

vital interests of its own Empire." That is to say—the Ameer was to get nothing except what former Viceroys had already given to him, and whatever more we might find it for our own interests to do on his behalf. After this confession, it is not to be denied that all the professions of Lord Lytton that he was now offering to the Ameer what he had desired, must be condemned as "ostensible pretexts."

I wish I had nothing more to add to the history of these deplorable transactions. But, unfortunately, there is another part of them, which must be told.

Lord Lytton had with him at Simla Captain Grey, who had been Persian Interpreter at the Conference at Umballa. As such he had become intimate with Noor Mohammed Khan, the confidential Minister of the Ameer. It seems to have occurred to the Viceroy that this friendship might be used for the purpose of representing to the Ameer that the Government of India was now offering to him all that he had ever asked or demanded. Accordingly, on the 13th of October, which was two days after Sir L. Pelly had been furnished with all these elaborate limitations, and multitudinous saving clauses, Captain Grey was employed to write a private letter to his friend Noor Mohammed. It referred, coaxingly, to the feeling of the Afghan Minister, that he had ground for annoyance at what had passed in 1873. It did not expressly say that the writer concurred in this impression. But Noor Mohammed was asked to "let by-gones be by-

gones." It pointed out to him that the Viceroy had now "accepted all the propositions which he (Noor Mohammed) made in 1873," imposing only the condition that he should be enabled to watch a frontier for which he was to render himself responsible, and that the Ameer, his friend and ally, should receive his Envoys. It then proceeded to remind the Afghan Minister of his alleged expressions at Umballa in 1869, and at Simla in 1873, as to the willingness of the Ameer at some future time to receive British officers in his Kingdom. It went on to represent the difficulty in the way at that time as having been the objection of former Viceroys to assume responsibility for the Afghan frontier. It represented that the existing Viceroy had no such objection, and was now prepared to assume that responsibility. In conclusion it intimated that hitherto, under former Viceroys, there had been "vacillation," because in the absence of a Treaty, "Ministers at home, and Viceroys in this country, exercised an unfettered discretion," but "where a Treaty has been entered into everyone would be bound by its conditions."*

What can be said of this letter—of its representations of fact—of its constructions of conduct—of its interpretation of the Viceroy's offers? It seems to me that nothing can be said which could be too severe. It is in the highest degree disingenuous and

* Afghan Corresp., II. 1878, No. 3, pp. 9, 10.

crooked. No part of it is worse than that in which it re-affirms by implication the distinction between the binding character of a Treaty, and the not-binding character of a Viceroy's promises. It represents former Viceroys as having taken advantage of this distinction in vacillating conduct. For this accusation, so far as I know, there is no foundation in fact. Lord Mayo and I had objected in 1869 to a Treaty, not because it would have made the promises we did give more binding than we considered them to be when less formally recorded, but because a Treaty was expected by both parties to involve other promises—of a different kind—which we were not willing to give. But another most objectionable part of this letter is that in which the Viceroy endeavours to persuade the Afghan Minister that he was now offering to the Ameer all he wanted. It is to be remembered that besides the knowledge which the Government of India had at its command in respect to the large expectations of the Ameer in 1873 and in 1869, this letter was written just six days after our own Agent at Cabul had told the Viceroy that what the Ameer wanted was that "we should agree to support the Ameer, on demand, with troops and money, in all and every case of attack from without."*

Before proceeding to the next scene in this strange, eventful history, it will be well to notice how Lord

* *Ibid.*, p. 182.

Lytton himself tells his story, in the Simla Narrative, of the transactions through which we have just passed. That narrative professes to be founded on the documents which it enclosed, and yet it departs widely in many most important particulars from the facts which these documents supply. The account given in the 26th paragraph, of the causes of the Ameer's dissatisfaction, does not set forth these causes faithfully, as given by our native Agent, misstating their number, and, above all, putting them in a new order of relative importance. These deviations are not accidental. They appear to be all connected with one idea,—that of throwing as much blame as the Viceroy could on his immediate predecessor in the Government of India, and of keeping as much as possible in the background, or of suppressing altogether those causes of dissatisfaction on the part of the Ameer which were inseparably connected with the desire of that Ruler to get what no British Government could give him. There is a total omission of one cause of complaint mentioned (the sixth) by the Agent, for no other assignable reason than that this one reflected directly on the tone and terms of one of Lord Lytton's own recent letters to the Ameer. In the presence of much graver matter, it is not worth while pursuing this characteristic of the Simla Narrative in greater detail. It is, indeed, of much more than personal—it is of political importance. The Government of India is a continuous body, and does not formally change with a change of Viceroy. Any

unfaithfulness to perfect fairness and accuracy in a narrative professing to give an account of its own action under former Viceroys, if it is committed deliberately, is a grave political offence. If it is committed unconsciously, and simply under the impulse of a strong desire to make out a personal or a party case, it is still deserving of serious notice and rebuke.

The next characteristic observable in the Simla Narrative of this time is the endeavour it makes to accumulate charges and innuendos against the unfortunate Ameer in respect to his communications with General Kaufmann. The statement in the 26th paragraph of the Simla Narrative is that the Ameer had been losing no opportunity of improving his relations with the Russian authorities in Central Asia, and that between General Kaufmann and his Highness "permanent diplomatic intercourse was now virtually established, by means of a constant succession of special Agents, who held frequent conferences with the Ameer, the subject and result of which were successfully kept secret." There is no justification for this most exaggerated statement in the papers which accompany Lord Lytton's narrative. On the contrary, he had been distinctly and emphatically told by our Agent on the 7th October, at Simla, that "the Ameer regarded the Agents from Russia as sources of embarrassment."* All the authentic informa-

* Ibid., Inclos. 18, p. 181.

tion which had reached the Government was consistent with this view. Our Agent at Cabul had indeed reported that on the 9th of June a messenger had come with a letter from General Kaufmann, and that this messenger had been received for half an hour, at a formal interview, by the Ameer. The letter had not then been seen by our Agent, but he believed it to be "merely a complimentary one, conveying information of the fall of Kokhand."*

The only other information in support of Lord Lytton's sweeping accusations, is a letter from a native news-writer at Candahar, who retailed, on the 9th of August, certain reports which he had got from a man who "hired out baggage-animals in Turkestan, Bokhara, and Cabul." This man, on being asked for "the news of the country," professed to retail a story which, he said, had been told him by a certain Sirdar, who, however, was now dead. The story was that this Sirdar had taken with him to Cabul, secretly, "a Russian who came from Turkestan." This Russian, it was further said, used to have secret interviews with the Ameer. Shere Ali is then represented, in the tale, as having, "a few days after the arrival" of this Russian, sent for a certain Mulla, Mushk Alam, whom he consulted about a religious war against the English. What the connexion was between a Russian Agent and the "Mulla" is not explained or even sug-

* Ibid., Inclos. 12, p. 178.

gested.* This stupid and incoherent story, founded on the gossip of a trader in baggage-animals, and bearing on the face of it all the marks of such an origin, seems to be the only foundation for the circumstantial accusations made by the Viceroy of India against Shere Ali in the 26th paragraph of the Simla Narrative, composed when he was hotly engaged in running that Ruler down.

There is, indeed, one half-line in that paragraph which leads us to a very curious illustration of the inconsistencies and inaccuracies which are characteristic of all Lord Lytton's State Papers referring to the Afghan question. That half-line refers to the communications which had been going on from time to time for several years, between the Russian Governor-General of Turkestan and the Ameer of Cabul. It is, of course, perfectly true that General Kaufmann had sent letters to Cabul. It was just three weeks before our Cabul Agent came to Simla that the Viceroy had sent that alarmed telegram to the Secretary of State, on the 16th of September, touching the letter of General Kaufmann which had been received by the Ameer on the 14th of June. That letter had given to the Ameer a long account and explanation of the conquest of Kokhand. We have seen in a former page how Lord Lytton, in his telegram of the 16th, and still more in his relative

* Ibid., No. 36, Inclos. 13, p. 178.

Despatch of the 18th of September, had denounced these letters as a breach of the Agreement of Russia with us, and how the Cabinet at home had taken up this view, and, within certain limits, had acted upon it. But in order to support this view, and make it plausible, the Viceroy had been led to represent the correspondence as one which had been always objected to by the Government of India, although they had never before formally remonstrated. The only foundation for this was that on one previous occasion Lord Northbrook had called attention to the tone of one of these letters—an instance of vigilance on the part of that Viceroy which had been entirely thrown away on her Majesty's Government, who had taken no notice whatever of his observation. But with this exception, it was entirely untrue that the Government of India had viewed the correspondence with alarm. On the contrary, as I have shown, both Lord Mayo and Lord Northbrook had encouraged the Ameer to welcome those letters, and to answer them with corresponding courtesy. Suddenly, in the Simla Narrative, Lord Lytton discovers that this is the true view of the case, because he was constructing a paragraph the object of which was to set forth the errors of former Viceroys. He, therefore, not only sets forth this view of the facts, but he sets it forth with emphasis and exaggeration. He says that the Ameer, in "losing no opportunity of improving his

relations with Russian authorities in Central Asia," had acted "in accordance with our own exhortations."* It is needless to say that this is in flagrant contradiction of the representation conveyed in the despatch of September 18th, 1876.† It is further interesting to observe that, in that despatch, the "baggage-animal" story about the "secret nightly conferences" between a Russian agent and the Ameer,—which reappears in the Simla Narrative as if it were an undoubted fact,—is referred to as coming from "an unofficial source of information" which the Government of India were, "of course, unable to verify."

Having now despatched—and having thus thoroughly prepared—his Agents alternately to frighten, to cajole, and to deceive the Ameer, the Viceroy proceeded on a tour to the frontier, and continued to pursue the same Imperial policy through some very remarkable proceedings. The time had come for converting Major Sandeman's mission to Khelat into the permanent occupation of Quetta. On the 22nd of October the Viceroy's Military Secretary selected a site for permanent barracks at that place. Under the pretext of disposing of Major Sandeman's escort, a detachment of Punjaub Infantry was posted there, and in no long time this force was enlarged to

* Ibid., No. 36, para. 26, p. 168.

† Central Asia, No. I. 1878, p. 83.

a small brigade of all arms. On or about the same day, the 22nd of October, Lord Lytton reached Peshawur, and a few days afterwards he gave orders for the construction of a bridge of boats at Khoshalgurh on the Indus. This bridge of boats—of which many months later, in June, 1877, the Indian Secretary of State declared he had never heard—was actually made and established in the course of a week. Officers were then sent to Tul, on the Afghan border, to inspect the ground preparatory to the establishment there of a military force. Military and commissariat stores were laid in at Kohat, and a concentration of troops was effected at Rawul Pindi. Following upon these strange and suspicious proceedings, of which no rational explanation has been ever given, the fussy activity of the Viceroy found employment in bribing the Maharajah of Cashmere to advance troops beyond Gilgit and towards Citval, so as to establish his authority over tribes which the Ameer of Cabul claimed as feudatories of his Kingdom. The immediate effect of all these measures combined was to make Shere Ali feel himself threatened on three different sides—on the east through Cashmere, on the south from Rawul Pindi, and on the west from Khelat. We cannot safely accept the denials of the Government that these movements were unconnected with the pressure which they were exercising on the Ameer. But it is at least extremely probable they had also a larger purpose. At this very time the firmness of the Emperor of Russia at Livadia was

confounding all the feeble and dilatory pleas of the English Cabinet. It is highly probable that at least some members of that Cabinet were seriously contemplating a war with Russia both in Europe and in Asia, for the purpose of maintaining in Europe the corrupt government of Turkey. The military preparations of the Viceroy may very probably have been due to personal instructions to prepare for an attack upon Russia in Central Asia—in which attack Afghanistan would have been used as a base. Under any supposition the Ameer was threatened.

Let us now return to Cabul, and see what was passing there.

