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AFGHANISTAN

BY

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AFGHANISTAN

LORD LAMINGTON presided, and in introducing Mr. Merk said he was a gentleman of great experience on the North-West Frontier of India and in Afghanistan. He had only recently retired from the Indian Civil Service, and the opinions contained in his paper were sure to be of great value.

Afghanistan, in its aspect as the principal gate to India, has naturally been the subject of our, at times absorbing, attention during the past hundred years. But from other points of view, also, the country is one of great interest, that well repays such study as it is possible to conduct without the local inquiries which for obvious reasons are impracticable, at least as yet. Geographically and politically it is, in Central Asia, in many respects almost the counterpart of Switzerland in Central Europe. Both are composed of mountains and primary valleys, with their secondary connections, radiating from a central Alpine knot, the St. Gothard in the one instance and the Koh-i-Baba, near Kabul, in the other. Both lie at the heads of peninsulas which are much larger than themselves, and are shut off from the central continents to their north by high ranges which in both cases extend far to either flank. Further, the parallel is curiously close in these details: that the south-western corners of both countries are occupied by lakes—the Hamun in Sistan, and the Lake of Geneva, respectively; that the Danube corresponds roughly to the Indus, and so forth. The analogy cannot, of course, be pushed too far. In many geographical and orographical particulars the two are by no means alike; for instance, as regards expanse, size of plains, rivers, and valleys, height of mountains, total area, etc., Afghanistan is planned on a far larger scale than is Switzerland; but on the whole there seems sufficient similarity in support of the conclusion suggested above. Again, the political positions are in a way astonishingly similar; in each case four Powers lie round about the frontiers of the hill State in question. Italy, Austria, Germany, and France encompass Switzerland, while Afghanistan marches more or less in direct

contact with British, Chinese, Russian, and Persian territory. But there the resemblance ends; for inasmuch as China and Persia are of no account *qua* Afghanistan, the Afghans, unlike the Swiss, have to take thought of only two Powers—a difference in the case which has threatened in past years on more than one occasion to lead to the gravest complications and danger to them and to others. Like Switzerland, Afghanistan has, only more so, been the meeting-place of nations and languages, a haven of refuge for broken clans, and an inaccessible shelter for aboriginal populations; it is a perfect ethnological and philological museum and treasure-house. In the matter of peoples you have first and foremost the Afghans and Pathans. I have purposely not lumped together these two sections, having a common language, under the sole denomination of either Afghan or Pathan. Both speak the same tongue, Pashtu or Pakhtu; and when asked what they are, must admit that they are “Pashtuns” or “Pakhtuns”—that is to say, speakers of Pashtu or Pakhtu, according as they use the harder Eastern or the softer Western dialect. On their eastern border these people are called “Pathans” by their neighbours (a corruption, of course, of “Pakhtāna,” the plural of Pakhtun), and on their western border “Afghans,” the correct derivation of which term is unknown. There can be little doubt that the different designations do denote some distinction of descent, not much, yet sufficient to differentiate the western from the eastern branch; the former is probably the purer, and is more closely allied to the Persian population of Khorasan, the latter has possibly some Indian admixture in it. But in neither case is the foreign element apparently strong enough to cause any appreciably great divergence of character, custom, tradition, society, and tribal and domestic institutions. In all likelihood the Afghans are racially a link between Iran and India. Then there are the Turks, still speaking Turki, beyond the Hindu Kush, but fused with the Afghans, and speaking Pashtu, and to all intents and purposes Pathans, in the shape of the great Ghilzai tribe. Pure Mongols inhabit the Hazara hills in the heart of Afghanistan; widespread throughout the country is a numerous substratum of ancient Persian origin in the Tajiks and Dehgans. Finally, to the east of Kabul, from the Kohistan to Kafiristan, Wakhan and Roshan, and within the limits of the Afghan State, a most diversified set of tribes and clans inhabits the glens on either side of the watershed of the Hindu Kush, representing partly aboriginal settlers living there from all time, and partly waifs and strays of dwellers in the plains

whom successive invaders and conquerors have driven to seek protection in the defiles of the great snowy mountains. Some of these hillmen in Badakhshan, Wakhan, and Kafiristan probably are of as pure an Aryan type as now exists anywhere in Asia. Of languages there is no end; an archaic form of Persian, which bears to modern Irani much the same relation as does Lowland Scotch to modern English, is spoken by the Tajiks and Dehgans, by the townspeople of Herat, Kabul, and Kandahar, and, for reasons which I will mention presently, by all Afghans with any claims to polite education. It is the literary and the official language current in Afghanistan, whereas Pashtu or Pakhtu is spoken by the Afghans and Pathans as the national language of the mass of the people. The Afghan form of Persian is, however, the *lingua franca* throughout the land. The Mongols of the Hazarajat speak the same form of Persian; the Turkish, or Usbeg, population north of the Hindu Kush adheres to Turki. East of Kabul a rich field awaits the philological explorer, in the many languages of polyglot Kafiristan, and of the population of the Kabul River Valley, where is found the débris of the ancient races that gave way to the Pathan immigration—the Urmars, the Safis, the people of Kuner, the Dehgans of Lughman, the Tirahis (who formerly held Tirah, whence they were expelled by the Afridi tribe), and many others, mostly relics of the pre-Mohammedan inhabitants of the country.

I have trespassed on your patience with these dry details in order to show that the people of Afghanistan is a conglomerate, and is not one compact body; it consists of differing races and diverse nationalities, with rival interests and clashing animosities, each with ambitions of its own, and not held together by the common bonds of language, joint descent, or even religion. The common tie of Islam is much weakened by the fact that whereas in Afghanistan all Afghans and Turks are Sunnis, all the Persian-speaking elements are Shiahs. In fact, Afghanistan is not a nation in the wider sense of the word; it is a nation only in the political sense, and not ethnologically; it is an agglomeration of different and sometimes antipathetic units, who are combined into one political entity by the pressure of whichever race happens to enjoy predominance. That is a difficulty which faces every Afghan Government. It is, no doubt, one which is far less in extent and severity now than it was in former times, say, when Ahmed Shah set to work to form the Afghan State, and when Dost Mahomad Khan had to reconstitute the same; still it exists, and every Amir has to reckon with the fact. At the present

moment the Afghans are, and for the past 160 years have been, the ruling race in what is comprised in the Afghan State. They are the bond that keeps the whole together.

