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John Kaye and George Bruce Malleon

Excerpt

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HISTORY OF THE INDIAN MUTINY.

BOOK XIII.—BOMBAY, CENTRAL INDIA, AND THE DAKHAN.

[1857.]

CHAPTER I.

LORD ELPHINSTONE, MR. SETON-KARR, AND MR. FORJETT.

THE western, or Bombay, Presidency of India comprises a long, narrow strip of country of varying breadth and irregular outline. Including the province of Sindh, the administration of which is subordinate to it, it occupies the western coast of the peninsula from the mouths of the Indus to the northernmost point of Goa, and from the south of that territory to the borders of Maisúr. It is thus bounded on the west by Balúchistán and the Arabian Sea; on the south by Maisúr; on the east by the Madras Presidency, Haidarábád, Barár, the central provinces, the states forming the central Indian agency, and Rajpútáná; on the north by Bhawalpúr, the Panjáb, and Balúchistán. The area of the British portions of the Presidency is one hundred and thirty-four thousand one hundred and thirty-five square miles, supporting fourteen millions of inhabitants; but, in subordinate political relations to it, there are, or rather there were in 1857, native states comprising seventy-one thousand three hundred and twenty square miles with six millions of inhabitants. The principal of these were Barodah, Káthíwár, Kachh, Kambháyat, Mahikantá, Réwakantá, Kohlápúr, Sáwantwári, and Khairpúr.

1857.
May.
The Bombay
Presidency.

Its area and
population.

The native
states con-
tained in it.

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2 LORD ELPHINSTONE AND MR. FORJETT. [1857.]

In 1857 Lord Elphinstone was Governor of Bombay. A man of culture and ability, Lord Elphinstone had enjoyed more experience of India than generally falls to the lot of governors unconnected with the civil or military services. He had been Governor of Madras from 1837 to 1842; and, although the records of the Madras Presidency throughout his incumbency had marked no stirring events within its borders, yet the first Afghán war, with its early success and its later collapse, had excited the minds of the natives throughout the country, and had called for the exercise of tact and judgment on the part of the rulers. These qualities Lord Elphinstone was eminently qualified to display, and he had displayed them. He was called, however, to deal principally with administrative details. The manner in which he performed these duties gained for him the confidence of the natives. His measures for improving the resources of the country, and for establishing means of communication in all directions, are spoken of to this day.

Lord Elphinstone.

His previous career.

Lord Elphinstone revisited India at the time of the first Sikh war, 1845-6, and marched in company with the 14th Light Dragoons, then commanded by the late Colonel William Havelock, who had been his military secretary, from Bombay, through central India, to the head-quarters of the British army before Láhor. On the transfer of Kashmír to Guláb Síng, a proceeding following the treaty of 1846 with the Sikhs, Lord Elphinstone formed one of the party which first visited that famous valley. After a residence in it of nearly three months, he set out for Ladákh by the Husora valley, and endeavoured to proceed thence up the Gilgit valley—in those days an utterly unknown country. Forced, perhaps fortunately, by the objections of the authorities, to renounce this expedition, Lord Elphinstone crossed the Hurpo pass to Rondu on the Indus, being the first Englishman by whom that journey had been attempted.

His travels in India.

His qualifications for his post.

It will be seen, then, that when in 1853 Lord Elphinstone was called to the post of Governor of Bombay, he brought to that office experience such as few men, not trained in the Indian services, could command. His knowledge of men, his courtesy, his genial bearing, gave effect to that experience. Up to the outbreak of the mutiny in 1857 his conduct as Governor of Bombay was

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LORD ELPHINSTONE'S ENERGY.