Our Agent returned to that capital in the end of October, 1876. The consultations and deliberations which were held by the Ameer lasted two months—that is, till the end of December. Lord Lytton says, in the Simla Narrative, that the Ameer evinced a desire to gain time. Of course he did ; that is to say, he wished to delay as long as possible coming to a decision which placed before him the alternatives of sacrificing finally the friendship of the British Government, as well as all the promises, written and verbal, which had been given him by former Viceroys,—or of submitting to proposals which, as he and all his advisers firmly believed, involved the sacrifice of his independence. Lord Lytton again says that he was evidently waiting for the war which was likely to break out between Russia and England, in order that he might sell his alliance to the most successful, or to the

highest bidder. There is not a scrap of evidence in support of this view, as a matter of fact, and it is in the highest degree improbable as a matter of speculation. Shere Ali was far too shrewd a man to suppose that his alliance would be of much practical value to either party in such a contest. The whole idea is evolved out of Lord Lytton's inner consciousness. There is plenty of evidence that both the Viceroy and his official chiefs were all thinking of Russia and of nothing else. There is no evidence whatever that Shere Ali was thinking of them at all. There were, of course, plenty more of those rumours about Russian agents at Cabul which belong to the "baggage-animal" class. But such direct and authentic evidence as we have is to this effect—that the Ameer and his Durbar, and his Chiefs whom he consulted, were engrossed by one prevailing fear—that the violent conduct, threatening language, and imperious demands of the British Government, indicated a design to assume complete dominion in their country. So strong is this evidence that Lord Lytton is compelled to try to damage it, and accordingly he does not scruple to hint that Atta Mohammed Khan, our native Agent, who had for many years enjoyed the confidence of former Viceroys, was unfaithful to the Government he had so long served. In the 29th paragraph of the Simla Narrative, in reference to the delays which the Ameer had interposed on the ground of health, Lord Lytton complains that the Vakeel had accepted the excuse "either through

stupidity or disloyalty." Again, he says that the reports of our Agent had become "studiously infrequent, vague, and unintelligible." This is an assertion which is not borne out—which, indeed, is directly contradicted—by the papers which have been presented to Parliament. The letters of Atta Mohammed range from the 23rd of November* to the 25th of December† inclusive, and, during a period of less than a month, the number of them was no less than eight. Nor is it at all true that they are vague or unintelligible. On the contrary, they convey a very vivid and graphic account of the condition of things which it was the business of our Agent to describe. The picture presented is one of distracted councils, and of a sincere desire not to break with the powerful Government which was already violating its own promises, and was threatening a weak State with further injustice. Of course these letters of Atta Mohammed were not pleasant reading for Lord Lytton, and it is, perhaps, natural that he should disparage them.‡ But no impartial man who reads

* Ibid., No. 36, Inclos. 26, p. 192.

† Ibid., Inclos. 33, p. 194.

‡ It is a curious comment on this most unjustifiable attack by the Viceroy on the character of Atta Mohammed Khan, that on the 13th of October, at the close of the last of the Conferences with him, Lord Lytton had presented him with a watch and chain, as well as 10,000 rupees, "in acknowledgment of the appreciation of the Government of his past faithful service" See Ibid., p. 185.

them can fail to see that they convey a very much more correct impression of the facts than the haphazard assertions and reckless accusations of the Viceroy. In particular, the very first of these letters, in its very brevity, is eminently instructive. It describes a sort of Cabinet Council to which the Agent was admitted, and its general result. That result was that the Government of Afghanistan was not in a position to receive British officers within the frontiers of that State; and the Agent adds, with great descriptive power, "The contemplation of such an arrangement filled them with apprehension."* Again, in the two letters dated December 21st, the Ameer is reported—in observations which described only too faithfully the hasty and excited action of the Government of India towards him—to have expressed the natural apprehensions with which this action inspired him, and the difficulty of so defining and limiting the duties of British Agents as really to prevent them from interfering in the government of his Kingdom. These accounts are perfectly clear, rational, and consistent, and the unjust account which is given of them by the Viceroy seems to be simply the result of the fretful irritation with which the Viceroy regarded every opposition to, or even remonstrance with, his new "Imperial Policy."

At last, towards the close of December, 1876, the

* Ibid., No. 36, Inclos. 26, p. 192.

Ameer, frightened by the threats of the Viceroy, and plied by the urgency of our Agent,—half-forced to accept the hated basis, and half-hoping to be still able to escape from it—made up his mind to send his old confidential Minister, Noor Mohammed, to meet Sir Lewis Pelly at Peshawur. In the 29th paragraph of the Simla Narrative it is a comfort to find at least one little bit of fair statement. We are there told that “the Ameer, finding himself unable to evade any longer the issue put to him, without bringing his relations with us to an open rupture, dispatched his Minister.” So much for the assertions, made more than once afterwards, that the Ameer had sought the Conferences, and had volunteered to send his Minister. The Conferences began on the 30th of January, 1877.

Let us now look back for a moment at the result of the transactions which we have traced.

First, we have the Secretary of State for India describing, and, by implication, disparaging, the assurances given to the Ameer by former Viceroys, as “ambiguous formulas.”*

Secondly, we have the same Minister instructing the new Viceroy that a dynastic guarantee need be nothing more than “the frank recognition of a *de facto* order in the succession established by a *de facto* Government,” and that this “does not imply or

* Afghan Corresp., I., 1878, No. 35, Inclos. para. 15, p. 158.

necessitate any intervention in the internal affairs of that State.”*

Thirdly, we have like instructions with regard to the other guarantees which had been desired by the Ameer, and which were all to be framed on the same principle—namely, that of the British Government “reserving to themselves entire freedom of judgment as to the character of circumstances involving the obligation of material support to the Ameer.”†

Fourthly, we have the Viceroy preparing, very elaborately, a “Draft Treaty,”‡ and a “Subsidiary Secret and Explanatory Agreement,”§ for carrying into effect the instructions and suggestions of the Secretary of State ; this being done by Articles so full of qualifying words, and so beset with saving clauses, that the Government did indeed effectually reserve to itself the most “entire freedom” under every conceivable circumstance, to give, or not to give, to the Ameer the assistance of which he desired to be assured.

Fifthly, we have the fact that both the Secretary of State and the Viceroy had before them authoritative documents proving that guarantees or assurances of this kind, which were not only conditional, but wholly made up of conditions within conditions, were not the

* Ibid., para. 16.

† Ibid., para. 24, p. 159.

‡ Ibid., No. 36, Inclos. 24, p. 189.

§ Ibid., No. 36, Inclos. 25, p. 191.

kind of guarantee or of assurance which the Ameer had asked for in 1869, and which he had ever since continued to desire.*

Sixthly, we have the fact that this Draft Treaty, with its intricate network of saving clauses, was not to be shown to the Ameer till after he had accepted the Viceroy's basis, or, in other words, till he had conceded to the British Government all it wanted.

Seventhly, we have the fact that the Viceroy endeavoured, in the meantime, by every device in his power, down even to the abuse of private friendship, to persuade the Ameer that the British Government was now offering to him conditions "in every particular the same as those desired by the Ameer himself on the occasion of his visit to Umballa in 1869, and again, in more or less general terms, so urged by him on the Government of India through his Minister, Noor Mohammed Khan, in 1873."†

Eighthly, we have the fact that the Viceroy, through the letter of Captain Grey to Noor Mohammed, tried still farther to enhance the value of his own offers by contrasting them with the "vacillation" of former Governments both in India and at home; which vacillation he ascribed to the absence of a

* Ibid., No. 19, paras. 9, 10, 11 and 45, pp. 93, 94, 96; also, Ibid., No. 36, Inclos. 18, p. 182.

† Ibid., No. 36, Inclos. 23, p. 187.

Treaty, and to the consequent "unfettered discretion" retained by Ministers and Viceroys.*

Lastly, we have the same Viceroy writing home to the Secretary of State that the concessions which that Minister had sanctioned, and which he himself had offered to the Ameer, "would not practically commit the British Government to anything more than a formal re-affirmation of the assurances already given by it, through Lord Mayo, to the Ameer in 1869."†

These transactions are but a fitting introduction to those which follow. If General Kaufmann had been detected in such a course of diplomacy towards any of the Khans of Central Asia, we know what sort of language would have been applied to it, and justly applied to it, in England.

* Afghan. Corresp., II., No. 3, pp. 9, 10.

† Afghan. Corresp. I., 1878, No. 36, para. 27, p. 168.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FROM THE PESHAWUR CONFERENCE IN JANUARY,
1877, TO THE WAR IN NOVEMBER, 1878.

THE great object of the British Envoy, from the first moment of the negotiations at Peshawur, was to fix upon the Ameer the position of an applicant for a new Treaty, in consequence of his dissatisfaction with the previous engagements of the British Government. Assuming him to occupy that position, it was easy to represent the new stipulations which he so much dreaded as necessary and natural conditions of what he desired.

It will be observed that this misrepresentation of the relative position of the two parties in the negotiation was part of the Viceroy's plan. His difficulty was this—that the British Government wanted to get something from the Ameer, whereas the Ameer did not want to get anything from the British Government, knowing, as he did, the price he would have to pay for it. The Viceroy felt the awkwardness of this position, and he determined to get over it, if he could, by the very simple experiment of pretending that the facts were other-

wise. In the 27th paragraph* of the Simla Narrative we have this policy explained under forms of language which but thinly veil its terrible unfairness. "The Ameer's apparent object was to place the British Government in the position of a petitioner; and that position it behoved the British Government to reverse." Yes,—if it could be done with truth. But the process of "reversing" facts is an awkward process. Sir Lewis Pelly did his best. He began at once by pretending that it was the Ameer, and not the British Government, who was desirous of some new arrangement.

Against this representation of the facts, from the first moments of the Conference, Noor Mohammed resolutely contended. He had one great advantage. Truth was on his side. The Ameer had indeed at one time wanted to get some things which had been refused him. But he had got other things which he still more highly valued, and he knew that the great aim of this new Viceroy was to get him to sacrifice what former Viceroys had granted, without really giving him what they had refused. The contention, therefore, that Shere Ali wanted this new Treaty, and was dissatisfied with the pledges he had already received from the British Government, was a contention not in accordance with the facts. Noor Mohammed saw at once the true aspect of the case, and the fallacious

* Afghan. Corresp. I., 1878, No. 36, p. 168.

pretexts which were put forward by Sir Lewis Pelly. The very foremost of these was a reference to the desires which Shere Ali had at first intimated at Umballa, but which he had abandoned before he quitted the presence of Lord Mayo. The Cabul Envoy would not hear of the allegation that the Ameer was dissatisfied with the promises of his old and firm friends, Lord Lawrence and Lord Mayo, and that the engagements of those Viceroys had any need of being supplemented by the new proposals of Lord Lytton. He repelled with firmness every suggestion, every insinuation, every argument to this effect. It is, indeed, impossible not to admire the ability and the dignity with which Noor Mohammed, whilst labouring under a fatal and a painful disease, fought this battle of truth and justice,—in what he considered to be the interests of his master and the independence of his country.

From the first he took very high ground. At a private and unofficial meeting with the British Envoy on the 3rd of February, Sir Lewis Pelly said, on parting, that it would depend on the Ameer whether the Afghan Envoy's departure should prove as happy as he desired. The Afghan replied, "No, it depends on you;" and then, correcting himself, he added, with a higher and better pride, "In truth, it depends neither on you nor on the Ameer, but on justice."* And yet, when speaking as a private individual, he did not shrink

* Ibid., No. 36, Inclos. 37, p. 198.

from admitting the dependent position of his Sovereign on account of the comparative weakness of his country. "Your Government," he said, at the close of the first meeting, to Sir Lewis Pelly, "is a great and powerful one: ours is a small and weak one. We have long been on terms of friendship, and the Ameer now clings to the skirt of the British Government, and till his hand be cut off he will not relax his hold of it."* But when speaking as the Envoy of the Ameer, and conducting the negotiations on his behalf, he spoke with a power and force which evidently caused great embarrassment to his opponent. Some of his simple questions must have been cutting to the quick. Thus, at the meeting on the 5th of February, he asked, "But if this Viceroy should make an agreement, and a successor should say, 'I am not bound by it'?" On this a remarkable scene occurred. The British Envoy, not liking apparently so direct a question, began to reply indirectly. Noor Mohammed at once interrupted—feeling, as he had a right to feel, that however inferior his master might be in power, he was the equal of the Viceroy in this contest of argument. The Afghan Envoy said he "wanted Yes or No." The British Envoy took refuge in evasion: "With the permission of the Afghan Envoy he would make his own remarks in the manner which might appear

* Ibid., No. 36, Inclos. 35, p. 197.

to him to be proper." Again, Noor Mohammed asked, "Whether all the Agreements and Treaties, from the time of Sir John Lawrence and the late Ameer, up to the time of Lord Northbrook and the present Ameer, are invalid and annulled?"* And again, when Sir Lewis Pelly had replied that he had no authority to annul any Treaty, but to propose a supplementary Treaty to those already existing, the Afghan Envoy asked, "Supposing the present Viceroy makes a Treaty with us, and twenty years after he has gone, another Viceroy says he wishes to revise and supplement it, what are we to do?" To these home-thrusts Sir Lewis Pelly could only reply by insisting on the pretext that it was the Ameer who had expressed dissatisfaction—a reply which Noor Mohammed had no difficulty in disposing of by telling the British Envoy that if the Ameer was dissatisfied, it was "owing to transgression of previous agreements."† Again and again he repudiated any wish on the part of the Ameer to have a new Treaty. He had "returned from Umballa without anxiety."‡

At last, having maintained this contest with admirable spirit for several days, Noor Mahommed intimated that he desired an opportunity of setting forth his master's views in one continuous statement, during

* Ibid., Inclos. 38, p. 199.