It may serve to explain parts, at any rate, of the later phases of their history if I dwell for a moment on their character, idiosyncrasies, and political and social constitution ; for this purpose it is immaterial whether the various individuals or tribes in question are Afghans or Pathans ; on broad lines all are alike in these matters. The Afghans, then, are in Afghanistan an aristocracy as against all non-Afghans, but among themselves, as far as may be possible, a democracy ; for any Afghan is as good as any other Afghan, but is better than any outsider. Their pride, arrogance, impatience, want of self-control and self-restraint, fickleness, excitability, proneness to violence, avarice, greed, restlessness, and envy and hatred of each other, are their worst features ; on the other hand, their martial qualities—far exceeding those of the other races in Afghanistan—their obedience to custom and tradition, their passionate love of freedom and independence, hardiness, hospitality, courage, attachment to hereditary leaders, enterprise, frugality, and power of combination, do much to counterbalance the evil side of their character. On the whole they are a manly race. More than many other Orientals, they present much that is attractive to Europeans, which ought to make it the more easy for the two to get on together, if due allowance is made for the essential differences between East and West. For military matters they show a marked and considerable talent ; none or hardly any for civil affairs and civil administration. The consequence is that the Afghan Government and high officers of State, who are mainly selected from men of Afghan blood, have to depend for clerical and subordinate assistance to a great extent upon the Persian-speaking population, which shows much aptitude for this kind of duty. To put it in a form which will be readily understood, what we should call the heads of departments are, as a rule, Afghans and Sunnis ; the departmental staffs are more often than not non-Afghans and Shiah— a state of things which is neither conducive to unity of purpose and efficiency, nor improves the weak point of all Eastern Governments, the civil administration. It is certainly a difficulty for the Amirs, though perhaps not so great as one would imagine, seeing that an Oriental State will stand with perfect impunity what in our eyes would portend the immediate dissolution of all order, society, and government, on the principle that less developed organisms are less susceptible to adverse influences than more highly developed ones. This evil in connection with the

civil administration must continue till the Afghans overcome their dislike to "office work," and till more Afghans receive an education which will qualify them for it; of neither is there much promise at present. One could not call the Afghans religious, except in the matter of keeping the fast of the Ramzan; but they are superstitious, and as a race fanatical to a degree, where that fanaticism subserves a political object, which is generally the preservation of their political independence. I am not speaking now of the wretched lunatics who virtually seek suicide in the commission of acts of "Ghāzi"-ism, but of the race as a whole. Prior to the Afghan War of 1839-41, it appears that Europeans were able to travel freely about the whole country and to live in it with no more molestation or danger on account of their origin or religion than they would have incurred anywhere else in India, Central Asia, and Persia. I am referring to the time before 1839. Foster, Masson, Moorcroft, Burnes, and many others, traversed Afghanistan from end to end, and resided there for years in safety. When, during the occupation of the country in 1839-40, the Afghans conceived their independence to be threatened, and resolved to strike for it, the leaders of the opposition enlisted in the Church a perfect agency for the advancement of their ends, with ramifications in every village and hamlet; briefly, wherever there was a mosque, and there are many mosques about the country. Moreover, the Mullahs, Pirs, Akhundzadas, and the holy men generally, were an admirable means for uniting discordant elements towards a common aim. Where a Mullah, or saint, leads, the bitterest personal enemies, who would not yield the *pas* to each other on any consideration, and who would not combine at any price, could, and did, join and follow, sinking their jealousies and burying their hatreds for the time. When the exhortations of the Mullahs fit in with the prevailing popular feeling, they have the strongest coercive influence and weight over recalcitrants. As in all semi-religious, semi-political movements, the flames in spreading at the same time increased in intensity. All this was noted at the time, and the powerful instrument then discovered has been kept ever ready for the purpose of safeguarding the national independence. It was applied, for instance, with great effect in the winter of 1879-80, when this independence was again believed to be in danger. The Afghan Government has, therefore, a tremendous weapon at its command for the protection of the country. But, as is often the case with weapons, the tool created in 1840-41, and kept sharp ever since, has two edges. Religious bodies have a tendency to be conservative. The Mullahs, having tasted power, have been by no

means hasty to relinquish it, and though a strong Amir can safely deal with single Mullahs (owing to the curious Eastern law or political tradition, to be mentioned presently), even the strongest ruler of Afghanistan is, and must perforce be, very chary of running counter to any general feeling held or exhibited by the Mullahs. If that feeling is in accord with, and has the support of, public opinion among the clansmen, the Amir must give way or lose his throne, possibly his life. It will be seen what a formidable obstacle lies in the path of an Amir who favours an enlightened or progressive policy; he has to proceed with the utmost caution, and if he does take a step forward, must be ever ready to pacify prejudices, and to retrieve himself by playing to the gallery. I have alluded to the enmities and jealousies rife among Afghans. Faction and strife, intrigue and conspiracy, are their pastimes, individual against individual, clan versus clan, tribe against tribe; yet they have the merit or characteristic, as one may like to consider it, of being able to combine for the sake of the national existence or predominance. No rising of non-Afghans against Afghans would have a ghost of a chance; and when the independence of the nation was understood to be endangered, in 1840 and in 1879-80, even Ghilzai joined Durrani in opposition to the invaders. This is remarkable, because from time immemorial there has been antipathy, often active hostility, between these two main sections of Afghans. As compared with Ghilzais or Durranis, the other tribes are of no account, whether in numbers or in wealth, or in fighting and reigning qualities, and in influence. The cleavage between Durrani and Ghilzai is no doubt due, in the first instance, to difference of origin. The Ghilzais are undoubtedly descended from Turkish ancestors, who took Afghan wives, and who in the twelfth century still spoke Turkish; whereas the Durranis form the core of the Afghan race. In the next place, during the last 150 years, as we shall see, Ghilzai has had to give way to Durrani, not without vain efforts to the contrary; and the existence of this, latterly dormant, hostility, or rather want of sympathy, is a distinct element in Afghan domestic politics. The strong individuality of Afghans and the clan system stand in the way of a national feeling. An Afghan thinks of himself first as the member of his tribe, and next as an Afghan—among themselves, that is to say; against others they present what corresponds to our national feeling. But *inter se* it is the opposite way from us, who are British first and English, Scotch, or Irish afterwards. The result, of course, is a want of internal cohesion, which materially facilitates those

curses of the country: civil wars and dynastic parties. The patriotism of an Afghan is primarily tribal, only in the second degree national; but among themselves only, not against others, it is always well to recollect. In internal affairs an Afghan is apt to prefer private or factional or tribal advantage to the national good, thereby impeding the national unity. The late Amir perceived this, as he saw many other things, clearly enough, and was never tired of exhorting the Afghans to union under the common banner of Islam. It is improbable that his precepts have been forgotten, but in any case past experience proves that heterogeneous tribes can for the time put aside their feuds for the sake of a supremely important national interest.

