Hindu-Muslim body. Through him the Provisional Government was able to disseminate revolutionary literature throughout northern India, urging the Muslims to rise. One of their pamphlets ran:

'A contract has been entered into with the forces of invasion by the Provisional Government. You should therefore use every possible means to kill British, continue to tear up railways and cut down the telegraph.'

It is very possible that the Provisional Government were also in touch with Gandhi and the Indian National Congress Party, and it was rumoured that their contact here was one of the leading politicians, Lokomanya Tilak. Certainly the Afghan attack was co-ordinated with the insurrection in the Punjab. This burst across the land on the 10th April, when there was rioting and arson in Amritsar, and Europeans were murdered. In Lahore the mob took charge of the city till they were fired upon by patrols and charged by cavalry. At Chheharta, Khasa, and Gurasar the main telegraph wires were cut; at Gurdaspore the leaders incited the people to rebellion; at Kazur the mob attacked the railway station and attempted to kill all Europeans. At Patti there was violence in the streets; and in dozens of towns there were hartals (that is, a general closing of the shops), mob violence, and meetings encouraging people to rise. At midnight the railway between Chheharta and Khasa was torn up, the job being done expertly by gangmen's tools. The whole plan seemed to be developing with the object of absorbing all available British troops and at the same time cutting off communications between the Punjab and the Frontier. On the 11th and 12th the violence continued, and for twenty-four hours it looked as if the whole of north-west India would go up in flames, and the British would find themselves with another Indian Mutiny on their hands, more violent and even more widespread than the mutiny of 1857. Then on Sunday 13th April an extraordinary event happened. Brigadier-General Rex Dyer, the commander at Amritsar, learned that, despite his orders to the contrary, a large political meeting was assembling in an enclosed space known as the Jallianwala Bagh. The meeting, as he well knew, would be addressed by all the leading agitators in the town, who would incite the mob to more violence and murder. Dyer's forces were very small and, should another major explosion come in the next twenty-four hours, they would inevitably be wiped out; and with their destruction, all the European women and children now sheltering in the fort would be butchered too. He therefore determined on one brutal decisive action, and marched into the Bagh with fifty men and opened fire

on the mob without warning. In under ten minutes 379 men and boys were killed and 1,500 were wounded. Such a scene of bloodshed had never been seen in India during all the years of British rule; but as the news of it spread the insurrection petered out and in a few days the Punjab was quiet again.

It would seem now that the insurrection in the Punjab had been launched too soon, the original intention being that it should start on the 15th May, the date on which the Afghans planned their attack on the Frontier. However, though the timing had gone wrong, Amanullah was now committed to the invasion, and pushed steadily ahead with his plans. From the beginning of May Sir George Roos-Keppel, the Chief Commissioner for the North-West Frontier Province, noted that the Pathans were getting restive in the streets of Peshawar; that Hindu-Muslim meetings were being held, and the political agitators were hard at work stirring up the emotions of the mob. Then on the 7th May the Afghan postmaster disclosed the Amir's plans to an informer in the pay of the British. These were for simultaneous attacks on the Khyber, the Kurram, and Quetta. Messages had been sent to Indian agents to stir up trouble in the Punjab as soon as the fighting had begun. Receiving this information, Sir George acted promptly, surrounding Peshawar with a cordon of British troops and capturing the local plotters, including the Afghan postmaster and his staff. In the postmaster's house, he found a lakh of rupees and large quantities of leaflets and proclamations. These were printed in Kabul and announced that the Germans had resumed the war and that India and Egypt had risen against the British. One leaflet gave an account of the Amritsar affair, alleging that the Sikhs had refused to fire and had turned their guns on the British. There was also a letter written by the postmaster to the Amir the previous day but fortunately not posted, assuring him that the Sikh regiments had promised to regard Muslims as brothers and would not fire on them. Another letter, from Amanullah's father-in-law, Mohammed Tarzai (the Foreign Minister), asked the envoy in Simla to obtain allegiance from Hindus and Muslims. 'Afghanistan', he said, 'shares the feelings of Indians and is determined to support them.'

Though Roos-Keppel had saved the situation in Peshawar, there is no doubt that he had delayed action until the twelfth hour. Already, the previous week, the new Afghan Commander-in-Chief,

Saleh Mohammed, had moved his headquarters to Dakka, near the western mouth of the Khyber, and had made an inspection of the village of Bagh on the British side of the Frontier. On the 4th May he occupied it with regular Afghan infantry, supported by artillery. On the 5th May there were further incursions into British territory, and Afghan troops at the western end of the Khyber were reinforced; the Landi Kotal water supply was cut off, and the Indian staff at the pumping station were murdered. Thousands of tribesmen poured into Jalalabad to receive rifles. The Indian Government now realised that the storm must break at any moment, and on the 6th May war was declared on Afghanistan and general mobilisation began.

Before dealing with the fighting which was soon to develop in the Khyber Pass, it may be well to recall some geographical details. The length of the Pass, from near Jamrud (ten miles west of Peshawar) to Torkham, on the Afghan border, is fifty miles. In 1919 the road would take motor traffic, and in some sections there was room for vehicles to pass. From the eastern mouth the road rises gradually, twisting and turning past the small military post of Bagiari and Fort Maude to an open area near Ali Masjid, which is twenty-five miles inside the Pass and about the half-way point. A mile beyond this is a deep narrow gorge with a torrent falling below it. The road here is narrow and cut into the overhanging rock face. There is a place where, as Molesworth has remarked, 'a few men could hold up an army'. Beyond the gorge the path opens out by the cultivated fields and villages of the Sultan Khel and Lal Beg Afridis. The road then climbs gently past the small posts of Katakushta and Zintara. The summit of the Pass is at Landi Kotal fort, which stands at 3,509 feet, and lies at a distance of thirty-two miles from Jamrud. Here the hills of Tirah approach on the south, but on the other flank a broad valley opens, rising in a series of ridges towards the Inzar Kandao Pass. Landi Kotal is on the edge of a small plain and overlooks terraced fields and a number of tribal villages, each with its watch tower. The plain is overlooked to the north-west by the Ash Khel Ridge (4,597 feet) and the hill of Shahid Ghar (5,928 feet) to the east. At this time, according to Molesworth, the Landi Kotal fort was 'a "Beau Geste" structure with high walls, corner towers, with Machicouli galleries, inner galleries reached by ladders and loopholed for musketry, and a great, arched gateway

to the south . . . inside were the quarters of the Khyber Rifles, with barrack rooms, stores, armouries, and tanks for the water reserve'. Beyond Landi Kotal the road descends westwards and in some ways the descent was more difficult than the climb which preceded it. 'The Khyber gorge is narrow, the hills on either side steep and rocky and the gradient of the road much steeper than to the east. Indeed going down from Landi Kotal to Landi Khana on a winding road cut into the sheer hillside, with a deep rocky gorge to the south, is like going down into a pit.' Six miles beyond Landi Kotal is Michni Kandao and here the road falls steeply with hairpin bends, then curves southwards to Landi Khana four miles on. Another four miles and the Afghan Frontier is reached at the post of Torkham.

Whether an army is advancing or retreating, the Khyber must always be a nightmare, and the British and Indian troops which now marched into it had no illusions as to what was awaiting them. To begin with, however, things went quite smoothly. On the 5th May a small column of Sikhs and Gurkhas went forward to Landi Kotal with a mountain battery. Then on the 7th the Somerset Light Infantry moved forward to join them, being carried in hooded lorries. (At last wheeled transport was making an appearance on the Frontier, though, as already noted, 450,000 pack animals were being employed too.) Molesworth relates that 'the lorries were hooded and proved to be veritable "Trojan Horses" for both tribesmen and Khyber Rifles thought they merely contained routine replacements of stores . . . thus we were allowed to pass unmolested. The Afghan commander let slip a golden opportunity! It was, however, a risky operation but no one in the column knew this. . . .' Things remained quiet on the 7th, but on the following morning the Somersets were astonished to see regular Afghan troops digging in and building sangars, that is stone breastworks, on a ridge some 1,500 yards away. The Afghans also observed the Somersets and soon afterwards opened fire. So the fighting had begun.

At midnight a conference was held by Brigadier Crocker, commander of the 1st Infantry Brigade, and it was decided that an advance should be made the following day with the object of capturing the Afghan position at Bagh. The Afghan forces around Bagh village were estimated at five battalions of infantry supported by six guns, and it was known that reinforcements were on their way from Jalalabad. Soon after the conference had finished there was a

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violent storm and the troops were almost washed out of their camp and down the hillside. The infantry were invited to attack along the narrow spine of the ridge on a two, and sometimes one, platoon front, and the terrain was so difficult that the covering fire proved inadequate. Once the Afghans realised what was happening they brought a strong and accurate fire to bear, and the infantry were halted and forced to dig shallow trenches in the rocky soil, or find such other cover as was available. In these uncomfortable positions they held on for two days. The operation was very much criticised, and there is no doubt that it was attempted with inadequate resources. The infantry were too weak, and the artillery and machine-gun units were inadequate. It also seems that relations between Crocker and Major-General Fowler, commander of the 1st Division, which had now arrived, were somewhat unsatisfactory. Fowler had been advised of the attack but took no step to countermand the orders. On the 11th May he decided to launch a second attack under his personal control, and the troops moved up into position in the darkness, scrambling up the steep slopes and manhandling their equipment as best they could. By 6 a.m. they were in position. Then at 8.30 a.m. the artillery opened up and the machine-guns joined in, to give covering fire for the assault. This time things went according to plan. By 9 a.m. the Afghans could be seen fleeing in headlong retreat down the steep gorge beyond Kafir Kot and into the bed of the Lower Khyber, where many of them were caught by accurate fire from the mountain guns. By 2 p.m. the second brigade were bivouacked in Bagh village, and though the tribesmen could be seen climbing the wooded heights to the south they did not launch any counter-attack. Probably their thoughts were occupied in wondering how they could best loot the arms and ammunition left in the Afghan positions.

General Molesworth, who took part in this battle, tells an amusing story—the kind of incident that soldiers remember long after more important matters have faded.

'A runner lying down close to me was suddenly hit, apparently through the head. His helmet had been knocked off and his head seemed to be a pulp of blood and brains. To my astonishment he rose to his knees. He was quite unhurt! Our bully beef rations were issued in 6-lb tins—one to each section and this had to be carried by one man. This runner had put his on the top of his haversack and

carried high on his back. The bullet had gone through his helmet, into the tin, and covered his head with bully beef. There was great hilarity as he clawed the stuff out of his hair and it was a long time before he got away from the joke about his "wound". The men of his section who had lost their meat ration were not so amused.'

In this small though not unimportant action, British casualties were only 39; it was estimated, however, that the Afghans lost 100 killed and 300 wounded, apart from their guns and equipment. Morale among the British and Indian units which had not been very high up till now, went up by leaps and bounds.

Fowler's next task was to open up the Western Khyber below Landi Khana, and for this he employed all the troops not required to hold the picket line covering Landi Kotal. On the 13th May the leading troops pushed ahead, and to their surprise there was no opposition at all. They went on past Torkham and Painda Khak to Haft Chah, which was occupied after the exchange with a few tribesmen, busy looting Afghan ammunition. On the 14th and 15th, operations continued around Dakka, and on the night of the 16th Brigadier Crocker decided to attack it next morning. Again the infantry had to leave in the darkness and cross the exposed ground en route for the objective. Fowler had no news of the operation until an hour before it started and so was not able to push forward the cavalry who might have played a useful part. By 5 a.m. the Sikhs were on the steep slopes of Stonehenge Ridge and climbing slowly towards the Afghan positions on the crest. At first the enemy gave no sign of life, but then they woke up with a start and began firing down on the attacking infantry. By now the artillery and machine guns were bringing down fire and making things very uncomfortable for them. However, the Sikhs were now finding the ground almost impossible, for the summit of the ridge was literally a razor edge, seldom more than a few yards across, and on either side of it the ground fell steeply and in some sections precipitously. By 8 a.m. the whole attack had come to a standstill and the artillery was silent, having run out of ammunition. The Afghan gunners seemed to have a rather better supply system, however, and brought down fire not only on the Indian batteries but the nalas which were sheltering the cavalry horses. Then, fortunately, at 10.30 a.m. three lorry-loads of ammunition arrived and another attack by the Somersets was laid on for 11.30. Later this was cancelled, and

Major-General Skeen, commander of the 3rd Brigade, took over the battle. The attack eventually went in at 2 p.m. across very difficult terrain. To make matters worse, the heat was now intense, and the troops had to sweat their way up rocky precipitous slopes until they reached a position about 100 feet below the crest. Here they found some dead ground, and, almost as important, some shade in which to shelter; they were well ahead of the artillery and machine-gun programme so lay back to rest. Then about three o'clock they saw the Sikhs going forward on a flank, so sounded the charge with all available buglers and headed for the enemy. The slope was so steep that most men had to sling their rifles and climb on all fours, but they all reached the top. Molesworth relates:

'The Afghans had gone, leaving a good deal of equipment. We had a fleeting glimpse of a pony-drawn Afghan gun galloping wildly away on a distant ridge to the south-west. Patrols were pushed down into the deep nala to the west and flushed a few Afghans sheltering there.... Next morning ... we found abandoned guns and standards hidden in the nala.'

From now on there is no need to follow the progress of the Khyber column in great detail, but, since this is one of the least known campaigns in British history, it is worthwhile noting the conditions which the troops endured. Once more, the sole informant is Molesworth, who writes:

'On 19 May two evils of the camp began to appear. The first was dust, raised in thick clouds by men and animals. It was ankle deep on the ground and rose in a thick, choking fog to a height of some 50 feet, settling slowly over everyone and everything at night. It got into food and water, the mechanism of rifles and automatics and caked in the sweat of one's body and round the eyes. It was a most serious discomfort. To combat it large fatigue parties were employed each day, for many weeks, to dig shale from the hills and lay it deep on the camp roads. This somewhat abated the nuisance, but never finally removed it.

'The second evil was the overpowering stench of decomposing animal and human corpses, which rotted rapidly in the intense heat. In the nalas between Somerset and Green Hills there were still many Afghan bodies and these took time to locate and bury. But the stench lingered on for many days. In the nalas near the first camp were the blown-out bodies of many horses, mules and camels and

the stench from these was wafted over the camp on the breeze. It was extremely difficult to dispose of these, particularly the camels, whose hide is very tough. Certainly the vultures did a good deal to help and sun and wind—like a blast from an open furnace door—did much to dry the bodies up. But this did not mitigate the smell. Later a special Indian Sanitary Section was brought up and they tried, without much success, to burn the remains with straw. That only made the smell more nauseating and it was a long time before we were clear of it. In the meantime, we existed in an atmosphere of dust, stench and myriads of flies.

'We still had no fresh rations of meat and bread, nor fresh vegetables, but were on tinned meat and biscuits. Some of the meat was "Bullied Mutton" from Australia. The gentleman who produced it had, rashly, put his portrait on the tins and many people kept these labels hoping that, in the future, they might meet him. There was nothing wrong with the tinned meat except that an unvaried diet of this nature, in intense heat, became nauseating and the stomach revolted from it. We tried many ways to make it more palatable. It could not be eaten "cold", for it came out of the tin in a greasy, semi-liquid mass. We tried it curried, in dumplings and in loathsome, stringy stews. To supplement the weavilly biscuits, we made "chappaties"—thin, unleavened bread from flour, for we had no yeast. It was a long time before Butchery and Bakery Sections arrived.'

As May advanced the heat grew even more intense and still no tents were issued; and the dust fog became so thick that it blotted out the sky. Aircraft, which were now supporting the column, could not land on the airstrips prepared for them with enormous labour. However, an old Handley-Page aeroplane managed to bomb Kabul on the 24th May, causing some damage and great alarm. The ladies of the royal harem were so overcome with terror that they rushed out into the streets. This was the most scandalous episode the capital had enjoyed for many years.

Since mid-May fighting had broken out in the eastern Khyber, where the Malik Yar Mohammed of the Malik Din Khel Afridis led the tribesmen into action. They cut roads, pulled down telephone wires, and began sniping the forward posts. Soon the pressure they exerted was so great that men of the Khyber Rifles began deserting with their arms. As May went on the Afghans began raiding the

Khajuri Plain, south of Jamrud and west of Peshawar, and until the 44th Brigade arrived on the 20th May there were not enough troops to hold them.

But it was to the south that the main Afghan threat developed. Here their forces were under Nadir Khan, the Commander-in-Chief, who had now been reinstated. He was the only man in the country with any real military knowledge or talent, and he now led a force totalling two regiments of cavalry, fourteen infantry battalions, and forty-eight guns. On the 14th May he had reached a point eleven miles west of Peiwar Kotal in the Kurram valley, and was patrolling towards the border. On the 23rd he left Matun, which lies thirty miles west of Thal, and marched down the course of the Kaitu river.

In the face of this advance the forward British posts were abandoned, to be occupied immediately by Afghan regulars, accompanied by large numbers of Waziri tribesmen. The rising of the Tochi Waziris soon affected the North Waziristan Militia, and, during the withdrawal on Dardoni and Miranshah, 150 of them deserted. A company of Dogras was rushed into Miranshah fort, but even their presence did not steady the situation, and on the 26th May the remaining Waziris mutinied, and, having dug a hole through the wall of the fort, headed north with two of their Pathan officers.

Soon the situation deteriorated ever further, and news arrived that the South Waziristan Militia was disaffected also. In view of this it was decided to evacuate the militia posts at Wana and on the Gomal river, but, while the operation was in progress, the Waziri and Alfridi militiamen at Wana fort seized the keep and turned on their British officers and the men remaining loyal to them. Major Russell, the commander, fought his way out with this small party and for sixty miles kept up a running fight with the mutineers. Eventually they escaped across the Gomal river into Baluchistan.

The position was now very grave, for, as the British commanders realised to their horror, the predictions of the pessimists for the last fifteen years were proving correct; the Militia were proving quite incapable of withstanding a major attack, and were now more of a liability than an asset. Unless troops could be rushed to the Kurram front in time to stop Nadir Khan, he could strike direct for the Indus. And if he succeeded in getting anywhere near it, or indeed enjoyed any success at all, the impact both inside Afghanistan and

among the tribes would be enormous; there could even be another general rising as in 1897, with the full backing of Kabul.

A good deal depended now on the communications between Peshawar and Thal, the fort which covered the eastern entrance to the Kurram valley. The distance as the crow flies was only eighty miles, but on the ground it was a good deal more, as the road ran through the Kohat Pass, thirty miles due south of Peshawar. If this were blocked by the tribesmen, the alternative route available was a very long one indeed via Attock, on the river Indus. From Kohat there was a narrow-gauge railway, flanked by a metal road which, it was hoped, would prove adequate, if nothing more.

Thal itself was a large village inhabited by Bangash Pathans. It is here that the Kurram finds its way out of the hills and joins the Sangroba river before flowing placidly across the plain. As it was May the rivers had very little water in them and provided no obstacle for an invading army. The total forces in Thal at this time consisted of two infantry battalions, a section of Mountain Artillery, and a squadron of cavalry, which were obviously quite inadequate to hold any large attack for more than a few days. Apart from two militia towers there were not even any outer defences, and so the local commander hurriedly set the Sikhs and Gurkhas to work building a perimeter camp to the north of the fort, and this was finished on the 26th May in the nick of time.

On the 27th patrols came back to report that the Afghans had occupied the fort at Yusuf Khel, some three miles to the west on the Kurram river, and had established a large camp at Azgol Khwar, a few miles further west. Soon afterwards the shells began coming over from ranges varying from 2,000 up to 5,000 yards, and considerable damage was done to the fort. Several shells burst in the militia barracks which were now being used as a hospital.

The firing increased on the 28th, as Nadir Khan brought more 10 cm. howitzers into action, and petrol and fodder supplies were set on fire. The mountain gunners attempted counter-battery shooting, but were outranged, and though the R.A.F. sent over bombers to attack the Afghan gun positions, their efforts met with little success. The artillery fire increased rather than diminished.