† Ibid., Inclos. 38, p. 199.

‡ Ibid., p. 200.

which he was not to be interrupted. Accordingly, this speech of the Afghan Envoy began on the 8th of February. The exhaustion of anxiety and of disease compelled him twice to stop, and to resume on another day. His statement, therefore, extended over three meetings, beginning on the 8th and ending on the 12th of February, 1877.

In this long argument he took his stand at once on the firm ground of claiming fidelity to the former engagements of the British Government. "If the authorities of the British Government have a regard for their own promises, and act upon them with sincerity, in accordance with the customary friendship which was formerly, and is now (what courtesy!), observed between the two Governments, there is no ground for any anxiety."* He cut off the pretext, which has since been repeated, both in the Simla Narrative and in its fellow, the London Narrative, that the Ameer had shown his desire to get some new Treaty, by sending his Envoy to meet Lord Northbrook in 1873. He reminded Sir Lewis Pelly that it was not the Ameer, but the Viceroy, who had sought that meeting. He repeated this twice, and asked, "The wishes, therefore, on whose part were they?" He objected to the garbled extracts which had been quoted to prove his master's dissatisfaction, and spoke with censure of "one paragraph of many paragraphs being brought

* Ibid., Inclos. 41, p. 203.

forward" to support erroneous interpretations. At great length, and with much earnestness, he contended that the Ameer had been satisfied by Lord Northbrook's confirmation of the assurances and promises of Lord Lawrence and of Lord Mayo, quoted a letter from the Ameer to this effect, and concluded an elaborate explanation on the subject by these words: "Therefore, till the time of the departure of Lord Northbrook, that previous course continued to be observed."* The only complaint he made of that Viceroy was his subsequent intercession on behalf of Yakoob Khan. But so far as regarded the assurances and engagements of the British Government, he wanted nothing in addition to those which had been concluded with Lord Lawrence and Lord Mayo.

On the third day of his laborious statement, the Cabul Envoy entered upon the question of questions—that of the reception of British officers. Here, again, he took his stand on the Treaty of 1857 and on the promises of Lord Mayo. He deprecated a course which would "scatter away former assurances." He declared that the people of Afghanistan "had a dread of this proposal, and it is firmly fixed in their minds, and deeply rooted in their hearts, that if Englishmen, or other Europeans, once set foot in their country, it will sooner or later pass out of their hands."† He referred to the

* Ibid., No. 42, p. 206.

† Ibid., No. 43, p. 208.

explanations given by the father of the present Ameer to Sir John Lawrence, and to the engagements of the Treaties of 1855 and of 1857. He referred to the ostensible object put forward by the British Envoy, that he wished to remove anxiety from the mind of the Ameer, and he asked whether the new proposals would not raise fresh anxiety, not only in his mind, but in the mind of all his people,* and he concluded by a solemn appeal to the British Government not to raise a question which would "abrogate the former Treaties and Agreements, and the past usage."†

In reply to these arguments, Sir Lewis Pelly, on the 13th of February, reminded the Ameer that although the Treaty of 1855 was still in force, and would be observed if no revised Treaty could be made, it did not bind the British Government to aid the Ameer against his enemies, whether foreign or domestic. If, therefore, the Ameer rejected the present offers, the Viceroy would "decline to support the Ameer and his dynasty in any troubles, internal or external," and would "continue to strengthen the frontier of British India, without further reference to the Ameer, in order to provide against probable contingencies."‡

It will be observed that this argument and intimation pointed very plainly to two things—first, to the

* *Ibid.*, p. 208.

† *Ibid.* p. 209.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

fact that the British Envoy acknowledged no engagement or pledge to be binding except the Treaty of 1855. The pledges of Lord Lawrence, of Lord Mayo, and of Lord Northbrook were all treated as so much waste paper, or as still more wasted breath. And secondly, that the British Government considered itself at liberty to threaten adverse measures on the frontier. Noor Mohammed at once took alarm at both these intimations—asked what the last meant, and referred to the Treaty of 1857 as also binding. Sir Lewis Pelly gave replies that can only be considered as evasive. He declined to give definite explanations on either point.*

At the meeting on the 19th of February, the Afghan Envoy gave his rejoinder on the subject of the British officers in Afghanistan. He again referred to the promises of Lord Mayo. And as regarded the danger of any external aggression from Russia, he referred to the Agreement between England and Russia, and the formal and official communication which had been made to the Ameer upon that subject by the British Government. He insisted that, as regarded the obligations of the British Government, it was not fair to quote the Treaty of 1855 as standing by itself. It must be read in connexion with the writings and verbal assurances of three successive Viceroys, and in con-

* This intimation by Sir L. Pelly looks very like a pre-determination to rectify our "hap-hazard frontier" by picking a quarrel. It is not easy to see what other meaning it can have had.

nexion also with the 7th Article of the Treaty of 1857. That Article was of surviving force, and it required that any British Agent sent to Cabul should not be an European. The Government of Afghanistan would "never in any manner consent to acknowledge the abrogation of that Article." But all these engagements were not to be read separately, but as connected one with the other. "They are one," said the Envoy.* They constituted one continued series of engagements. He was very glad to hear of the desire of the Viceroy for the advantage of the Ameer. But it was "based upon such new and hard conditions, especially the residence of British officers upon the frontiers." Not once, but many times in the course of this Conference, the Afghan Envoy specified this demand—and not any demand for an Envoy at Cabul—as the one which he considered dangerous and objectionable. He said the Ameer had "not entrusted the protection of those frontiers from an external enemy to the English Government."

Sir Lewis Pelly had said that if the Ameer rejected his demand as to British officers, no basis was left for negotiations. In reference to this, "I beg to observe," said the Afghan, "in a friendly and frank manner, that the basis which has been laid for you by the wise arrangement of previous Councillors and Ministers of Her Majesty the Queen of England

* Ibid., p. 212.

in London, of Her Viceroy in India, after mature deliberation and thought, from time to time, during the course of all these past years, and has been approved of by Her Majesty the Queen, still exists." . . . "The Government of Afghanistan is certain that the British Government, of its own perfect honesty, will continue constant and stable to that firm basis."*

This was hard hitting. But it was hard hitting delivered with such perfect courtesy, that no just offence could be taken. But besides this, it was irrefutable argument. Sir Lewis Pelly had to take refuge in the coarse expedient which was alone possible under the circumstances, and which was alone consistent with his instructions. His basis was not accepted, and he declined to enter into controversy. He did, however, try to frighten the Ameer about Russia by asking the Envoy whether he had considered the conquests of Russia in the direction of Khiva, Bokhara, Kokhand, and the Turkoman border. He reminded Noor Mohammed (and this was fair enough) of the former expressions he had made use of in respect to apprehensions of Russia. He then declared "England has no reason to fear Russia." Noor Mohammed must have put his own estimate on the sincerity of this declaration. He could not have put a lower one than it deserved. But as Sir Lewis Pelly had nothing to reply to the weighty arguments Noor

* Ibid., p. 213.

Mohammed had used, and to the appeals to honourable feeling which he had made, the Afghan begged that they should be reported to the Viceroy, submitted to his consideration, and referred to his written decision. The Envoy would then be prepared either to give a final answer or to refer to the Ameer for further instructions.

It was not till the 15th of March—an interval of nearly a month—that Sir Lewis Pelly replied to the Afghan Envoy. This reply, I am afraid, must be considered as the reply of the Viceroy, as it is drawn up professedly upon his written instructions. It is very difficult to give any adequate account of this document: of its rude language—of its unfair representations of the Afghan Envoy's argument—of its evasive dealing with Treaties—of its insincere professions—of its insulting tone. There are, indeed, some excuses for the Viceroy. Brought up in the school of British Diplomacy, he must have felt himself beaten by a man whom he considered a Barbarian. This Barbarian had seen through his "ostensible pretexts," and his ambiguous promises. He had not, indeed, seen the Draft Treaty with its labyrinth of Saving Clauses. But our Agent at Cabul had been told enough to let Noor Mahommed understand what kind of a Treaty would probably be proposed. He had not been deceived by the letter of Captain Grey. The Afghan Minister had challenged, with only too much truth, the shifty way in which the Viceroy dealt with

the good faith of the British Crown, and the pledged word of former Viceroys. He had even dared to tell Lord Lytton's Envoy that he expected a plain answer to a plain question—Yes or No—whether he admitted himself to be bound by the pledges of his predecessors in office? He had done all this with the greatest acuteness, and with perfect dignity. All this was, no doubt, very hard to bear. But if irritation was natural, it was in the highest degree unworthy of the British Government to allow such irritation to be seen. If the Viceroy really considered the conduct of the Ameer, as then known or reported to him, as deserving or calling for the manifestation of such a spirit, it would have been far better to have no Conference at all. So far as the official language and conduct of the Ameer was concerned there was nothing to complain of. The language of his Envoy was in the highest degree courteous and dignified; and if Lord Lytton could not bear the severe reproaches which undoubtedly were of necessity involved in that Afghan's exposure of the Viceroy's case, it would have been better to avoid a contest in which the British Crown is represented at such signal disadvantage. Let us, however, examine the answer of the Viceroy a little nearer.

The impression which the Viceroy says he has derived from the first part of the Envoy's statement is an impression of regret that the Ameer should feel himself precluded from receiving a British Envoy at his Court, "by the rude and stationary condition in

which Afghanistan had remained under the administration of his Highness." Returning to this charge, the Viceroy adds that the "unsettled and turbulent condition of the Afghan population, and the comparative weakness of the sovereign power, however, appear to have increased rather than diminished, under the reign of his Highness."* Not only was this a gratuitous insult, even if it had been true, but it was an insult in support of which the Viceroy produced no evidence, because, as I believe, he had no evidence to produce.

The first approach to argument in reply to the Afghan Envoy is an assertion that the 7th clause of the Treaty of 1857 has "nothing whatever to do with the matters now under consideration."† This however, is mere assertion—no attempt is made to support it. It is an assertion, moreover, wholly inconsistent with the facts, and one which, as we shall presently see, it became necessary to retract.

The next assertion is that the Envoy had taken "so many pains to explain the reasons why the Ameer still declined to receive a British officer at Cabul," and had at the same time as "carefully avoided all references to the reception of British officers in other parts of Afghanistan." For this assertion there is absolutely no foundation whatever. The Afghan Envoy had not only repeatedly stated his objections as referring to the whole country of Afghanistan, but in the able

* Ibid., p. 214. † Ibid., p. 215.

argument of Noor Mohammed on the 19th February, which Lord Lytton was now professing to answer, and which it concerned the honour of the Crown that he should answer with some tolerable fairness, the Afghan Envoy had at least seven times specified the residence of British officers "on the frontiers" as the "chief proposal of the British Government."* Sir Lewis Pelly had, with equal precision, referred to this demand as the one to which the Envoy had objected.

The next assertion is that the British Government had been induced to believe both from events, and from many previous utterances both of Shere Ali and his father, that the advantages of British Residents in his dominions "would be cordially welcomed and gratefully appreciated by his Highness." Can anybody maintain that this is true? Is this a fair representation of the facts, even if Captain Grey's private memorandum-book be accepted as the only faithful record of Umballa?

The next assertion is that if the Ameer was unwilling, "the British Government had not the slightest desire to urge upon an unwilling neighbour an arrangement so extremely onerous to itself." Not content with this, the Viceroy goes the length of declaring that "the proposal of this arrangement was regarded by the British Government as a great concession."† Again, I ask, was this true? Could it

* Ibid., Inclos. 45, pp. 211-213.

† Ibid., p. 216.

be said with any sincerity? Was it consistent with the despatches and instructions which have been examined in the preceding narrative?

Next we have a repetition of the unfounded assertion that the Envoy had elaborately answered a proposal which the British Government had not made, "and which he had no right to attribute to it," whilst he had left altogether unnoticed those proposals which alone he had been authorised to discuss.

