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When the Amir Dost Mohammed died in 1863, 16 of his sons were still alive. His nominated successor, Sher Ali, son of a Popalzai mother, had been with his father in exile at Ludhiana and then, under him, Governor of Ghazni. Perhaps the best indication of his character is in my slim book *The Races of Afghanistan* by Surgeon-Major Bellew (first edition, 1880). This is a brown hardback with a good engraving of a gold lion and sun on the cover. A senior medical officer with the British forces, Bellew clearly enjoyed talking to local people about legends of origins and names of Pashtun tribes. Points made include: the Yusufzai were now mainly loyal to the British, the Afridis were inveterate robbers, Khattaks were fine-looking, Ghilzais had been hostile and treacherous but were now working better with the British. Of non-Pathans the Tajiks were intelligent and hard-working and the Hazaras faithful and industrious servants.

Bellew includes a fairly accurate history of the Afghan royal family, Sadozais and Durranis. He claims few Afghans could be trusted but they understandably hated the British after the invasion of Kabul in 1839 and the disastrous retreat, over which Bellew chooses to draw 'a veil of mourning'. My books have little to say about the new Amir, Sher Ali. Bellew claims that he had been wayward and quarrelsome as a child and later displayed an irrational temper, including alternating fits of 'vice and piety'. Soon after assuming the throne the Amir had to fight some rival brothers. Around 1867 he was able to consolidate his authority, after which he asked for protection from the British government.

Since little was known about him the Viceroy, Lord Mayo, decided to receive him with honour and ceremony at Ambela in 1869. Bellew interpretsed. Sher Ali was flattered by the personal hospitality shown by Mayo but his pleas for further support, for instance to endorse one of his younger sons as heir, and to commit to helping Afghanistan if attacked by the Russians, were politely declined (the British were still following Lord Lawrence's policy of

'H.H. The Amir Shere Ali Khan', attributed to Samuel Bourne and Charles Shepherd.

not getting involved in internal Afghan affairs). He also felt that the British hadn't taken his side in a land dispute with the Persians. He had had little opportunity to get to know the British and it didn't help when Lord Mayo was killed, murdered by a convict in the Andaman islands in 1872.

Meanwhile, the Russians under General Kaufmann had been making huge territorial gains in Siberia, including the conquest of most of the Central Asian Khanates. Tashkent had been occupied in 1865 and Samarcand in 1868. Khiva was to fall in 1873 and Khokand three years later. Bokhara became a client state. Merv survived until 1884. (A book by Francis Skrine and Dr Edward Denison Ross on the history of Russian Turkistan called *The Heart of Asia* was published in 1899. It contains pictures of the ruins of Central Asian cities as how they then survived, very different from today's over-restored buildings shown to tourists.) Concern was beginning to be expressed in London about an alien power circumventing the natural barriers of the Himalayan and Hindu Kush mountains and threatening India. British elections in 1874 brought Disraeli to power. The 'Hands off Afghanistan' policy was replaced by a 'Forward Policy' that argued for Britain to be better informed about Afghanistan and its Amir. There had to be a British envoy in Kabul. In 1877, at war with Turkey, Russia became more distrustful of the UK. Kaufmann was bombarding Sher Ali with offers of help and friendship. Backed by a mistaken confidence in the strength of his armed forces, he and his senior nobles began to think that it would be advantageous to side with the Russians.

Then a senior Russian mission arrived in Kabul, not invited but warmly welcomed at the Bala Hissar. In a serious letter to the Amir the Viceroy said that he would now be sending a mission to Kabul, headed by a General, to discuss 'matters of importance'. Cavagnari, the British Deputy Commissioner in Peshawar, would be No 2 and Surgeon-Major Bellew would be included. When this mission was discourteously blocked by the Afghan army on the Amir's instructions, the British were angry. They lost patience with the Amir and his unpredictable moods. British troops started to occupy land at the key border crossing points into Afghanistan and to move towards Kabul. General Frederick Roberts, who had distinguished himself in 'Mutiny' fighting, was happy to head the main force. Receiving no positive response to his fervent appeals to his Russian friends for help, Sher Ali fled north across the Hindu Kush. He abdicated in favour of his senior son, Yakub Khan, released from prison, and died only a short time later, heartbroken, at Mazar-i-Sharif. He had been faced with problems, including two super powers, with which he was ill equipped to cope. He was also distraught at the death of his favourite younger son. It is not surprising if his mental health suffered.