Then at 10.30 a.m. an attack came in, led by regular Afghan infantry, who scrambled over the bed of the Sangroba river. They were beaten off. But the armed Frontier Constabulary, who had

been holding one of the towers north of the village, were so shaken by this action that as soon as it was dark they decamped. The Afghans then occupied the tower, which lay some 500 yards from the fort, and so were able to dominate its water point. The garrison therefore had to dig pits and line them with tarpaulins to collect water, which was from now on in short supply. To make matters worse, the food dumps were burned to a cinder and all troops were placed on half-rations.

On the night of the 29th another attack came in, but the defences held. All next day the heavy bombardment from the Afghan guns continued. The fort was now getting knocked about rather seriously, and how long its garrison could hold out was a matter of speculation; if Nadir Khan had launched a major attack with all his available forces he must have captured both fort and village.

But he failed to do so; and meanwhile things were moving in Peshawar. When news of Nadir Khan's offensive was received, commanders there were concentrating on their plans for an advance on Jalalabad, but this operation was quickly abandoned, and the major effort switched to Thal and the Kurram valley. To the general alarm it was realised that there were literally no troops north of the Indus available for coping with this new threat, and a call went out to G.H.Q. India for part of the Central Reserve. The result was that part of the 16th Division was detailed for the task but, as soon came to be revealed, this formation was scattered over a wide area, its units being stationed in cantonments in Lahore, Agra, Ferozepore, Ambala, and other smaller towns. Furthermore, the Division possessed a large proportion of elderly men, and the Territorials of the 1/25th London Regiment were waiting to go home. However, it concentrated with all speed, and from the 28th May onwards began trickling through the Kohat Pass.

The command of this force, which now became known as the 'Thal Relief Force', was given to Brigadier-General Rex Dyer, whose name had resounded all over India after the Amritsar affair. He was ill and tired, but he was a most experienced Frontier fighter and had a great command over troops. The Indians, especially the Sikhs, almost worshipped him. The transport and administrative difficulties facing Dyer were considerable; there were not even enough locomotives to pull the troop trains forward from Kohat. However, at 1 a.m. on the 31st May he succeeded in concentrating

at Togh, a village on the railway, some twenty-seven miles to the east of Thal. The heat was intense, and the troops had been marching with no food and little sleep. Still the relief would not wait, and after a few hours the advance continued; by 1 p.m. the entire force had reached Darsamand, only nine miles from Thal. The following day, the 1st June, at 5 a.m. the last stage of the advance began.

It was at this point that Dyer, who was moving with his advance guard, received the first detailed information regarding the enemy. North-west of Thal, so it was reported, there were a few Afghan regulars with 200 tribesmen and four guns; to the north there were parties of Orakzais and men of the Koidad Khel and associated khels, who were waiting till Nadir Khan had taken Thal before joining in; to the east and south-east there were some 4,000 Afghan Kostwals and Waziris, under a Zadran chief called Malik Babrak; and to the west, on the hills south of the Kurram river, was the main Afghan force.

Dyer made his plan at once: it was to attack the tribal forces to the north and south-east, dealing with Malik Babrak's lashkar first. To give the impression, however, that he would be putting in two attacks simultaneously, the gunners were to put down concentrations on Thal village as well as the hills to the south.

The operation went exactly as planned. Malik Babrak had not expected an attack and after a severe hammering from the artillery his men had no stomach to face a determined assault from the infantry, and broke. By 4 p.m. the Indian troops were streaming over the hill and beginning to consolidate, having sustained very few casualties. Once the success signal was received, Dyer ordered forward his main force, and by nightfall this had established a perimeter camp some two miles north-west of the fort. Meanwhile Dyer had sent a section of guns into the original perimeter camp, and from this position they began harassing the Afghan artillery sited on Kapianga Hill, south of the Kurram river.

The following day Dyer launched his attack against Khadimakh Hill, to the north-west, a feature some 5,000 feet high and defended, as already noted, by Afghan regulars and 2,000 tribesmen. The operation began soon after first light, and while it was still in progress a party of Afghans approached Dyer's headquarters under a flag of truce. Their object, so it transpired, was to deliver a message from Nadir Khan saying that the Amir Amanullah had ordered him

to suspend hostilities. He asked that the message should be acknowledged. What had happened, though Dyer was still ignorant of this, was that the Amir had requested the Indian Government for an armistice on the 31st May, and it had not yet been granted. Dyer, as an old campaigner, was unwilling to take any chances, especially as his men were now committed to action, and told the envoys: 'My guns will give an immediate reply, but your letter will be forwarded to the Divisional Commander.'

The attack on Khadimakh continued to develop, and then reports came in that Nadir Khan was withdrawing his forces. Dyer at once sent forward a squadron of Lancers, supported by armoured cars and a battery of guns, with orders to harass the enemy as they withdrew up the Kurram valley and shell their main camp area on the Azgol Khwar. Further north the R.A.F. dispersed gatherings of tribesmen with their bombs and Lewis-gun fire.

All day the heat had been tremendous and the troops suffered greatly from thirst and heat exhaustion. Many collapsed. Dyer himself had fallen unconscious soon after giving his orders, but revived after sipping some whisky which his aide-de-camp always had available for such emergencies.

On the 3rd June a small column pushed forward to seize the Afghan camp at Yusuf Khel, to find that it had been hastily abandoned. Ammunition and stores littered the whole area. That day the armistice was signed, and any further pursuit had to be broken off; but still the victory against Nadir Khan had been complete, and for the loss of only ninety-four officers and men killed and wounded.

In so far as Nadir Khan had prevented the British advance against Jalalabad, he had succeeded; but he had shown lack of resolution in his attack against Thal fort, and missed the chance of a deeper incursion towards the Indus. It is possible, of course, that this had never been part of his plan. Certainly the Afghans retained their faith in him, for years later he was to ascend the throne of Kabul as the Amir Nadir Shah.

Dyer, the victor of Thal, went back to India, where he faced the Hunter Committee, which had arrived to investigate the Punjab uprising and, in particular, the shooting at Amritsar. Under prolonged examination from the Indian lawyers he lost his temper, and, even before the Committee reported, found himself abandoned

by General Monro, the Commander-in-Chief India, and relieved of his command. In a few years he was dead.

Amir Amanullah's foolish attack on the British Raj left the Frontier in a state of great unrest. When peace was formally signed on the 8th August bitterness among the Waziris and Mahsuds increased, rumours having been spread that the British had agreed to hand Waziristan to the Amir. At a meeting with the maliks in Kabul the Amir did little to mend matters; he made fun of them for not having taken their chances to loot and pillage during the recent campaign, and hinted that he would be declaring war against the British in the near future. Given this encouragement, the tribes began raiding on a large scale and by November had killed 225 men in the administered areas and wounded over 200 others. The British reaction was to hold a number of jirgas at which it was explained that there was no intention of handing over Waziristan, but, on the other hand, roads would be built and troops would be located in protected areas as thought necessary. But the tribes obviously did not want peace, and by mid-November two Indian Army columns were in the field. In the next two months there took place some of the hardest and bloodiest fighting the Frontier has ever known, and the names 'Jandola' and 'Palosina' still strike a deep chord. The Mahsuds were well armed and included large numbers of men who had served in regular units; the Indian troops, on the other hand, were green, half-trained, and inexperienced. Despite the use of machine-guns and liberal air cover—this was the first time that the R.A.F. had operated on the Frontier in strength—they were no match for the tribesmen. Their pickets were often badly sited, their use of ground was poor, and they had not learned the hard rules of Frontier warfare. But they pressed on with great courage and in thirty days fought no less than twenty actions. The medal struck for this campaign was not earned lightly.

In the years that followed, the penetration of Waziristan went ahead steadily. At Razmak a fortified camp was constructed, large enough to hold 10,000 men, and a second camp at Wana. New roads allowed columns to move much faster than before, but the

tribesmen could usually escape across the Durand Line into Afghanistan and return later on to make more trouble. Equally important, though some of the Afridis benefited by the jobs which became plentiful as the road-building programmes developed, the basic economic problems of the tribal areas were left untouched. No one had any doubt that tribal warfare and the punitive expeditions it provoked would still continue; and this was what happened.

But from now on the pressures on the Frontier were to be exerted from both sides: from the growing Indian freedom movement launched by Gandhi and the Indian National Congress, as well as the Amir and the tribal mullahs. The situation was more complex, more unpredictable, and in some ways more dangerous than ever.

285

13

THE MOLLIE ELLIS AFFAIR

This story, unlike many incidents on the Frontier, did not spark off any international trouble; Afghanistan was not concerned and neither was Russia. But the story did claim the headlines in the press throughout India and England while it lasted, and caused a great deal of worry to the Indian Government. It was probably the most famous story to come from the Frontier during the period between the wars. Also, to an extraordinary degree, it illustrated the complex relationship between the Frontier administration and the tribes of the independent areas.

It began on the 14th April 1923 when some Afridi tribesmen entered a bungalow in the Kohat cantonment, occupied by Major Ellis, his wife, and their seventeen-year-old daughter Mollie. The Major happened to be away on duty, and the tribesmen murdered his wife and abducted his daughter. When daylight came she was far away in tribal territory and beyond the help of Frontier officials, the police or the Army. Soldiers and political officers who heard the news with horror when it reached Peshawar were very doubtful whether the girl would ever be seen again. Kidnappings of rich Hindu or prosperous merchants were quite frequent on the Frontier, and were usually carried out with the object of obtaining ransom. But this kidnapping was accompanied by murder; and the girl kidnapped was British, and the daughter of an officer. No such incident could be recalled in the entire history of the Frontier. The motives behind it were obviously complex.

The man responsible for handling this affair was the Chief Commissioner for Peshawar, Sir John Maffey. Within hours his officials were advising him of all the rumour and gossip from the bazaar, which was hurriedly analysed and assessed. Many of the rumours were wildly inaccurate, but one of them seemed to have the ring of

truth about it, and Maffey decided to follow it up. This rumour was that the kidnapping was carried out by a gang living in the Bosti-Khel valley, near Kohat. Their leaders were two notorious criminals, Ajab Khan and his brother Shahzada, and their motive seemed to be as follows: Three years previously they had carried out the murder of a Colonel Foulkes and his wife, but as no evidence could be produced against them, they went free. However, a few years later, some rifles were stolen from the Frontier Police and, after information had been received that these were now in the Bosti-Khel valley, a raid was carried out there. To escape arrest some of the gang dressed in women's clothes, but were caught all the same, and as they were being marched away their womenfolk jeered at them, told them that they were not true Afridis to have posed as women when danger threatened. This so incensed Ajab and his brother that they conceived the daring plan of kidnapping an English girl and using her as a hostage; their intention was to demand from the Government of India a free pardon for the entire gang. If this were not granted, so they swore, then the girl would be murdered.

Maffey knew about the murder of Colonel Foulkes and his wife, and about the incident in the Bosti-Khel valley, and decided to act on the assumption that the rumour were true. The gang had associates in tribal territory, and it was a reasonable guess that their village would provide the gang's hiding place while their demands were being discussed. But how were the gang to be reached? And, more important, how was Mollie Ellis to be rescued? It was no use asking the police to enter Tirah, as the Afridis would butcher them before they were many paces over the border. Movement in this entire area was strictly controlled; even the Afridis themselves could not move through territory held by a neighbouring khel without obtaining permission. Since Sir William Lockhart's expedition in 1897, no European had been able to enter Tirah at all; and obviously a major expedition could not be launched to rescue the girl. Even if it could, the Afridis would undoubtedly murder her once the column had crossed the border. The job was obviously one to be carried out by carefully selected individuals, people with a thorough knowledge of the tribe and their customs.

But who were they to be? First, Maffey chose one of the leading Khans of the Khyber, a man called Zaman Khan. He was sent from

Peshawar with orders to bring pressure on the tribe to stop the murderers carrying Mollie Ellis into Afghanistan. He was to do this by raising a lashkar or local army. The second man to be sent was the Khan Bahadur Kuli Khan, the Assistant Political Agent of the Kurram valley. Summoned by Sir John Maffey on the 17th April, he had been asked about the steps taken in the Kurram valley so far, and reported that clothes and comforts had been dispatched by Major Heale, the Political Agent, as soon as he heard of the crime. Later on, however, men carrying them had returned, reporting that no knowledge could be obtained of the route taken by the gang or the place of their concealment. In view of this failure Kuli Khan asked that he should be sent himself and his offer was accepted.

Maffey still felt, however, that someone else was needed; someone who could bring pressure to bear in a way that neither of the men already dispatched could do. After some thought he came to the conclusion that it would be impossible to send an Englishman, and an Englishwoman would have to go; and by good chance he was able to think of the ideal person for the job. She was a Mrs. Lilian Starr, who was then serving as a nursing sister at the Peshawar Mission Hospital. She was a remarkable woman in many ways. Some years previously she had married Dr. Vernon Starr, the doctor in charge of the hospital, but on the night of the 16th March 1918 some Afridi tribesmen had raided her house and stabbed her husband to death in front of her. Such an event as this would have made most women abandon any idea of service to the tribesmen; but Mrs. Starr was a Christian, and within two years she was back at the hospital nursing the Pathans who came down from the independent territories, men from Afghanistan and even from as far away as Bokhara and Khiva. Her reputation for mercy and goodness was known throughout the whole area, and in hundreds of villages there was at least one man or woman whom she had nursed back to health. She was also a woman of great courage and resource, and Maffey decided quite rightly that if anyone could find the missing girl it was she.

So on the 18th April Mrs. Starr found herself summoned to Government House and ushered into the presence of the Chief Commissioner. Briefly running over the details of the case, he told her that parties, both from the military and the police, had searched the country around Kohat but failed to find any trace of Mollie

Ellis. Now, however, rumours were coming in that the gang had taken her to a village at the top of the Khanki valley, north of the Samana Range, in Tirah. Maffey then added: 'Mrs. Starr, would you be willing to go over the border, to find Mollie Ellis, if possible, and stay with her until you could be rescued?' Mrs. Starr accepted without hesitation, and left immediately to hand over her work at the hospital. An hour later she was back at Government House, where Maffey discussed the route she would have to take, and gave her details of the men who would accompany her. In the afternoon stores were purchased and all the necessary administrative arrangements were made. By evening everything was ready.

Next morning Mrs. Starr set out by car with Sir John Maffey at 8.15 a.m. They drove through Kohat, then on up to the Niranzai valley to Hangu. To the right of them now was the line of the Samana Range, with Fort Lockhart and Fort Gulistan poised on prominent heights. Masses of dwarf palm about two feet high covered the bare dry ground, stretching between the road and the hills on one side and the stream on the other. On the road itself were parties of Kuchis or gipsies, with their families, cattle, and camels, all moving off for the summer to the cool hills of the Kurram. Turning sharply off the main road, the car drove on to Shinawari fort, which was perched on a low hill at the foot of the Height of Dargai, which formed the end of the Samana Range. These were the heights that the Gordon Highlanders and Gurkhas had captured with such loss in 1897.

At Shinawari there was a brief conference between Maffey and his official there. No news whatsoever had come through about the missing girl—Maffey, it will be recalled, was working purely on speculation and rumour—and the officials were against letting Mrs. Starr proceed until something more definite were known. But Maffey was insistent and at 1 p.m. Mrs. Starr was introduced to the leader of the rescue party, the Khan Bahadur Rissaldar Moghal Baz Khan, Indian personal assistant to the Chief Commissioner. He was an Afridi and had with him a band of forty loyal tribesmen. As he explained to Mrs. Starr, to reach Khanki Bazaar the party would have to travel through five distinctive tribal territories: those of the Akhels, Ali-Khels, Alisherzais, Khadazais, the Manozais. None of these was very friendly to the British, and some were definitely hostile. Delicate negotiations would have to be completed therefore at each stage.

Looking round the tribesmen that were to accompany her, Mrs. Starr was not very impressed. They were, she said, 'a motley crew . . . with their rough black beards, dark slate-grey clothing, their belts packed with cartridges, each with a rifle slung over his shoulder as though it was nothing more than a match in weight'. However, they all seemed friendly, warmly shook her by the hand and announced that they would see her to her destination in safety.

While the last-minute arrangements were being made, Mrs. Starr was still wearing khaki and a white topi, and the Rissaldar firmly pointed out that she would have to discard the latter. The very sight of the topi would lead the tribesmen to the belief that an Englishman was entering their territory and they would fire without hesitation. He therefore requested Mrs. Starr to wear a chaddar over her head and she complied willingly.

The Rissaldar had been an officer of the Guides and was well qualified for the work now ahead of him. He took charge of the supplies and the money allocated to the expedition, while Mrs. Starr took only a bag of twenty-five sovereigns which Maffey gave her for use in an emergency. She carried no weapon, but had some medical supplies packed in yakdans (leather cases), and these were loaded on to the mules.

Some time in the afternoon the party set off, the tribesmen on foot, the Khans, Mrs. Starr, and the Rissaldar on horseback. Maffey rode with them for the first two miles. The first object which attracted their attention was the cemetery on the hillside containing the graves of the Gordons who fell in the attack on Dargai. Then a stony path wound up towards the summit of the hill which formed the border between British and tribal territories, and here Maffey turned back, having said his farewells, and the little column pressed on.

Soon they were entering a narrow gorge which led down to a river bed. The sun was now blotted out and the crags rose far above their heads. The going was slow and further on the path merged into the river bed, along which the horses picked their way amongst stones and boulders, until the track emerged again. Later on the column came across a group of trees around a spring, and here it halted, while the men made their religious ablutions and a mullah, who, it now appeared, was accompanying the party, led them in prayer. It was the month of Ramzan, when no good Mohammedan

touches food and drink between sunrise and sunset, so no one might drink the spring water. Soon the column moved on again.

The Mullah (so it emerged) was Abdul Haq, son of the Mullah Karborgha, one of the most influential men in the territory. Karborgha was loyal to the British, and had three times publicly condemned the gang for the crimes that they committed, warning them that an attack on a woman was against all Muslim law. To help Mrs. Starr in her quest, he had sent his younger son, a mullah also, up the Khanki valley to make enquiries and to smooth the way for the column as much as possible. Now his eldest son, Abdul Haq, was on hand to lead the negotiations with the tribesmen who would be encountered en route.

Mrs. Starr, as it will be appreciated, was the first white woman, and certainly the first Englishwoman, ever to be seen in Tirah, and, as the column passed through small villages, she excited great interest, especially amongst the womenfolk. Some of them asked her if she had news of Mollie Ellis. 'Is she still alive?' they would say; to which Mrs. Starr could only reply, 'I was just going to ask you that myself.'

The first night was spent in the village of Na'amat Salah, and then at 7 a.m. the following morning the column pushed on. After five miles the river bed opened out near the village of Karappa, and they entered the Khanki valley. The going was better now and they pressed on easily. As Mrs. Starr relates: 'We halted occasionally for negotiations to be held as they became necessary, to enable each of the five tribes through whose limit we passed, to hand us over to the next. On one occasion there was a half an hour's delay. The jirga had met in a field under a tree. . . . I sat on the other side of the hedge listening to the debate. I understood a good deal more than they knew and most interesting I found it. "Ha . . . the woman understand!" they more than once exclaimed in surprise; and another amusing remark was "Now we know why the British rule Hindustan—their women are as their men."'

As soon as the negotiations were over, the column forded a river and crossed a series of rolling hillocks guarding an open plain. There were very few trees now, clumps of wild rose bushes, pomegranate, and barberry bushes in flower. In the distance they could see the snow-clad peaks of Parachinar, and snow lay here and there in the crevices on the hills to their flank. They were now some 6,000

feet above sea level and climbing steadily; sometimes, as they breasted a rise, Mrs. Starr could see the outline of the Samana Range. There were few travellers on this route, and most of these were women, carrying loads of dry grasses from the valley to their village homes. They all turned in amazement to see a white face riding amongst a party of Afridi tribesmen. Every man and boy the column passed en route was armed, though some of the jezails were so old that Mrs. Starr could hardly imagine how they would be fired. Sometimes parties of tribesmen would appear from nowhere and each would go across to the Mullah, grasp his hand and greet him. They would then walk alongside his horse for a short distance and put a few questions, then disappear again as suddenly as they had come. There could be no doubt the presence of the Mullah at the head of the column made their rapid progress possible.