The Viceroy has great difficulty in dealing with the telling and dignified passage of Noor Mohammed's speech in which he referred to existing obligations as the true basis for all further negotiations. Lord Lytton could only say that the existing Treaties being old, and not having been disputed by either party, afforded "no basis whatever for further negotiation." This was in direct contradiction with Sir Lewis Pelly's language at the previous meetings, in which he had spoken of the new Treaty as a supplement to those already existing. At the meeting held on the 5th of February, Sir Lewis Pelly had expressly declared that his authority was to propose "to revise and supplement the Treaty of 1855."*

The Viceroy then went on to say that if there was to be no new Treaty, the two Governments "must revert to their previous relative positions."† But as the Ameer seemed to misunderstand what that position was, Sir

* *Ibid.*, p. 199.

† *Ibid.*, p. 216.

Lewis Pelly was instructed to remove a "dangerous misconception" from his mind. For this purpose he repeats at length the previous argument on the Treaty of 1855, that whilst it did bind the Ameer to be the friend of our friends, and the enemy of our enemies, it did not place the British Government under any obligation to render any assistance whatever to the Ameer. He then accumulates against the Ameer charges of unfriendliness, founded on the non-reception of Envoys, on ingratitude for subsidies, on refusals to let officers pass through his country, on alleged intentions of aggression on his neighbours, and, finally, on the reported attempt of the Ameer to get up a religious war. Some of these accusations mean nothing more than that the Ameer had stuck to the engagements of Lord Mayo. Others were founded on mere rumour, and the last referred to, was conduct on the part of the Ameer, which was the direct result of Lord Lytton's own violent conduct towards him, and which had been quite well known to the Viceroy before this Conference began.

The Viceroy then comes again to the Treaty of 1857, and is at last compelled to admit that the 7th Article is "the only one of all its articles that has reference to the conduct of general relations between the two Governments."* As, in a previous paragraph, he had said that the Treaty of 1857 had

* Ibid., p. 217.

"nothing whatever to do with the matters now under consideration ;" and in another paragraph that the obligations contracted under it had "lapsed, as a matter of course, with the lapse of time,"* this was an important admission. But the Viceroy gets out of it by evading the force of the 7th Article altogether, through a construction of its meaning wholly different from the true one. The force of the 7th Article of the Treaty of 1857 lies in this—that it stipulates for the complete withdrawal, not from Cabul, but from the whole of the Ameer's country, of "British officers," after the temporary purpose for which they were sent there had been accomplished. It is, therefore, a record of the permanent policy of the Rulers of Afghanistan not to admit British officers as Residents in any part of it, and a record also of the acquiescence of the British Government in that policy.

It is hardly credible, but it is the fact, that the Viceroy proceeds to argue on this Article as if it referred only to the reception of a British Envoy at the Capital—at Cabul itself. It almost looks as if the whole paper had been written without even looking at original documents—even so very short and simple an Instrument as the Treaty of 1857. "It is obvious," continues the Viceroy, "that no Treaty stipulation was required to oblige the British Government not to appoint a Resident British officer at Cabul without the

* Ibid., pp. 215, 216.

consent of the Ameer."* In the same vein Lord Lytton proceeds to argue that it could not bind the Ameer never at any future time or under any circumstances "to assent to the appointment of a Resident British officer at Cabul." All this is absolutely irrelevant, and has, to use his own previous words, "nothing whatever to do with the matters now under consideration."

The Viceroy then adds one argument which, I think, is sound, if strictly limited—namely, this, that there is nothing in the 7th Article of the Treaty of 1857 "to preclude the British Government from pointing out at any time to the Ameer the advantage, or propriety, of receiving a British officer as its permanent Representative at Cabul, nor even from urging such an arrangement upon the consideration and adoption of his Highness in any fair and friendly manner."† Not only is this true, but I go farther and say that there is nothing even in the later pledges and engagements of Lord Mayo and of Lord Northbrook with the Ameer to prevent this kind of conduct. But the injustice of the conduct of Lord Lytton lay in this—that he was trying to force a new policy on the Ameer in a manner which was neither "fair nor friendly"—but, to use his own words, under threats of an "open rupture." We had, of course, a right to argue with the Ameer, and to persuade him,

* Ibid., p. 217. † Ibid., p. 218.

if we could, to let us off from our engagements. But what we had no right to do was precisely that which Lord Lytton had done and was then doing—namely, to threaten him with our displeasure if he did not agree to our new demands—and to support this threat with the most unjust evasions of the written and verbal pledges of former Viceroys.

But the Viceroy had not yet done with his strange perversion of the 7th Article of the Treaty of 1857. He again assumes that it refers to the reception of an Envoy at Cabul. He says, tauntingly, that “it so happened that the British Government had not proposed, and did not propose, or intend to propose that arrangement. Consequently his Excellency’s (the Cabul Envoy’s) remarks on the Treaty of 1857 were not to the point, and did not need to be further noticed.”*

Having thus got rid by misquotations of the real force and direct language of the Treaties of 1855 and of 1857, the Viceroy proceeds to declare broadly that “neither the one nor the other imposes on the British Government, either directly or indirectly, the least obligation or liability whatever, to defend, protect, or support the Ameer, or the Ameer’s dynasty, against any enemy or any danger, foreign or domestic.”

Lord Lytton next proceeds to deal with the pledges of preceding Viceroys. He refers to these as “certain

* *Ibid.*, p. 218.

written and verbal assurances received by the Ameer in 1869, from Lord Mayo, and by his Highness's Envoy in 1873, from Lord Northbrook." He thus starts at once the distinction between Treaty engagements and the formal promises of the representative of the Crown in India. But he does more than this. This would not have been enough for the purposes of his argument.

It was necessary not only to put a new gloss on the promises of the British Government, but also to put a special interpretation on the claims of the Ameer. At the Simla Conferences, indeed, in 1873, the Ameer had shown a disposition to put an overstrained interpretation on previous promises. But Lord Northbrook had fully explained all the conditions and limitations which had uniformly been attached to them. Noor Mohammed, who now argued the case of the Ameer, was the same Envoy to whom these explanations had been addressed, and in the able and temperate representation which he had now made of his master's views he had made no extravagant claims whatever. It was this representation to which Lord Lytton was now replying, and he had no right to go back upon former misunderstandings, which had been cleared up, and to assume that they were still cherished by the Ameer. The Afghan Envoy had made no extravagant claim. This constituted Lord Lytton's difficulty. It would have been very difficult indeed to make out that the promises

and pledges of Lord Lawrence, of Lord Mayo, and of Lord Northbrook, taking them even at the lowest value, did not imply, directly or indirectly, "the least obligation to defend, protect, or support" the Ameer. But it was very easy, of course, to make out that they did not promise him an "unconditional support." At first, as we have seen, it had been Lord Lytton's object to fix on the Ameer a condition of discontent because Lord Mayo and Lord Northbrook had not given him assurances enough. It now became convenient to represent him, on the contrary, as so over-estimating those assurances as to claim them as having been unconditional. Accordingly, this representation of the facts is quietly substituted for the other, and the Ameer is assumed as having claimed this "unconditional support," which he had not claimed, and about which there had not been one word said in the whole course of Noor Mohammed's pleadings—except a single incidental observation*—the purport of which is not very clear, and which, if it had been noticed at all, should have been noticed as incidentally as it arose.

Having effected this substitution of the case to be proved and of the claim to be met, Lord Lytton proceeds at great length to argue from the circumstances under which the previous Viceroys had given their promises, that, in the first place, "these utterances," "whatever their meaning, and whatever

* Ibid., p. 206.

their purpose," were not "intended to have the force of a Treaty," and, in the second place, that they did not "commit the British Government to an unconditional protection of the Ameer." Having established this last proposition to his heart's content, he finds himself confronted with the task of describing what all the previous promises had meant and had amounted to. And here, at last, there is a gleam of fairness, like the sun shining for a moment through a thick bank of stormy clouds. They amounted, says the Viceroy, to neither more nor less than this:—"An assurance that, so long as the Ameer continued to govern his people justly and mercifully, and to maintain frank, cordial, and confidential relations with the British Government, that Government would, on its part also, continue to use every legitimate endeavour to confirm the independence, consolidate the power, and strengthen the Government of his Highness."*

The value, however, of this gleam of candour is much diminished by two circumstances, which are proved by the context. In the first place, the binding force of this "assurance" was destroyed by the careful explanation that it was not equivalent to a Treaty obligation. In the second place, it was implied that the refusal of the Ameer to accept the new condition of Resident British officers was in itself a departure from the "frank, cordial, and confidential relations"

* Ibid., p. 218.

which were represented to be among the conditions of the "assurance." The first of these circumstances, as affecting the Viceroy's definition, deprived the "assurance" of all value; whilst the second was in itself a direct breach of that assurance, inasmuch as the whole essence of them lay in the promise that the reception of British officers was not to be forced or pressed upon the Ameer by threats and punishments of this kind.

Lord Lytton next returns to the plan of representing the Ameer as disappointed at Simla by Lord Northbrook's refusal to give to him a Treaty, and argues that the "verbal assurances" of that Viceroy could not be interpreted as assuming in favour of the Ameer those very liabilities which had been refused in the Treaty. Of course not; and Noor Mohammed had never made any such allegation.

The Viceroy then proceeds to represent himself as simply the giver of all good things—as offering to the Ameer what he had vainly solicited from others. Not very consistently with this, he refers to the acceptance of his conditions as a proof of "sincerity" on the part of the Ameer, thus admitting, by implication, that their acceptance was an object of desire to the British Government. And yet, not to let this admission stand, he declares that the "British Government does not press its alliance and protection upon those who neither seek nor appreciate them." The Viceroy then retires in a tone of offended

dignity, and of mortified benevolence. He harboured "no hostile designs against Afghanistan." He had "no conceivable object, and certainly no desire, to interfere in their domestic affairs." The British Government would scrupulously continue to respect the Ameer's authority and independence. But in the last sentence there is a sting. The promise it contains is carefully, designedly, limited to "Treaty stipulations," which, in the opinion of Lord Lytton, did not include the most solemn written and verbal pledges of the representatives of the Crown in India. So long as the Ameer remained faithful to "Treaty stipulations" which the Envoy had referred to, "and which the British Government fully recognised as still valid, and therefore binding upon the two contracting parties," he "need be under no apprehension whatever of any hostile action on the part of the British Government."*

It is not difficult to imagine the feelings with which the Envoy of the unfortunate Ameer must have received this communication of the Viceroy. He must have felt—as every unprejudiced man must feel who reads it—that he was dealing with a Government very powerful and very unscrupulous,—too angry and too hot in the pursuit of its own ends to quote with even tolerable fairness, the case which he had put before it,—and determined at any cost to force con-

* Ibid., p. 220.

cessions which he and his Sovereign were convinced must end in the destruction of the independence of their country. During the month he had been waiting for the answer of the Viceroy, his sickness had been increasing. When he did get it, he probably felt under the heavy responsibility of finally deciding whether he was to yield or not. His master, who had probably been kept informed of the tone and of the demands of Sir Lewis Pelly, had become more and more incensed by the treatment he was receiving, and he was acting as most men do when they are driven to the wall. Noor Mohammed made some despairing attempts to reopen the discussion with Sir Lewis Pelly. But that Envoy told him that his orders were imperative to treat no more unless the "basis" were accepted. "The Viceroy's communication" (with all its misquotations) "required only a simple Yes or No." Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that within ten days of the receipt of the Viceroy's message, Noor Mohammed had "gained time" in another world. The Cabul Envoy died on the 26th of March.

And now a very remarkable transaction occurred, the knowledge of which we derive and derive only from the Simla Narrative.* It appears that the Ameer, either after hearing of the death of his old Minister, or from knowing that he was extremely ill, had determined to send another Envoy to Peshawur,

* Ibid., No. 36, para. 36, pp. 170, 171.

and it was reported to the Viceroy that this Envoy would have authority to accept eventually all the conditions of the British Government. Lord Lytton himself tells us that he knew all this before the 30th of March ; on which day he sent a hasty telegram to Sir Lewis Pelly to "close the Conference immediately," on the ground that the basis had not been accepted. And so eager was the Viceroy to escape from any chance of being caught even in the wily offers which he had made to the Ameer, that it was specially added in the telegram that if new Envoys or messengers had arrived in the meantime, the refusal of farther negotiations was still to be rigidly maintained.* The ostensible reason given for this determination is not very clear or intelligible. It is that "liabilities which the British Government might properly have contracted on behalf of the present Ameer of Cabul, if that Prince had shown any eagerness to deserve and reciprocate its friendship, could not be advantageously, or even safely, accepted in face of the situation revealed by Sir Lewis Pelly's energetic investigations." That is to say, that, having driven the Ameer into hostility of feeling by demands which had all along been known to be most distasteful, and even dreadful, in his sight, the Viceroy was now determined to take advantage of this position of affairs, not only to withdraw all the boons he had professed to offer, but

* Ibid., No. 36, Inclos. 52, p. 222.

to retire with the great advantage of having shaken off, like the dust of his feet, even the solemn pledges and promises which the Ameer had obtained from former Viceroys. There was another result of this proceeding which Lord Lytton seems to admit that he foresaw, and which, from the language in which he refers to it, he does not seem to have regarded with any regret. That result was that Shere Ali would be thrown of necessity into the arms of Russia. "Seeing," says Lord Lytton, "no immediate prospect of further support from the British Government, and fearing, perhaps, the consequences of its surmised resentment, he would naturally become more urgent in his advances towards Russia."* This, therefore, was the acknowledged result of the policy of the Government—a result which the Viceroy was not ashamed to acknowledge as one which he regarded, if not with satisfaction, at least with indifference. This feeling could only arise, so far as I can see, from a deliberate desire to fix a quarrel on the Ameer, and then to obtain by violence the objects which he had failed to secure by the proceedings we have now traced.