Yakub Khan had been imprisoned for resisting his father's plans to disinherit him. Assuming the throne of a country in disarray he was determined to stop the fighting and to persuade British troops to leave. He came personally down to the British camp at Gandamak, 30 miles

Konstantin Petrovich Von Kaufmann, Wikimedia Commons.

north of Jalalabad, and signed a treaty giving the British almost all that they wanted. He agreed that a British mission should come to Kabul, with a suitable escort, that land should be ceded near the frontiers, that British traders should be admitted and protected and, moreover, that he would undertake to conduct his country's foreign policy in accordance with the advice of the British government. This last element was, of course, considered humiliating by the Afghans.

Cavagnari, now 'Sir Louis', who had conducted the negotiations, was chosen to head the new mission in Kabul. He took only a month before starting there, where he and his escort were given accommodation inside the Bala Hissar fortress, which housed the royal palace and dominated the city. He was accompanied by a civil servant, a doctor and a highly regarded young officer, Lieutenant Walter Hamilton (who had already won a VC), commanding a contingent of about 75 members of the Corps of Guides. My copy of *The Story of the Guides* by Colonel Younghusband (1909) credits Sir Henry Lawrence with the concept of this select, khaki-costumed corps which was raised in Peshawar to be specially trained and mobile. It relates examples of the Guides' successes, including giving a full account of their heroism in Kabul. Initially Cavagnari had friendly meetings with Yakub Khan, who lived only about 200 yards away. Cavagnari appeared relaxed about security, although Afghan

Statue of Lieutenant Walter Hamilton, Erected in Dublin Museum, from The Story of the Guides *by Col. G.J. Younghusband, London: Macmillan and Co., 1909.*

leaders had been understandably concerned about religious-sponsored threats to any Englishman living in the country.

In the end a disaster happened almost by accident: a large group of Herat-raised Afghan troops, due for a period of duty in the capital, became furious and excited at being long underpaid. When someone shouted that there must be plenty of money in the new British embassy, they could not be restrained. Armed soldiers started to steal horses and other equipment from premises that were not designed for defence. Shots were fired, some were killed, Cavagnari was wounded. Appeals to the Amir nearby didn't get through or were ignored. The British side defended bravely but after several hours every man was killed. Cavagnari had been considered clever and noble and now something of a martyr, but others had thought him rather rash and too ambitious.

One can imagine the reaction in India and at home when news of the massacre got out. Yakub Khan, feeling threatened himself ('I have no friends here'), abdicated without naming a successor and took refuge with the British Army, asking for conveyance to India. 'Grass cutting in a British camp', he was reported to have said, 'is preferable to ruling Afghanistan'. The second Anglo-Afghan war had begun.

Attention now focuses on one of the most prominent, popular men in the British Empire story: General Frederick Roberts, commander of the main British field force marching to Kabul. He occupied the city, behaving as if he was the Amir. In revenge for the embassy massacre he was ready to take whatever action was necessary, however merciless it seemed. He issued a proclamation saying that those responsible for the attack would be severely punished (i.e. executed), while the rest of the population must be disarmed and encouraged to keep order – better than some Afghans had feared – and women and families should be respected. From his diaries and personal notes, in due course Roberts wrote a full and detailed account of his activities and reminiscences in a two-volume book, *Forty-One Years in India*, published in 1897 and widely read. My worn copy is a 14th edition, not difficult to find. It has good maps and some photographs but only '£1' in pencil as the price inside the cover.

The General's accounts of his campaign appear to be reliable. He admitted few mistakes but many problems, commenting at the end of the second volume: 'in writing one's own experiences it is difficult to avoid being egotistical'. Fortunately, we have a second confirmatory version of events by an enterprising journalist: Howard Hensman of *The Pioneer* (Allahabad) and *London Daily News*. He published in 1882 the series of long letters that he had written in the field and sent home to his employers – *The Afghan War 1879–80*. Mine is a second edition. Apparently, he was the only journalist who managed to get accredited to the British forces. Roberts must have had confidence in him. Hensman's lengthy paragraphs sometimes stray with useful general comments about political issues and personalities, and even local architecture, with remarks such as that Afghan women are generally given more freedom than Muslim women in other cities.