One of the most, if not the most, remarkable traits of the Afghans, as compared with Persians and Indians and other Eastern Asiatics, is their strong democratic feeling (within the bounds of the general Afghan aristocracy, which I have mentioned), and their vivid interest in clan, tribal, and national affairs. That is a characteristic of every democracy that is alive. Every Afghan is by ancient traditional custom, which brooks no denial and is a living reality, entitled to a personal voice and opinion in clan politics, and to individual action concerning them, as he may think fit, and subject, of course, to the will of the majority if it chooses to exert it. In larger issues the hereditary chiefs, or leaders of clans, represent their clansmen in the clan councils, or in the greater tribal assemblies, as the case may be; and in questions of national importance the mass of the tribes, through their heads, not only expect, but have the ancient right, which is jealously guarded, of being consulted by the ruler of the country before any step of grave national importance is taken. The deduction is patent: not only does the nation as a whole take a very real share in the national policy, but also the power of the ruler is by no means so despotic and autocratic as one may think. There are rough and ready checks to his authority in large matters. But from the ruler's point of view these limitations are tempered by the attribute which, according to invariable Eastern custom or law, attaches to supreme power, even in Afghanistan, and that is an uncontrolled and arbitrary power in regard to individuals, as many an Afghan chief has found to his cost. Afghan rulers may do, and have done, horrible things, the recital of which would make our hair stand on end; but so long as such acts affect only individual Afghans, public opinion will see them through it; after all, it only concerns the sufferers and their relations. But let a ruler touch general interests, act contrary to popular wish, or attempt to

generally govern, without consulting the Afghan chiefs, and through them the body of the nation, and that ruler is doomed. It was an attempt to set aside this informal national constitution, and to rule by officials and through the means of non-Afghans, without national assent and consultation, that chiefly brought the Sadozai dynasty to its ruin. And although the late Amir, of all Afghan rulers, exercised to the utmost his despotic power over individuals, he was ever careful to conciliate the Mullahs as a body; he was never tired of assembling the heads of Afghan society in council, asking for their advice, and taking them into his confidence—or, at any rate, pretending to do so. His constant aim was to carry the mass of the people with him—which accounts for his success. Throughout his correspondence, and indeed that of all the Amirs, from the days of Dost Mahomad Khan, you will find incessant references to the necessity for consultation with chiefs and elders, references to Afghan public opinion, and to the will of the nation. Although it is, of course, not at all unlikely that a specious use has been, and is, on occasion, made of this condition of affairs, there can be no doubt whatever that the general view of the Afghan nation, combined with that of the Mullahs, constitutes the ultimate force in the State. Our experience of the past seventy years is a useful guide towards a judgment of what that general public opinion may be expected to accept and to refuse. No Amir who is wise will take a vital step without holding, so to say, an informal general election, and sounding the opinion of the nation. A corollary to this state of things is free and unrestricted intercourse and communication between ruler and subject. Any Afghan who feels himself moved thereto can, and sometimes does, claim the right to air his views in open royal durbar, at his personal risk occasionally during the late régime, if the Amir happened to have gout! But the right is acknowledged on both sides, as is the duty of the ruler to listen, to do justice in person, to inquire personally into grievances, and to receive petitions. Impatient of restraint as they are, they deeply admire and respect a strong, just, and energetic “*hākim*”; accustomed to violence, and turbulent by nature, they expect the maintenance of public order, and security from their government. The greatest and most successful and popular of Afghan rulers—Ahmed Shah, Dost Mahomad Khan, and Abdur Rahman Khan—have been those who were most accessible to the people in daily durbar, who were patient with them, of simple and homely habit in their everyday life. Like all Easterns, they love pomp and show, and are duly impressed by it; but as a matter of habit, they dislike

to have their Kings always on pedestals, or else hidden away in seclusion. A cause contributory to the fall of the Sadozai royal house was the inaccessibility to the people of its later members. They lost touch with the currents of public opinion, and on the other side the people and their chiefs ceased to be personally influenced by them. Personal rule is here the keynote to success.

Before commencing a brief sketch of Afghan history, it may be useful to indicate in a few words the distribution of the different races that go to make up the Afghan State. What is its total population it is impossible to estimate with any certainty; calculations, which must in the absence of anything like a census be more guesses than anything else, range from four to ten millions; personally, I should think six millions is near the mark. Of this number about one-half are Afghan and Pathan, the remainder are non-Afghan. The former live mainly in the quadrangle formed by a line drawn from Kabul to Kandahar, the British frontier to the south-east and east, and the Hindu Kush to the north. A continuation of territory held by the Afghans is the area bounded by a line from Kandahar to Sabzavar, and the British and Persian frontiers to the south and west. Within these two areas, or, roughly, the eastern and southern portions of the State, the Afghans preponderate, both as inhabitants and as owners of the soil; almost exclusively so in the extreme and central east and south, less as one proceeds westwards and northwards, where Persian-speaking races begin to grow more numerous, and eventually take the lead in the matters of population and ownership of the land; till at last the Afghans disappear entirely, except as military or semi-military garrisons holding the country. The central plateau of rolling hills and downs is held by Mongols, the Hazara, who, however, have substituted Persian for their native language, and are all Shiah; the Herat province is mainly in the hands of Persian-speaking races of Perso-Bactrian stock, and beyond the watershed of the Hindu Kush and its western prolongation the country is Usbeg as far as the Upper Oxus, where Aryan tribes, popularly tracing their descent from the Greeks, are reached. The political and fighting strength of the State is concentrated in its eastern and southern portions; cut them off, and the western and northern sections are in the air, a prey to the laws of attraction.

I propose now a hasty glance at the history of the Afghans. Practically nothing is known of them till they emerge from the welter that followed the collapse of the Turkish kingdoms of Ghazni and Ghor, and the crumbling up of the Hindu princi-

palities in Northern India. Prior to that period they seem to have led a quiet and uneventful existence as nomads in the vast arid plains intersected by barren ranges, of South-Eastern Afghanistan; pushing northwards and eastwards under the pressure of expanding population into the, then probably uninhabited, maze of hills to the west of the Indus. In accounts of the years 1001 to 1040 of Mahmud of Ghazni's armies, we come upon the first distinct notice of their names. Among the different contingents that made up his forces are mentioned "Afghans *and* Ghilzais," showing incidentally that the fusion of the two had not yet taken place. These accounts are by the Persian historians and poets at the Ghazni Court, where Persian literature reigned supreme, in spite of the vicissitudes of 1,300 years since the Greeks had ousted Persian rule from these tracts—an instance of the amazing vitality of Persian civilization. To this day Persian culture has retained its hold upon this region, wherefore a knowledge of Persian (as I have said) is still incumbent upon every Afghan of good breeding. The shattering of the Hindus was the opportunity of the Afghans; for centuries they poured down to the loot of India, where many of them stayed, gradually increasing in numbers and strength, till towards the end of the fifteenth century they were able to seize and hold the throne of Delhi. In 1526 this Afghan kingdom was conquered by Baber, but the Afghans reasserted themselves against Humayun, Baber's son, under the leadership of the great Sher Shah. His premature death, however, proved fatal to the Afghan supremacy in India, where the Moghuls firmly and finally established themselves in 1566. Thence onwards for 150 years the Afghans were perforce content to serve the Moghuls; indeed, a numerically feeble people with few resources as compared with the Moghul Empire on one side of them and the great Persian kingdom of the Saffavæans on the other side, both then at the height of their power and prosperity, had no other choice. But they did the best they could for themselves; many Afghans rose to high position and great affluence under the Moghuls; and at the Courts of Jehangir (Nur Jahan was an Afghan) and Aurangzebe the Afghan party was all-powerful. The rest and quiet of 150 years, the wealth sent home from service and trade in India, and the outlet afforded there for the surplus numbers and energy of the nation, must have materially benefited the stock that remained behind in their native country. But no national feeling had as yet been excited. Its birth came to pass at the time when, to the east and west of Kandahar, the great States fell into decay simultaneously. The death of Bahadur Shah (son