One important circumstance connected with the conduct and policy of the Viceroy at this moment does not appear, so far as I can find, in the papers presented to Parliament, and that is, that he withdrew

* *Ibid.*, para. 37, p. 171.

our Native Agent from Cabul—or, in other words, suspended all diplomatic intercourse with the Ameer, after the Peshawur Conference. This measure, indeed, seems to have been most carefully concealed from public knowledge both in India and at home. Few parts of the London Narrative are more disingenuous than the 18th paragraph,* which professes to give an account of the conduct of the Government on the close of the Conference at Peshawur. It says that no course was open to Her Majesty's Government "but to maintain an attitude of vigilant reserve." It refers, moreover, to the "imperfect means of obtaining information" from Cabul after that event, without even hinting that this imperfection was due entirely to the deliberate action of the Government in withdrawing its Native Agent. All this indicates a consciousness that it was a step to be concealed, and a thing to be ashamed of. And so, indeed, it was. Lord Lytton had no right to fix a quarrel on the Ameer because he had refused to accept what the Viceroy declared to be nothing but concessions in his favour. The rupture of diplomatic relations was in direct breach of the intimation which had been previously made at that Conference—that if the Ameer refused the basis, our relations with him would revert to the footing on which they stood before. If this course had been followed, some

* Ibid., No. 73, p. 264.

amends would have been made for the unjustifiable attempt to force the Ameer by threats of our displeasure to give up his right to the fulfilment of our engagements. But this course was not followed. Our relations with him were not restored to the former footing. Not only was our Agent withdrawn, but, as I have been informed, there was an embargo laid on the export of arms from our frontiers to the Kingdom of Cabul. All this must have tended to alarm Shere Ali, and to give him the impression that he had nothing to hope from us except at a price ruinous to the independence of his Kingdom. It amounted to an official declaration of estrangement, if not of actual hostility. It left the Government of India without any means of knowing authentically what was going on at Cabul, and it must have given an impression to the Ameer that we had deliberately cast him off.

After all the inaccurate statements which have been already exposed, it seems hardly worth while to point out that the Simla Narrative is particularly loose in its assertions respecting the circumstances of this Conference at Peshawur. For example, it states that "owing to the Envoy's increasing ill-health, several weeks were occupied in the delivery of this long statement."* The fact is that the Conferences began on the 30th of January, 1877, and that the Afghan

* Ibid., para. 32, p. 170.

Envoy's long statement was concluded on the 12th of February.* Even this period of twelve days was not occupied by the Envoy's "long statement," but, in a great measure, by Sir Lewis Pelly's arguments and explanations. The "long statement" of the Afghan Envoy occupied only three days—the 8th, the 10th, and the 12th of February. The two next meetings of the 15th and 19th of February were chiefly occupied by the arguments of the British Envoy ; whilst the period of nearly one month from that date to the 15th of March was occupied by Lord Lytton himself in concocting the remarkable reply of that date.

There is one very curious circumstance connected with the time when Lord Lytton was on the point of closing the Peshawur Conference which does not appear in the papers presented to Parliament. On the 28th of March, 1877, two days after the death of the Afghan Envoy, and something less than two days before the Viceroy sent the imperative order to close the door against further negotiation, there was a meeting at Calcutta of the Legislative Council of India. This is a body before which Viceroys sometimes take the occasion of making speeches for public information. Lord Lytton did so on this occasion, and went out of his way to express his sympathy with the Indian Press in knowing so little of the policy of the Government.

* Afghan. Corresp., I., 1878, No. 36, Inclos. 43, p. 207.

But there was one thing, he said, which the Viceroy could do to mitigate this evil. This was to waive "official etiquette, and seize every opportunity which comes within his reach to win confidence by showing confidence, and to dispel fictions by stating facts." In illustration of this, he gave an account of his policy towards the Ameer, and of the Conference just concluded at Peshawur. He told them that he had "invited the Ameer to a friendly interchange of views," and had "complied also with the suggestion made to us by his Highness that Envoys on the part of the two Governments should meet at Peshawur for this purpose." He did not tell them that he had bullied the Ameer into this suggestion as the only means he had of postponing or of evading demands which were new, violent, and in breach of former promises. He told them that the Conference had been "prematurely terminated by a sad event"—the death of the Cabul Envoy. He did not tell them that he was himself on the point of closing the Conference in order to prevent a new Envoy coming. He told them that his policy was to maintain, as the strongest frontier which India could have, a belt of frontier States, "by which our advice is followed without suspicion, and our word relied on without misgiving, because the first has been justified by good results, and the second never quibbled away by timorous sub-intents or tricky saving clauses." Surely this is the most extra-

ordinary speech ever made by a Viceroy of India. At whom was he speaking, when he talked of "sub-intents" and "tricky saving clauses?" Of whom could he be thinking? What former Viceroy had ever been even accused of such proceedings? We seem to be dealing here with a veritable psychological phenomenon. If he had read to the Council the Ninth and Tenth Articles of the Draft Treaty which he had just been preparing for the Ameer of Cabul, together with the "Secret and Subsidiary Explanatory Agreement,"—then, and then only, the Legislative Council of India would have understood the extraordinary observations which were thus addressed to them.*

The Simla Narrative of these events is dated the 10th of May, and was, therefore, drawn up within about six weeks of the close of the Conferences at Peshawur. It is important to observe the view which it expresses of the final result of the Viceroy's policy and proceedings in reference to our relations with Afghanistan. It speaks with complete, and no doubt deserved, contempt of the passionate designs to which our violence towards him had driven the Ameer. It admits that the whole movement had collapsed even before the Conferences had been summarily

* Abstract of the Proceedings of the Council of the Governor-General of India, &c., 28th March, 1877. These Abstracts are, I believe, published in India.

closed, and that the Ameer had sent a reassuring message to the authorities and population of Candahar, on the subject of his relations with the British Government. The truth, therefore, seems to be that the moment the Indian Government ceased to threaten him with the hated measure of sending British officers into his country, his disposition to be friendly returned, thus plainly indicating that any danger of hostility on his part arose solely from our attempts to depart from our previous engagements with him.* The next thing to be observed in the Simla Narrative is this—that the Viceroy and his Council did not pretend to be alarmed, or, indeed, to have any fears whatever of external aggression. On the contrary, they declared that whatever might be the future of Cabul politics, they would “await its natural development with increased confidence in the complete freedom and paramount strength of our own position.”†

This is an accurate account—as far as it goes—of that estimate of our position in India which had inspired the policy of Lord Lawrence, of Lord Mayo, and of Lord Northbrook. Lord George Hamilton complained, in the late debate in the House of Commons, that he could find no Despatch in the India Office setting forth the view which I

* *Afghan. Corresp.*, I., 1878, para. 38, p. 171.

† *Ibid.*, para. 40, p. 172.

had taken as Secretary of State on the Central Asian Question.* I had no need to write any such Despatch, because the policy of the Cabinet was in complete harmony with the conduct and the policy of Lord Lawrence, of Lord Mayo, and of Lord Northbrook. In Europe that policy was represented by the Despatches of the Foreign Office. But if I had felt called upon to write a formal Despatch on the Central Asian Question it would have been based upon that confidence in the paramount strength of our own position which Lord Lytton expresses in the paragraph which I have just quoted. It would have been written, however, under this difference of circumstances—that the confidence expressed would have been sincere, and in harmony with our actual conduct. The sincerity of it in Lord Lytton's case had serious doubts thrown upon it by the desperate efforts he had just been making to persuade the Ameer of Cabul to let us off from our engagements on the subject of British officers, and by the transparent insincerity of his repeated declarations that all these efforts were for Shere Ali's benefit, and not for our own.

As for the Government at home, it was necessary for them, at this time, to keep very quiet. They care-

* The policy of the Government on the Central Asian Question was more than once stated and defended in the House of Commons, by my honourable friend, Mr. Grant Duff, with all the knowledge which his ability and his indefatigable industry enabled him to bring to bear upon the subject.

fully concealed everything that had happened. It was on the 15th of June, 1877, that I asked certain questions in the House of Lords upon the subject. The impression left upon my mind by the reply was that nothing of any importance had occurred. Private and authentic information, indeed, of which I was in possession, prevented me from being altogether deceived. But I hoped that it might at least be the desire of the Cabinet to restrain Lord Lytton. Certainly, nothing could be more misleading as to the past than the answers I received. There had been a Conference at Peshawur, but it had been arranged at the Ameer's own request. There had been no attempt to force an Envoy on the Ameer "at Cabul." Our relations with the Ameer had undergone no material change since last year. All this was very reassuring, and whatever may now be said or thought of the accuracy of the information which these replies afforded to Parliament, this at least is to be gained from them, that at that time, which was two months and a half after the close of the Peshawur Conference, no alarm whatever was felt as to the disposition or conduct of the Ameer. Now that we had withdrawn our proposal to send Envoys, and had abstained from threatening him, all was going comparatively well.

But farther evidence on this important point is to be found at a much later date, and from the same authoritative source of information. The time came when the

Indian Secretary had to review officially Lord Lytton's proceedings. This was done in a Despatch, dated October 4, 1877. In it Lord Salisbury dealt almost lightly with the whole subject,—dwelt upon the fact that there were "already indications of a change for the better in the attitude of the Ameer,"—trusted the improvement would continue,—and indicated that this end would be "most speedily attained by abstention for the present, on the one hand, from any hostile pressure on his Highness, and, on the other, from any renewed offer of the concessions which have been refused."*

This important declaration by Lord Salisbury establishes a complete separation and distinction between the Afghan Question as directly connected with the politics of India, and the Afghan Question as it came to be revived in an aggravated form by the action and policy of the Cabinet in support of Turkey.

In the meantime, as we all know, great events had happened. From the date of Lord Salisbury's Despatch of the 4th of October, 1877, reviewing the situation after the Conference at Peshawur, to the 7th of June, 1878, when the first rumour of the Russian Mission to Cabul reached the Viceroy, we have not a scrap of information as to what had been going on in India in the papers presented to Parliament by the India Office. There is thus a complete hiatus of eight

* Ibid., No. 37, para. 9, p. 224.

months, for the history of which we must go to the papers connected with the Eastern Question in Europe, and to what are called "the ordinary sources of information." Some of these are at least as worthy of confidence as the narratives and the denials of the Government, and the main facts of the succeeding history are not open to dispute.

The Russian Declaration of War against Turkey had followed close upon the termination of the Conference at Peshawur. Early in October, when Lord Salisbury wrote the Despatch just quoted, the fortunes of the Russian campaign were doubtful both in Europe and in Asia. Probably this contributed to the spirit of comparative composure which inspires that paper, and which contrasts so much with the nervous fears apparent in the Afghan policy which had so completely failed.

But soon after Lord Salisbury's Despatch of October 4th, 1877, the tide had turned both in Europe and in Western Asia, and, when it did turn, the reverse current came in as it does on the sands of Solway or of Dee. The Turks were defeated : Kars was taken : Plevna fell : the Balkans were crossed : and the armies of Russia poured into the Roumelian plains. There is reason to believe that the agitation of the Government at home communicated itself to their representative in India. Long before this, as we have seen, he had begun to play at soldiers, he had been accumulating forces on the frontiers, building a bridge of boats upon the Indus,

inciting border Governments to aggressive movements on or beyond their own frontier, and formally occupying Quetta,—not in connexion with any mere Khelat disturbance, but as a part of a new Imperial policy. All round, it had been a policy of fuss and fear, giving indications that the obscure threat of Sir Lewis Pelly at Peshawur would be carried into effect—namely, that the British Government would adopt some new measure on the frontier which would be regardless of the interests of Afghanistan. The tongue of the Indian press was let loose upon the subject, and the Indian mind was agitated by the expectation of great movements and bold designs.