Roberts records that it was always a priority to keep communicating with Peshawar and Calcutta, if necessary by heliograph. He had earlier sent home some elephants that had been part of his invading army because the weather became too cold for them. (He had also at times needed to put his inkwell under his pillow, to prevent the ink freezing.) Everything in Kabul seemed calm. The attitude of the people was best described as 'sullen'. Yakub Khan was got safely out to India (where he lived until as late as 1932). But this left the question of who was legally in charge, since the British wanted to get out as soon as possible provided the Russians were kept at bay. In the end they took a big gamble on Abdur Rahman Khan, son of Dost Mohammed, who was slowly coming down South from Turkistan. He had no use for Sher Ali's part of the family and was making it clear that he wanted to unite the country and work with the British. Envoys sent to him were impressed.

It wasn't long before Roberts was alerted to increasing numbers of hostile Afghan tribesmen assembling in groups around all the outskirts of Kabul, which he had not expected. He was warned that he could be faced with at least 40,000 armed Ghazis, stirred up by a prominent Mullah.

Left: Frederick Roberts, from Forty-One Years in India *by Field-Marshal Lord Roberts of Kandahar, London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1897. Below: Portrait of Frederick Roberts on a jug*

After some damaging skirmishes he withdrew his men from the city, concentrating them in a large fortified barracks about a mile to the north. There were heavy casualties of officers and men as his units came under siege. Hensman reports that 'we no longer despised our enemy'. But defences held firm and, as reinforcements started to arrive from Qandahar and Peshawar, the Afghans lost heart and withdrew. There was a limit to the extent that large numbers could stay away from their homes. The British re-occupied the city but Roberts never knew if he could trust the leading barons or 'Sirdars', several of whom had appeared to be friendly.

Then suddenly news came through in the summer of 1880 that there had been a major British defeat in a battle near Qandahar. Yakub's younger brother, Sirdar Ayub Khan, had brought a large body of troops down from Herat towards Qandahar and soundly thrashed a British brigade sent to probe the situation near Maiwand. As many as 1,000 British soldiers had been killed. The Battle of Maiwand has ever after been celebrated by Afghans as a great victory. When I attended National-Day functions in Kabul in 1959, British guns captured at Maiwand were part of the military parade. Some elite soldiers marched in goose steps, presumably to show that they were not clones of the British and had good relations with a non-colonial European power. Roberts decided that he had to take his troops with all urgency to Qandahar. Marching 10,000 men and followers through 300 miles of hostile territory in only 20 days was a major achievement. He rescued anxious British besieged behind the high walls of Qandahar, and defeated Ayub's forces in the area, who faded away in the presence of other Afghan troops loyal to Abdur Rahman Khan who had now been proclaimed Amir in Kabul. Then, comparatively quickly, about 7,000 British troops in that area moved away down to Peshawar, while Roberts and his troops retreated to Quetta. He was impressed there by Sandeman who seemed to know personally all the local people with whom they came into contact. Roberts was acclaimed when back on leave in London. He was sagely reported to have said that 'the less the Afghans see of us, the less they will dislike us'. He spent a few more years in India before leaving in 1893. He then spent four years as Commander in Chief in Ireland before being moved to South Africa where he made an important impact in the Boer War and where he eventually handed over to another highly regarded general, considered a paragon of empire, Lord Kitchener. He died in 1914 as Field Marshal Earl Roberts of Qandahar VC, KG, GCB, OM, GCSI and GCIE, buried in Saint Paul's Cathedral.

Another book corroborates part of the story of Roberts' field-force march to Kabul, which he considered more difficult than the Qandahar march for which he became more famous. A British member of the Bengal civil service was appointed to be his private secretary. This self-confident young man kept a full diary almost all his life. He wrote that Roberts listened carefully to advice from those around him but normally went his own way. They shared distrust of the ministers sent from Kabul to persuade the army not to proceed: the cunning hard-faced vizier and revenue officer with no teeth. Roberts was more sympathetic towards Yakub Khan, whom the diary writer thought pleasant enough but disappointingly nervous and weak. He was unhappy with the first text of Roberts' proclamation to the people of Kabul, which included 'preaching historical morality to the Afghans, all our troubles with whom began by our own abominable injustice'. Paragraph by paragraph he persuaded him to change it. He may have persuaded Roberts not to destroy completely the Bala Hissar fortress, which had been the latter's intention at one time, but he couldn't stop the unnecessary ruthless destruction of 'hostile villages'. Early in 1880 the diary author was withdrawn, to Roberts' regret, to take up a more senior post at the office of the Foreign Secretary in Calcutta.