of Aurangzebe), the last efficient Moghul Emperor, almost coincides with the expulsion of the Persians from Kandahar, in 1707, by the Ghilzais, which began the break-up of the Saffavæan kingdom. In 1719 the Ghilzais, pursuing their initial success, took Ispahan, and put an end to the Persian dynasty under circumstances of appalling cruelty. The reign of the Ghilzais lasted only eight years, but was marked by a wholesale savage devastation of Persia, from which it is doubtful if that country has ever quite recovered. In 1731 they were expelled with great slaughter by Nadir Shah, who, though a Sunni, was adopted by the Persians as their saviour from the merciless Ghilzais. The latter had shown no constructive ability whatever, their rule was simply that of robbers and bandits, and they richly deserved their fate. The struggle with Persia and subsequent defeat seems to have much exhausted the tribe, for during the next seventy years they remain quiescent. At that time the main stock of the Afghans—viz., the Abdali tribe, now known as Durrani—was settled near Herat, whence they were transplanted to Kandahar by Nadir Shah, who enlisted large numbers of them in his army. The Afghan horse formed some of the best portion of his cavalry, of which arm his troops, after the custom of the day, chiefly consisted. In his train they went to India, no doubt sharing in the sack of Delhi, and occupied a high position in his confidence. At his murder, in 1747, it so happened that Ahmed Khan (the chief of the Abdali tribe, and commander of the Afghan horse) was in a position to seize the royal treasure. This fortunate accident laid the foundation of the Afghan State. With a bold spirit he resolved to strike out a new line, and to create an independent Afghan kingdom. There was nothing to prevent it. To his left the Persians were in anarchy, to his right the Moghul Empire was crumbling to pieces. Intuitively he grasped the situation, procured his election as King of the Afghans, whom he carried with him, and who seem to have thoroughly appreciated the position, and forthwith proceeded to consolidate his power with the enthusiastic support of his nation. An able general, a great organizer and administrator, a man of exceptional physical and mental energy, resolute, sagacious, genial, affable, simple and popular in his ways, no mean poet in his native language, the Afghans owe their national existence to him, the most remarkable man whom their race has produced. The system he adopted was excellently suited to the national temper: as far as possible local autonomy under the tribal heads, who were consulted on every important measure, and received handsome allowances; light taxation; no interference

if possible with local affairs; grants of land revenue in return for military service; the maintenance of general order; preference for Afghans. On every act he endeavoured to impress the stamp of nationality. Subject peoples were treated with mildness, but naturally kept subordinate to the ruling race. The military training he and his men gained under Nadir Shah stood them in good stead. For a generation the Afghan army was pre-eminent in Central Asia. Successful wars and expeditions materially helped to consolidate his rule and to enhance his prestige. In 1750 he annexed the Panjab, Herat in 1751, Kashmir and Sind in the next years; he penetrated to Delhi in 1757; and, returning to India in 1760, fought in January, 1761, the great battle of Panipat, a blow that shook the power of the Mahrattas to its base. An account of the battle by an eyewitness has been preserved, and I am tempted to quote an extract which will give us a good idea of the man :

“From the day of their arrival in their present camp, Ahmed Shah Durrani caused a small red tent to be pitched for him a *kos* (1½ miles) in front of his camp, and he came to it every morning before sunrise, at which time, after performing his morning prayer, he mounted his horse and visited every post of his army, accompanied by his son Taimur Shah and forty or fifty horsemen. He also reconnoitred the camp of the enemy, and, in a word, saw everything with his own eyes, riding usually forty to fifty *kos* (about fifty to sixty miles) every day. After noon he returned to the small tent, and sometimes dined there and sometimes at his own tents in the main camp, and that was his daily practice. . . . Ahmed Shah used to say to the Hindustani chiefs: ‘Do you sleep; I will take care that no harm befalls you.’ And, to say the truth, his orders were obeyed like destiny, no man daring to hesitate or delay one moment in executing them.”

It speaks volumes for his moderation and his insight into the limitations of himself and his race that he refrained from laying hands on the Moghul Empire as it lay helpless before him after the battle. He died in 1773, leaving to his successor, Taimur Shah, an empire that stretched from Meshed to the Sutlej, from the Oxus to the Persian Gulf. The peaceful rule of the latter for twenty years bears witness to the excellence of his father's measures. But Taimur Shah sowed the seeds of decay, and the course he took, as followed by his sons, led within forty years to the extinction of Sadozai rule. He moved the seat of the central government from Kandahar to Kabul and Peshawar, thereby severing the dynastic connection with the Durrans, who then (as now) had

their settlements at that town, and thence to the west. As far as he dared he withdrew provincial governments from tribal chiefs, whom, however, he for the time compensated by raising their allowances, and put in his own men. He adopted a stiff ceremonial at Court, lived in considerable seclusion, and was entirely wanting in that vigour of body and mind that distinguished his father. Gradually the King and his people drifted apart, the government of the outlying provinces was relaxed, and there was a sensible slackening of authority throughout the Empire, although its finances continued to be well managed—the one point on which the administration of Taimur Shah was satisfactory. On his death, in 1793, he was succeeded by one of his numerous sons, Zaman Shah, who appears to have started a reign of terror. There being no law or custom of primogeniture, and the sons of Taimur Shah being more solicitous of their personal advantage than of the national well-being, Zaman Shah's accession to the throne was soon followed by intrigues and conspiracies in favour of brothers. He sought to check these by severities, in the course of which Payinda Khan, Barakzai Durrani, was executed by the Shah. We now arrive at a point where I must digress for a moment to explain the relations of the Shahs with the family that supplanted them.