It was on this day that there arrived the first news of Mollie Ellis. In a country valley a man who was questioned by the Mullah said he had heard that 'the girl is still alive and well'. Pointing vaguely to the hills, he added, 'She is somewhere up there!' but could not say how the information had reached him. It could be possible that he merely made the statement to please the Mullah.

Farther up the valley the villages became smaller and scarcer, then there weren't real villages at all, but rather fortified blocks commanded by watch-towers. The latter were square two-storeyed towers situated at the corner of each village, their bases being wider than their summits. The fact that they were necessary was an indication of the total insecurity of the people in Tirah. No man trusted another man, no family trusted another family, and no village another village. The only real law was force.

It had been hoped that Khanki Bazaar would be reached that night, but by 3 p.m. it had already come in view. It was not really a bazaar but a group of tribal forts at the end of the Khanki valley, with houses dotted around them. As the column came outside the first house a letter was brought to the Rissaldar. He opened it and read it, but made no comment, and Mrs. Starr concluded that it could not be of any importance. Looking up she could see groups of villagers crowding on the roofs of the houses, in the doorways, and even up the hillside. Gradually the groups merged as the general curiosity drew the people down towards the column. Mrs. Starr dismounted and sat on the grass with the Rissaldar, the Mullah, and

the tribesmen. The villagers began questioning her and were highly amused at her attempts to reply in Pushtu. The main thing that they wanted to know was whether she really was a woman; and when she was able to give an assurance on this point interest mounted steadily.

The Rissaldar now gave orders that they should ride on to the house of the Chief Mullah of the valley, the Mullah Mahmud Akhunzada, and after a short journey they dismounted at his door. The crowds had followed them and were now pressing round on all sides. Mrs. Starr imagined that she would now be invited into the house, but for a while nothing happened, and as she relates, 'I waited . . . there was much talking and running about. The Khans were in and out; it was evident some discussion was on. What was the delay? The atmosphere suddenly seemed most hostile and unwelcome. Evidently my arrival was exactly what it was meant to be—a climax!'

While she waited, still wondering and becoming increasingly anxious, the Rissaldar came up to her and asked her to remount and remain at the head of the path. Then two of the local Manozai Khans arrived with instructions to take her to their house. Being a woman, Mrs. Starr was not allowed even to pass the Mullah's house and the Khans led her by a circuitous route along a goat track until they eventually reached the house of the Chief Khan, Subadar Major Azim-Ullah. Here they rode under an archway and Mrs. Starr was taken through a narrow courtyard shut in with high walls which were pierced with small slits. Greeting her the Khan said with characteristic Pathan hospitality, 'Everything in this house is yours.' He then sent his nephew to fetch her tea and walnuts.

It was at this point that the Rissaldar explained to Mrs. Starr the reason for the delay outside the Mullah's house. The message he had received, which was in Persian, read as follows:

'From the Mullah Mahmud Akhunzada, who lives in Khanki Bazaar, to the Mullah Abdul Haq, son of the Mullah Karborgha:

'My dear son of the Mullah Karborgha,

It is very necessary that you should not come with the Englishman; if so, then this no pardon. Absolutely, lady-doctor and her

company are prohibited. This is very urgent order. In default of this there will occur very long fighting.

'Signed and sealed: The Mullah Akhunzada.'

The cause for the Mullah's anxiety, it appeared, was the belief that there were Englishmen in the party, disguised as tribesmen. The Khan Azim-Ullah's assurance that Mrs. Starr was a woman and that apart from her there were no infidels in the party did little to calm him, and it rapidly became obvious that a little bluff was necessary. Azim-Ullah therefore said: 'I fear from the day of the resurrection between your house and my house there will be a feud over this matter. My house tops yours, and we are ready if need be to fight.' He then pointed out to the Mullah that he and his followers could not possibly return the fire as it was against the rules of his religion to fire on a woman. Increasingly embarrassed, the Mullah replied that he could not admit the woman into his house and suggested that Azim-Ullah should take her to his. By making this suggestion the Mullah had retreated from his earlier demand that Mrs. Starr should be sent back to British territory at once; and while she stayed in Khanki Bazaar there was at least the hope that news of Mollie Ellis would arrive, and negotiations could begin for her release. What Mrs. Starr didn't realise at the time was that the Mullah was a great friend of the gang; but despite this he was determined that if negotiations *had* to take place, he would make something out of them.

It was at this stage that Kuli Khan re-entered the story. He was the Assistant Personal Agent of the Kurram valley who, it will be recalled, asked Sir John Maffey for permission to go to Khanki Bazaar. He had reached there the day before Mrs. Starr and her party, and after tortuous negotiations had managed to see the Mullah at eleven o'clock at night. When he brought up the question of Mollie Ellis and her whereabouts, however, the Mullah denied all knowledge of the matter, and it was evident that his whole attitude was coloured by hatred of the British. Finally, however, he admitted that Ajab and his brother Shahzada had committed the murder, although they were still denying it. He also gave the startling news that the two murderers were in the village at the time, and suggested that a meeting should take place next morning, the 21st April. This was arranged, and somewhat reluctantly Ajab

and Shahzada appeared and protested their innocence. Kuli Khan pointed out to them that their complicity was well known, and such protestations would deceive no one. Their most sensible course, he suggested, would be to start discussing terms for the girl's release. Naturally enough, their reaction to this was hostile and the argument went on for an hour or more. At the end of it, however, Ajab admitted that he had been in the raid on the Ellis bungalow; and soon he was admitting a good deal more. The girl had been brought away from Kohat, he said, by himself and his brother Shahzada with the help of two friends, and she had been placed in the tower of Sultan Mir, the Tirah Jawaki raider. His motive, Ajab said, had been 'outraged pride at the successful invasion of his village, and mortification at the position of outlawry and poverty to which he and his dependents had been brought by the discovery in his village of the stolen police rifles and other articles which had irrefutably implicated him in the murder of Colonel and Mrs. Foulkes'.

The discussion now took a rather startling turn. The successful kidnapping, Ajab said, had gone no way towards solving his problems, but had rather brought on him a new load. Tribal pressure was being brought to bear on him and the other members of the gang, and the Tirah Jawakis 'had threatened to sow their lands with salt and bring their roofs about their ears if they should get Jawakis into trouble by disclosing the presence of Miss Ellis in *their* territory'. To deal with this situation, Ajab said, it had been decided that the girl should be taken to Ningrahar in Afghanistan, or some other inaccessible spot. The intention then was to withhold all information from the British Government in a hope that prolonged suspense would produce acceptance of the terms proposed.

Kuli Khan, knowing the way of Frontier gangs, had feared all along that the girl would be smuggled into Afghanistan, but cleverly concealed his feelings. He ridiculed the plan, condemned it as right outside practical politics. Did Ajab think he could get away with it? he asked. If the girl were subjected to many more journeys with the inadequate clothing and poor food she would soon die. What would Ajab's situation be then? He would never receive a pardon; the British would hound him until his dying day, and the tribe would have none of him either. At some stage in the proceedings Kuli Khan persuaded the Mullah Mahmud to provide a messenger who would take a letter, clothes and food, to the girl, and these were

dispatched at once. Then Ajab and Shahzada announced the terms on which they were prepared to surrender her. These were:

1. A payment of 50,000 rupees.
2. Complete amnesty for the members of the gang and for the other men wanted for the murder of Colonel and Mrs. Foulkes.
3. The release of four men who had been arrested by the Frontier Constabulary in the searching of Ajab's village in the Bosti-Khel valley.

Kuli Khan's reply to this was a quotation from a Pushtu proverb about a frog who wanted to be a bull. The Mullah's reaction was equally hostile, and, rounding on the murderers, he told them that their terms would obviously be so unacceptable to the Government that negotiations might as well be broken off at once. But true to the rules of Asian bargaining, no such thing happened; the argument went on for several hours, right through the morning of the 21st and the early afternoon. Though the gang modified their attitude to a certain extent, their demands still remained preposterous even when the meeting finally broke up. Their notions of their own powers were absurdly inflated.

For the next two hours Kuli Khan sat in the shade, trying to think of some method whereby the plan to move the girl from Tirah could be frustrated. The job would obviously not be easy, as the gang were thoroughly unscrupulous, and had several murders on their hands already. Ajab, in particular, was a reckless character; a man who would make the wildest threats, then carry them out through sheer bravado. In the circumstances Kuli Khan decided that he must somehow establish personal contact with the girl or persuade the Mullah Mahmud to take her under his protection. The latter seemed the more promising course and he walked back to the house; but just as he was being ushered into the Mullah's presence, there was an unexpected development. A sheikh (that is a follower) came in and informed the Mullah that there was a party of Government officials, accompanied by a son of the Mullah Karborgha and an English lady-doctor, approaching from the south. The Mullah greeted this news with horror. The presence of Kuli Khan was bad enough, but an official party with an Englishwoman could cause him enormous trouble. His friends and supporters would begin

imagining that he was somehow connected with the arrival of the party, and there would be suspicion and mistrust. Caught off his guard, the Mullah issued confused instructions to his servants. The approaching party was to be turned back; a letter warning them of the consequences of their visit was to be sent them; young men were to be sent to let off rifles with the object of frightening these intruders into tribal territory. If Kuli Khan had not been present these orders would have been carried out, but luckily he was able to suggest a more moderate course. 'Why shouldn't a party come?' he asked. 'There is already one Englishwoman in the country, so a second cannot make much difference. Also if the Mullah gives orders for fire to be opened on a woman it will be a black stain on his reputation. He should remember that apart from the Englishwoman, all the other members of the party are good Muslims and have a mullah with them.'

After some hesitation the orders to fire were cancelled; but a stern warning was sent to the son of the Mullah Karborgha. Its contents and the reaction to it when it was delivered we already know.

So on the evening of the 21st Kuli Khan watched the party wend its way into the Khanki Bazaar, and to his delight saw that its leader was the Rissaldar Mohgal Baz Khan, an old friend of his. Immediately they were together, Kuli Khan narrated his experience, and then the two men discussed a plan of action. Their first step was to return to the mosque and hold a meeting with the Mullah. This was concerned more with theology than practical politics, the Khan and the Rissaldar trying to demonstrate that Mohammed would not in any circumstances have tolerated the murder of one woman or the abduction of another. How much more honour would accrue to the Mullah, they argued, if he would rescue the girl from danger and become one of the leading agents in securing her release.

At six in the evening the Rissaldar returned to Mrs. Starr to tell her the news, so that she could dispatch her report to Sir John Maffey. While she was engaged on this task, translating the Rissaldar's narrative from Pushtu and Hindustani into English, five letters from the girl were brought her. These had been written at the instigation of her captors, stating their terms for her release. None of these, however, had got further than Khanki Bazaar, and now Mrs. Starr sent them on to Peshawar with her report. The girl was still in

danger, she stated, but was at least alive; and arrangements were being made for her release from the gang.

That night, as dusk came down on the mountains, Mrs. Starr walked out of the walled courtyard with the Khans and some other members of her party. Below them lay the village, a collection of separate mud-and-wattle buildings. There was not a brick house in the place. Beyond the river lay a wide valley and, beyond that, range after range of the hills of the Tirah. The Khans were anxious of news of the outside world. What was happening at the Lausanne Conference? they asked. What had happened to Turkey? Then they examined Mrs. Starr's camera with great interest, and, having tired of it, asked for quinine and aspirin tablets. They did not need them at the moment, they assured her, but were certain to at some future date.

After this the talk inevitably returned to the girl Mollie Ellis, and the problem of securing her release. Mrs. Starr tried to get information as to who exactly would go for her, but the answers of the Khans were vague. All they would keep repeating was that it would be done and eventually the night grew cold and the party went back into the courtyard for a meal. This consisted of curry, rice, and meat, everyone helping themselves with their fingers from one large dish. The room, Mrs. Starr relates, was 'low and windowless, dark but for the open door, with a hard, beaten-mud floor, two string bedsteads, and guns, knives, pistols, clothes and quaint odds and ends hanging about on nails in the wall'.

Sometime after the meal the Rissaldar came back with the news that the girl would be brought down to them and might even come that night. Mrs. Starr immediately had a second bed made up, then dozed off for a while.

The basis for the Rissaldar's hopes was that the Mullah had now agreed to coerce the gang into accepting reasonable terms. At 10 p.m. he had summoned Ajab and Shahzada, and dispatched them with three of his sheikhs, with orders that the girl should be brought immediately to his house, so that she could be held under his protection. Whether the gang would comply with these orders was still a matter of doubt; and, as the night wore on, the doubt grew.

At five in the morning, however, Mrs. Starr was woken and found three of the Khans standing by her bed. 'The girl has come; she is here,' they told her. 'We tell you this for your comfort but

you cannot go to her yet.' This last remark somewhat astonished Mrs. Starr and she turned to the Rissaldar, who, she now noticed, was standing with the Khans. 'I must welcome her,' she told him; but the Rissaldar explained that by 'here' the Khans meant the Mullah's house and it was impossible for her to go there. The Mullah would be very angry. Feeling excited but at the same time frustrated, Mrs. Starr got up and walked about in the courtyard, and watched the dawn which was now approaching across the mountains.

It was two hours later before the Khans returned, but this time they told her that permission had been obtained for her to join the girl. Quickly following them down the stony hillside to the Mullah's house, she went in through the door which she had been refused permission to enter the previous day. The Mullah was standing there looking surly but making no attempt to stop her; and she followed the Khans round the base of a stone watch-tower, across a narrow courtyard, and through into a room at the far end. Lying on a bed and looking pale and tired, but otherwise unhurt, was the girl. Guarding her were three members of the gang. There was, however, no need to worry, as the Rissaldar and Kuli Khan had entered the room also.

The girl assured Mrs. Starr that she was all right, and then went on to give an account of her experiences. She was a tiny, slim, pale-faced young creature, only a few months out of school. But, knowing something of the Frontier, she must have considered herself very lucky to be alive. When the murderers had hustled her out of the bungalow, she said, she was still wearing her nightdress and her head and feet were bare. But she was forced to hurry across the fields and up into the hills overlooking the Kohat road where the gang lay up for the first day. She was able to lie under the shade of a rock, she explained, while her captors watched the road through field-glasses and followed the movements of the troops who were searching for them. At night they slipped down from the hills, crossed the Kohat-Peshawar road, then turned westward into the hills again. One of the gang gave her his dirty coat, and others found her socks with leather soles, to protect her feet. The journey into the Tirah went on for five days, and once they had reached the snow-line the girl suffered intensely from the cold. However, she survived and eventually her captors took her to Ajab's house about eight

miles from Khanki Bazaar. There she lay hidden for three days, and during this time wrote the letters which were now in the possession of Mrs. Starr. She was frightened and exhausted, and suffered from lack of proper food, but had shown great courage. She knew that her mother was dead and that her own life was forfeit, but still she refused to give in. In one of the letters she had written: 'I am keeping my strength up as much as possible and hope daily to be rescued.'

While talking to the girl, Mrs. Starr still found time to take a good look at the murderers. She relates: 'Ajab Khan, dark for a Pathan, with hooked nose and black beard, was heavy and somewhat detached in attitude. His brother, however, was very different; a typical Pathan, his characteristic features—high cheek-bones, aquiline nose, a light complexion, cunning expression, hard, quick eyes. Shahzada was very evidently the leader; he had shown himself to be the dominating spirit of the gang throughout the retreat from Kohat; and it was his hand that had committed the dastardly murder. Gul Akbar was much younger than the other two and evidently under their orders. All wore the ordinary dark grey of the Afridi dress.'

Mrs. Starr very much wanted to take the girl out to Azim-Ullah's house where she was staying herself, but the Rissaldar and Kuli Khan advised that it would be safer for the girl to remain where she was. No one dare molest a mullah's guest.

In these circumstances Mrs. Starr decided to occupy her time in composing another dispatch, and this she did, exciting the curiosity of Ajab and Shahzada. What the outcome would be it was still impossible to say. A bargain still had to be struck with the gang, and the Mullah seemed reluctant to press them any further. But at least the great danger of the girl's abduction to Afghanistan was now passed. Action must now be superseded for a while by the calm exercise of patience.

But about half past three in the afternoon there was another sudden development in the situation. Without warning, four members of the gang, Ajab, Shahzada, Gul Akbar, and Haida Shah suddenly strode into the room with their arms. Addressing Mrs. Starr in Pushtu, Shahzada burst out: 'You must write a letter at once. An army has come up from the Khyber direction and will fire our houses. Write now and stop it.' Mrs. Starr's first reply was

to ask the gang to remove themselves to the courtyard, as it was quite against the Pathan custom to enter a woman's room in that way. When they had done so, she said, 'What does a woman know of armies? I come only to look after the girl'. At this Shahzada rounded on her angrily: 'She does not need you; she is not ill. She is all right.' Mrs. Starr held her ground. 'That is for me to say.' To this Shahzada replied: 'You—who are you? You can do nothing—what authority have you? The authority is mine!'

What all the fuss was about, and whether in fact any troops had come up from the Khyber, Mrs. Starr had no means of knowing. What she suspected from Shahzada's anger was that things were running against him, and this suspicion was heightened when the gang withdrew into a huddle and began shouting at each other. This was the opportunity Mrs. Starr needed, and, signalling to her orderly, she asked him to fetch the Rissaldar as quickly as possible. She had barely done this when Shahzada pushed her outside so that the girl was left alone with a man called Haida to guard her. Shahzada then closed the door, then latched it, but with no little courage Mrs. Starr opened it again and called to the girl that she was not to worry—that they were just having a talk outside.

Meanwhile Shahzada went on ranting. '*You* are the cause of all the trouble—why are you here? You will not be allowed to go back to her but will be kept separate!'

But still Mrs. Starr held her ground.

'Have I come all this way to see the girl and then go?' she asked.

Before Shahzada could make his next comment, a man rushed into the courtyard breathlessly shouting: 'They're fighting! Fighting has begun!'

Shaking with rage, Shahzada rounded on Mrs. Starr. 'Now it is too late!' he said; 'our houses are burned and our women are killed!'

Before he had stopped ranting the Khans arrived, having heard the commotion from the room where they were resting. The gang now turned on them, accusing them of treachery, and complained that while they had brought the girl to Khanki Bazaar under the orders of the Mullah, the Khyber Afridi lashkars were now maltreating their families and burning down their houses in Jawaki country.

What had happened, as Mrs. Starr learned later on, was that the Khan from the Khyber sent by Maffey, Zaman Khan, had advanced

with his friends on Sultan Mir's and Ajab's houses where the girl had been kept until a few hours previously, with the object of destroying them.

However, all she could see at the moment was a furious argument between the Khans and the gang and what would be the result of it and whether it would lead to fighting she couldn't tell. In fact what happened was that, after a fierce bout of argument, Shahzada and Ajab were hauled before the Mullah by the Rissaldar. Vehemently, the latter protested at the unceremonious treatment to which Mrs. Starr, a guest of the Mullah, had been subjected. This complaint aroused such anger in Shahzada that he shouted at the Mullah and called on heaven to witness that it was under his instigation that this treachery had been worked upon the gang. Shahzada's friends, ruffians that they were, stood somewhat amazed by this outburst; they made feeble attempts to restrain him, as if expecting him to be struck down by a fireball from the Prophet. In fact, no fireball arrived and the Mullah had no need of one. Having stood silently listening to Shahzada's complaints, he suddenly let loose a great torrent of abuse, laying upon Shahzada, Ajab, and all the members of the gang a passionate curse. When this had been pronounced the sheikhs came forward to hustle the gang out of the courtyard, but the latter were so stricken that they went down on the knees, removed their turbans, and laid them at the Mullah's feet. In a welter of tears they begged for his forgiveness and a revocation of the curse. Eventually this was given and the gang were dragged from his presence and out into the street.

This episode, as Mrs. Starr and the Rissaldar were soon to realise, had changed the whole situation. The gang were now in no position to demand fantastic terms or indeed any terms whatsoever. Weakly they agreed to surrender the girl in exchange for the release of two men of Bosti-Khel who were held in Kohat Jail, petty thieves who had not been connected with any of the murders. These terms presented no difficulty to the Rissaldar who was able to authorise their acceptance. He therefore sent instructions to the Afridi lashkars, now gathering among the village fortresses of the Tirah Jawaki, telling them to refrain from molesting the gang, and to remain in readiness for instant action until the girl should have been escorted safely across the border.