Some of these were soon known to, or surmised by, Russia. Colonel Brackenbury, the military correspondent of the *Times*, who crossed the Balkans with the force of General Gourko in July, 1877, tells us the following curious story :—"One day in Bulgaria, I think it was the day when Gourko's force captured the Shipka, and we met young Skobeloff on the top of the Pass, that brilliant and extraordinary young General said to me suddenly, 'Have you any news from India?' I replied that the Russian postal authorities took care that I had no news, from anywhere. His answer was, 'I cannot find out what has become of that column of 10,000 men that has been organised by your people to raise Central Asia against us.'" Possibly the rumour which had reached the Russian General may have been at that time un-

founded. Perhaps it may have ranked with the "baggage-animal" rumours against Shere Ali, of which Lord Lytton made so much. But there is reason to believe that if not then, at least at a somewhat later period, the busy brains which were contemplating a call on Eastern troops "to redress the balance of the West," had it also in contemplation, as part of the Imperial policy, to make some serious military movement against Russia beyond the frontiers of India. There is a well-known connexion between the *Pioneer*, an Indian Journal, and the Government of India. In the number of that paper, dated September 4th, 1878, there appeared a letter, dated Simla, August 28th, which stated that in anticipation of a war with Russia, it was no secret that an army of 30,000 men had been prepared in India, with the intention of forcing its way through Afghanistan, and attacking the Russian dominions in Central Asia. Considering that on a much more recent occasion, as I shall presently show, Lord Lytton, or his Government, seems to have communicated at once to the correspondents of the press the orders sent to him by the Cabinet, on the subject of his final dealings with the Ameer, it is not at all improbable that the writer of this letter in the *Pioneer* had authentic information. The British Government was, of course, quite right to take every measure in its power to defeat Russia if it contemplated the probability of a war with that Power. It is notorious

that such a war was anticipated as more or less probable during the whole of the year previous to the signature of the Treaty of Berlin. All the well-known steps taken by the Government in the way of military preparation had reference to that contingency, and there is nothing whatever improbable that among those preparations, the scheme referred to in the *Pioneer* had been planned.

But if the Government of England had a perfect right to make such preparations, and to devise such plans, it will hardly be denied that Russia had an equal right to take precautions against them. It is true she had an engagement with us not to interfere in Afghanistan. But it will hardly be contended that she was to continue to be bound by this engagement when the Viceroy of India was known or believed to be organising an attack upon her, of which Afghanistan was to be the base. The letter written at Simla, to which I have referred above, expressly states that the Russian Mission to Cabul was sent under the apprehension of such a movement, and having for its object to bribe Shere Ali to oppose our progress. Sir Henry Rawlinson, in his Article in the *Nineteenth Century* for December, 1878, professes to give an account in some detail of the proceedings of Russia in connexion with the Cabul Mission. He does not give his authorities; but, as he has better sources of information than most other men upon this subject, we may take that account as the nearest

approximation to the truth at which we can arrive at present. He takes no notice of the intentions of the Indian Government to attack Russia. But his whole narrative shows that the Russian movements, of which the Mission to Cabul was only one part, were of a defensive character, and in anticipation of a war with England. He says that they were a mere "tentative demonstration against the Afghan frontier,"—that "the force was totally inadequate to any serious aggressive purpose,"—and that the military expeditions were abandoned when the signature of the Treaty of Berlin removed the danger of war.* It is well worthy of observation, as I have already pointed out, that of the three military movements then contemplated by Russia, two were movements directed from territories over which she had acquired command between 1864 and 1869, or in other words, before the Umballa Conferences. The main column was to start from Tashkend, and move by Samarkand to Jám. The right flanking column alone was to move from a point in the former territories of Khiva, whilst the left column was to be directed from the borders of Kokhand, upon the Oxus near Kunduz, crossing the mountains which buttress the Jaxartes Valley to the south. The whole force did not exceed 12,000 men. Such was the terrible danger to which our Indian Empire was exposed.

* *Nineteenth Century*, No. 22, pp. 982, 983.

The Peace of Berlin stopped the whole movement. It has been stated that the Mission proceeded to Cabul after that event was known. But as the Treaty of Berlin was not signed till the 13th of July, and as the Russian Envoy is stated by the Viceroy to have been received in Durbar by the Ameer, at Cabul, on the 26th of July,* it is obviously impossible that this can be correct. Sir Henry Rawlinson, indeed, places the arrival of the Russian Envoy on the 10th of August, but he admits in a note that this date is uncertain. Even if it were correct, it would by no means follow that the Treaty of Berlin had been heard of by the Russian authorities in Central Asia before that time.

We may therefore take it as certain that the whole of the Russian proceedings, including the Mission, were taken in connexion with a policy of self-defence, and that the Mission to Cabul was a direct and immediate consequence, not of any pre-conceived design on the part of Russia to invade India, or gratuitously to break her engagement with us in respect to Afghanistan, but of the threatening policy of the British Cabinet in Europe, and of its intention, in pursuance of that policy, to make India the base of hostile operations against Russia.

This being so, let us now look at the position in which we had placed the Ameer. We had treated him, as I have shown, not only with violence, but

* Afghan. Corresp., I., 1878, No. 61, p. 231.

with bad faith. We had formally declared that we owed him nothing in the way of assistance or defence against any enemy, foreign or domestic. We had founded this declaration on unjust and disingenuous distinctions between Treaty engagements, and the solemn promises, whether written or verbal, of former Viceroys. We had withdrawn our Agent from his Capital. We had thrown out ambiguous threats that we should direct our frontier policy without any reference to his interests or his wishes.

In spite of all this, there is no proof that the Ameer had the slightest disposition to invite or even welcome the agents of Russia. On the contrary, all the evidence of any value goes to show that he was quite as jealous of Russian officers as he was of British officers coming to his country. Our own Agent had told Lord Lytton that this was the real condition of his mind just before the Peshawur Conference, and there had been distinct indications of the truth of this opinion in the language of the Ameer just before that Conference. It was consistent with the frame of mind of the Viceroy to believe against the Ameer every rumour which came to him through his secret agents, of whom we know nothing, and the truth of whose accounts is very probably on a par with that of the dealer in "baggage animals" whose narrative has been quoted on a previous page.

In spite of all this, there is the best reason to believe that the Ameer received the intimation of the ap-

proaching Russian Mission with sincere annoyance and alarm. There are indications of it, but only indications of it, in the papers presented to Parliament. One of our spies, a native doctor, had heard the Ameer tell his Minister that the Russian Envoy had crossed the Oxus on his way to Cabul, "refusing to be stopped."* The Ameer had sent orders to cease the opposition, but this report does not say under what amount of pressure, or with what degree of reluctance. Major Cavagnari, however, dating from Peshawur, on the 21st of July, expressly says: "Chetan Shah has arrived. He corroborates the intelligence I have recently reported regarding Russian pressure on the Ameer, and military preparations in Trans-Oxus."†

I must at once express my opinion that under whatever circumstances or from whatever motives the Russian Mission was sent and was received, it was impossible for the British Government to acquiesce in that reception as the close of our transactions with the Ameer upon the subject of Missions to his Court. We cannot allow Russia to acquire predominant, or even co-equal, influence with ourselves in Afghanistan. The Cabinet was therefore not only justified in taking, but they were imperatively called upon to take, measures to ascertain the real object of that Mission, and if it had any political character,

* Ibid., No. 42, p. 227.

† Ibid., No. 48, Inclos. p. 229.

to secure that no similar Mission should be sent again.

But considering that under the circumstances which have been narrated, the sending of the Mission could only be considered a war measure on the part of Russia, and had arisen entirely out of circumstances which threatened hostilities between the two countries,—considering farther, that, as regarded the reception of the Mission, we had ourselves placed the Ameer in a position of extreme difficulty, and had reason to believe and to know that he was not in any way party to the Russian policy in sending it,—justice absolutely demanded, and our own self-respect demanded, that we should proceed towards the Ameer with all the dignity of conscious strength, and of conscious responsibility for the natural results of our own previous conduct and policy.

There is, I am happy to acknowledge, some evidence that at the last moment the Cabinet at home did feel some compunction on account of the crisis which they had brought about. There is no evidence that the Viceroy felt any. He was all for instant measures of threat and of compulsion. But as the last steps in this sad and discreditable history are only in too complete accordance with those which had gone before, I must give them in some detail.

Lord Lytton, by his own act in withdrawing our native Agent from Cabul, had placed the Government of India in the position of being without any authentic

information from that Capital. It could only hear of what might be going on through spies of untrustworthy character, or by rumour and report. The first rumours of the approach of a Russian Mission, and of the mobilisation of Russian forces in Turkestan, reached the Government of India from the 7th to the 19th of June, 1878.* But it was not till after the lapse of another month, on the 30th and 31st of July,† that any definite information was obtained. Even then, it does not seem to have been very accurate, but it was certain that a Russian officer of high rank, with a large escort, had made his way to Cabul, and had been received there.

It will be observed that this period of nearly two months was exactly the period during which we passed in Europe from the imminent danger of a war with Russia to the probability of peace. The Salisbury-Schouvalow agreement was only signed on the 30th of May, and nothing of it could be known in India or in Turkestan early in June. But before the end of July the Treaty of Berlin had been signed, and peace with Russia was assured. This was the condition of things when, on the 30th of July, Lord Lytton telegraphed that he had certain information of the arrival and of the importance of the Russian Mission. It is only due to Lord Lytton to

* Ibid., Nos. 39, 40, p. 226.

† Ibid., No. 42, p. 229.

point out that he saw, and that he raised, the obvious question whether, now that peace with Russia was assured, the Russian Mission should not be dealt with directly between the Cabinet of London and the Russian Government, rather than indirectly between the Government of India and the Ameer of Cabul. He did not recommend the first of these two courses rather than the last—that was hardly his business. But he did suggest it. The Cabinet, however, simply replied by telling him to make sure of his facts in the first place.* On the 2nd of August Lord Lytton proposed† that the Government of India should insist on the reception at Cabul of a British Mission, pointing out that now we might probably secure all our previous demands without paying for them any price in the shape of “dynastic obligations.”

On the 3rd this course was approved by the Cabinet.‡

Accordingly, on the 14th of August, the Viceroy wrote a letter to the Ameer intimating that a British Mission would be sent to Cabul, in the person of Sir Neville Chamberlain, who was to visit his Highness “immediately at Cabul,” to converse with him on urgent affairs touching the course of recent events at Cabul, and in the countries bordering on Afghanistan.§ This letter was sent in advance by a native gentleman, Nawab Gholam Hussein Khan.

* Ibid., No. 43, p. 228.

† Ibid., No. 45, p. 228.

‡ Ibid., No. 46, p. 229.

§ Ibid., No. 49, Inclos. 4, p. 232.

Within three days after this letter was written, an important event happened at Cabul. On the 17th of August the Ameer lost his favourite son, Abdoolah Jan. If the unfortunate Ameer had been perturbed by the conduct of the Indian Government, if he had been still further troubled by the necessity of receiving a Russian Mission, this bereavement must have completed the miseries of his position. When Lord Lytton heard of this event on the 26th of August,* he was obliged, out of decency, to arrange for the postponement of Sir Neville Chamberlain's departure, so that the Mission should not reach Cabul until after the expiry of the customary mourning of forty days. A second letter was also sent to the Ameer, being a letter of condolence. The intention here was good, but unfortunately it was hardly carried into effect. Lord Lytton's impatience could not be restrained, and indeed he confessed that he did not think it expedient to relax preparations for the speedy departure of the Mission "beyond what was decorous."† The decorum seems to have consisted in spending as many as possible of the forty days in despatching a perfect fire of messages through every conceivable channel, all of them in a more or less imperious tone. The Ameer was plied with threats through native Agents that the Mission would leave Peshawur on the 16th of September, so as to time the probable arrival at Cabul

* Ibid., No. 50, p. 233.

† Ibid., No. 50, p. 233.

as exactly as possible at the end of the forty days, whilst at the same time he was informed that resistance or delay would be considered as an act of "open hostility." Moreover, these fiery messages were repeated to the subordinate officers of Shere Ali at the forts and citadels on the road—so that no indignity might be spared to the unfortunate Ameer.*

It must be remembered that all this was being transacted at a time when it was known that the Russian Envoy had himself left Cabul on or about the 25th of August,† leaving only some members of the Mission behind, and when it was quite certain that no hostile movement on the part of Russia could be contemplated, or was possible. But this is not all. The Viceroy's messenger, Nawab Gholam Hussein Khan, reached Cabul on the 10th of September, and on the 17th Sir Neville Chamberlain was able to report from Peshawur the result of the first interview with the Ameer. From this it clearly appeared that Shere Ali did not intend to refuse to receive a Mission. What he objected to was the "harsh words" and the indecent haste. "It is as if they were come by force. I do not agree to the Mission coming in this manner, and until my officers have received orders from me, how can the Mission come? It is as if they wish to

* Afghan. Corresp., II., 1878, pp. 16, 17.