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invariably marked by temper, judgment, and discretion. Calm and dignified in manner, courteous to his colleagues and to all with whom he was brought in contact, he evinced, on every occasion likely to test his action, the possession of a guiding mind, of a will not to be shaken, a resolution that went direct to its aim. The crisis of 1857 was just one of those occurrences which Lord Elphinstone was constitutionally fitted to cope with. He at once realised its difficulty and its danger, and rose equal to encounter the one and to neutralise the other. In the words of a contemporary writer, generally unfavourable to him, he displayed "the courage of the soldier who knows his enemy." *

Well fitted to encounter the crisis of the mutiny.

The truth of this judgment was proved by the action taken by Lord Elphinstone when the news reached him of the outbreak of the 10th of May at Mirath. Lord Elphinstone was at Bombay when he heard of that event. It happened that General Ashburnham, commanding the expeditionary corps on its way to China, was staying with him. So greatly did the importance of the intelligence impress the Governor, so certain did he feel that the Mirath revolt would spread, and that it should be met at once by bringing large reinforcements of European troops without delay into the country, that he urged General Ashburnham to proceed immediately to Calcutta, and to offer his services, and the services of the China expeditionary force, to the Governor-General.

Lord Elphinstone's action on hearing of the mutiny at Mirath,

with reference to General Ashburnham;

It was a fortunate circumstance that the war with Persia had just been brought to a successful conclusion. Fortunate, likewise, that the disaffection had not spread to the native army of Bombay. Lord Elphinstone thus felt himself equal to the most decisive measures. He at once authorised the Commissioner of Sindh, Mr. Frere, to transfer the 1st Bombay Fusiliers from Karáchi to the Panjáb. He arranged that the 64th and 78th regiments, then on their way from Persia, should proceed forthwith, without landing at Bombay, to Calcutta. The more speedily to carry out this object, he caused vessels to be equipped and prepared for the reception of these regiments, so that on the arrival in the Bombay harbour of the transports

to Mr. Frere;

regarding the regiments on their way from Persia;

* *The Friend of India.*

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which were conveying them from Bushír they might be transhipped without loss of time. This measure was duly and effectively carried out. The men moved from the one transport into the other, and reached Calcutta in time materially to influence the campaign. But Lord Elphinstone did more. He despatched on the instant to Calcutta a company of Madras artillery which happened to be on the spot, taking the duty of the Bombay artillery, then absent in Persia. He at the same time sent instructions to the officer commanding at Disá to hold the 83rd regiment and a troop of horse artillery at that station in readiness to march on Ajmír, on the sole condition that, in the opinion of the local authorities, the departure of the only European troops in the vicinity of Áhmadábád and Gújrát might be hazarded without the absolute certainty of an outbreak. And, still penetrated by the necessity to concentrate on the scene of the mutiny as many European troops as could be collected, Lord Elphinstone chartered, on his own responsibility, two steamers belonging to the Peninsular and Oriental Company, the *Pottinger* and the *Madras*, provided them with all necessary stores, and despatched them, under the command of Captain Griffith Jenkins of the Indian navy, to the Mauritius and the Cape, with letters to the Governors of those settlements, dwelling upon the importance of the crisis, and begging them to despatch to India any troops they could spare.

regarding the Madras Artillery in Bombay.

He prepares to assist Rajpútáná,

and sends to the Mauritius and the Cape for reinforcements.

Result of his applications to the Mauritius,

and to the Cape.

I may here state that the result of these applications was such as might have been anticipated from the characters of the men to whom they were addressed. The Governor of the Mauritius, Sir James Higginson, embarked on board the *Pottinger* the head-quarters and as many men of the 33rd as that steamer could carry. Not content with that, he took an early opportunity to charter and despatch another transport to convey the remainder of that regiment, a battery of artillery, and as much money as could be spared from the treasury of the island.

Nor was the Governor of the Cape, Sir George Grey, animated by sentiments less patriotic. It fortunately happened that an unusually large force of British regiments was, at the moment, concentrated at Cape Town. Sir George despatched, without delay, as many of them

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SIR GEORGE GREY.