Although the girl was technically free, it was agreed that the party

should not leave until news had been received that the Government had carried out their side of the bargain and the two thieves were on their way. While she waited, Mrs. Starr began treating the villagers who were now streaming in to see her from all over the area. She even treated two of the mullahs, including the Mullah Adbul Haq. By the rules of his religion, he was not able to speak to her personally, so sent his servant to describe his symptoms and then, later on, to inform her of his progress. The Mullah Mahmud Akhunzada, however, appeared willing to treat the rules somewhat more liberally, and sent for Mrs. Starr in person. He was suffering from rheumatism in the ankles; and, while she gave him such treatment as was possible, he questioned her on a variety of matters. He had never been to India or seen an Englishwoman but seemed to have a great fund of general knowledge. When the treatment was over the Mullah handed her a ten-rupee note and invited her to come back to Tirah with a greater supply of drugs. He personally would guarantee her comfort and safety.

On the night of Sunday, the 22nd, the news came through: the thieves were definitely on their way, and the party could begin their return journey to India the next morning. After farewells were over and the Mullah had been formally thanked, the tribesmen, the Rissaldar, Mrs. Starr, the girl, and the other members of the party mounted their horses and headed west. Mrs. Starr relates of this moment: 'We rode along the track I had come only three days before, not even definitely knowing if Miss Ellis were alive. We rode along the left bank of the river for a few miles. Afterwards through the heat of the day for some seven or eight miles Miss Ellis travelled comfortably on a stretcher brought with bearers for the purpose. The return journey of nearly thirty miles we accomplished in eleven hours, stopping once for an hour and a half to get a meal, sitting under a deserted roofed-in hut for shade. Half-way down we met the two exchanged prisoners in charge of their guard, Hehangir, the revenue collector.'

There was now the long steep climb to the top of Chagra Kotal and by the time the party reached the summit and dropped over into British territory it was quite dark. 'The horses stumbled on the steep, stony, down-hill path so we were obliged to walk, the intermittent flash of my small electric torch being all the light we had to see our steps.' Then suddenly turning the corner on the narrow

slopes of the hill, they came face to face with Sir John Maffey who, with the Deputy Commissioner of Kohat, had ridden forward to greet them. Soon they reached Shinawari fort, where Major Ellis was waiting to greet his daughter. It was a bitter-sweet moment; the two of them were delighted to see each other again, but both no doubt remembered the third member of their little family who was dead.

Next morning, as she drove back to Peshawar with Sir John Maffey, Mrs. Starr learned that news of her exploit had made headlines in the press both in India and at home. She also heard that prayers for her and the girl had been said in many churches on the previous Sunday. Some newspapers had been so inspired by her exploits that they had pictured her going into Tirah armed to the teeth and leading a bunch of wild but faithful tribesmen in the face of the Afridis. She also learned something of the anger which had prevailed in Government circles over the kidnapping of the girl. A few days later this anger was to translate itself into action when two squadrons of R.A.F. planes flew over Tirah.

On the 12th May the affair was ended. Sir John Maffey summoned a great council of Afridis—probably one of the largest jirgas which has ever met. Speaking very bluntly, he told them that there was now cause for a feud between the British and the Afridis, the worse type of feud involving a woman, which by their own custom must be paid in blood. When the deliberations were over the mullahs and the maliks set their seal on a document which perhaps is unique in the history of the Frontier. In translation, it runs as follows:

'We, the chief elders and representatives of the Afridi and Orakzai clans, hereby declare that Ajab Khan, Shahzada, Gul Akbar, Sultan Mir, Haida Shah who are the enemies of the British Government are likewise our enemies. The five men mentioned above and their families shall from now onwards never enter our country. If they should enter the country or any of our sections, it shall be the duty of the section in question to capture them and hand them over to the British Government. If any section or individual of our tribe should give them shelter or passage, it is our prayer that the Government shall take such action as it may deem suitable, whether by means of airplanes or otherwise.

'Dated: 26th Ramzan Sijri, 1341, equivalent to May 13th 1923.'

But Maffey was still not finished with the jirga. He now listed the

full terms to be imposed, and these included the destruction of the settlement in the Alisherzai country which had last give shelter to the gang, and the burning down of the village in the Bosti-Khel valley, where the gang had first stayed after the Kohat outrage. Furthermore, heavy fines upon the tribes were imposed for the past acts of the gang and the offence of giving them passage. These terms were accepted by the jirga which then dispersed.

Mollie Ellis returned to Kohat with her father, and so disappeared from history. Mrs. Starr went back to her mission hospital where she was to continue treating the tribesmen with great skill and devotion for many years.

It would be wrong to say that relations between the British and the Afridis improved after this incident. Though there were no kidnappings which excited such interest as that of Mollie Ellis, there were many other incidents, and relations continued to be turbulent and unpredictable. As the Mullah Mahmud Akhunzada told Mrs. Starr while she treated his rheumatism, the fact was that the Afridis were not a peaceable people, and nothing would ever change them.

Opposite: Courtyard of the Mullah's house. A member of the rescue party guarding Mollie in foreground

Previous page: A column of Lancers on the march in the 1890s

Below: Arrival at Shinawari Fort: 24th April 1923. Mollie is wearing the white topee

Light Infantry on the march four miles from Jamrud during the Third Afghan War, 1919

305

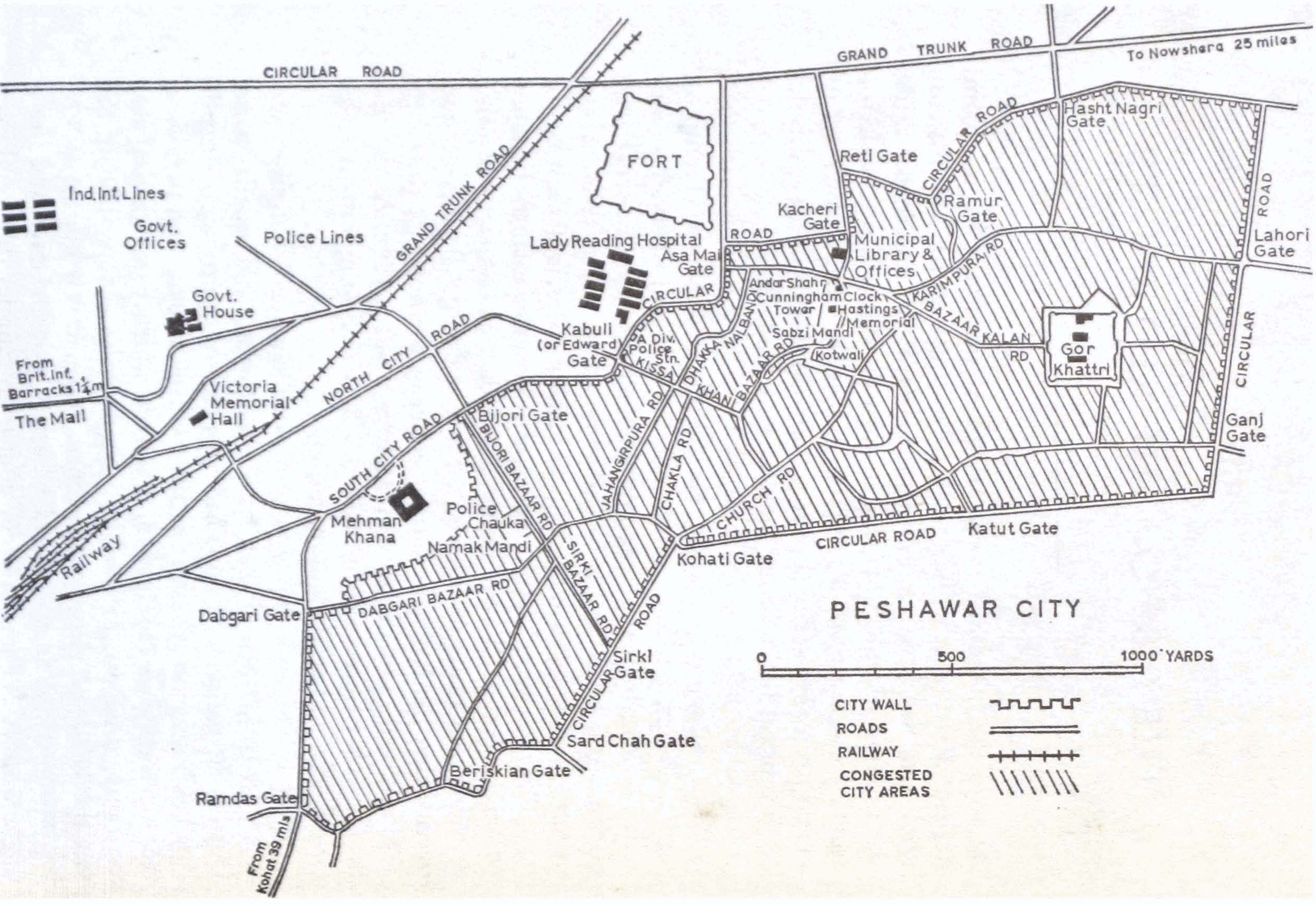
14

THE RISE OF THE RED SHIRTS

By 1930 the 'Modified Forward Policy' generated by the Third Afghan War was at its height. The bases at Razmak and Wana in Waziristan had been completed as planned, and the motor traffic was running up and down the new roads. Razmak was an extraordinary construction, a complete military monastic town, set on an arid plain among the bare mountains. Molesworth has given this detailed picture of it during the time he served there:

'The camp held a Brigade of six infantry battalions with Pack Artillery, supporting troops, Pack Mule and Motor Transport, supply dumps, ancillary units and hospitals and covered a wide area. The lengthy perimeter consisted of a built up breast-work with machine-gun posts and a barbed-wire apron. There were a few masonry buildings such as Brigade Headquarters, but most of the troops lived in wooden hutments and at least one infantry battalion was in tents in the "Lower Camp". Outside the perimeter was a ring or permanent masonry piquets, the largest being Alexandra Piquet overlooking the Razmak Narai, 5 miles to the north of the camp. This was really a small fort with a garrison of 100 rifles. At all times the Razmak Brigade was on an Active Service footing moving with loaded rifles and artillery ammunition.

'Space inside the camp was somewhat cramped, but there was room for basket-ball pitches, hard tennis-courts and squash courts. Outside the perimeter a slope had been cleared to provide a Brigade Parade Ground on which athletics, football, hockey and periodical race meetings were indulged in. In spite of athletics and training near the camp, time was inclined to hang heavily—a repetition of the Frontier *kila-bandi* already mentioned. Razmak was known as "the largest monastery in the world with ten thousand men and not a single woman". There were of course no families there and even


PESHAWAR CITY
CIRCULAR ROAD
GRAND TRUNK ROAD
To Nowshera 25 miles
FORT
Ind. Inf. Lines
Govt. Offices
Police Lines
Govt. House
From Brit. Inf. Barracks 1½ m
The Mall
Victoria Memorial Hall
Railway
Lady Reading Hospital
Asa Mai Gate
Kabuli (or Edward) Gate
A Div. Police Stn.
NORTH CITY ROAD
SOUTH CITY ROAD
Bijori Gate
Mehman Khana
Police Chauka
Namak Mandi
Dabgari Gate
DABGARI BAZAAR RD
BIJORI BAZAAR RD
SIRKI BAZAAR RD
Sirki Gate
Sard Chah Gate
Beriskian Gate
Ramdas Gate
From Kohat 39 mls
Kohati Gate
Katut Gate
CHURCH RD
CHAKLA RD
JAHANGIRPURA RD
KISSA KHANI BAZAAR RD
DHAKKA NALBANDI
Andar Shahr
Cunningham Clock Tower
Hastings Memorial
Sabzi Mandi
Kotwali
Kacheri Gate
Municipal Library & Offices
Reti Gate
Ramur Gate
Hasht Nagri Gate
KARIMPURA RD
BAZAAR KALAN RD
Gor Khattri
Lahori Gate
Ganj Gate
0
500
1000 YARDS
CITY WALL
ROADS
RAILWAY
CONGESTED CITY AREAS

hospital nurses were banned. Life tended to be monotonous and many people longed for the monthly "Columns" when the Brigade went out along the roads for 3 or 4 days.'

However tactically desirable, such an isolated camp had great drawbacks; and, as it was quite obvious to the generals, if troops were allowed to stay cooped up in it for long periods they would go out of their minds. It was therefore arranged that periodically columns should go out and show the flag in the surrounding countryside. Also, as John Masters who served there has related:

'Once every two or three months the politicals thought hard, and went on thinking until they had thought of a headsman whom they suspected of intrigue or harbouring outlaws or hatching embarrassments to the Afghan Government, and in whose backyard a display of force might be salutary. Then we got ready. Leaving two of its six battalions at Razmak to guard the fort, the brigade gathered its guns and paraphernalia and marched out of the main gate to spend a week or ten days stamping noisily around the suspected headman's section of country. Then it marched home again! In reasonable weather columns were healthy and rather romantic.'

Though expensive and clumsy, the modified forward policy in Waziristan had proved quite successful, and raiding across the border had almost ceased. To some degree the prophecies of Lord Roberts and Curzon appeared to have been realised. The wind was also blowing more gently from Kabul where Nadir Khan had replaced Amanullah on the throne, and an era of Anglo-Afghan friendship seemed about to dawn.

The British were heartily glad to see the back of Amanullah who had been a thorn in their side for so long. He had detested the 'Forward Policy' and stirred up the tribes; in 1923 things reached such a pitch that the Viceroy threatened to break off diplomatic relations. The following year the pressure eased, as Amanullah's plan to educate the womenfolk of his nation had proved so unpopular that he was almost toppled from his throne. In 1924 he was faced with a major revolt in the Khost valley, to the south of Kabul, an event which weakened the whole fabric of his realm. But still he went on with his crazy spasmodic plan of reforms, and the result was a further revolt led by Habibullah Khan in 1928. On the 5th January Amanullah hurriedly cancelled all his reforms, but it was too late, and within ten days he was thrusting the crown into the unwilling

hands of his elder brother and fleeing to Kandahar. In March Nadir Khan crossed the Afghan frontier (with no help or support from the British), and after many delays and setbacks reached Kabul. On the 16th October he was proclaimed King of Afghanistan under the title of His Majesty King Nadir Shah.

Though the British had scrupulously refrained from interfering in Afghan affairs, almost to the point of absurdity, things had worked out just as they wanted them. Nadir Shah was a good soldier and a strong man, who would soon bring back stability. He would pursue, so it was hoped, a friendly policy on the Frontier. And, even more important, he would present a cold face towards the Soviet Government which since 1926 had made no secret of the main objective of its eastern policy—to overthrow British supremacy in the East. Nadir Shah did not disappoint; and by 1930 everything hoped for had come about. Fears of Russia had receded; all was quiet in Kabul; and the Frontier was tranquil.

Then a man called Abdul Ghaffar Khan came on the scene and all was chaos again.

He was a tall Pathan, about six feet four inches, and a passionate political agitator. Coming from a good family, he owned extensive lands and property around Charsadda. His education was not very far advanced but his personality made a powerful impact, especially on the ignorant and poor. He'd been known to the British since 1919 when he started widespread agitation in Peshawar against the Rowlatt Act, a stupid measure designed to retain in peace time powers taken in the Great War to deal with anarchical crimes. Skilfully he had misrepresented the clauses of the Act (which incidentally were never used on a single occasion), alleging that no one would be able to marry without the consent of the Government, and meetings of three or more people could be fired on by the police without warning. Undoubtedly his influence was considerable, and Sir William Barton has given it as his view that, if the Afghan invasion had not been dealt with so decisively, Ghaffar Khan would have succeeded in raising the whole of the Peshawar district.

From 1920 onwards, the political soil was favourable for agitators beyond the Indus, for the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms, which introduced a form of dualism (often known as the dyarchic experiment) as a step towards responsible government by Indians, were

not extended to the Pathans. Roos-Keppel, whose ideas were more in tune with the tribal areas than the settled districts around Peshawar, argued that the Pathans were not yet ready for such an advance, and persuaded Lionel Curtis, the architect of the Montagu-Chelmsford experiment. So, to quote Sir Olaf Caroe, there was to be 'No franchise for Pathans, no elections, no legislature, no ministry —not even elections to local bodies. . . . R-K thought the whole system so much flummery; if challenged, his answer would have been that Pathans had their own methods of democracy, much more to their taste.' What Roos-Keppel could never understand, in fact, was that once higher education was extended to the Pathans in the settled districts, things could never stand still; that the young men would never be satisfied with the primitive ways of life of their fathers. Ghaffar Khan, however, understood the situation perfectly, and preached that the Pathans were being insulted by discrimination over the dyarchic experiment. They must rise and fight for their rights. They must oppose the British with every means in their power.

After he came out of gaol in 1920 Ghaffar Khan joined the Khilafat movement, but abandoned this in favour of the National Congress Party which, as he could see, was becoming more powerful each year. Through Dr. Ansari, a Muslim supporter of the Party, he was able to meet Gandhi and Nehru; and though both of these leaders wondered how such a ferocious Pathan could embrace the Hindu conception of ahimsa or non-violence, they were undoubtedly impressed. Nehru once remarked of him, 'Straight in body and mind, he looks forward to the freedom of his province within the framework of Indian freedom.' It was 1929 that Ghaffar Khan formed the organisation which was to make him famous or notorious, according to one's viewpoint. This was the 'Khudai Khitmatgars', or 'Servants of God', which recruited young Pathans for the fight against British rule. Most of them were poor and could not afford any elaborate uniform, so shirts were dyed in brickdust and the organisation gained the name by which it is usually remembered —the 'Red Shirts'. Units of this organisation drilled regularly and carried out military training; Ghaffar Khan even published his own drill book. The elements of a military hierarchy were established and badges of rank were worn. For reasons which mystified Frontier officials at the time, and have never been adequately explained since,

the Government of India decided to let Ghaffar Khan have a good run for his money. Perhaps from Simla his organisation appeared ludicrous, and opinion was that it would die of its own volition; or perhaps the will of government was paralysed by the fear of another Amritsar massacre. It is difficult to say. But certainly, given this degree of licence, the Red Shirts prospered. Ghaffar Khan himself stomped the Frontier preaching sedition and violence, especially among the Waziris of Bannu and the Mohmands; his agents penetrated the Black Mountain areas to the north of Peshawar, they went into Dir, Bajaur, and the protected areas of Malakand. Ghaffar Khan's personal prestige soared to great heights; by now he was known as 'the Frontier Gandhi'; his underground government in Peshawar district was almost as powerful as the British administration.

And still the British smiled benignly on him. In the tribal areas Congress politics were eagerly discussed, and the mullahs preached that British power was at last slipping; that the Sikhs, Gurkhas, and Punjabi Mussulmans would not fight for them much longer. If the authorities *could* have dealt with Ghaffar Khan and his Red Shirts, they argued, they would have done so months ago.

In Peshawar events swiftly gathered momentum. On the 20th April Ghaffar Khan summoned a large meeting, ostensibly to celebrate the anniversary of the Azad school. Discussions went on for two days, attended by representatives from all over the Frontier Province, and many villages sent Red Shirt contingents, complete with bands and banners. One of the main items at the meeting was 'the performance of a seditious play, calculated to bring the Government into hatred and contempt', and it was obvious to the authorities that some form of rising could not be far off.

At this time the population of Peshawar was about 80,000, and (it will be remembered) the city is surrounded by walls, pierced at intervals by gates. The main streets are thirty to forty feet wide, but between them there are narrow lanes running between high buildings. As the city is built on a number of hillocks, many of the streets are very steep, and they are always crowded and congested. The main thoroughfare, the Kissa Khani Bazaar, is some 820 yards long and forty feet wide and runs from the Kabuli or Edwardes Gate, on the western wall, and into the heart of the city. The military forces available at this time were a battalion of the King's

Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, two battalions of Sikhs, a battalion of the Royal Garhwal Rifles, a company of armoured cars of the Royal Tank Corps, and the Poona Horse. From these units a 'City Disturbance Column' had been formed, the troops of which were at half an hour's notice to move from 4 p.m. on the 23rd April. The creation of the column was the only precautionary measure taken; it was thought unnecessary to picket the gates.