His name was Henry Mortimer Durand, in some ways more famous than his old boss. His biography by Sir Percy Sykes, published in 1926, covers his long career and includes large extracts from the diaries. Mortimer was the second of three tall good-looking sons of the admired engineer officer Henry Durand, mentioned in part two of this series; the man who bravely organised the collapse of the seemingly impregnable fortress of Ghazni, which had been crucial to the success of the first British (misguided) invasion to overthrow the Amir in Kabul. He withdrew from the forces occupying Kabul and went home for a period. After returning to India he distinguished himself in the Sikh and 'Mutiny' wars. Posted as Foreign Secretary for his experience and judgement – not then a very senior Indian post, but responsible for advice on relations with India's neighbours and the independent states – he was then promoted to Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab, as Sir Henry Durand. In 1871 he died in an unusual accident which would have been almost amusing if it had not been tragic for his family. As a courtesy to a local ruler in the Frontier town of Tank he was mounted ceremonially on an elephant that went through one arch of an old building but panicked when faced with a lower arch, so that the howdah on its back was broken and the tall rider decapitated.

The three Durand brothers, 1881. L to R: Edward, Mortimer, Algernon, from The Right Honourable Sir Mortimer Durand *by Brigadier-General Sir Percy Sykes, Cassell and Company, 1926.*

Mortimer's eldest brother Edward was educated at Repton school, worked for a time with his father in India, explored and travelled in Iran and Central Asia and served as British resident in then unfriendly Nepal. He was a member of the Afghan/ Russian Boundary Commission. He was created baronet, perhaps through good relations with the Duke of Northumberland, a friend of the family, after which he retired from India to live in the UK. He was a keen sportsman and hunter, about which he was reported to have written well. The youngest brother, Colonel Algernon Durand, played an important role in Gilgit, in the foothills of the Himalayas, about which I shall be writing later.

Mortimer himself was a remarkable all-rounder. He didn't go to university but was well read, studied law and had a proficient command of European as well as Asian languages. Several of his poems are in Sykes' biography, some reproduced from his own accomplished hand. He was not only a very good tennis and polo player, but an advocate of association football, i.e. soccer, not then so widely known. While on summer break at Simla he organised a tournament which became the leading such event in India. Playing centre forward he was the very fit captain and mainstay of his own team. More important, of course, was his work in the East India Company's Foreign Secretary department. He worked his way up, known for travelling to all corners of India. He made himself useful to viceroys and was promoted to Foreign Secretary at the very early age of 35. He was not responsible for the Afghan Boundary Commission though he gave the British team full support. Despite the complex and confusing problem of the Panjdeh Oasis just outside the north-west corner of Afghanistan, which nearly brought Russia and Britain to war, an acceptable agreement was reached with the Russians and the new Afghan Amir. Durand's main task was to cope with this new, powerful, often unpredictable Amir Abdur Rahman of Afghanistan, described as 'like an Afghan Henry VIII'.

The Right Honourable Sir Mortimer Durand, from The Right Honourable Sir Mortimer Durand *by Brigadier-General Sir Percy Sykes, Cassell and Company, 1926.*

The new Amir had started to take steps to consolidate his authority within his own country, dealing harshly with troublesome Ghilzai tribes. He succeeded in keeping foreigners out of Afghanistan but he needed a successful negotiation with the Indian government over his southern and western borders, areas occupied by tribes that were not used to recognising any outside authority. In 1893 Abdur Rahman asked for a mission to come to Kabul to negotiate an agreement about frontiers. Durand made sure that he led the British team. He and the Amir were two strong personalities face to face. Originally hostile, the Amir carefully watched and assessed Durand, and eventually trusted him. After four weeks he conceded control of Chitral and Bajaur, accepted division of most of the northern Pathan tribal areas and agreed to take sovereignty of the Wakhan corridor, without stationing troops there, which the British hoped would avoid a direct British Indian/ Russian border. In the end the Amir said that he had agreed the solutions achieved because Durand had had the necessary knowledge and authority, spoke Persian 'though not perfectly' and was honest and sincere. Mortimer described the Amir as 'gentlemanly and cordial'. Details of the borderline were then worked out peacefully on the ground.