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as he could spare. The 89th and 95th he sent to Bombay; the 6th, the 1st battalion 13th, the 2nd battalion 60th, the 73rd, 80th, and 31st to Calcutta. In subsequent vessels he despatched horses in as large a quantity as he could conveniently procure.

The despatch of Lord Elphinstone to Sir George Grey had painted the urgency of India's needs in terms so glowing that that able Governor considered himself justified to stretch his powers. He did not hesitate to direct the commanders of the transports conveying the China expeditionary army so far to divert from their course as to call at Singapor for orders. The result of this patriotic action was most happy. The intelligence which met these transports at Singapor induced their commanders, in every case, to bear up for Calcutta.

Responsibility nobly assumed by Sir George Grey.

To return to Bombay. So important did it appear to Lord Elphinstone that reinforcements should promptly be sent from England by the overland route—a route till then untrodden by British troops—that, telegraphic communication being open with Calcutta, he suggested to the Governor-General the propriety of sending to England a special steamer, which he had ready, with despatches, impressing upon the Home Government the urgency of the need. There can be no doubt that the suggestion was a wise one. A fast lightly-laden steamer, travelling at her highest speed, would have anticipated the ordinary mail steamer by three or four days at the least. This, too, at a time when the most important events depended on prompt and decisive action. But Lord Canning did not view matters in the same light. He refused to interfere with the ordinary mail service. The steamer, therefore, was not sent.

Lord Elphinstone suggests sending a special steamer to England,

but Lord Canning refuses.

Before I pass from the record of the precautionary measures taken in the early days of the revolt, to describe the actual occurrences in the various parts of the Bombay Presidency, I wish to advert for a moment to one material result which followed them. Those measures undoubtedly saved Bombay from serious outbreak. They did more. They secured an important base of operations against central India and Rajpútáná, and they preserved the line of communication between those and the provinces beyond them and the seaboard. It is diffi-

measures

Effect of the precautionary measures above recorded.

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cult to over-estimate the importance thus gained, solely by the exercise of timely foresight.

A rather serious breach of the law at Bharoch in the month of May, originating in a dispute between the Pársis and the Muhummadians, might have led to important consequences but for the firmness with which it was met, in the first instance, by the officer commanding on the spot, and, in the next, by the Governor. The spirit of Lord Elphinstone's action may be judged from the fact that, to prevent the spread of the riot, he despatched a hundred and fifty men of the 86th to Súrat—a movement of troops which left only three hundred and fifty European troops of all arms in Bombay itself.

The riot at Bharoch was, for a time, the only indication of ill-feeling manifested in the western Presidency, and it was entirely unconnected with the great revolt then raging in the north-west. Lord Elphinstone, whilst carefully repressing it, did not abate a

single effort to carry out the policy which he was convinced was the only sound policy—the policy of offensive defence.

Almost from the very first he had designed to form, at a convenient point within the Presidency, a column to secure and hold the great line of road between Bombay and Ágra. Not only would the line thus secured form a base for ulterior operations, but a great moral advantage would be gained by its tenure. In the

crisis which then afflicted India, it was not to be thought that any portion of the empire would stand still. The attitude of folded arms was an attitude to invite danger. To check the

approach of evil, the surest mode was to go forth and meet it. A column marching towards the north-west would encounter the elements which, having brewed there disturbance, were eager to spread it, and, encountering, would annihilate them. The presence of such a column, marching confidently to the front, would, moreover, go far to check, per-

haps even to suppress, any disloyal feelings which might have been engendered in the minds of the native princes whose states bordered on this line of communication. For these reasons, then, at a very early period of the crisis, Lord Elphinstone proposed in council, and ordered, the formation of a column, under the

Lord Elphinstone meets a breach of law in Bharoch.

He designs a policy of offensive defence ;

to hold the line between Bombay and Ágra,

and, by advancing to meet the evil coming from outside, to prevent it entering within.

With this view forms a column under General Woodburn.

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command of Major-General Woodburn, to open out communications with central India and the North-West Provinces.