Two days after the meeting at the Azad school was over, Ghaffar Khan and a number of his lieutenants were arrested by orders of the Deputy Commissioner. Two other men who were named in the warrant surrendered themselves to the police, but, on their way to gaol, the police lorries were stopped by angry crowds and the tyres were slashed. Soon the mob were swarming all over the lorries, trying to rescue the prisoners, and the latter, in a somewhat Gilbertian gesture, offered to make their own way to the gaol on foot. The police sub-inspector accepted their offer, and in due course the prisoners arrived. Meanwhile the situation in the city was deteriorating and the mobs were becoming angry; the Deputy Commissioner therefore made a formal request for aid from the military, then tried to make his way through the Kabuli Gate with a column of four armoured cars. But the crowds were waiting in force; a hail of brickbats greeted the leading car and it had to retreat to a position by the divisional police station, which lay a few yards to the north of the gate. Unfortunately, two motor-cyclists attached to the armoured car unit had mistaken their orders and attempted to follow the column, and these were set on, one of them being killed. Immediately the driver of the armoured car who witnessed the incident drove forward to cover his body, and in so doing, knocked over some men on the pavement. The result was that the whole mob now retaliated, attacking the cars not only with brickbats, but with crowbars and axes. Hearing the commotion, a force of mounted police attempted to charge, but their horses refused, being beaten with sticks. Now the mob grew bolder; poured petrol over the body of the dispatch rider and over one of the armoured cars, then set light to them. The crew of the car hurriedly scrambled out and were immediately set on, but using their revolvers they managed to force a passage to the remainder of the cars. By now the Deputy Commissioner had been knocked unconscious by a missile, but his Assistant managed to get through permission to the armoured car

commander to open fire, which he did at once with his machine guns. There was a screech from the crowd which surged frantically along the Kissa Khani Bazaar, with the cars following close behind. It was now about 11 a.m. and luckily the Assistant Deputy Commissioner had managed to get a telephone message through to Peshawar Brigade Headquarters, where orders were given that the Disturbance Column should leave at once for the Kabuli Gate. Here the infantry of the K.O.Y.L.I.'s began sealing off the side streets running into the Kissa Khani Bazaar, aided by the Royal Garhwal Rifles and the Poona Horse. But still the mob came back to attack the armoured cars, attempting to set fire to them with petrol as they had done the leading car. They were shrieking like madmen; the heady atmosphere of revolt had spread through the whole city, turning normally peaceable men into killers. The thirst for destruction and bloodshed grew from its own satisfaction. The scene was frightening in its savage power, its animal lust, and its ruthlessness.

The troops were still forbidden to fire, and the Royal Garhwal Rifles, who were ordered to put a cordon round the cars, found themselves heavily assailed by all manner of improvised weapons. One soldier was so badly hit that he dropped his rifle, and the mob made frantic efforts to seize this. An Indian V.C.O. in command of a platoon rushed forward to prevent them and, being set on, shot four of the crowd with his revolver. The situation here was growing very ugly indeed, but just as it looked as if the infantry would be overwhelmed, the Inspector General of Police, who held magisterial powers, gave permission for fire to be opened again. But even then hand-to-hand fighting developed and it was not until more troops had arrived that the street was cleared.

During the afternoon, pickets were posted at all the gates of the city, and gradually, the columns were able to penetrate towards the centre and regain control. All that night and the day of the 24th Peshawar remained occupied by the army and for a time it seemed likely that a second and greater explosion would come. In the evening, however, a deputation of elders visited the Chief Commissioner and begged that the troops should be withdrawn; if this request were agreed to, they said, they would give assurances that peace would rapidly be restored. The Chief Commissioner agreed, and by the evening of the 26th the police had taken over again. Peace didn't last, however, and soon more trouble was stirred up,

with the erection of a Red Shirt 'Memorial', and a swift reoccupation was ordered. Four columns moved in at first light on the 4th May and the city awoke to find itself in the firm grip of the army. On the 19th May the 'Memorial' was demolished, the pavement where it had stood being cemented over so that no trace remained. By the end of the month, the city seemed quiet again.

Meanwhile some of the tribes had grown restive, and on the 11th May the Madda Khel and Khidda Khel Waziris marched against the post at Datta Khel and attacked it in large numbers. The garrison consisted of a company of Tochi scouts which put up a stout resistance, pouring rifle and machine-gun fire into the ranks of their attackers. Fortunately a message had got back to Miranshah, and in the afternoon the scouts were heartened to see an R.A.F. plane flying towards them. This circled the post, bombing and machine-gunning the tribesmen, who broke up into small groups and ran for cover. On the 12th there was desultory firing from the tribesmen, but no attack developed till the evening. Meanwhile a force of twelve bombers arrived to attack the tribesmen, before going on to Kaniguram where they staged a demonstration to deter the Mahsuds from rising. At 2 p.m. on the 13th, as the siege of Datta Khel had still not been broken off, an ultimatum was issued demanding the disbandment of the lashkar and the surrender of twenty maliks as hostages. Twenty-four hours later, as no reply was received, two bomber squadrons of the R.A.F. (forty-eight aircraft) attacked the Madda Khel and Kiddar Khel villages, killing seven people and destroying thirty houses. Meanwhile, on the morning of the 14th, the Razmak column moved out to attack Datta Khel which it reached the following day. By now, however, the lashkar investing the Tochi Scout post there had melted away, and twenty Waziri maliks walked in to surrender themselves as hostages. But then the news arrived that the Mahsuds were on the warpath and the lashkars were gathering in the Shawal area, west of Razmak. The Red Shirt agents were obviously still active there.

Worse still, the troubles had spread to Tirah, where other Red Shirt agents were busy among the Afridis. Requests for assistance found a ready response from the mullahs, and on the 2nd May a jirga was held at Bagh to decide on a course of action. Here the elders spoke against any move against the British, but the young men were itching for war and loot, and their counsel won the day.

A lashkar was raised under the leadership of Sayed Kabir and his nephew Sayed Almar, both Malikdin Khels, and in a few days this had established itself in caves along the western edge of the Khajuri plain. Gradually more and more of the Afridi mullahs declared for Sayed Almar and by early June no less than 7,000 tribesmen were assembled. On the 4th June a great jirga was held at which the elders again urged the leaders to disperse their men, but by a large majority a motion to attack Peshawar was passed. Next day the lashkar split into two columns and began marching against the city, harassed intermittently by R.A.F. bombers. It had been hoped to attack on the morning of the 5th, but when this became impossible, orders were given that the tribesmen should lie up among the crops during the day and attack the following night.

From the 4th June onwards reports of the lashkar's movements had been flooding into Peshawar Brigade Headquarters. Discussion took place as to whether a mobile column should be sent out, or whether all forces should remain concentrated in Peshawar. Eventually the latter course was decided on. During the night of the 4th telephone wires to Bara, Shabkadr, Charsadda, and Kohat were cut, and a patrol of the Poona Horse out on the Bara road reported that it had been fired on, and the road ahead had been blocked. Then in the early hours reports came in of Afridis penetrating to within a mile of the city, both to the south and the west. Evidence multiplied too, that the villagers were co-operating with the insurgents and there was now danger of a concerted rising; the inhabitants of the area throwing in their lot with the tribesmen.

In view of this new danger, it was obviously impossible for the army to confine itself to a passive role, and a plan was quickly evolved for a cavalry 'drive' in an easterly direction from Bara fort. This, it was hoped, would cut the Afridis' line of retreat and allow the infantry and artillery to put in a 'drive'. The country was intersected by hundreds of deep watercourses, and the operation was therefore likely to prove difficult. But it had to be carried out, and the 'Risalpur Flying Column' (as it was now called), composed of Guides, 20th Lancers, and a squadron of 15/19th Hussars, reached Bara fort at 11 a.m. and began a sweep along the line of the river an hour later. No large parties of tribesmen were encountered, but the column had a marked impact, for during the next twenty-four hours the lashkars poised for an attack on Peshawar melted

away. By the 6th June they were retreating across the plain, machine-gunned and bombed by the R.A.F. Two days later they were back in Tirah and the Bazar valley.

The tribesmen were bitterly humiliated by this fiasco. When the jirgas assembled again there was argument and recrimination, the Malikdin Khels accusing the Kuki Khels, and the Kambar Khels upbraiding the Zakka Khels. Man after man rounded on the mullahs who had told them the British raj was finished, and asked them to explain how it was that its army moved so swiftly, and its aircraft were always on hand to shoot up the lashkars as they marched. Some of the elders put forward a plan to send a deputation to Peshawar, with the object of discussing their grievances with the Chief Commissioner, but they were howled down; and later as they were making their way back home, the Khilafat party fired on them. For the next month there was jirga after jirga as the various factions fought each other for power, jostled for position, and grouped and re-grouped. Finally on the 1st August a plan was agreed on: this was to form a base in the Khajuri and Aka Khel foothills, and from here to send a series of raiding gangs into Peshawar and the surrounding area.

News of the jirga's decision reached Peshawar within a few hours, and orders were given out, to meet the threat. Apart from the Risalpur Cavalry Column, a second column from Nowshera was to be engaged and some units brigaded under the title of 'Fordham's Force'. On the 5th August news of the lashkars' advance was signalled by the R.A.F. reconnaissance planes. The vanguard, consisting of 300 men, had reached Mamanai and the main body was about a day behind. In accordance with the plan worked out at Peshawar Brigade Headquarters, the Cavalry Column moved to Bara and the Nowshera Column took up an outpost position astride the road in front of it. Their task, once the tribesmen had committed themselves, was to drive them westward so that the cavalry could deal with them in the open country towards the Khajuri plain. During the 9th August only small parties of the enemy were discovered by the Cavalry Column, but the Poona Horse received orders to reconnoitre the Zindai Khwar area from the direction of the Kohat road. The regiment left Peshawar at 5.45 p.m. and reached Soraizai Payan two and a half hours later, to be told by the villagers that no Afridis had been seen. However, an aircraft

dropped a message to say that a party of seventy-five of them had been spotted going north, and the Poona Horse set off in pursuit. When the leading troop reached the edge of the Khwar it came under heavy fire from the banks of the Hazar Khani Canal. The steep water-worn sides of the Khwar gave the tribesmen excellent cover and formed a barrier impassable to cavalry. Now the Afridis, some thousand of them, began to creep forward under cover of the crops, and almost succeeded in surrounding the regiment. A sharp action ensued after which it was able to extricate itself, but it was a very narrow shave. Reports of its plight were received by the Column Headquarters while the action was still going on, and armoured cars and cavalry raced to the rescue. But the cars became ditched, and the cavalry failed to make contact; this round had definitely gone to the Afridis.

At 4.30 p.m. another threat developed—against the supply depot, a few miles to the north-east of Peshawar. The sepoy on duty at the Nowshera Gate was amazed to see a large body of Afridis approaching and hurriedly shut the gate and sounded the alarm. The garrison was commanded by a Jemadar who hurriedly ordered his men to their defensive positions, but by the time they were deployed the Afridis had reached the gate and fired the lock. With a great roar they swung the gate open and surged into the depot, but the garrison's fire was controlled and accurate, and after their initial impetus had been lost, the Afridis seemed somewhat disconcerted. While they hesitated the Jemadar coolly completed his dispositions and telephoned Brigade Headquarters for help, after which he took a section of men with a Lewis gun and engaged the Afridis from the roof. He could see them quite clearly, signalling to each other with flags, and then some of their leaders called on him to stop firing, as 'We are both of the same religion'. The reply was a long burst from the Lewis gun, and the Afridis, seeing that a frontal attack was impossible, began infiltrating round the flanks. A party of them scaled the north wall, but were picked off one at a time; then heavy firing developed from the eastern area of the depot. Here there was parked rolling stock, and a litter of dumps gave good cover which the tribesmen used expertly.

Things were beginning to look bad for the Jemadar and his small garrison when two armoured cars raced in to help. They had come through a heavy concentration of rifle fire outside the depot, but

were undamaged, and now they began systematically working their way round inside the depot, taking on targets wherever they found them. Then four more armoured cars raced in to join the fight, taking on the Afridis concentrated in a breach they had made in the north wall. Before long the situation was well in hand, and the Afridis began retreating through the crops to the north. Here the armoured cars still harassed them and the R.A.F. joined in with some accurate bombing. Some men of the 11th Sikhs carried out a sweep to the north of the depot and came across large numbers of the enemy which they engaged. There was a sharp action with casualties on both sides, but the Afridis knew their operation had failed, and were only too anxious to get away.

This whole action was notable for the fact that no British or Indian troops were killed or wounded, despite the heavy firing which had gone on for some hours; the marksmanship of the Afridis had been incredibly bad. Thirty Afridis, however, were buried in the depot area and large numbers of dead and wounded were seen to be carried away.

Though there was no major incursion in the days which followed, a number of minor incidents occurred, and the Peshawar–Nowshera railway had to be closed to traffic, after trains were fired on. It was estimated, however, that there were still 1,200 Afridis roaming the Peshawar District, and 3,000 in the Khajuri plain, all waiting to see if the Mohmands and Orakzais would come down from the hills and join them. On the 16th August martial law was proclaimed throughout the Peshawar district.

For the rest of the year the situation remained tense and uncertain; and the Afridis showed no signs of wishing to come to terms. The Government therefore decided that an area to the west of Peshawar, including the Khajuri and Aka Khel plains, would have have to be occupied permanently. This would entail the building of tracks, the construction of roads and defence posts, and then the establishment of garrisons; and orders to go ahead were received on the 2nd October. Several Afridi maliks who had received a summons from the Chief Commissioner for a jirga to be held at Jamrud were prevented from attending by the Khilafat party, which was steadily gaining ground. Its leaders were demanding the evacuation of the Khyber, the release of Ghaffar Khan, and the payment of Rs 50,000 fine by the Indian Government as a pre-requisite for any negotia-

tions. Eventually, after a good deal of argument amongst the Afridis, a jirga was held outside Jamrud, but this proved quite pointless. Those maliks whose inclination was to be reasonable were afraid of what the Khilafat leaders would do to them on their return to tribal territory, and would make no concessions. On the 23rd, after an address by the Chief Commissioner, the jirga dispersed; and when the Khilafatists heard what had happened they threatened to launch a mass attack on Peshawar. This did not materialise, however, and in due course the occupation of the Khajuri and Aka Khel plains went ahead.

It was not until March 1931 that there was any real sign of weakening among the ranks of the Khilafat extremists. By then grazing was becoming sparse, and the women of the tribe were suffering considerable hardships. Gradually a peace movement began to grow in Tirah, and towards the end of June the maliks requested a jirga to settle all outstanding disputes between the Afridis and the British. This was granted, subject to the condition that the occupations of the plains would be accepted as a fait accompli; but again nothing was accomplished. It was not until the 3rd October when the Chief Commissioner for the North-West Frontier Province met a fully representative jirga that the affair was brought to an end. The Government of India refused to restrict flying over Tirah or patrolling in the plains; but agreed to consider lifting the ban on the enlistment of Afridis in the Army. Also, on a clear admission of guilt by the maliks, it agreed 'as an act of grace' that no fine would be imposed.

By now Abdul Ghaffar Khan was out of gaol again, having been released in March 1931 under a pact between the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, and Gandhi. Immediately he began reorganising his movement and built up the Frontier Youth League which was now declared lawful by the Government. His efforts to embroil the tribes in a new rebellion mounted steadily, but fortunately had no success. In the Peshawar valley, however, his influence grew greater than ever and in July, after his followers had attempted to obstruct the police, the Commissioner issued an order banning meetings, processions, and demonstrations, along an area four miles on each side of the Grand Trunk Road from Attock to Peshawar. This measure drove the Red Shirts away from the road, but reports kept pouring in of their activities in the villages. Attempts were made to

obstruct civil cases, and army pensioners and others loyal to the British found themselves persecuted. In August the alliance between the Red Shirts and the National Congress Party was ratified at a mass meeting at Utmanzai, and Ghaffar Khan was elevated to the title of 'Generalissimo of Volunteers'. But relations with Congress did not run entirely smoothly, and in October he received orders from Nehru to disband both the Frontier Youth League and the Provincial Congress Committee. In their place a 'Provincial Frontier Jirga' was formed. This administrative change, however, made no difference to Ghaffar Khan's main activity which was to pour out vitriolic anti-British speeches at gathering after gathering. He also interfered with increasing arrogance in civil affairs—his officers 'trying' cases before they reached the courts, and even imposing fines and other punishments. The British authorities had been weak and vacillating for the last few years, but now things became so serious that they were driven into action. On the 24th December 1931 what amounted to emergency powers were taken to safeguard public services, transport, property, and public order; the Red Shirts were declared an illegal organisation and their funds were made liable to forfeiture. On the same evening Ghaffar Khan was deported from the province with four of his leaders and all of them were gaoled in various parts of India. In anticipation of a major disturbance in Peshawar, the gates were picketed, but in fact, the reaction was slight and short-lived. Only in a few villages did the local Red Shirt leaders provoke rioting but after a few shots had been fired by the police, all was quiet again. On the 28th December the last British troops were withdrawn from Peshawar city. By the spring of 1932 the Red Shirt movement had dissolved completely.

It should be conceded, however, that its efforts had not been without some results. That year the North-West Frontier Province was raised from a Chief Commissionerate to a Governor's Province, and from now on its political rights and institutions were equal to those in the rest of India. In 1935 the Province shared the further advance towards self-government marked by the Government of India Act. It was at this time that Ghaffar Khan's brother, Dr. Khan Sahib, rose to eminence as Chief Minister of the Province. He was a devoted follower of Gandhi and the National Congress, and was to play an important part in the struggles ahead.

Ghaffar Khan (when he eventually came out of gaol again) pre-

ferred his role of village agitator to the acceptance of real political power. He continued long after the British had left, and came to make an intimate acquaintance with the inside of Pakistan's gaols. Pakistan was a fraud, he declared; the Pathans had never been given a chance of independence. The last news of him came in 1962 from the American, James Spain, who interviewed him at his home village, Charsadda. He relates:

'We found him lying on a rumpled bed. Tall and gaunt, he looked like a sick Jeremiah outside the gates of a king of Israel. He wore a single long garment of homespun, something like an old-fashioned nightshirt, and his grizzled head was bare. Above his prominent Pathan nose huge dark eyes glistened and charged the otherwise dim and dingy room with a sense of urgency. He did not rise but offered me his hand—he gripped mine so strongly that I was unable to withdraw it and I had to slip back into the chair pushed gently against the back of my knees by his associate.'

Ghaffar Khan had lost none of his passion nor his power to express it. 'What matters . . .' he said, 'is that we be free to develop ourselves, to tear down our own khans who have oppressed us, to make our own laws, to speak our own language.' Spain says he could still feel his eyes boring through the back of his head as he walked out of the room.

By the end of 1932 (even though Ghaffar Khan was in gaol and the Red Shirts had disbanded) one thing was clear. Any extravagant claims for the 'Modified Forward Policy' had proved just as illusory as claims in previous years for the 'Non-Involvement Policy', the 'Forward Policy', or the 'Masterly Inactivity Policy'. Peace and tranquillity still remained as elusive as ever. Many soldiers and administrators realised by now—and not always with as much regret as one might have expected—that so long as the British remained on the Frontier they would have to fight.