Ahmed Shah belonged to the Saddozai section of the Popalzai clan, which, with six other clans, including the Barakzai, forms collectively the great Durrani tribe. The Saddozai are the section from which were drawn the hereditary chiefs of the Popalzai, and, therefore, also of the Durrani, of whom the Popalzai are the leading clan in point of rank, though not of wealth or numbers. The Saddozai were thus the "Khan Khel," as it is called, or "chieftain's house," of the Durrani, and as such enjoyed great respect, even veneration, their persons being *sacrosanct* and their property inviolable. The most powerful clan, however, among the Durrani, by reason of size and property, at that time were the Barakzai. Among them one Haji Jumal, son or grandson of Mulla Yusuf, of the Muhamadzai section, was conspicuous for his force of character and prominent position among the clansmen at the time that Ahmed Shah resolved to create an Afghan kingdom. In this project he was loyally and effectively aided by Haji Jumal, who no doubt recognized in the young chief of the Durrani not only an hereditary leader with inherited prestige which none could dispute, but also a young man of the highest promise. In reward Ahmed Shah is reported to have made Haji Jumal his hereditary Wazir. However that may be, the Haji and after

him his son Payinda Khan enjoyed the greatest consideration at Court. The latter had no less than thirty-six sons, of whom Futteh Khan was the eldest and most capable, and Dost Mahomad Khan (later on to become Amir of Afghanistan), the youngest.

On his father's death, Futteh Khan naturally took the side of Mahmud Shah, a half-brother of Zaman Shah, then in rebellion against the latter. With the help of the Barakzai, who resented Payinda Khan's fate, Mahmud Shah seized Kabul in 1800 and blinded Zaman Shah. Thereupon Shah Shuja, (who was to be destroyed at Kabul with the British army forty-one years later), a full brother of Zaman Shah, set up as King at Peshawar. The Ghilzais seem to have considered this fratricidal strife a favourable juncture for ousting the Durrani, and rose in a formidable rebellion against Mahmud Shah, but were crushed by his armies in two campaigns during 1801-2. This appears to have finally settled them in their places; if we except the, never dangerous, rising against the Amir Abdur Rahman Khan in 1887. Why Shah Shuja did not take the opportunity to move simultaneously against Mahmud Shah is not clear; probably Durrani feeling was too strong for him even to appear to co-operate with Ghilzais. Presently a defection of Afghan nobles enabled Shah Shuja in 1803 to seize Kabul and the person of Mahmud Shah, whom, weakly, no doubt, from an Afghan standpoint, he neither killed nor blinded. Futteh Khan went off to Western Afghanistan, and the land was divided between the factions of the two rivals. At the same time, during these troubles the Panjab, Sind, and Turkistan provinces were lost. It is noteworthy that neither then, nor for some fourteen years afterwards, did the deposition of the Sadozai dynasty suggest itself to any Afghan. It required much more bloodshed and more misery to produce that result—a tribute to the great prestige of the first Shah. In 1807 Mahmud Shah escaped from custody and fled to Western Afghanistan. In that year Napoleon discussed with the Czar plans for a joint invasion of India through Central Asia. The project can hardly have been seriously meant, for the British commanded the sea, the Russian and British frontiers in Asia were about 2,000 miles apart, and a land march for French and Russian troops would have meant a journey of some 2,500 to 3,000 miles through mostly unknown and inhospitable country. The news must have reached India long after the project had been shelved, but it was thought desirable to get into friendly touch with the people beyond the Indus, and, I suppose, to obtain reliable information. For this purpose a mission was despatched to Zaman Shah

under Elphinstone, and found him early in 1809 at Peshawar, in rather anxious anticipation of an attack by Mahmud Shah. The mission fulfilled its purpose admirably; Elphinstone's work on the Afghans is a mine of information, and his memory was still cherished at Peshawar thirty-five years ago, as I can say from personal observation. It is noticeable that nowhere does he appear to have met any trace of anti-foreigner fanaticism, or, indeed, of any hostile feeling. This is our first official contact with the Afghans. Shortly after the departure of the mission, Shah Shuja was defeated by Mahmud Shah in 1810, and fled to the Panjab, whence, after being despoiled of the Koh-i-Noor diamond by Ranjit Sing, he eventually found his way to Indiana in 1815, there to live as a pensioner of the British Government till 1839. So far as could be the case effectively, the kingdom was now, in 1810, reunited under Mahmud Shah's titular authority, with Kabul as the capital. But he was a thoroughly incompetent ruler, a man of vicious and depraved tastes, indolent, inert, abandoned to drink and the pleasures of the harem. Content with the existence of a *roi fainéant*, the reins of power fell entirely and uncontrolled into the grasp of his Wazir, Futteh Khan, who would have been more than an Afghan, one may say more than human, if he had not taken advantage of this circumstance. He was virtually King. Maintaining order and tranquillity, and carrying on an administration that was vigorous yet popular, and enjoying the sympathy and support of the tribes, he took care gradually to appoint to the governorships of the various provinces his numerous brothers. In the course of seven years the position developed into that of an all-powerful Mayor of the Palace, with his nearest relatives in charge of the outlying portions of the kingdom. No doubt the design of gradually supplanting the royal family had by that time formed itself in his mind; but probably he would have been satisfied with the slow extinction of the royal prestige which would have smoothed the way of his house to the outward assumption of the authority it actually possessed. The senseless action of the younger Princes precipitated the downfall of their dynasty and accelerated the accomplishment of the designs of Futteh Khan, at his expense it must be said. On a pretext which arose out of the alleged misconduct of Dost Mahomad Khan at Herat, but which certainly did not justify what was done, Kamran Shah, son of Mahmud Shah, seized Futteh Khan and blinded him. This occurred in 1817. As might have been expected, his brothers immediately rose everywhere in rebellion. The country was

plunged into uproar. Although the people had been long estranged from the royal house, it still enjoyed some prestige, and as the Barakzais were naturally not without enemies, jealous of their rise to power, an able, energetic, and conciliatory prince might yet have saved the fortunes of his house. All, however, was lost by the utterly useless cruelty of Kamran Shah, who, still in possession of the person of the blind Futteh Khan, in 1818, put him to death in the most atrocious manner, and inflicted gross indignities on the corpse of the man who had raised his father to the throne. What little feeling had remained for the family of him who had created the nation was completely alienated by an act that revolted even men accustomed to bloodshed from their infancy. The spell of the Sadozais was broken. With one accord the Afghans went over to the Barakzais and expelled the Sadozais, except from Herat, where the wretched Kamran Shah prolonged a drunken existence for many years under the tutelage of a Durrani Wazir who eventually murdered him. The country now split up into principalities, independent of each other, but connected by the ties of near relationship as regards the chiefs, and of a common race and creed as regards their followers. Peshawar and Kashmir were held by one set of Futteh Khan's brothers: Dost Mahomad Khan with the aid of other brothers, who were content to remain in the background, dominated Jelallabad, Kabul, and Ghazni; and Kandahar and South Afghanistan were in the possession of another set of brothers.