Subsequent commentators have argued that the line was never meant to be a fixed border, rather an indication of zones of influence. But the goodwill that the series of negotiations engendered probably ensured that the Amir and his eldest son and heir, Habibullah Khan, who had been kept informed, remained in good relations with the British until the First World War. Also that Russia was on the right side in that war. Durand's achievement was widely lauded in India and Great Britain, although he privately felt inadequately rewarded. Job done, he was happy to be posted as Minister at Tehran and later Ambassador in Madrid. His success led to the top diplomatic post of Ambassador at Washington. He stayed there only three years until 1906, however, because President Teddy Roosevelt tried to get one of his own friends to replace him. He then settled in the UK, partly in Cornwall, where his beloved wife died, dabbled in

Rev. Canon Bruce, from The Forward Policy and its Results *by Richard Isaac Bruce, Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900.*

politics and did a good deal of writing, including editing his father's history of the first Afghan war (which I have not seen). I have a strange book by Mortimer Durand called *Nadir Shah* which I discovered is not a history of that Persian conqueror but a sentimental historical novel. It provides a theory of how and why the cruel Nadir Shah was assassinated, after which it ends abruptly. My copy was a gift to a certain Dorothy Deane signed in Mortimer's own clear hand, which gives me pleasure. He died in 1924.

Another book that confused me, after lying for some time on my bottom shelf, was *The Forward Policy and its Results* (1900) which I had been expecting to be an uninteresting rehearsal of political theories. It turned out to be the too-detailed autobiography of Richard Bruce, son of a poor Irish family, who had come to work in India not through military connections but because an elder brother was a missionary in Dera Ismail Khan. There is a good picture of the Rev Canon Dr Bruce but sadly no information about the latter's work, except that he had some link with the respected Sir Robert Montgomery in Lahore. Richard Bruce was not a covenanted member of the Indian civil service but spent 35 years working with Baluch and Pathan tribesmen. He started as assistant to Robert Sandeman whom he greatly admired and considered the practical epitome of the 'Forward Policy' for the way that he dealt closely with tribal leaders. Bruce claimed that he himself was the first government employee to study the Baluch language. He was disappointed not to succeed Sandeman as Agent for Baluchistan but worked effectively with Kakar Maliks at Zhob, Marri and Bugti tribal leaders and eventually with the troublesome Wazirs. He was made Deputy Commissioner for Dera Ismail Khan and then Derajat and was involved in working out where the Durand line might be agreed on the ground. Then as now, tribesmen were keen to play the authorities in Kabul and Peshawar off against each other.

Towards the end of Bruce's time this led to a serious crisis with the Wazirs and Mahsuds. Trying to enforce traditional disciplinary action (usually hostage-taking) after criminal acts by certain tribesmen, two leading Maliks friendly to Bruce were murdered, sanctioned by a powerful rabble-rousing Mullah living near the border, called the Mullah Powindah. This couldn't be accepted by the British. Military units were sent to the area where they were attacked by thousands of Wazirs and Mahsuds, encouraged by the Mullah. There was loss of life and injuries on both sides. Bruce claimed that all his skills in negotiation were required to return to stability. After a long life of service and many bouts of serious illness he retired in 1896. He was proud of his CIE decoration, but was only thanked and little rewarded, probably because of his limited status and social contacts. What pleased him the most was to have secured attendance at Wellington School and Sandhurst for his eldest son, who then qualified for the Indian Civil Service. His book suffers from an excess of names and repetition of 'Forward Policy' arguments.

I also expected more from Sir Thomas Holdich's book *The Gates of India* (1910). He was a distinguished surveyor who was a member of the Afghan Boundary Commission but this book is not about his work. He repeats stories of others who have travelled in Central Asia beginning with the Greeks and praising highly Charles Masson, whom he calls 'the American explorer'. No photographs, but on the map at the end of the book he clearly separates off an area including Sibi, the Bolan Pass and Quetta designated as 'British Baluchistan'. His book *The Afghan Borderland*, which I have not seen, is meant to have good descriptions of Afghanistan.

In my next piece I shall cover a final account of the second Anglo-Afghan war as depicted in the two-volume autobiography, *The Life of Abdur Rahman, Amir of Afghanistan,* edited by his Indian munshi, Sultan Muhammad Khan, and explore further the Amir's remarkable character.

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