15

THE TURBULENT THIRTIES

It was in this decade that fighting on the Frontier probably reached its highest peak of professional skill. The Indian Army now had tanks, armoured cars, and motorised transport in considerable, if not adequate quantities; and a supply system which had at last escaped from its Mogul origins. Radio had come into general use; and though the effectiveness of aircraft had proved a major disappointment, at least they were available for reconnaissance work, and their role was gradually being understood. There had also been a great improvement in the standard of generalship; in the Mohmand campaign of 1935, for example, the future Field-Marshals Auchinleck and Alexander both served as brigade commanders. The tribes also found a string of effective leaders, and one of them, Mirza Ali Khan, usually known as the Fakir of Ipi, proved himself to be a man of extraordinary resource and resilience. Both British and Pathans saw a great deal of action; for after the Afridis temporarily subsided, with the eclipse of the Red Shirts, it was the turn of the Mohmands, and then the tribes of Waziristan. Between 1933 and 1940 the sound of gunfire had barely died down in one sector of the mountains before it erupted in another. The pressure exerted by the growing power on the Indian Congress inevitably increased; many reports were received of their paying allowances to the tribes on condition that they kept the Frontier on tenterhooks. Then, to complicate matters further, King Nadir was assassinated on the 8th November 1933 and a disturbed period followed in Afghanistan. By 1935 Hitler had sent in 150 'technicians' who did a good deal of construction work, but also indulged in intelligence activities. And Soviet Russia helped keep the pot on the boil by subsidising the Fakir of Ipi. Altogether, this was an energetic and expensive period for the British, who on some occasions had up to 50,000 men in the field.

The cost, and therefore the burden on the Indian taxpayer, was enormous; between 1924 and 1939 it totalled £112,000,000.

During this period the ambivalence of the British attitude towards the Frontier continued, and, in fact, was pushed to absurd limits. The troops were ordered to make war peacefully, keeping down casualties among the tribes, while accepting them uncomplainingly themselves. The Political Officers in many instances so identified themselves with the tribal inhabitants of their areas, that if they remarked 'Our chaps did rather well today', they probably meant the Mahsuds or Afridis or Mohmands. Naturally enough, this did not endear them to the army.

To give some idea of how irksome the rules of Frontier warfare had become, one cannot do better than devote a few words to the 'proscribed area'. This was the agreed trouble area, often delimited after a good deal of argument between the army and the politicals. Outside it the troops could not shoot until shot at. Inside it they couldn't shoot at any party of less than ten men unless these were armed and off the path. As the paths were often impossible to discern at a distance, and the Pathan clothing made concealment of weapons quite simple, the danger inherent in this restriction was immense. In their own interests the troops took few prisoners, and none at all if the Political Agent was not around. The Pathans, as always, mutilated and beheaded any Indian or British troops who fell into their hands. They had also become adept at mining roads and using stolen grenades to construct booby-traps. Needless to add, they knew the rules of the Frontier imposed on the troops as well as they knew the Koran, and took advantage of them at every conceivable opportunity. They would dress up as women and even lay on fake funeral processions. If these caught a picket or any party of troops relaxing for even a moment, they would open fire then disappear into the hills.

Undoubtedly the fact that the troops were fighting with 'one hand tied behind their backs' not only introduced a new bitterness but also a new ruthlessness into the Frontier campaigns. John Masters has told how a wounded British officer, who had fallen into enemy hands, was later found 'castrated and flayed, probably while alive, and his skin pegged out on the rocks not far from the camp'. Soon afterwards his Indian troops captured a Pathan and, to the fury of the commanding officer, brought him back. Both the prisoner's

thighs were broken, but the commanding officer ordered that he should be pegged out on the ground in the blazing sun, without food or water. It was also ordered that every soldier who happened to pass him should kick him in the testicles. When the prisoner eventually expired the troops carried him out and dumped him on the exact spot where the skin of the British officer had been found.

Even more Gilbertian than the rules for ground troops were the rules for the R.A.F. The commanders on the spot were never allowed to call for offensive air action direct, and the result was inevitably a fatal delay. To quote General Molesworth:

'The Foreign and Political Department, the Commander-in-Chief, and the Viceroy all had to be satisfied that it was necessary. Thereafter the Political Officer in the area to be attacked had to issue a 24 hours warning to the tribesmen and an aircraft flew over the area dropping leaflets giving the target to be bombed, the date and time of the bombing and warning everyone to keep clear of the area.'

Under this arrangement, the women and children had ample time to take refuge in the caves, and there was virtually no danger to anyone. It was only later on that arrangements were made to 'proscribe' bombing areas so that any movement in them could be attacked without warning. No doubt this gallant notion of warfare and the consideration for women would have pleased Sir Charles Napier whose views will be remembered from earlier chapters; but officers and men of the Indian Army, who knew that it was often the womenfolk who inflicted torture on wounded prisoners, even the prolonged agony of 'death by a thousand cuts', did not always feel so tender towards them.

The Mohmand operations of 1933 resulted from a feud between the tribes, the Upper Mohmands having brought pressure to bear on the Lower Mohmands to sever their connections with the Indian Government. With the advance of a powerful column up the Gandab valley, commanded by Brigadier Auchinleck, the Upper Mohmands decided to negotiate, and the troubles were temporarily patched over. But they obviously were the mere prelude to greater troubles to come.

Meanwhile there was fighting in Bajaur, further to the north-east.

In May 1933 an individual appeared, calling himself the pretender to the throne of Afghanistan, and was given shelter by the Khan of Kotkai in the Chaharmung valley. Here with his lieutenants he attempted to raise the tribes against Nadir Shah, who appealed to the Indian Government for help. Initially political pressure was brought to bear, but when this failed, military action was resorted to, which took the form of air bombing. For once this seemed to have the desired effect, and the conspiracy dissolved.

By 1934, however, the Mohmands were stirred up again, this time by a mullah, the Fakir of Alingar. Despite warnings by the Government he marched into the Loe Agra area, a few miles to the west of Malakand, with a powerful lashkar, easily scattering the Swat levies who were sent against him. Here he preached against the Government, urging the tribes to rise in yet another jehad and enjoyed some success. It was February 1935 before the Government took action, but then it sent the Nowshera Brigade in to deal with the situation. The terrain was frightful, consisting of great mountain masses, precipitous slopes, and steep densely wooded valleys. The large smooth slabs of rock which punctuated the paths, made them difficult for mules and horses; and villages and therefore local produce were scarce. For some weeks the column played hide-and-seek with the Fakir and his lashkar, but finally was able to engage him in some scattered actions early in April. Then on the night of the 5th April the tribesmen put in one of the most ferocious night attacks in the whole history of Frontier warfare.

This was against a position known as Kila Hari, which was defended by a rifle company of the 3rd Battalion 2nd Punjab Regiment, supported by a machine-gun platoon of the 4th Gurkhas. About 5 p.m. the tribesmen could be heard blowing bugles among the hills around Loe Agra, and parties of them could be seen streaming over the Ghund Pass. They then split into three columns, one going east, one west, and one remaining where it was. By 7 p.m. it was dark and then the sound of the dhols broke out in the dead ground below the post. Then a party of swordsmen rushed forward, screaming and yelling, and were able to force their way through the barbed-wire fence. The attack was well planned and executed, being helped by accurate covering fire from a position to the south. Numbers of the swordsmen reached the outer walls of the post, and audaciously grabbed the muzzles of rifles and even machine-guns,

trying to tug them away from their owners. The close fighting raged for some while, but eventually the swordsmen were dealt with by rifles and bayonets, by knives and kukris. But as one rush was defeated, another came on, and till midnight there was no let-up. Meanwhile the rifle platoon on the summit of the hill was heavily attacked, and as no barbed wire had been available for its defences, it had to rely on rapid and accurate fire from its Lewis guns and rifles. For nearly an hour great masses of tribesmen poured up the hill against this small force—a platoon had only thirty-two men at full strength—and though its commander, a subadar, was mortally wounded, it fought on till the tribesmen had had enough. The machine-gunners played an important part in this heroic action, breaking up concentrations of enemies on the north face, and in some instances catching them in enfilade from a well-sited position on a spur. The company commander was fortunately able to help his platoon also, being in touch by telephone throughout the action. He was also in touch with the observation officer of the Mountain Artillery, whose screw guns brought down immediate defensive fire when called upon. After a lull at about 9.30 p.m. the artillery commander rang up to say that large numbers of the enemy were concentrating to the east in preparation for yet another assault. Soon it came in, but the plan this time was to get as many men as possible up to the wire and from here launch small parties of swordsmen in a desperate attempt to reach the sangars. But still they failed; and at five o'clock next morning the weary defenders could see electric torches flashing signals on the hills. Soon afterwards the tribesmen melted away.

Extraordinarily enough, for such a long and close-fought action, the defenders suffered minute casualties, apart from the subadar, only one other rank being killed and seven wounded. The tribesmen removed their own wounded and all their dead except for one man who was found a few feet from a machine-gun post, his out-stretched hand still tightly grasping his sword.

Next day urgent requests for reinforcements were sent back by the brigade commander, and on the 11th April a full-scale attack was put in against the enemy lashkar, at Loe Agra. This was completely successful and the lashkar hurriedly withdrew, taking a severe mauling. After this, the usual course of events followed, the Shamozai jirga asking for an interview. It soon became evident,

however, that the influence of the Fakir of Alingar still remained strong, and the prospects of an early settlement seemed remote. The British therefore decided to leave some troops in the area, in the hope that the maliks would soon tire of the struggle, which in fact they did. The Fakir too lost influence and eventually disappeared into the mountains from which he had come a few months earlier.

The campaign in Loe Agra was not an important one; but the fighting was as desperate as in any of the great campaigns of the past, and vividly recalls Neville Chamberlain at Ambela, and Bindon Blood in the Malakand. It illustrates, too, the pitch of training to which the Indian Army had now been brought; no one but first-class men with high morale could have survived in that terrain and against such an enemy.

The year 1935 also saw a major campaign carried out by both the Peshawar and the Nowshera brigades against the Mohmands. This, like so many campaigns before it, was carried on in great heat and humidity. For most of the campaign, Auchinleck was in command, in the absence of Major-General Muspratt, and showed the talent for high command which he was to realise in the desert. One operation deserves special mention. In this three brigades carried out a night march simultaneously, to occupy the heights around the Nahakki Pass—a Mohmand stronghold—and then the cavalry went through the Pass next morning to debouch on to the plain beyond. Hurriedly the road through the Pass was extended and the tanks went up to support the forward infantry, and the Mohmands not unnaturally seemed over-awed. But a week later, when the 5th/12th Frontier Force Regiment (the Guides) sent out a hastily mounted reconnaissance in force to the south-west of Nahakki, the tribesmen laid on a beautifully concealed ambush. In the desperate fighting to extricate themselves, the Guides lost no less than thirty-five killed and some sixty wounded. However, this triumph seemed to expend the tribesmen's energy and soon the jirgas came in to sue for peace. For his part in the two Mohmand operations Auchinleck received the C.B. and C.S.I. and was promoted to the rank of major-general. It may seem churlish to suggest that the campaigns achieved very little, but this was so. However, it is not for soldiers to reason why, but to carry out their duties as best they can; and duty against the Mohmands was never an easy one.

Now, after a period of relative tranquillity, it was time for the tribes of Waziristan to strike. The Fakir of Ipi had arrived on the scene. He was a wiry little man from the Tori Khel Waziris who was born about 1890. In 1936 he was imam of a small mosque at Ipi, a hamlet close to the road between Bannu and the lower Tochi valley; up to this date he had lived a quiet religious life, and, so far as the British were aware, had not been concerned with previous political troubles, even those stirred up by his fellow clansman, Abdul Ghaffar Khan. However, to those who knew him, his main characteristics were already apparent. He could be brutal and treacherous, even by Pathan standards; he took bribes; he sheltered outlaws; he was not above hiring assassins to deal with his enemies, and even his enemies' children. But he was independent and pursued his own path; and he was a fanatical hater of all infidels, willing at any time to stir up religious passions for his own ends. Inevitably it was only a matter of time before such a man found a cause, and for the Fakir of Ipi it arrived in 1936 with what is usually known as the 'Islam Bibi' case.

Chand Bibi, the wife of a Hindu merchant living in Bannu, was abducted—forcibly or otherwise—by a Waziri who went through a Muslim rite of marriage with her. The Hindu husband then sued in the Bannu court of justice for restoration of conjugal rights and won his case. Now abductions of this kind were by no means rare in the Frontier districts, and the normal course would have been for the matter to be settled between the Political Officer and a Waziri jirga. But, as the husband had taken matters to court, this course was out of the question, and the result was a blaze of publicity and an immediate and loud chorus of protest from the tribes. Seeing his chance, the Fakir of Ipi launched an attack on religious grounds, and within a few days had become the leader of a Waziri revolt. As luck would have it, he had chosen a propitious moment, for the tribes had been chafing at Government policies for some time, and it only needed a spark to set the whole of Waziristan ablaze. Soon the Fakir was at the head of a great lashkar in the Khaisora river valley, a few miles south of the Lower Tochi Road, and here he was able to threaten communications with Razmak, in addition to the administered areas around Bannu. The columns from both these places were called on, and soon heavy fighting broke out. By the end of the year the Wana Waziri and the Mahsuds of the Wana

area of South Waziristan became restless and the situation deteriorated. According to General Molesworth, who bore heavy responsibilities on the Frontier at this time:

'The Faqir organised his lashkars with great skill, raised a levy from the clans to maintain them and even contrived to manufacture primitive cannon. It may here be noted that when a lashkar assembled in any area, each man brought with him food sufficient for, say, 10 days. As they had no "commissariat" for food supply, when the food was consumed the lashkar had to disperse to obtain more. . . . Thus, from a military point of view, it was necessary to try and bring the lashkar to battle within a limited time before it vanished into thin air.'

By 1937 over 30,000 troops were in the field, trying to curb the Fakir's activities, but met with little success. One great difficulty was the proximity of the Durand Line which—it will doubtless be recalled—marked the Frontier between the tribal areas and Afghanistan. Once a lashkar was hard pressed it slipped across the border to enjoy the hospitality of the Afghans for a while, before re-forming and advancing into action again. The Afghan Government either couldn't or wouldn't do anything about the matter; and the Fakir himself was as slippery as an eel. In time he built himself a hide-out in the remote valley of Gorwekht, about a mile from the border: and his lieutenants were always able to give him ample warning of the approach of any troops. From the British and Indian viewpoint, operations were hampered especially by the necessity to make formal application for air action. And even then Mr. George Lansbury, the Socialist leader, began inveighing against the use of bombing; and there were debates in the League of Nations.

Towards the end of 1936 the 'Muslim Bibi' case reached the British law courts, and here it was ruled that the Hindu girl should be returned to her parents. This decision enraged the Fakir even more, and in 1937 a punitive expedition was sent up to the Khaisorak valley and remained there until fines had been paid and rifles were surrendered. The clan involved here was the Tori Khel, and it was by now perfectly obvious that their maliks had no control over the young hotheads and were quite unable to carry out any pledges with regard to the Fakir. Before long the whole tribe was up in arms, and, as Sir William Barton relates:

'A series of outrages followed, consisting of raids in the adminis-

tered and protected areas, kidnappings, murders, burnings; there were twenty-nine raids, thirty-one persons were kidnapped, mostly Hindus; ten Hindus were killed; sixty Hindu houses and shops were burnt; cattle and sheep carried off; lorries looted and destroyed. There were attacks on British picquets and convoys, culminating in the ambushing in the Shahur Tangi (gorge) just beyond Jandola, of a convoy of fifty lorries on its way to Wana. . . .'

The Government still vainly hoped for peace, and went on trying to persuade the Tori Khel to expel the Fakir from their territory. But they refused; and soon the young men in the adjoining territories were infected by the heady doctrines still bubbling from him. Heavy military action was therefore inevitable and in 1937, after some heavy fighting, the Fakir's headquarters at Arsalkot were attacked.

John Masters fought in this action which took place on Coronation Day—12th May. Again his description gives an idea of the savage, ruthless nature of the fighting.

'The general now decided to force his way farther into this part of the country and catch the Faqir of Ipi. Intelligence reported that the Faqir lived in a cave twelve miles east, at a place with the delightful name of Arsalkot. Trouble began at once, and we were soon in action on both sides of the valley—there was no road. It was a day of confused fighting, heroism, and humour. On the left Willie Weallens, our second-in-command, and Lance-Naik Dhansing of the buglers rescued a wounded rifleman from certain mutilation. Willie had a pistol and Dhansing nothing but a *kukri*—but then, the man who singlehandedly attacked three hundred camels needed no other weapon and Willie was an Edwardian to whom personal danger weighed nothing when put in the scale against good manners. They ran out under point-blank fire from forty Pathans and carried Kiruram to safety.

'Also on the left Rifleman Tilbahadur was hit in the stomach and head and killed almost instantly. The tribesmen rushed his corpse. As it lay under our fire, they saved time by thrusting a knife into his stomach, ripped upward through his belt, and pulled off his equipment and ammunition pouches in one stroke. A counter-attack recovered the body, a torn and bloody sack that looked nothing like a man, shrunken, its hands rusty from dried blood. The doctor put him into a *khajawa* with another dead man on the other side of the

camel, and covered him with a blanket. These *khajawas* were camel stretchers, with headrests and raised sides. The dead or wounded swayed and rocked along in them to the camel's bouncing stride. This camel went back down the line past us, and Tilbahadur's hand fell out and trailed along over the side, swinging limp out of the stretcher. A Rifleman standing near me lifted the blanket to see who it was, then shook the corpse warmly by its swaying hand as it passed on, laughing with a genuine and carefree laugh in which all his watching comrades joined. They all had been Tilbahadur's comrades too.'

When John Masters and his men reached the caves where the Fakir had been lodging, they were empty, though 'their mouths were still black with the smoke of his old cooking fires. Smoke still trickled out of one, and we knew he could not have been gone long.'

Casualties in all the operations in Waziristan were considerable, and the Indians lost 163 killed and several hundred wounded. On the 3rd June, however, resistance among the Tori Khel collapsed and an armistice was granted, on condition that they did not re-admit the Fakir, and handed over Hindus who had been kidnapped. This was done.

But still there were 6,000 Bhitannis in the field, all heavily committed to the Fakir's campaign, and probably subsidised by the Indian National Congress. However, after extensive air bombing had been carried out and a brigade had marched into their territory, they came to terms also.

By now, however, the Fakir had moved on to Madda Khel country and trouble started there. He was still as elusive as ever; still as active. By December 1937, when the 40,000 British and Indian troops pulled back on Peshawar, the situation was no better than it had been in January; and in 1938 more fighting was to ensue. One action, in June, was described by *The Times* correspondent, who was not aware of its futility.

'For several hours I watched the advance of the Razmak Brigade down from the Razmak-Narai [pass] to Razani, a distance of under five miles. Piquets were thrown out on either side of the valley head and with their establishment the brigade was on the march. Suddenly scrappy rifle fire broke out from the scrub-covered hillsides, two or three thousand yards on the left flank. The riposte was tremendous. Machine-guns rattled from the piquets and from

behind; a battery unlimbered on a hairpin bend of the twisting, steeply descending road and went into action; an aeroplane zoomed overhead, spotting for the guns and doing some firing on its own account. No one knew whether the spasmodic—at that distance practically futile—hostile fire came from five, fifty, or five hundred tribesmen, but the few shots certainly did not suggest very many hostiles. Yet the vulnerable column had to slow up almost to a halt to thunder at this gnatlike evidence of enmity—and here it is doubtful if anything happened to anybody.'

The Indian Government had made a mistake in not declaring at the outset that they would not deal with the Mahsuds except as a whole. As things were, the system of tribal responsibility fragmented, with some tribes being at war, others at peace, and some ostensibly neutral who co-operated with the Fakir when called upon. The Fakir could continue to hop about unmolested, and no one felt it in their interests to hand him over.

No one likes failures, and the old arguments between the soldiers and the politicals broke out again. Both sides no doubt had some justification for their views; but it now seems probable that the root cause of failure was the lack of any clear-cut policy in Simla and Whitehall.

Meanwhile the Fakir moved to the mountainous country to the west of Razmak and near the Afghan border. Two brigades moved forward to assail his hide-out but the caves could not be reached. Then more troubles developed in South Waziristan, and on the 23rd July one of the most daring exploits of the war took place. Bannu was attacked by night by a lashkar some 200 strong, citizens were killed and wounded, and £30,000 of damage was done to the shops. The raid was undoubtedly a reprisal against the decision of the court in the 'Muslim Bibi' case, and was mostly confined to the Hindu quarter. After some heavy fighting the lashkar was driven off, leaving several of its members dead in the streets and twenty as prisoners. It then took up a position in the hills to the north of the town, and the sense of menace became so great that about a third of the population left their homes and trekked south across the Indus. This was a great blow to British prestige.