The question at this point was whether this amorphous state of things was to continue till each chiefship, in turn, had been eaten up by more powerful neighbours, or whether out of the struggle some commanding personality would emerge who would gather together the fragments and weld them into a consolidated whole. The abilities of Dost Mahomad Khan, aided by the circumstances of the time, and, in no small degree, by the course of the first Afghan War and his misfortunes at our hands, brought about the second solution of the question. At first it looked as if the fate of the chiefships was to be absorption, for the Sikhs took Kashmir, and gradually spread themselves trans-Indus, laying hands on Peshawar and the plains to the foot of the hills. But there the forward movement stopped. The failing health of Ranjit Sing made him disinclined to undertake risky enterprises involving his personal exertions; and after much desultory fighting, in which the fortunes of war swayed to and fro, the struggle ended by the plains remaining Sikh and the hills Afghan. On the other side,

Persia was in no mood for a move on Kandahar. Beyond the Hindu Kush the former Turkistan province had disintegrated into a number of small independent chiefships. Matters thus resolved themselves into the relatively simple problem of who should take the lead, Kabul or Kandahar? Gradually Dost Mahomad Khan forged ahead, and by 1835 he felt his strength sufficient to proclaim himself "Amir," the same repugnance and disgust attaching, by this time, in the mind of the Afghans to the title of "Shah," which attached to that of "Rex" among the Romans. This brings us to the fateful moment of our second contact with Afghanistan. It would be travelling beyond the scope of this paper to enter into any detailed criticism of the grounds for a policy that prompted that most hazardous enterprise, the forcible restoration of the discredited Saddozai dynasty. With the Russian and British frontiers in Asia some 1,600 miles apart, and with a very powerful and independent military state lying athwart the lines of communication between Afghanistan and India, it was not only needless, but the conditions predetermined failure. There is no reason to recapitulate even the leading incidents of the years 1839 to 1841, we are all sufficiently familiar with them. In the end, Amir Dost Mahomad Khan returned to Kabul, the hero of his people; who, at the same time, had formed the conviction that we had endeavoured to seize the country for ourselves and had failed. It does not matter whether this conviction is right or wrong, that is not the point. The point is, that the mass of the people firmly entertain it; that is what concerns us. And what the Afghan democracy believes must profoundly influence the policy of their ruler; he may know better, but in large matters he is bound by the will or the fears of the nation. From this period dates, too, the fanatical dislike of the residence of Europeans in their country, which is exhibited by the Afghan people. During the years 1841 to 1848 Dost Mahomad Khan busied himself with the reduction of the former Afghan possessions to the north of the Hindu Kush, and in preparing the way towards an eventual absorption of Kandahar. In 1849 he marched with 12,000 horse to the aid of the Sikhs, and took a half-hearted part in the battle of Gujrat; after which, to quote a contemporary writer, "the gates of the Khyber closed on the retreating Durrani host for ever." The next few years he spent in watching our intentions towards Afghanistan. Remember, we had occupied the country only ten years before when we were still east of the Panjab, and for all that he and his people knew the annexation of the Panjab was but the

prelude to further extensions westward. Reassured, he entered into a general treaty of friendship with us in 1855. Subsequently, feeling more safe in respect of our attitude, he took Kandahar. Thereupon the Persians moved on Herat; this induced him to come to us for aid, which was afforded to him by pressure on Persia and by monetary assistance, according to the treaty with him of January, 1857. During the Mutiny he remained loyal, thoroughly faithful to his word. Meanwhile matters at Herat had been ripening towards its incorporation in Afghanistan. In 1862 he moved on that city, and after a long siege took it in 1863, dying three weeks after at the full age of seventy-five or eighty. The creator of the second Afghan State passed away just as he had completed his task. To his successor his testamentary injunction was to remain on good terms with the British, but to keep Europeans out of Afghanistan—advice that falls in line with national sentiment. In many respects resembling Ahmed Shah, he was inferior to him as a military leader and civil administrator. Less happy than the founder of the nation in his opportunities, he nevertheless ranks high in the list of notable Afghans; a place that would have been higher if he had been able to transmit his power undisturbed to his successor, as did Ahmed Shah and the late Amir. His death was followed by a five years' struggle between his sons, led respectively by the eldest, Afzal Khan, father of the late Amir, and by Sher Ali Khan. The latter ultimately triumphed, and became undisputed Amir in 1868.

It would again exceed the scope of this paper to enter at any length into what has occurred since then to the present time; for one thing the events are too recent, and controversy over them has at times been too bitter to permit of our viewing them in proper proportion; for another, we have witnessed them ourselves, and all I need do is to go lightly through the course of the past forty years. In 1869 Sher Ali Khan met the Viceroy (Lord Mayo) at Ambala, and for four years thereafter relations with him were satisfactory. Then gradually an estrangement came about, due to faults on both sides. One may say so at this date without reviving the dry bones of old controversies. The ill-feeling, however, was chiefly on his side, and was much aggravated by his mental peculiarities. Matters reached a crisis when, in 1878, he admitted a Russian mission to Kabul, just after the conclusion of the Treaty of Berlin. It is difficult to understand what was in his mind; if he was really apprehensive of Russia, the least reflection must have told him that any substantive danger to Afghanistan would

call the British to arms, however reluctant in the past they might have been to bind themselves by treaty to support him *vi et armis*. On the other hand, if the presence of the Russian mission was intended to provoke us, to put pressure on the British, to play off one against the other, then any ordinary intelligence might have known that, unless two great European Powers had determined to go to war on other grounds as well, they were exceedingly unlikely to fight about a relatively distant cause of quarrel alone, which, moreover, was capable of being settled in several ways. And especially so, just when one of these Powers had terminated an exhausting war. It is doubtful if the Afghans generally approved of Sher Ali Khan's policy in receiving the Russian mission—the dislike to the foreigner extends to all foreigners. No enthusiasm was shown on their arrival, and a prolonged stay on their part would in all probability have led to unpleasantness. However that may be, though the army was bound to fight for the Amir, the popular demonstrations against us, and in his favour, from November, 1878, to July, 1879, were few and insignificant; it is probable that the nation was indifferent, and was looking on, waiting to see. Not till Yakub Khan was deported early in December, 1879, when the people came to think that their national independence was in danger, were there popular risings to any purpose. But then they were formidable, and it was abundantly clear that the country had gone against us. At the same moment, Abdur Rahman Khan, who had taken refuge at Samarcand in 1868, left his asylum to try again his fortunes. The people were without a wise and experienced leader or head, (for Ayub Khan was not only young and untried but also far away in Herat), and the British Government wanted some Afghan authority with whom they could treat. Abdur Rahman Khan supplied the requirements of both sides, and with common consent assumed power, revealing in the course of time unexpected ability and administrative talent besides the courage and capacity for leadership on which his previous career had justified expectations. Quetta and Pishin, the Khyber, and the Kurrum Valley were taken over by us, the three first mentioned in 1879, and the last in 1892 actually, but potentially in 1881. Otherwise matters stayed much where they were before the war. Its result, however, cannot be gainsaid to have supported the belief of the Afghan people, whatever the better informed among them may think, that again we had tried to hold the country and had not succeeded. The belief may be right or it may be wrong; what they think is the important thing and not its truth.