The column formed in consequence, under the command of Major-General Woodburn, was but small in numbers. It consisted only of five troops of the 14th Light Dragoons, the 25th Bombay Native Infantry, Captain Woodcombe's horse-battery of artillery, and a pontoon train. It set out from Puná on the 8th of June, under orders to march with all speed to Máu, with the view to save that place while there was yet time, and to prevent the spread of the insurrection in Málwá, and along the northern frontier of the Bombay Presidency.*

Composition
of the
column.

June.
It is ordered
to march to
Máu.

The state of affairs at Máu and at Indúr was such as to demand the most prompt action on the part of General Woodburn. It was just possible that, making forced marches, he might approach so near to Indúr as to baffle the plans of the discontented. The dread that he might do so for a long time paralysed their action.† Circumstances, however, occurred which baffled the hopes expressed by Lord Elphinstone, when, acting on his own unaided judgment, he pressed upon the military authorities the necessity for General Woodburn to advance.

Possibilities
before
General
Woodburn.

The city of Aurangábád—once the capital of the kingdom of Ahmadnagar, and, at a later period, the favourite residence of the Emperor Aurangzíb—occupies a prominent and important position in the north-western corner of the dominions of the Nizám. The corner of which it was the capital juts like a promontory into British territory. To the east and north-east it touches western Barár and the central provinces; to the south, the west, and the north-west, the northern portions of the Bombay Presidency. Beyond the northernmost part of that Presidency, and within easy distance of Aurangábád, lies Málwá.

Aurangábád.

Disaffection was known to reign in Málwá, and it was of the highest consequence that that disaffection should not spread southward to Bombay. But at Aurangábád, the capital of the small promontory I have described, almost touching Málwá on one side and running into Bombay on the other three sides,

* Lord Elphinstone's letter to General Woodburn

† *Vide* Vol. III. page 137.

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were quartered the 1st and 3rd Cavalry, the 2nd Infantry, and a battery of artillery, of the Haidarábád Contingent. These regiments, commanded by British officers, were composed chiefly of Muhammadans, and one of them—the 1st Cavalry—had, in the early part of June, displayed symptoms of disaffection.

Garrison of
Aurangábád.

Aurangábád is distant from Púná a hundred and thirty-eight miles; from Ahmadnagar, about midway between the two, sixty-eight miles. In the ordinary course of events, General Woodburn, armed with positive instructions to push on with all speed to Máu, would not have entered the dominions of the Nizám. It happened, however, that the authors of the disaffection I have spoken of as prevailing at Aurangábád proceeded on the 13th of June to more open demonstrations, and in consequence General Woodburn received, not from Lord Elphinstone, instructions to deviate from the line urged upon him by that nobleman, and to march upon Aurangábád.

Disaffection
of the
garrison.

In explanation of the open demonstrations at Aurangábád, I may state that a rumour had reached that place that the cavalry regiment stationed there would be required to join General Woodburn's column and march with him on Dehlí. The rumour was founded upon truth, for it had been intended that the regiment in question should join General Woodburn's force. But to the minds of soldiers who were not British subjects, who lived under the rule of the descendant of a viceroy appointed by the Mughul, the idea of fighting against the King of Dehlí was peculiarly distasteful.* They showed their dislike on the moment. On the 13th of June the men of the 1st Cavalry openly expressed their dissatisfaction, and—it was stated at the time—swore to murder their officers if pressure to march against Dehlí were put upon them. Fortunately, the commanding officer, Captain Abbott, was a sensible man. He summoned the native officers to his quarters, and discussed the question with them. The native officers declared that, for their own part, they were ready to obey any lawful order, but they admitted that their men would not fight against the mutineers. Captain Abbott

Reasons of
the disaffec-
tion.

Judicious
conduct of
Captain
Abbott.

* The splendid manner in which the Haidarábád cavalry atoned for this momentary disaffection will be found recorded in subsequent pages.

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DISAFFECTION AT AURANGABAD.