The Fakir of Ipi remained in business for many years yet; even in 1940 he was causing great unrest around Bannu. And when Pakistan took over the Frontier he remained still at large and as

great a menace as ever. A Pakistan official in the fifties described him as 'a vicious old man, twisted with hate and selfishness'. He died in 1960, to be honoured with a *Times* obituary which must have raised many a wry smile in Cheltenham and the armchairs of the military clubs. Describing him as 'a man of principle and saintliness . . . the inspiration of and general of tribal revolt . . .' the obituarist added: 'Many retired army officers and political agents will hear the news [of his death] with the tribute of wistful regret, which is to the memory of a doughty and honourable opponent.'

In following the Fakir of Ipi to the end of his course, we have leapt ahead somewhat and must go back to look briefly at events on the Frontier in general. From 1938 onwards the shadow of the Second World War crept across the mountains. That year Hitler sent his agents—the Haji al Amin Husaini, the ex-Mufti of Jerusalem, and members of the Gillani family which has its tentacles all over the Middle East. Hitler's aim, according to Sir Olaf Caroe, was 'to disturb Afghanistan, and with it the North-West Frontier, with the notion of tying the hands of the British Government in India, so compelling the British to retain strong forces in that region'. To what extent he succeeded, it is difficult to say; but certainly his agents did not cause the British as much trouble during the war years as did Gandhi, Nehru, and the National Congress. Even when India was in danger from the Japanese these politicians did not relax their efforts to cause civil strife and unrest; and in 1942 a whole regular British division was diverted from the Middle East to Bombay to help stabilise the situation.

It was also in 1942 that the North-West Frontier was suddenly eclipsed by the North-East Frontier—a frontier whose existence many soldiers and politicals had not consciously recognised at all, This was a wild remote area of jungle-mountains covering Assam, Manipur, and the Arakan, territory flanking the boundaries of Burma. When the Japanese suddenly swept through Malaya and Burma, and stood poised on the borders of India, the British realised to their horror that this frontier lay open and exposed. Then in March 1944 the Japanese launched their great thrust against Imphal and Kohima, and in a matter of days were inside Indian territory. For three, perhaps four days, the great base at Dimapur lay at their

mercy; and if it had been captured there was little to prevent the Japanese armies streaming across the Brahmaputra and heading for Calcutta. But after sixty-four days of savage and costly fighting, the enemy was hurled back from Kohima and then routed from Imphal The North-East Frontier had been saved.

By now though, the war in Burma, the greatest campaign ever undertaken by the British and Indian Armies in the Far East, had coloured the mind of every soldier who served in it. The North-West Frontier suddenly seemed trivial, outmoded, and irrelevant. At this time, to say that an officer was 'Frontier-minded' was to condemn him. It was quite common to be asked 'Were you in the war, or did you stay up on the Frontier?'

However, the situation was dynamic; for, as the war drew to its close, it became increasingly obvious that the British would be quitting India in a very few years. Instinctively it was realised that in the world now to be born colonialism would not be tolerated. Equally clear became the fact that Mohammed Ali Jinnah and the Muslim League would no longer be content to remain in a Hindu-dominated state. They wanted their own country—Pakistan. Pandit Nehru, whose bitter tongue and hatred for Jinnah had poisoned relations between the Congress and the League for more than twenty years, did not take Jinnah's claims seriously, and remained confident that any settlement with the British would ensure that India was handed over as it was, unitary and with a Government including men of all the main faiths. It took until 1946, when the war was over and India was about to gain her freedom, before he realised his error. Then he went to see his old enemy and plead with him; but it was too late, far too late. Pakistan, said Jinnah, must come; and Nehru realised to his horror that there was no way of preventing it.

The Pakistan issue had naturally a great impact on the North-West Frontier Province, where the vast majority of the population were Muslim. But it so happened that the National Congress was well-organised and strong there, and under Dr. Khan Sahib (Abdul Ghaffar Khan's brother) dominated the local government at Peshawar. Thus there were the seeds of a new conflict, and as the day of Independence drew near it grew in size and intensity.

EPILOGUE

On the 20th February 1947 the Prime Minister of England, Clement Attlee, made the historic announcement that his Government intended to keep their election pledge and would definitely quit India by June of the following year. He also announced that Admiral Lord Mountbatten would be arriving in Delhi within a month to take over from Wavell as the last Viceroy. India at this time was in a ferment, its politicians squabbling and bickering among themselves as to the shape and form of the handover, the fate of the princes, and a thousand other matters. The leaders of Congress and the Muslim League detested each other, and both mistrusted the British; the former because they feared that a separate state would be granted and the latter because they feared it would not be, or not in the terms they were seeking. Wavell had been struggling patiently for over two years to effect a compromise, to evolve a plan acceptable to both sides which would avoid what he dreaded more than anything else: civil war between Hindus and Muslims. The Congress politicians, however, feared that Wavell's efforts would prolong British rule for at least ten years, and declared their lack of trust in him. Civil war, Nehru declared, would be a cheap price to pay for independence; he would rather the whole Punjab went up in flames than that peace were kept by British bayonets. But now, with Attlee's declaration, the politicians knew that the sands were running out; that whether the British left India at peace or left her in the grip of bloodshed and communal violence, whether there was a government in control or complete anarchy, they would leave. So the inter-party strife intensified. The struggle for possession of this great sub-continent reached extraordinary heights of passion, bitterness, and venom.

From the start the North-West Frontier Province had been an important factor in the struggle. In March 1945 Dr. Khan Sahib,

the Congress supporter, had overthrown the Muslim League in the Provincial elections and still held power. By July, however, support for him began to dwindle, and the Pathans swung away from Congress in large numbers. For the last twenty years this great Party had seemed the only organisation which could rid them of the British, and they had formed a curious alliance with it. But now the departure of the British seemed less important than what was to come after: and a Hindu-dominated Congress Party was not at all to their taste. It was some time before Nehru and his Interim Government at Delhi realised the true position in Peshawar, as Khan Sahib had continued to send optimistic reports. But by the summer of 1946 the truth could not be concealed, and Nehru determined on a tour of the Frontier to rally support and bolster Khan Sahib's ailing administration until Independence Day arrived. He was strongly warned not to attempt the tour both by the Muslim President of Congress, Abul Kalam Azad, and Sir Olaf Caroe, the Provincial Governor. However, he was determined, and in October flew up to Peshawar, accompanied by Azad and other leaders.

His reception was not a happy one. At Peshawar airport thousands of Pathans were massed, carrying black flags and shouting anti-Congress slogans. Dr. Khan Sahib and his ministers who were there to greet him had to be protected by a strong police guard, and any effective demonstration was out of the question. As Nehru continued his tour the going got tougher and the insults more pointed: at Razmak the members of a tribal jirga reviled him as an infidel and intruder; in the villages his car was stoned; he was hit on the head with a missile; and Khan Sahib and his ministers seemed so powerless to keep order that Nehru had to take the arrangements into his own hands. Despite this, however, the tour ended in a fiasco. Near Landi Kotal on the journey back a group of Afridis tried to attack Nehru and he was lucky to escape alive. Back in Delhi, though somewhat chastened, he still clung obstinately to his belief that the Muslim League could not be regarded as a serious political organisation; and that in due course the whole population of India—Pathans included—would come to realise this.

So, despite his waning belief in Khan Sahib's abilities as an administrator, Nehru ordered that Congress headquarters should continue financial and other support; that propaganda among the Pathans should in no way be abandoned. And with this aid, Khan

Sahib clung to power. In February 1947, however, the Muslim League intensified their pressure against him and against Sir Khizar Hayat's administration in Lahore. By June the latter had fallen, and Khan Sahib's days seemed numbered; but then he acted swiftly, arrested Abdul Qayyum Khan (the Muslim League chief in Peshawar) and large numbers of his supporters. By the end of the month the gaols were full to suffocation. But the League kept in action; day by day there were meetings and processions; effigies of Khan Sahib were paraded on donkeys, then flung on to bonfires and burned; police stations and public buildings were picketed; trains were wrecked. Pathan ladies climbed ladders propped against the gaol walls and waved Muslim flags.

It was in the third week of April that disorders throughout the Province reached their peak. There was rioting in the Derajat; in Dera Ismail Khan, on the Indus, there was fighting in the streets. The troops were rushed in from Manzai, and it was some days before they could restore order. When two members of Khan Sahib's administration arrived (both of them pledged to Gandhi's creed of non-violence), they pressed the local army commander for more ruthless action, suggesting that tanks should be used against snipers. Reluctantly the army obliged; but when the troubles were over, six days after they began, nearly a thousand shops had been destroyed. By then the tide of violence had swept on to the nearby villages, and reached Tank, a market town in Waziristan, where there was looting and arson. Here it was impossible to bring in regular troops in time, and so the South Waziristan Scouts had to be called down from the hills. For three days there was fighting in the streets, sniping from roof-tops, and inter-communal strife. Some of the rich Hindus hired Mahsud tribesmen to protect them, paying 'for every hour that the Government's forces could be kept at bay'. With a grim sense of humour, the Mahsuds lay on the roofs, firing at anything that moved and so keeping the battle going long after it would normally have ceased. When peace was eventually restored, they were seen parting from their Hindu employers with wads of notes stuffed in their pockets.

At the end of April, realising that the Frontier Province was probably the most explosive area in India—rivalling even Calcutta where nearly 30,000 people had already been killed or maimed in Muslim-Hindu fighting—Mountbatten decided he must make a

tour of inspection. In Peshawar some 100,000 League supporters gathered near the fort and there were some anxious moments. But the Mountbatten charm worked its usual spell, and, despite some hard bargaining with the political leaders, the atmosphere lost its tension and became even friendly. Khan Sahib argued that the Muslim League represented only the wealthy Muslims—not the common people. But Sir Olaf Caroe, who was present at the meeting, pointed out that the Congress Party contained wealthy Hindus amongst its leaders. The jirgas of Afridis and other tribesmen left Mountbatten in no doubt as to their own preference; if they had to be ruled at all, it must be by Muslims. Any other solution would lead to a massive jehad and war from Chitral to the Sind Frontier. At this time Mountbatten was still of the opinion that a Referendum could not be fitted in before Independence (now brought forward to the 15th August), but the situation was so explosive that he soon came to realise that there was no alternative. So on the 3rd June the terms of a Referendum were announced. The people would vote and decide whether they would join the new state of Pakistan which (as was also announced on All-India Radio that day) would come into existence on Independence Day. Mountbatten had broadcast personally, and he was followed on the air by Nehru, Jinnah, and other leaders; and at last the people learned of the great political decision which would affect all their lives. Nehru had tried till the last moment to retrieve his chestnuts from the fire and suggested to Mountbatten that the terms of the Referendum should not be whether the Frontier Province should go to Pakistan or Hindustan but whether it should become an independent state. As he was perfectly aware, Khan Sahib had already mooted the idea of Pakhtunistan (or Pathanistan) which had found some favour, and perhaps he imagined that such a gesture would conciliate the Pathans. He knew that such a Province could not stand on its own—the Frontier had never been self-supporting—but he knew also that its existence would embarrass Jinnah, and would therefore be a useful lever. As a counter-feint, Jinnah suggested a referendum for the independence of Bengal; but Mountbatten would have none of these suggestions.

The Referendum took place on the 20th July 1947, and was carefully organised by a Commissioner and a team of forty British officers, all experienced in Frontier affairs. Fifteen thousand troops

moved in to keep order, but in the event none of them had to be used. The Khan brothers had intrigued till the last moment, trying to convince the people that to join either Pakistan or India would be equally disastrous; that the Pathans must now struggle for complete independence. But the Pathans are sophisticated and realist, when it comes to politics, and ridiculed such advice. The result of the poll was 289,224 votes for Pakistan, and 2,874 for India. Even Nehru had to accept this decision as conclusive.

It is worth noting here that, once the granting of the Referendum had been announced, the Afghan Government decided to play its hand. In an official note to the British Government, it argued that all the inhabitants of India north-west of the Indus river were really Afghans and should be given the opportunity to decide whether they wished to be governed from Kabul. This note was not even acknowledged; but the Afghans did not give up, and began intriguing all along the Frontier. So far these efforts have failed miserably; but their persistence indicates the intensity of Afghan hostility towards Pakistan. Whether Indian agents are fomenting this hostility, and to what extent, it is still difficult to say.

Independence Day came in with one of the greatest explosions of communal violence the world has yet seen. Six hundred thousand men, women, and children were killed; 14,000,000 people were driven from their homes; 100,000 young girls were kidnapped; and how many people were injured or suffered in other ways is beyond computation. Both sides were equally guilty. Trains arrived in Lahore station, crammed to the roof with dead bodies and with messages scribbled on the sides of the carriages: 'A present from India'. The Muslims sent back trainloads of dead Hindus and Sikhs with the message: 'A present from Pakistan'. Freedom stank; not only with rotting flesh and burning buildings but with malice, hatred and lust.

Most of the violence occurred in the Punjab, and the Frontier escaped relatively lightly. After the result of the Referendum had been announced, Jinnah left Khan Sahib in office until Independence. Then on the 22nd August he was dismissed and Abdul Qayyum took over the reins of government. Before long, many Pathans who had been prominent in the Congress Party joined him and he was able

to command a majority on the Legislature. Khan Sahib made his way to Lahore where some ten years later he was assassinated; Ghaffar Khan was thrown into gaol and remained there till 1954. Since then he has been back several times.

To the tribes the coming of Independence was something of a mystery. Both British officers who elected to stay on and serve Pakistan for a period and Pakistani officers worked hard to explain the situation to them, and assure them that the new country which would now control the Frontier earnestly desired their friendship. For some weeks though the tribesmen suspected a trap. 'The British haven't been defeated,' they said, 'so why should they clear off? No one gives up land voluntarily.' But every day the signs became clearer. The Indian Army had to be split up with partition, and its garrisons were moving back from the strong points, notably Razmak and Wana. Wisely Jinnah had decided to pull back Muslim units and Muslim companies of mixed units also; they would all have to be concentrated and re-grouped to form the new Pakistan Army. By the middle of December the last trucks had rumbled out of Razmak, and the Mahsuds gazed upon this great fortress which had been a focus of tribal hatred for so many years, but was now empty and silent.

Though the army's withdrawal from the Frontier was accomplished smoothly and without incident, the situation did not remain quite placid. The Fakir of Ipi was now in Afghan pay, and spread rumours that Pakistan could not last; now, he cried, was the time for the Pathans to rise and take Peshawar, and realise their ancient dream. But times had changed and the Fakir was batting on a bad wicket. Tribesmen who had been down to Peshawar were impressed by the welcome they received there from local officials; by the quiet insistence that Pakistanis and Pathans were both of the same faith, and had no cause to quarrel. Also, some of the wealthier Pathan leaders took over the town houses in Peshawar, vacated by Hindus who thought it wise to scuttle south. Less opulent tribesmen followed suit, and were delighted to find that there were jobs for the asking in the settled districts. In due course the rigid barrier between the latter and the tribal areas came to be blurred. Pakistan was working the biggest, the most revolutionary, change on the Frontier that it had known in a thousand years.

But as so often happens on this troubled strip of the Earth's

surface, the picture was not entirely a bright one: by October 1947, only two months after partition, the Kashmir problem began with the invasion of tribesmen from the Khyber. For the next eighteen years it poisoned relations between India and Pakistan, and in September 1965 brought them to war. With Russia and China closely watching the outcome, the whole fabric of Central and South-East Asian stability seemed in danger of being torn to shreds, but after pressure by the United Nations and economic threats by the United States and Britain the fighting was brought to an end. In January 1966, Ayub Khan and Lal Shastri attended a conference called by Mr. Kosygin, the Russian Prime Minister, at Tashkent. The choice of the town, the very symbol of Russia's old threat to South-East Asia, was extraordinary, and, as Edward Crankshaw wrote, 'Lord Curzon must be gyrating in his tomb.' Despite the conference, the Kashmir issue still remains unsolved.

Elsewhere along the Frontier, the changes have been rapid and even breath-taking. Hundreds of miles of new roads have been built; lorries have largely replaced animal transport; there is a regular bus service through the Khyber Pass; hundreds of schools and colleges have been built; the Kabul river has been dammed at Warsak. Coal is being mined in South Waziristan, Tirah, Khyber, and Chitral, iron ore in Dir and Swat, marble in Pir and Sabak, limestone in Parachinar and Gandab, antimony, mica, and sulphur in many other places. There are irrigation schemes, forestry schemes, and animal husbandry schemes. The tribesmen are becoming more educated with every year that goes by; more interested in money and comfort. But they still resort to violence when their interests are threatened, and, according to Askar Ali Shah, a Pakistani journalist, a new irrigation scheme has only to be mooted for tribesmen to start fighting over the land which may benefit.

Military, or at least para-military, forces have by no means disappeared on the Frontier, as Arnold Toynbee observed in 1962.

'Military precautions are still punctiliously observed. The forts and posts that are still held are vigilantly guarded; convoys on the road are escorted (sometimes by low-flying planes, as well as by lorry-

loads of scouts); fighting among the tribesmen is firmly put down, and attacks on the Government's forces and installations would meet with a vigorous and effective reply in kind, delivered with weapons more modern, and therefore more deadly, than the now obsolete weapons of the antediluvian British Age. But the military side of the frontier regime is kept in the background. The para-military forces, which we recruited from among the tribesmen themselves, have become partly devices for providing employment and partly educational institutions. Their strict discipline and smart turn-out has, in fact, a valuable educational effect.'

Undoubtedly the hostile attitude of Afghanistan has preserved the need for caution, and has been a brake on development. On the coming of Independence the Afghan Government denounced the Durand Line and claimed suzerainty over the tribes, to the delight of the latter who saw the resultant tug of war as a development to their own advantage. If the Pakistan Government wish to thank the British for nothing else, they are eternally grateful for the Durand Line. Time after time they have had to assert that Pakistan is the lawful successor to the British on the North-West Frontier and as such inherits the treaty of 1893 between Sir Mortimer Durand and the Amir Abdul Rahman. This treaty, they point out, was ratified by Amir after Amir; and in the House of Commons, Noel Baker, then Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, stated on the 30th June 1950 that:

'It is His Majesty's Government's view that Pakistan is in international law the inheritor of the rights and duties of the old Government of India and of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, in these territories and that the Durand Line is the International frontier.'

The same view was expressed in similar words by Lord Home in 1955, and by Sir Anthony Eden (then Prime Minister) in 1956. That year the validity of the Durand Line as an international frontier was upheld by the Council of Foreign Ministers of the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation. Such pronouncements, though comforting for Pakistan, have made little impact in Kabul, and it is doubtful if they ever will. Every Amir and nearly every Afghan till the end of time will dream of Peshawar and the Indus valley.

India, especially since the development of bitterness over Kashmir, has also done her best to stir up trouble on the Frontier, but with

diminishing results. The Pathanistan issue still bubbles, and from time to time the Pakistan Government still feels it worth while to bring out publications exposing what it calls 'the Pakhtunistan Stunt'; but it is very doubtful whether the issue need be taken very seriously. It is doubtful too, if any considerable percentage of the money filtered to intelligence agents and saboteurs is used for the purpose intended. A few years ago a malik confided to a Pakistani official that he had accepted Rs. 10,000 to blow up Peshawar University. 'Will you do it?' the official asked. The malik roared with laughter. 'How can I?' he asked. 'My son and daughter are due to take their degrees there.'

What is left to remind the traveller of a century of British rule? Some roads, railways, fortresses, cantonments, clubs, hotels, but not so much as might be expected from a century's occupation. Many features of Frontier life the British took with them, the point-to-points, the cricket, the hunting, the annual racquets and squash competitions, and the army festivities in the Peshawar Club. The great camp at Razmak remains, but Arnold Toynbee on his visit found it desolate and neglected. As he relates:

'The decay is not yet far gone, because the place was built to last. It is built of solid masonry with corrugated-iron roofs. The church, the cinema, the shopping centre, the workshops, the officers' quarters, the barracks; they are still well preserved; but the only building that is still occupied and used is the tehsil [the local administrative office]. The avenue of trees still line the principal streets, but the roadways themselves are already half overgrown with sumac bushes.'