The first care of the Amir was to consolidate his power against his rivals, and then, having gained the day, to plant firmly the roots of his authority. In both aims he succeeded, to the hilt. In 1882 he routed Ayub Khan, who had advanced to Kandahar from Herat, which he had left unprotected, and which fell to a clever expedition direct from Kabul across the Hazara hills, undertaken by one of the Amir's lieutenants while he himself marched on Kandahar to meet Ayub Khan. On his return to Kabul, in the flush of victory, he proceeded to make short work of many a tall poppy, suspected either of belonging to Sher Ali Khan's party, or of enjoying too much power. The process was interrupted by the events which led to the demarcation of the Afghan boundary between the Heri Rud and Oxus Rivers by the Boundary Commission of 1884-1886. At the time of the collision at Panjdeh, the Amir was at the Raval-Pindi conference and showed remarkable coolness and common sense; what might have been a grave shock to his position, if he had been panicstruck, passed by without doing harm. In 1886 and 1887 he had to deal with rebellions of Hazara and Ghilzai tribes which, however, never seriously assailed his security. It was somewhat different in 1888, when Ishaq Khan, his cousin, and the governor since 1880 of Afghan Turkistan, rose in rebellion. Ishaq Khan was himself the son of a former Amir, and possessed a trained and drilled army. The case differed from the movements of half-armed clans without leaders who would not command general respect and adherence if they were successful. There is no doubt that the Amir was honestly perturbed on this occasion. But his men and his fortune stood by him; Ishaq Khan was defeated, fled to Russian Turkistan, and has been seen no more on Afghan soil. This has been, so far, the last dynastic trouble, and for twenty-five years now has Afghanistan enjoyed not only freedom from civil war but also from rebellions; a general peace lasting for a quarter of a century is an unprecedented occurrence in the annals of this turbulent race.

Too much significance will not be attached to this fact; still, it is not without some meaning. Whether it is due entirely to the measures of the late Amir and of his successor; or to the impression of all concerned that internal commotions may, under the altered conditions of the day, be fraught with far greater peril to Afghanistan than was the case fifty, or even thirty, years ago; or to an improvement in the political good sense of the nation and its leaders—it is impossible to say. Probably more than one cause has been at work. In any case, this long peace is a reassuring symptom, for the future of the State depends upon its stability.

After the suppression of Ishaq Khan's insurrection, the Amir continued the consolidation of his power, which had been interrupted; the conquest of Kafiristan commended itself greatly to his people and to the Mullahs as an action eminently worthy of a Mahomedan Sovereign; and for some time before his death, in 1901, the late Amir was undeniably as nearly absolute as any Afghan ruler can be—with the general approval, it must always be understood, of his nation. His eldest son, Amir Habibulla Khan, peacefully succeeded him, and has so far reigned in peace.

Since the Boundary Commission of 1884, the salient points of contact with the British have been the Durand mission to Kabul in 1893-94, which, by the fixation of the boundary known as the Durand line, did much to remove causes for friction in the debatable lands between Afghanistan and India; the visit of S. Nasrulla Khan, the Amir's second son, to England; the Pamir Delimitation Commission, which demarcated the Russo-Afghan boundary on the headwaters of the Oxus; the MacMahon mission, which performed somewhat similar offices in Perso-Afghan disputes near Sistan; the Dane mission to Kabul, and the visit of the Amir Habibulla Khan to India in the winter of 1906-7.

Looking back now over the period, the lifetime of a generation, which has elapsed since 1880, when the late Amir ascended the throne, what, taking it "fair and large," has been the state of affairs with Afghanistan in so far as we are concerned? The answer I submit is, "On the whole, satisfactory." The "Amir's Soliloquy," written by Sir A. Lyall in 1881, concludes with the following verse:

" But the kingdoms of Islam are crumbling,
 And round me a voice ever rings
 Of death, and the doom of my country—
 Shall I be the last of its kings?"

Fate has decreed otherwise. That there has been friction, and at times serious friction, is true; but taking everything into consideration, the wonder is not that there have been difficulties, but that they have not been much worse. The causes for irritation have not lain alone on one side of the boundary—if the Amirs have not always looked at affairs with our eyes, neither have we always been at pains to put ourselves in their position. But on the whole, and in matters of great importance, we have stood faithfully by each other; the British have not sought to subvert the reigning dynasty, and the Amirs have been loyal to their pledges towards the British. Whenever necessity arose British officers have

been given free access to all parts of Afghanistan, and the Afghan Government has been content to have its territorial boundaries laid down by British officers. On our side much generosity has been shown in the matter of money and arms, and readiness to meet the Afghans half-way in insuring the stability of their Government and nation. The change that has come about in the relations of the European Powers has happily removed one, and the most potent, cause of possible trouble. The deep-seated suspicion of the nation that we intend some day to possess ourselves of the country, grounded as it is on what has happened in the past, is the chief obstacle to the existence of really cordial relations. Eradicate that suspicion (which only within the last few years has found expression in the creation of a national quasi-militia by encouraging the importation of arms and ammunition) and you will go far towards establishing a footing of mutual confidence and trust, much as, for instance, that existing with Nepal. Then "the sun of friendship will shine clear in the sky of contentment, not darkened by the clouds of distrust."

DISCUSSION

The CHAIRMAN: Speaking for myself, I feel much more thoroughly informed about the characteristics of the Afghans than I was before the lecture. Mr. Merk brought out many instructive and suggestive points. I was particularly struck with the comparison between Afghanistan and Switzerland. It is an interesting parallel, and one which creates ideas and gives matter for thought. To me it is quite new to learn that there is so large an admixture of Mongol races in Afghanistan. I wish there had been a map, as it would be interesting to have the racial distribution in the country. I did not quite follow Mr. Merk when he dealt with the division of the country into Afghan and Pathan sections. I wish he had told us a little more in detail about our present relations with Kabul, as affected, for instance, by the visit of the Ameer to India in 1906-7. As I understand the present position, there is a rather dangerous feeling growing up in connection with the war against Turkey first in Tripoli and later in the Balkan States. I am informed that in Afghanistan, as well as in India, Mahomedan feeling has been very deeply stirred in connection with these wars, and that it is considered that the policy of this country

has been rather pusillanimous. I will leave it to others to continue the discussion, and will only say how greatly we are indebted to Mr. Merk for the extremely interesting review he has given us.

GENERAL SIR THOMAS GORDON: I should like to express my admiration of Mr. Merk's paper from the standpoint of one who has cultivated close attention to Afghan affairs for the past forty-five years. I was thrown a good deal into the company of the Ameer Shere Ali when he came to meet Lord Mayo at Umballa in 1869; and when I was on the Oxus in 1874 I had hoped that my acquaintance with him would be renewed. The occasion was the diplomatic Mission to Kashgar, and the party included two members of this Society—Sir Henry Trotter and Colonel John Biddulph. The professions of the Ameer toward this country were most friendly; but when he heard that our wish was to return by way of Herat or Kabul we found that a change had come over him. A sort of madness seized upon him, and he began to communicate with the Russian side: We had to retrace our steps to Chinese Turkestan; but, after all, that did not turn out to be a disadvantage, as it enabled us to explore the Great Pamir, which had not been done before. Some years later I was on duty at the Rawal Pindi Durbar when Lord Dufferin met the late Ameer Abdur Rahman Khan. It fell to my lot to communicate to the Ameer the telegram announcing the Panjdeh incident, and I can testify to the cool judgment and good sense he showed in the negotiations which followed.