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then, after communicating with the Resident, resolved to adopt a conciliatory course. He gave the men assurances that they would not be required to march on Dehli. In this way order was restored. So little confidence, however, in the stability of the compromise was felt on both sides, that the officers proceeded to barricade themselves in their mess-house, whilst the mutinous cavalry boasted over their moral victory in every quarter of the city.

Order is restored, but not confidence.

Matters were in this state when, on the morning of the 23rd of June, General Woodburn's column entered Aurangabad, marched at once to the ground occupied by the mutineers, and ordered the men to give up their arms. With the exception of one troop of the 1st Cavalry, all obeyed. The general gave the men of that troop six minutes to consider the course they would pursue. When the time elapsed, the men, instead of submitting, put on a bold front and attempted to ride away. In this attempt most of them succeeded. The next morning some three or four, convicted of attempts at assassination, were hanged, and order was restored.

Woodburn enters Aurangabad and disarms the mutineers.

General Woodburn was under the orders of the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Henry Somerset. In the opinion of Lord Elphinstone, the danger at Aurangabad had not been so pressing as to necessitate the deviation of the field force from the direct road to Mau. He thought that, in the presence of two dangers, that which would result from the mutiny coming down to Bombay from central India and Malwa was greater even than the disaffection of a portion of the troops of the Nizam. Forced, however, to accept General Woodburn's action at Aurangabad, he lost not a moment in urging him to press on towards Mau. "I am persuaded," he wrote to that officer on the 22nd of June, "that the local officers greatly exaggerate the danger of a rising in our own provinces. I have no fear of anything of the sort; and, if it should happen, I trust that we should be able to put it down speedily. But I feel confident that it will not happen—at all events, for the present. If you allow the insurrection to come down to our borders without attempting to check it, we shall almost deserve our fate; but if by a rapid advance you are able to secure Mau you will also, in all probability, save Mehidpur, Sagar, Hoshangabad," &c. Lord Elphinstone

Lord Elphinstone urges Woodburn to press on to Mau.

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followed up these noble words, displaying the true conception he had formed of the situation, by a letter addressed, the same day, to Sir Henry Somerset: "I am very much obliged to you," he wrote, "for the perusal of General Woodburn's letter. I conclude that since it was written he has received his orders to continue his march to Máu with all possible expedition."

But General Woodburn did not move forward. In reply to the letter I have just quoted, he wrote, on the 25th, to Lord Elphinstone, urging the various reasons which, he thought, would necessitate a long stay at Aurangábád. These reasons might, in the presence of the greater danger at Máu, be justly termed trivial. They consisted in the possibility of a fresh outbreak after his departure, and in the necessity of trying some sixty-four prisoners by court-martial.

Woodburn, however, delays to try his prisoners.

Lord Elphinstone answered the objections to advance urged by the general in a very decided manner. "I wish you to remember," he wrote to him on the 27th of June, "that it was for the object of relieving Máu, and not for the purpose of chastising a mutinous regiment at Aurangábád, that the field force was formed. The latter is an incidental duty, which it was hoped would not interfere with the main object. I am perfectly aware that, in these times, circumstances may occur to divert your force from its original destination, but I do not think they have yet occurred." He then proceeded in a few forcible words to urge the folly of wasting unnecessary time upon trials,* and the necessity of disarming regiments which might show disaffection, instead of delaying a movement of the first importance from a fear that a revolt might take place after the departure of the British troops.

Lord Elphinstone combats his reasons and still urges him onwards.

This letter, I have said, was despatched to General Woodburn on the 27th of June. On the morning of the 28th Lord Elphinstone received a despatch from Calcutta, instructing him to send to Calcutta by sea the wing of the 12th Lancers then stationed at Púná. This diminution of his available European strength, already extremely small, following immediately upon the departure

Lord Elphinstone is ordered further to diminish his strength.

* "To allow twenty days for the trial of sixty-four prisoners is out of the question in these times."