† Ibid., No. 51, p. 234.

disgrace me. I am a friend as before, and entertain no ill-will. The Russian Envoy has come, and has come with my permission. I am still afflicted with grief at the loss of my son, and have had no time to think over the matter." On the following day, the 18th of September, Sir Neville Chamberlain reported a farther message from Nawab Hussein Khan, that he had been assured by the Minister of the Ameer, on his oath, that "the Ameer intimated that he would send for the Mission in order to clear up mutual misunderstandings, provided there was no attempt to force the Mission without his consent being first granted according to usual custom, otherwise he would resist it, as coming in such a manner would be a slight to him." He complained of the false reports against him from news writers. He denied having invited the Russian Mission. "He believed a personal interview with the British Mission would adjust misunderstandings." Some of the Russians were detained by sickness in Cabul. The Nawab thought that the Russians would soon be dismissed, and that the Ameer would then send for the British Mission.*

To all this the Viceroy replied by telegraph, on the 19th of September, that it made no change in the situation, and that the preconcerted movements of Sir Neville Chamberlain should not be delayed.† If the Government wanted war—if they now saw their

* Ibid., pp. 242-3.

† Ibid., p. 243.

opportunity of getting by force what they had failed in getting by a tortuous diplomacy—then they were quite right. There was not a moment to be lost. It was evident that at any moment, and in all probability at the end of the forty days, a message might be received taking away all excuse for threats.* But if the Government wanted peace, then nothing could be more violent and unjust than their proceedings, nor could anything be more frivolous than the pretexts they put forward. It is said that the Ameer's object was "to keep the Mission waiting indefinitely." It did not stand well in the mouth of the Viceroy to attribute "ostensible pretexts" to others—whose only crime was that they had been able to detect his own. There was no evidence and no probability that the Ameer desired an indefinite postponement. It was only reasonable and natural that he should wish to see the Russian Mission finally cleared out of his Capital before he received the British Mission. And if any inconvenience arose from the Mission having been already sent to Peshawur, that inconvenience was entirely due to the blundering which had sent it there in such unnecessary and unreasonable haste.

And so—casting aside all decorum as well as all justice—the Mission was advanced to Ali Musjid on the 21st of September,—five or six days before the expiry of the forty days of mourning,—and there, as is well known, by orders of the Ameer it was stopped.

Following on this, on the 19th of October, a letter

from the Ameer was received, complaining of the "harsh and breathless haste" with which he had been treated, and of the "hard words, repugnant to courtesy and politeness," which had been addressed to himself and to his officers.* The Viceroy now at once telegraphed to the Government at home that "any demand for apology would now, in my opinion, be useless, and only expose us to fresh insult, whilst losing valuable time." He proposed an immediate declaration of war, and an immediate advance of troops into Afghanistan.†

This was on the 19th of October. The Cabinet replied on the 25th that they did not consider matters to be then "ripe for taking all the steps" mentioned in the Viceroy's telegram. They were of opinion that, before crossing the frontiers of Afghanistan, "a demand, in temperate language, should be made for an apology, and acceptance of a permanent British Mission within the Afghan frontiers, and that a reply should be demanded within a time sufficient for the purpose."‡ In the meantime military preparations were to be continued.

It will be observed that in this reply the Cabinet took advantage of the position to put forward a demand on the Ameer not merely to receive a Mission, but to admit a permanent Mission, and to do

* Afghan. Corresp., I., 1878, No. 61, p. 263.

† Ibid., No. 64, p. 253.

‡ Ibid., No. 65, p. 264.

this without offering to Shere Ali any one of the countervailing advantages which, before, they had professed a willingness to bestow upon him.

A gap—an interval of five days—here occurs in the papers presented to Parliament. Between the telegram of the 25th and the Ultimatum 'Letter to the Ameer dated the 30th October, there is nothing to show what was going on. But this gap is in a measure supplied from a singular source of information. On the 1st of November a long telegram was published by the *Daily News* from its well-known correspondent at Simla, which professes to give an account of what had been done, and was then being done, both by the Viceroy and by the Cabinet at home. This account is confirmed by the papers subsequently presented to Parliament, in so far as it relates to particulars which are traceable in them. It is, therefore, a reasonable presumption that the same account is not altogether erroneous as regards those other particulars which cannot be so verified. Whether it is perfectly accurate or not, it gives a striking picture of the atmosphere which prevailed at the head-quarters of the Government of India, and is a signal illustration of the truth of Sir J. Kaye's opinion that the spirit of the Indian services, both civil and military, is almost always in favour of war. The telegram published in the *Daily News* of November 1st is as follows :—

"SIMLA, Thursday night (Oct. 31, 1878).

"The formal decision of the Viceregal Council was made to-day in full self-consciousness of bitter humiliation. The following is the succinct story of this blow to its prestige :—

"At the Cabinet Council on Friday last (Oct. 25) the formal decision was telegraphed to despatch an Ultimatum to the Ameer. At the Viceregal Council held here on Saturday (Oct. 26), there was a unanimous agreement to urge the reconsideration of the matter on the Home Government. Representations were made with an earnestness seldom characterising official communications, the Viceroy throwing all his personal weight into the scale. A continuous interchange of telegrams followed, and yesterday (Oct. 30) there was good hope of a successful issue. The Viceregal Council assembled this morning (Oct. 31) to give effect to the final resolve of the Home Cabinet, which adheres meanwhile to its decision as telegraphed.

"The emissary despatched on Monday (Oct. 28), bearing the Ultimatum as prescribed by the Cabinet, was instructed to receive at a point *en route* a telegram bidding him go on or stop, as the final resolve might dictate. Thus three days are saved. The emissary proceeds towards the frontier to await his application for admission to Cabul. It is hoped here that the Ameer will forbid his entrance, and decline all communication with him."

It is impossible not to ask how this correspondent

came to be informed on the 1st of November of the decision which we now know was actually taken by the Cabinet on the 25th of October. It is impossible to suppose that telegrams so delicate and important were sent otherwise than in cipher. Is it possible that the Viceroy and the Government of India communicated all these messages to the representatives of the press, and thus appealed to the popular opinion of the Indian services against the decision of Her Majesty's Government?

But now, once more, we emerge into the light of official day. When the curtain rises on the work of those five days we find the Cabinet sending to the Viceroy, on the 30th of October, an Ultimatum Letter,* which was to be sent to the Ameer. It does not seem certain whether the first draft of this letter was drawn up by the Viceroy or by the Cabinet. The original authorship of the draft matters not. We have the "Text of letter, as approved." The Cabinet is, therefore, responsible for every line, and for every word. Let us see what it says.

The very first sentence sets forth unfairly the purposes of the Mission on which the Viceroy had intended to send Sir Lewis Pelly to Cabul. It is a repetition of the "ostensible pretexts" which the Indian Secretary and the Viceroy had together devised to cover the secret objects of that Mission. It pretends that it was a Mission of disinterested friend-

* Ibid., No. 66, p. 254.

ship towards the Ameer, whereas it was a Mission intended to provide against "a prospective peril to British interests"* by forcing on the Ameer a measure which we were pledged not to force upon him.

But the second sentence of this Cabinet letter is a great deal worse. It asserts, in the first place, that the Ameer left the Viceroy's proposal "long unanswered." It asserts, in the second place, that the Ameer refused that proposal on two grounds, one of which was "that he could not answer for the safety of any European Envoy in his country."

Neither of these assertions is true. The Ameer did not leave the Viceroy's letter "long unanswered;" and when he did answer it, he did not ground his refusal on the plea that he could not answer for the safety of an Envoy.† The facts are these: The letter of the Viceroy proposing the Mission, dated May 5th, reached Cabul on the 17th of May, 1876,‡ and was probably not brought before the Ameer till the 18th. Shere Ali's answer was dated May 22nd,§ and we happen to know from our own Agent that it was the result of deliberations in his Durbar, which (apparently for the very purpose of avoiding delay), we are expressly told, were held "continuously," for the four days which intervened.||

* Instructions to Lord Lytton, *Ibid.*, p. 156.

† Simla Narrative, para. 23. ‡ Afghan. Corresp., I., 1878, p. 166.

§ *Ibid.*, No. 36, Inclos. 7, p. 174.

|| *Ibid.*, Inclos. 8, p. 176.

So much for the truth of the first assertion made by the Cabinet in the second paragraph of the Ultimatum. Now for the second.

In the Ameer's answer of May 22nd there is not one word about the safety of a British Envoy in his country. His refusal to receive, or at least his desire to postpone indefinitely, the reception of a British Mission is put wholly and entirely upon a different ground—which, no doubt, it was not convenient for the Cabinet to notice. The reason assigned by the Ameer was the very simple one, that he was perfectly satisfied with the assurances given to him by Lord Northbrook at Simla in 1873, and that he did not desire any reopening of negotiations upon the subject to which those assurances referred.

The reckless unfairness with which the Ameer of Cabul has been treated by Her Majesty's present Government throughout the transactions which have resulted in war, could not be better illustrated than by this Cabinet Ultimatum. In this case the Cabinet has not even the excuse of having been led astray by similar recklessness on the part of the Viceroy. In the 23rd paragraph of his Simla Narrative he tells this particular part of the story with substantial correctness. He does not accuse the Ameer of leaving his letter "long unanswered." On the contrary, he speaks of the reply as having come "shortly afterwards." But it is much more important to observe that Lord Lytton states, as fairly as the Cabinet

states unfairly, the grounds of objection taken by the Ameer:—"On the ground," says Lord Lytton, "that he desired no change in his relations with the British Government."* Lord Lytton also states with fairness that the argument about the safety of Envoys, which is not even mentioned by the Ameer, appears only as one among several "additional reasons" which were reported by our Native Agent as having been used in Durbar during the "continuous" discussion of several days' duration.

But the unfairness and inaccuracies of the Cabinet Ultimatum do not end even here. It proceeds thus: "Yet the British Government, unwilling to embarrass you, accepted your excuses." Was there ever such an account given of such transactions as those of the Viceroy, subsequent to the receipt of the Ameer's reply? So far from "accepting his excuses," the Government of India, after leaving that reply "long unanswered"—out of pure embarrassment as to what to do—began addressing to the Ameer a series of letters and messages, one more imperious and insulting than another, until, as we have seen, they ended by suspending all diplomatic relations with him, and were now about to declare war against him because he claimed his right to consider as binding upon us the pledges of the British Crown.

I confess I cannot write these sentences without

* Simla Narrative, para. 23, p. 166.

emotion. They seem to me to be the record of sayings and of doings which cast an indelible disgrace upon our country. The page of history is full of the Proclamations and Manifestoes of powerful Kings and Governments who have desired to cover, under plausible pretexts, acts of violence and injustice against weaker States. It may well be doubted whether in the whole of this melancholy list any one specimen could be found more unfair in its accusations, more reckless in its assertions, than this Ultimatum Letter, addressed to the Ameer of Cabul, by the Cabinet of the Queen.