I regard Afghanistan as in many ways the most remarkable of the sovereign States on the great Continent of Asia. Amidst all its difficulties it maintains the political cohesion established by the late Ameer, and it keeps on fairly friendly terms with neighbouring countries. In fact, having regard to its difficulties, it is a model State, and it is a pity that we cannot see the model reproduced in Persia. (Cheers.)

COLONEL A. C. YATE said that as a colleague of Mr. Merk's on the Afghan Boundary Commission, and as one knowing something of Afghanistan, he would like to touch upon one or two characteristics of the Afghans he had met. When he went from the Boundary Commission near Herat to Meshed, he there met Sardār Mahommed Hashim Khan, who had been in Kabul in 1880, but deemed it expedient to seek a home elsewhere when Abdur Rahman Khan came to the throne. We were not very much accustomed to think of the Afghans as giving way to strong emotion, but when this man talked to him about the Panjdeh affair of March 30, 1885, his feelings were so intense that tears came to his eyes, and with strong emotion he urged that it was the duty of England to avenge the affront put upon the Afghan nation by the Russians. The incident was worthy of notice, as showing the strong affection of the Afghan for his country, even though an exile from it. He afterwards saw him at Karachi, where he was interned. Since leaving India he had not been able to follow his destiny, and did

not know whether he was still alive. (MR. MERK: No.) Another trait of Afghan character he would like to illustrate by an incident also connected with the battle of Panjdeh. Some years after that event he was in the train at Karachi, when he heard someone on the platform talking Persian, and saw it was a man without any feet. He left the carriage to talk with him, and learned that he had taken part in the battle of Panjdeh. The night following the battle was one of terrible weather. His regiment struggled on in the teeth of a merciless blizzard, and he himself fell out and was left in the snow, but the next day was brought into Herat. He was taken to his home at Farah, and there lost his feet. He was now at Karachi returning from the Hajj. He (Colonel Yate) felt very sorry for the poor fellow, because his limbs were not healed, ending in sloughing stumps of bone, a painful sight. He gave him a note to the P.M.O. at Quetta, but heard no more of him. This chance meeting was worth mentioning, as showing the strength of religious feeling on the part at least of some Afghans, seeing that in his maimed condition he had undertaken the long and difficult pilgrimage to Mecca.

One of his most curious experiences of the Afghan character was during the time when he was a prisoner in an Afghan fort. It came about in a purely accidental way. He went up to Quetta to meet Lord Kitchener, and then returned to Chaman to make preparations for the visit of His Excellency, who, with Sir Alfred Gaselee and Colonel C. E. Yate, was expected the next day. He had always supposed that the visit of these eminent soldiers put the Afghan troops on the *qui vive*. In his morning gallops he had often passed across the frontier line, but he did so just once too often, to find himself confronted with men with loaded firearms, and as he carried no arms himself, he felt bound to act in a discreet manner. He therefore proposed a visit to the Afghan commandant at the fort of Spin Baldak, where he was detained for nineteen days, until the Ameer gave permission for him to be allowed to return to British territory. A telephoto-meter picture of Spin-Baldak, taken by himself in 1902, is reproduced in Sir V. Chirol's "Middle Eastern Question." The life he led there was not one of comfort (no life in prison was), and very often his guards were difficult to deal with. They were most suspicious of him and of each other. The men who were responsible for him were extremely cautious in every word and action, more from dread of what might be reported behind their backs to the Ameer, he thought, than from any other cause. One evening they invited him to a musical party, and he heard the Rabab played, as he had never heard it before nor since, extremely well. Another curious incident was the punishment of an Afghan havildar who had allowed a prisoner to escape. The commandant told him that he might at least apologize for his negligence, but the havildar replied: "I never yet have apologized to man; only to God." That

answer did not have the desired effect, for it convinced the commandant that the only method of dealing with him was a very sound flogging, which he got.

Probably many of them had been reading Maud Diver's recent book on Eldred Pottinger, "The Hero of Herat." He had had some correspondence with Mrs. Diver on the subject. The book reminded him of a remarkable incident which occurred in November, 1841, when first the Afghans broke out at Kabul. We had then a Gurkha regiment at Charikar. Want of water forced that regiment to attempt to break through the thousands of Afghans who besieged it. Only two men found their way into Kabul—viz., Eldred Pottinger and Lieutenant John Colpoys Haughton, father of Colonel John Haughton, who distinguished himself so highly in the Tirah Campaign of 1897-8, and died so gallantly. How little their escape from the perils of their position was expected was vividly brought out in Lady Sale's "Journal." "We received them," she wrote, "as men risen from the dead."

Had time permitted it, it would have been most interesting to consider the position of Afghanistan at this moment, and its political, military, and commercial future. The Ameer of Afghanistan is the only Mahomedan potentate who to-day can call his soul and his country his own. There is reason to believe that he is fully prepared to invite the Mahomedan world, including His British Majesty's seventy millions of Musulman subjects in India, to rally round him.

In reply to a question as to whether he would favour the removal of restriction in the importation of arms into Afghanistan, Mr. Merk said he did not mean to convey that impression by his remarks at the end of the paper. He said that Afghan suspicion of British intentions had led to their forming a sort of national militia. That seemed the only explanation of the Ameer allowing a general arming. He must have weighed the consequences of the act, for it was a policy no Eastern ruler would adopt if he could help it. The reference to the militia in the paper did not imply approval. So far as we were concerned, he would advocate allowing the importation of no rifles except what we gave the Ameer. The Chairman had asked him a question about the effect of the wars in Morocco, Tripoli, and the Balkans. Any effect produced in Afghanistan, he thought, was simply due to nervousness, arising from a natural feeling as to the exercise of the power of European States generally. In his view, that was all the more reason for our reassuring them. The overthrow of temporal Moslem power was making them suspicious, and we should let them see most clearly that our attitude was free from ulterior motive.

The CHAIRMAN said that, in reference to Colonel Yate's remarks, he would like to mention an incident of the Ameer's visit to India when he was Governor of Bombay. In maintaining his authority among his

own people, the Ameer was credited with the adoption of excessive punitive measures. At some sports His Majesty attended he was greatly horrified because one competitor sprained his ankle; indeed, he wished the whole of the sports to be stopped. His feelings were stirred by this most trifling accident, and this showed what humane feeling might exist among the Afghans, despite their methods of dealing with malefactors.