The American, James Spain, who visited the place about the same time remarks: 'Within the cantonment itself the barracks' doors swing in the dry wind and each year the bright colours of the regimental insignia emblazoned on the walls grow a little dimmer.' There were more potent memories of the British, Spain found, in the Peshawar Club, for here the Masters of the Peshawar Vale Hunt still gazed down from the dark-panelled walls. The cantonment too, preserved echoes of Victorian England, with its green lawns and prim bungalows. And in Dean's Hotel they were still serving mulligatawny soup.

But probably the most vivid memory of the British lies in the minds of the old tribesmen who still recount their battles and show their wounds to the youngsters of the tribe. In a thousand villages tales are told and re-told by Mohmands and Afridis, by Orakzais and Mahsuds . . . tales which in time will be woven into song and saga, and so become part of the folk-memory of the Frontier.

A parallel process will no doubt happen in England. One only has to speak to an old soldier and at the mention of 'the Frontier' his eyes will light up and a tremor will come into his voice. Solemnly he will declare that those were the best days of his life . . . all gone and never to be repeated. He will remember the heat, the thirst, the strain, the savagery, and the bloodshed, but still the magic remains. The Frontier lives on both for the British and the Pathans as a golden memory of youth.

As one reaches the end of this long, tortuous, and often savage story, several questions inevitably spring to mind. Why, for example, did the British fail to settle the tribal question? And was their immense expenditure of money, effort, and blood worth while? What was really achieved? To take the first question, Sir Kerr Fraser-Tytler has suggested that the real trouble was an inherent lack of ruthlessness in the English character. A people like the Russians or the Germans would have based their frontier on the Hindu Kush and subdued the tribes by systematic brutality. There is probably something in this argument; but against it is the fact that on two occasions, in the First and Second Afghan Wars, the British did reach the Hindu Kush, but found maintaining an army there and keeping open a line of communications through the Khyber a crippling expense. Both Auckland and Lytton ended up by searching frantically for an excuse to withdraw. The cost of keeping a large army on the Hindu Kush for a century would have bankrupted both India and Britain. As things were, however, Britain decided to solve the major problem of the Frontier in a manner which left the minor problem insoluble.

There may be another factor: that deep down in the British subconscious there was an extreme reluctance to solve the tribal problem. The Frontier provided an inexhaustible vein of excitement;

it was a testing ground for new weapons; it was a live training area for officers and men; it made the army feel that it had a real job to do. Furthermore, it fulfilled the basic human need for drama; it was all that remained of the Great Game. The army did not want the destruction or dispersal of the tribes; for if this happened, the game would be over. As Liddell Hart has indicated recently, the generals even detested the encroachment of the R.A.F., because they were strangers to the game and might spoil it. This attitude, one may consider, is reflected in the army's acceptance of the absurd restrictions in the use of aircraft. Admittedly the game sometimes became too hot for comfort, and sometimes it developed in the wrong direction; but one cannot fail to sense the army's relief that it still managed to move on to yet another chukka.

As to the second question—was the effort worth while?—one must first cast one's mind back and realise how immense it was. One may think of the desperate labours of the pioneers like Edwardes and Nicholson, Lumsden and Cotton . . . the exertions of Neville Chamberlain and Lord Roberts, of Bindon Blood and of Lockhart, Auchinleck, and Alexander . . . the forgotten troops who sweated through 200 campaigns and punitive expeditions, not to mention the thousands of minor and bloody forays . . . the 300 Gordons who fell on the Dargai Heights . . . the administrators who gave their entire life's work, Sandeman, Bruce, Warburton, Roos-Keppel, Caroe . . . the lonely figure of John Jacob traversing the vast wastes of Sind. Viewed as a whole, this must be an effort unique in the history of the world; and the fact that the Frontier still holds, that the Durand Line still remains the keystone of South-Eastern stability, must surely justify it.

But what of the future? At this moment Russian influence in Afghanistan appears to be stronger than it ever was under the Tsars; engineers and technicians are reaching Kabul in increasing numbers; and recent travellers have suggested that Russia is nearer than ever to gaining political and economic access to the Indian Ocean. This may be so. A new and explosive era may lie just over the horizon. But on the whole it is wiser not to anticipate events; or simply to repeat the warning Lord Curzon gave in 1904: 'No man who has read a page of Indian history will ever prophesy about the Frontier.'

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349

INDEX

ABDALIS (Frontier tribe), 23
Abdur Rahman (Afghan ruler), 180–3, 194, 204
Afghan Wars, First, 43ff., aftermath of, 81 ff., Second, 153 ff., Third, 262, 267-82
Afghans, origins, appearance, language etc., 18 ff.; women: status of, 20; as sacrifices at husbands' funerals, 92; tortures inflicted by, 323
Afridis (Frontier tribe), 105–7, 155, 242, 243, 250–1, 256, 284, 285, 287, 302, 304, 313 ff.
Ahmad Shah (first King of Afghanistan), 23
Akbar Khan (son of Dost Mohammed), 65–73 *passim*
Ambela campaign, 127–32
Anquetil, Brigadier, 68, 69, 77
Argyll, Duke of, 145, 194
Attock, importance of, in First Sikh War, 95–6
Auchinleck, Brig. Claude, and the Mohmand operations, 323
Auckland, Lord, 25; parentage, character, career, 30–1; eventful first meeting with Ranjit Singh, 26–7; and Afghanistan and the Sikhs, 26–52; and East India Co., 45–6; and British expedition to Kabul, 43 ff.; and Russia's designs on India, 56; and aftermath of First Sikh War, 81–2; and Ellenborough, 81–2
Ayub Khan (son of Sher Ali), 183–91 *passim*

BALUCHIS in Sindian army, 87–9, 108–9
Baluchistan, 18, 23, 152–3
Beynon, Lieut. William, and siege of Chitral, 215, 221, 222, 226–7
Blood, Brig.-Gen. Bindon, and siege of Chitral, 214, 217, 218–19, 239, 245, 246
Bolan Pass, 17, 46
Borrodaile, Capt., and siege of Chitral, 215, 216, 217
Browne, General Sam, 157, 163, 165
Brydon, Dr., 77, 78
Bugtis (tribe), Napier and, 90–1; John Jacob and, 108
Burnes, Capt. Alexander, 34–40, 51, 57, 84; murdered, 59
Burrowes, Brig.-Gen., and Ayub Khan, 183

CAMPBELL, Brig.-Gen. Sir Colin, 101, 105, 106, 107
Campbell, Capt. Colin, and siege of Chitral, 209
Canning, Lord, 124, 125, 126
Cavagnari, Major Sir Louis, 155, 156, 163, 164, 166–7, 169, 267; murdered, 171
Chamberlain, Brig.-Gen. Sir Neville, 114 ff. *passim*; and the Ambela campaign, 127 ff.; and the Frontier tribes, 132 ff.; and Sher Ali, 155, 156
Chatar Singh (Sikh leader), 95, 96
Chillianwala, Sir Hugh Gough's defeat at, 96

Chitral, siege and relief of, 207–31; aftermath, 234–5
cholera and dysentery among the British troops, 44, 47, 165, 170
Churchill, Winston, on the Mohmand operation, 245
Civil Service and friction with the army, 102
clan system (khels) and the Afghans, 18, 20 ff.
Cobbe, Brigadier, 158, 161, 216
Coke, Capt. John, 101, 105
Corps of Guides, 94, 96, 101
Cotton, Brig.-Gen. Sydney, 114 ff. *passim*
Cotton, Major-Gen. Sir Willoughby, 43, 44, 46, 54, 58
Crag Picket, tribesmen attack, 134, 135
Curzon, George Nathaniel, Marquess (Viceroy of India), 254–66

DALHOUSIE, Lord (Governor-General), and First Sikh War, 95, 97; and the Frontier tribesmen, 109, 111
'dancing dervishes' (dust-storms), 86
dancing girls at the Sikh court, 28, 29
Delhi and the Mutiny, 115–24 *passim*
Dhulip Singh (Punjab ruler), 93, 98
disease among the British troops, 44, 47, 165, 170
Disraeli, Benjamin, on Afghanistan, 83–4, 145, 167
Dost Mohammed (Afghan ruler), 24; and Lord Auckland, 34; and Capt. Burnes, 35, 36; and the British and the Russians, 37–40; British expedition to overthrow, 47, 50; flight and capture of, 51, 57–8; restored to throne, 84; joins Sikhs against British, 96; and Peshawar, 112–14, 122, 125; death of, 140
Durand, Sir Henry, 49–50
Durand, Sir Mortimer, 204
Durand Line, the, 205, 341
Durranis (tribe), 23–4, 183
dyarchic experiment, the, 308–9
Dyer, Brig.-Gen. Rex, 280–3

EAST India Company and Ranjit Singh, 28; functions and powers of, 31–2; support for Shah Shuja, 45; and aftermath of First Afghan War, 82; and cost of war, 83; takes over the Punjab, 97, 98; end of rule by, 124
Eden of Norwood, Lord: *see* Auckland, Lord
Edwardes, Herbert, and First Sikh War, 93, 94; and Peshawar, 113 ff. *passim*
Elgin, Lord, 257
Ellenborough, Lord (Governor-General), 78 ff. *passim*; and Lord Auckland, 81–2; character, 85; and First Sikh War, 93
Ellis, Sir Henry (British representative in Teheran), 34
Ellis, Mollie: kidnapping of (1923), 285–304
Elphinstone, General, 35, 41, 58 ff. *passim*; Auckland condemns, 82

FANE, Sir Henry, 27, 32–3
fireballs, British use of, 211, 212
First Sikh War, 93 ff.
'Folly of the Plain', 55
'Forward Policy', 181, 182, 251, 253–4, 262, 307
'Frontier Switzerland', the, 18
Frontier tribes, punitive expeditions against, 101 ff.

GANDAMAK, treaty of, 167, 169
Garvock, General, 136–9 *passim*
Gatacre, Brig.-Gen., and siege of Chitral, 225, 230
Ghaffar Khan and the Red Shirt movement, 308–20 *passim*

Ghazni, British capture of, 49–50
Ghilzais (Afghan tribe), 21; attack on British expedition to Afghanistan, 48–9; revolt of, 58 ff; in Afghan uprising, 61 ff.; as itinerant traders, 104
Gordon, Col. John, 158, 159
Gough, Brig.-Gen. Charles, 178
Gough, Sir Hugh, 93, 95, 96, 161, 179
Gujerat, battle of, 96
Gulab Singh, Kashmir, sold to, 93
Gurdon, Lieutenant, and siege of Chitral, 209, 221, 229
Gurkhas, 158, 159, 190–1, 249

Habibullah Khan (Afghan ruler), 263–4
Hamilton, Lord George, 257, 262
Hardinge, Sir Henry, and First Sikh War, 93
Harley, Lieut. H. K., and siege of Chitral, 209, 227, 228, 230
Hartington, Marquess of, 181, 182
Herat, 22, 24 33; Persia's attack on, 33, 38, 42, 113; siege raised, 45; Eldred Pottinger in, 38–9
Hindu Kush Mountains, 16–17, 18, 22
Hodson, Major, and First Sikh War, 93
homosexuality and desert life, theories on linkage of, 110
hostages, British officers as, 75–6
Hyderabad, and Napier's Sind campaign, 87, 88–9

India: Independence and its aftermath, 334–44
Indian Mutiny, the, 114–24
Indus river, 15–16, 18
internecine warfare (nineteenth century), 22–4
Ipi, Fakir of, and the 'Islam Bibi' case, 327–32
'Islam Bibi' case (1936), 327
itinerant traders on the Frontier, 104

Jacob, Capt. John (Sind administrator), 89, 90, 101, 102; character, 107, 110; designs improved uniforms for the Sind Horse, 107–8; and the Frontier tribes, 107 ff; and Quetta, 111; death of, 112
Jalalabad, British retreat to, 69 ff.; in Second Afghan War, 163
Jindan, Maharani, 94
Jinnah, Mohammed Ali, 333
Jirgas (Afghan councils), 20

Kabul, 24; British expedition to, 43 ff.; British occupation of, 53 ff.; retreat from, 68 ff.; triumphant return to, 79–81; Roberts at, 173–4
Kalat, and John Jacob, 109
Kandahar, 22–3; Auckland's expedition reaches, 47–8; in Second Afghan War, 163; Roberts and, 183; problem of British evacuation of, 193–6
Kashmir, annexed and sold by British, 93; Indian-Pakistani dispute over, 340
Kaufmann, General (Russian officer), and Sher Ali, 143, 144, 145, 146
Keane, Lieut.-Gen. Sir John, 43, 44; and expedition to Afghanistan, 47 ff.; peerage, 54
Kelly, Col. J. G., and siege of Chitral, 215–27 *passim*
Khalsa (Sikh army), 28, 93
Kharak Singh (Punjab ruler), 83
khels system (clans) of Afghans, 18
Khyber Pass, 17–18, 78, 79
Kitchener, Lord, 263
Koh-i-Noor diamond 'surrendered' to Queen of England, 98
Kuli Khan, and the kidnapping of Mollie Ellis, 287, 293–6
Kurram Pass, 17

LAWRENCE, George, and the First Sikh War, 95, 96; and the frontier tribes, 105–6
Lawrence, Major Sir Henry (Resident at Lahore), and First Sikh War, 93, 95; and the annexation of the Punjab, 97; killed, 123–4
Lawrence, Sir John, and the Junjab, 95, 98, 112 ff. *passim*, 137, 141, 144, 165
Low, Gen. Sir Robert, and siege of Chitral, 214, 217
Lucknow, siege and relief of, 115, 124
Lumsden, Harry, character, 94; and First Sikh War, 93–4; and Corps of Guides, 96; and the Frontier tribes, 101–2; and Peshawar, 114
Lumsden, Gen. Sir Peter, and the Panjdeh clash, 199, 200, 202
Lytton, Edward Robert Bulwer, 146–51, 154–7, 164–7 *passim*, 171–5 *passim*, 180, 181, 194

MACNAGHTEN, Sir William, 36–7, 40–3 *passim*, 48, 51 ff. *passim*; murdered, 68, 80
'Mad Mullah, the', 232 ff. *passim*
Maffey, Sir John, and the kidnapping of Mollie Ellis, 285–8 *passim*, 303–4
Mahrattas (Indian empire), 23, 25
Maiwand, battle of, 183
maliks (Afghan clan leaders), 20
'Masterly Inactivity, Policy of', 99
Mayo, Lord, and Sher Ali, 141–4 *passim*; assassinated, 142
Meiklejohn, Brig.-Gen., 235–41 *passim*
Melbourne, Viscount, 83
Moguls, 22, 23
Mohammed Khan, Sultan, 65, 66; treachery of, 96
Mohammed Shah (Mogul emperor), 22
Mohmand operations (1933), 323–6
Mongol tribes, 21
Montagu-Chelmsford reforms, 308–9
Montgomery, Sir Robert, 136
Muhammadzais (tribe), 24
Murghab, battle of, 201
Muslim League, the, 333

NADIR SHAH, 22, 308; assassinated, 321
Napier, Sir Charles, 85; captures Sind, 86–9; and the Bugtis, 90–1; and punitive expeditions against Frontier tribes, 102; and the Afridis, 106; and the wife-murderers, 90
Nasir Khan (Amir of Hyderabad), 87
Nicholls, Sir Jasper, 64, 78, 81
Nicholson, John, and First Sikh War, 93; takes over Attock, 95–6; and Peshawar, 115 ff. *passim*; death, 124
Northbrook, Lord, and Russian pressure on Afghanistan, 144–6 *passim*
Nott, General, 79, 80
Nur Mohammed (Sher Ali's minister), 147, 148

OUTRAM, Col. Sir James, 88, 89, 109

PAKISTAN issue, the, 333
Palmerston, Lord, 30, 42, 58, 82, 84, 125
Panipat, Battle of, 23
Panjdeh, the Russians and, 197–206
Pashtu (Afghan language), 18
Pathans, culture and characteristics, 18 ff.; as Frontier problem, 105; revolt of, 236 ff.; excluded from terms of Montagu-Chelmsford reforms, 309; atrocities by, 322–3
Peel, Sir Robert, 83, 84
Pelly, Sir Lewis, 147
Persians, and the Afghans, 22; British treaty with (1814), 33; and Russia, 33; attack Herat, 33, 38–9, 42, 45, 113; British declare war on, 113–14

Peshawar, Ranjit Singh as governor of, 28; Dost Mohammed and, 36; in First Sikh War, 94 ff.; Chatar Singh and Lumsden take over, 96; Henry Edwardes and, 113 ff. *passim*; and Pathan revolt, 242–4; and the Red Shirts, 310 ff.; and National Congress, 333
Pollock, General, 78–80
Pottinger, Major Eldred, and defence of Herat, 38–9; and the Afghan uprising, 62
Powindahs (Frontier itinerant merchants), 103, 104
Probyn, Lieut.-Col. Dighton, 131
Punjab, and the Afghans, 23; and the British, 91; rebellion in, 95; East India Co. takes over, 98
Punjab Frontier Force, 101 ff. *passim*
Punjab Movable Column, 115, 117, 123, 124

QUETTA, 47; question of occupation of, 111–12, 126, 151 ff.

RANJIT SINGH (Sikh ruler), 24, 28–9; British treaty with, 25; eventful meeting with Lord Auckland, 26–7; and East India Co., 28; absolute power of, 30; and Shah Shuja, 41; and the Afghans, 41–2; and the Koh-i-Noor diamond, 98; death and funeral, 52, 91
Rawlinson, Sir Henry, 147, 193
'Red Shirts' movement, 309–19
Roberts, Lord, 116, 117, 136, 137; and Second Afghan War, 157 ff.; and the peace, 169 ff. *passim*; ordered to Kandahar, 183 ff.; as national idol, 191–3; and the 'Forward Policy', 253
Robertson, Surgeon-Major (British Agent), 209–31 *passim*
Russians, and the Frontier, 25; and Persia, 33; marches into Central Asia, 142–3, 198–9; pressure on Afghanistan, 36, 144–5, 153–4; and Pandjeh clash, 197 ff.; relations with British at turn of century, 264–6

SANDEMAN, Robert, 151–3
Second World War, effects of, 332–3
Shah Shuja (Afghan ruler), 40–1; march on Afghanistan, 43 ff. *passim*; placed on throne, 47 ff. *passim*; and the Koh-i-Noor diamond, 98; murdered, 78
Shelton, Brigadier, 60–3, 68
Sher Ali (Kandahar ruler), 140 ff.
Shuja-ul-Mulk: *see* Shah Shuja
Sikhs, 24; and the British, 25–8: *see also* First Sikh War; Ranjit Singh
Sind, Napier's capture of, 86–9: *see also* Jacob, Capt. John
Skinner, Captain, 70–5; killed, 76
Smith, W. H. (bookseller and 1st Lord of the Admiralty), 30
Sobraon, battle of, 93, 94
Starr, Mrs. Lilian, and the kidnapping of Mollie Ellis, 287–304 *passim*
Sulaiman Range, 17, 18
Supply system and camp followers for Indian armies, 44
Sutlej, British expedition withdraws to, 81
Suttee (widow sacrifice), 92

TAXATION: British collecting expedition to Frontier villages, 101; rescinding of, 103
Tibet annexed by Ahmad Shah, 23
Timur Shah, 23; and succession quarrels, 24
Townshend, Capt. C. V. F., and Chitral siege, 209–30 *passim*
'tribal territory', 18
tribes, Afghan, 20–1

UMRA KHAN, and siege of Chitral, 210–29 *passim*

VENDETTAS, 20

WADE, Captain (British agent at Ludhiana), 40–1
Warburton, Sir Robert, 252
Wavell, Lord, 261
Waziristan, 18, 106, 283, 321, 327 ff.
Whitchurch, Surgeon-Captain, and siege of Chitral, 209, 230
wife-murderers, Napier and the, 90
Wilde, Colonel, 132, 137–8
Wolseley, Sir Garnet, 191; and Roberts, 192

YUKUB KHAN (Kandahar regent), 163–75 *passim*
Young, Sir Mackworth, 257, 258, 259