I repeat here that, holding, as I do, that we cannot allow Russian influence and power to be established in Afghanistan, I hold also, as a consequence, that Her Majesty's Government could not acquiesce in the position in which they would have been placed by the acceptance at Cabul of the Russian Mission, followed by a refusal on the part of the Ameer to receive a Mission from the British Crown. But they were bound to remember that they had themselves brought the Russian Mission upon the Ameer, and upon ourselves; and they were equally bound to consider that Shere Ali was not refusing to accept a Mission from the Viceroy, but was, on the contrary, expressing his opinion that "a personal interview with a British Mission would adjust misunderstandings." All that the Ameer desired was that this Mission should not be forced upon him by open violence in the sight of all

his officers and of all his people. They knew that he did not complain of the determination of the Indian Government to send an Envoy, but only of the "blustering" messages to himself and to his officers by which he had been incessantly plied even during his days of grief. They knew that if ever there had been real mourning in the world it must have been the mourning of Shere Ali for Abdoolah Jan. For this boy he had sacrificed whatever of affection and of fidelity is possible among the children of a harem. With this boy at his side, he had sat enthroned, as an equal, beside the Queen's Viceroy at Umballa. For this boy he had spent his years in endeavouring to procure a dynastic guarantee from the Government of India. Now, all these memories and all these ambitions had vanished like a dream. No prospect remained to him but the hated succession of a rebellious son. Well might Shere Ali say, as he did say, in his letter of October 6th :* "In consequence of the attack of grief and affliction which has befallen me by the decree of God, great distraction has seized the mind of this supplicant at God's threshold. The trusted officers of the British Government, therefore, ought to have observed patience and stayed at such a time." Unless the Government desired to force a quarrel, and were glad of an opportunity to rectify a "haphazard frontier"

* Afghan. Corresp. II., 1878, p. 18.

by means of war, there is nothing to be said in defence of the unjust and indecent haste with which they pushed up the Mission to Ali Musjid even before the forty days of mourning were expired. It cannot be pretended that there was any danger from Russia then. In the meantime our own position had not long before been described by Lord Lytton himself as a position in which we were "able to pour an overwhelming force into Afghanistan for the vindication of our own interests, long before a single Russian soldier could reach Cabul."* The haste with which the extreme measure of war was hurried has crowned and consummated the injustice of the previous transactions, and even if the war had been ultimately inevitable, which it was not, the Government cannot escape censure for the conduct from which the supposed necessity arose.

Unjust and impolitic as I think the conduct of the Government has been in the East of Europe, it has been wisdom and virtue itself in comparison with its conduct in India. I venture to predict that the time is coming, and coming soon, when the reply of Lord Lytton to the statement of the Afghan Envoy at Peshawur, will be read by every Englishman with shame and confusion of face. In a way, but in a very humiliating way, the whole of these transactions carry us back to the days of Clive. We

* Ibid., p. 183.

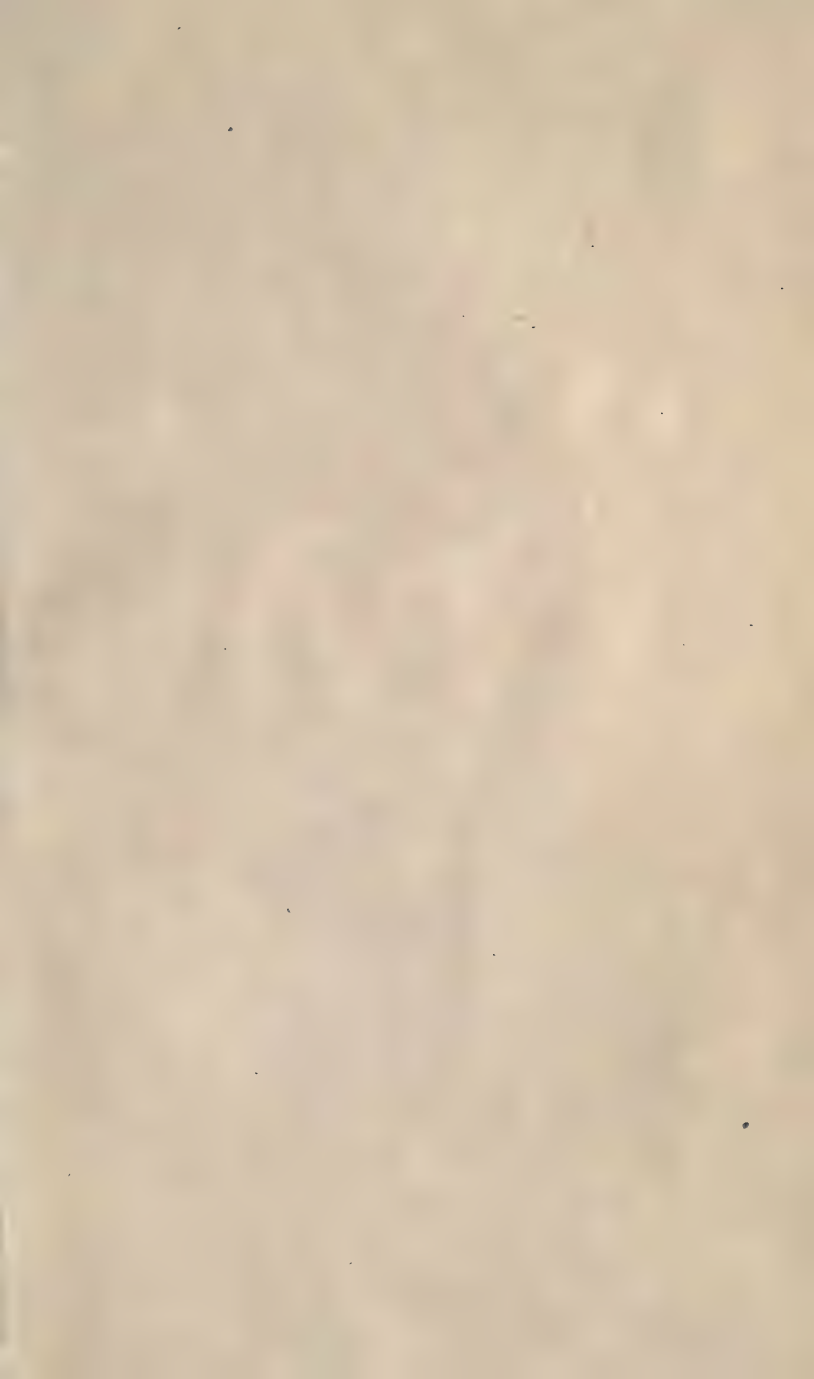
are reminded only too much of the unscrupulousness of his conduct. But we are not reminded, even in the least degree, of the violence of his temptations, or of the splendour of his achievements. There has not been, indeed, any such daring fraud as duplicate Treaties, one genuine and the other counterfeit—one on white paper and the other upon red. But, in a timid way, the Draft Treaty which was to be offered to the Amcer, as compared with the representations of it made to him in the instructions to Sir L. Pelly, and in the letter of Captain Grey—comes very near the mark. On the other hand, the Government of India has had none of the excuses which have been pleaded on behalf of Clive. We have not had to deal with any dangerous villains whose own treachery was double-dyed, and who might hold our fate in the hollow of their hand. There has been no Surajah Dowlah, and no Omi-chund. Shere Ali is a half-barbarian, but his relations with Lord Mayo showed that he could respond to friendship, and could be secured by truth. His Minister was straightforwardness itself when compared with the English Viceroy. It seems almost like the profanation of a great name to compare anything lately done by the Government of India with the deeds done by the genius of Clive. But I speak of what was bad or doubtful in his conduct, not of what was great. In this aspect of them the proceedings I have recorded have been worse than his. In the

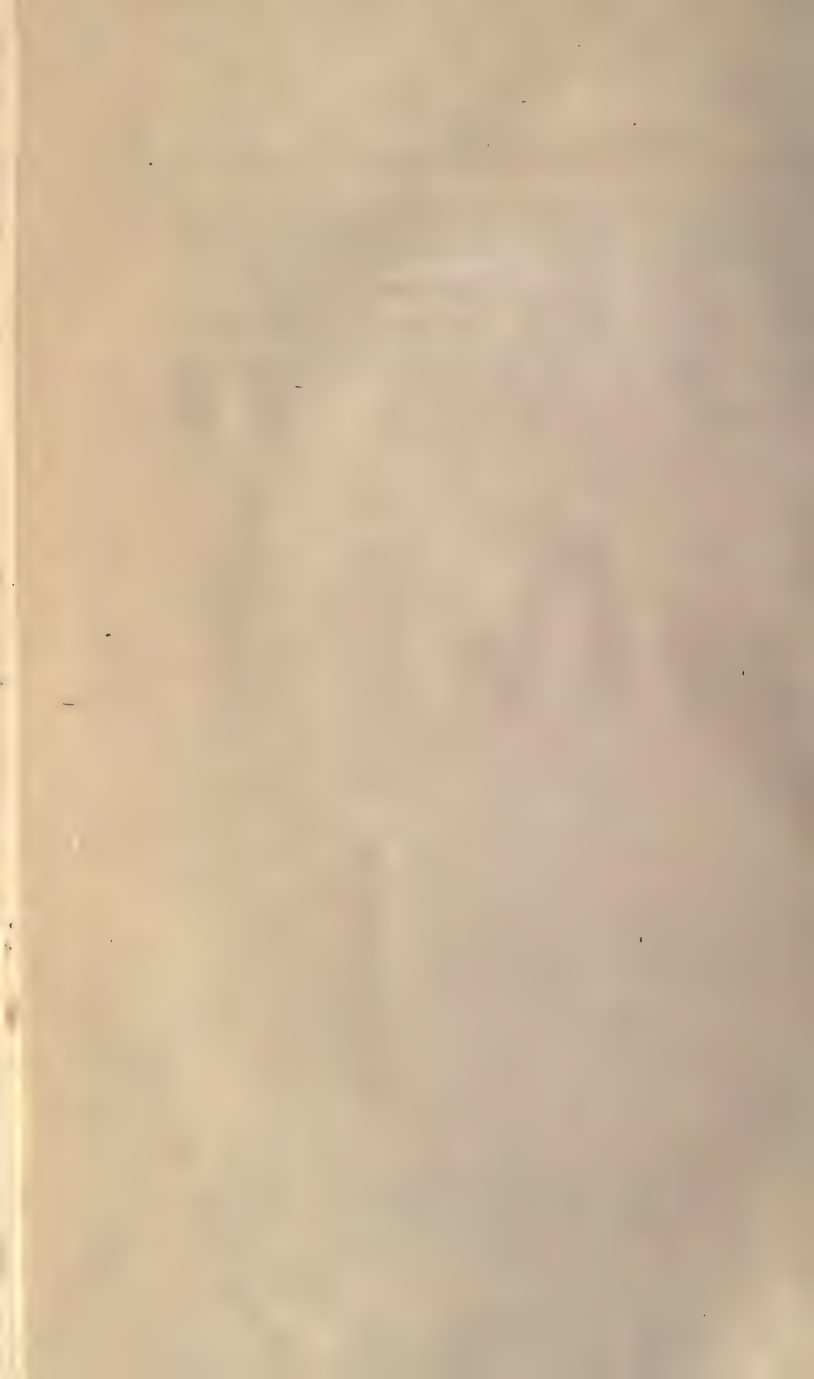
first place, Clive was only the agent of a "Company," and even that Company was not really responsible for his proceedings. The Viceroy now represents the Sovereign, and all his doings are the doings of the Ministers of the Queen. In the second place, the earlier servants of the Company were not the inheritors of obligations of long standing, or of relations with native Princes well understood and regulated by solemn Proclamations of the Imperial Crown. Lord Lytton was bound by all these, and by traditions of conduct handed down through a long roll of illustrious names. From these traditions he has departed in matters of vital moment. The Government of India has given way to small temptations—to ungenerous anger at cutting but truthful answers, and to unmanly fears of imaginary dangers. Under the influence of these, it has paltered with the force of existing Treaties ; it has repudiated solemn pledges ; it has repeated over and over again insincere professions ; and it has prepared new Treaties full of "tricky saving clauses." Finally, it has visited on a weak and unoffending native Sovereign in Asia, the natural and necessary consequences of its own incoherent course in Europe. The policy which brought the Russian army to the gates of Constantinople is the same policy which brought the Russian Mission to Cabul.

It is always in the power of any Executive Government to get the country into a position out of

which it cannot escape without fighting. This is the terrible privilege of what, in the language of our Constitution, is called the Prerogative. It is, in reality, the privilege of every Executive, whether of monarchical or of popular origin. I am not one of those who are of opinion that it could be lodged elsewhere with any advantage, or even with any safety. The majorities which support a strong Government in power are invariably more reckless than the Ministry. In this Eastern Question, wrong and injurious as I think their policy has been, it has been wise and moderate as compared with the language of many of their supporters in both Houses of Parliament. I have too vivid a recollection of the difficulty which was experienced by the Cabinet of Lord Aberdeen in moderating within reasonable bounds the excitement of the country, to place the smallest confidence in any scheme for checking, through some popular agency, the action of the responsible advisers of the Crown. They are always, after all, through a process of "natural selection," the ablest men of the party to which they belong. Except under very rare conditions, they are more disposed, and are more able, to look all round them, than any other body in the State. They may commit—and in this Eastern Question it is my contention that they have committed—terrible mistakes, both in Europe and in India. These mistakes—and errors much more serious than mistakes—I have endeavoured to expose in the present volumes. Some of

them affect the gravest considerations of public duty. They affect the permanent interests of this country and of India, as involved in the good faith and honour of the Crown. I now leave this review of them to the conscience of my countrymen, and to the judgment of later times.







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Argyll, George Douglas
Campbell
The Eastern question

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