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978-1-108-05023-4 - Military Operations at Cabul: Which Ended in the Retreat and  
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Vincent Eyre

Excerpt

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OPERATIONS  
OF  
THE BRITISH ARMY  
AT  
CABUL.

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## NOTES OF OPERATIONS,

ETC.

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### INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

INTERNAL STATE OF AFGHANISTAN IN 1841. — DISAFFECTION — ESPECIALLY IN KOHISTAN, AND MILITARY OPERATIONS THERE. — MARCH OF GENERAL SALE FOR JELLALABAD, WHO HAS TO FIGHT HIS WAY. — EARLIER PREMONITORY SYMPTOMS OF DISTURBANCE.

WHEN Major-Gen. Elphinstone assumed the command of the troops in Affghanistan in April, 1841, the country enjoyed a state of apparent tranquillity to which it had for many years been a stranger. This remark applies more particularly to those provinces which lie north-east of Ghuznee, comprehending Cabul proper, Kohistan, Jellalabad, and the neighbouring districts. The Giljye tribes, occupying a large portion of the country between Ghuznee and Candahar, had never been properly subdued, and the permanent occupation of Khelat-i-Giljye by our troops had so alarmed their jealous love of independence, as

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to cause, during the months of July and August, a partial rising of the tribes, which, however, the valour of our Hindoostanee troops, under Colonel Wymer, at Huft-aseer, and of the 5th Bengal Cavalry under Col. Chambers at Mookoor, speedily suppressed. Some of the principal chiefs delivered themselves up as hostages, and quiet was restored. To the west of Candahar, a notorious freebooter, named Akter Khan, having collected about 7000 followers, horse and foot, was signally defeated near Girhisk, on the banks of the Heermund, in the month of July, by a detachment of the Shah's regular troops under Capt. Woodburn, consisting of only one infantry regiment, two H. A. guns, under Lieut. Cooper, besides two regiments of *Janbaz*, or Affghan horse: the latter, however, behaved ill, and can hardly be said to have shared in the glory of the unequal conflict. Capt. Griffin, with the Bengal 2d Native Infantry, was, a few days after, equally successful in an attack on the enemy in the same quarter. Akter Khan fled to the hills with a few followers, and the land again enjoyed repose. Kohistan, whose wild and turbulent chiefs had sturdily maintained their independence against the late ruler, Dost Mahommed Khan, seemed at last to have settled down into a state of quiet, though unwilling, subjection to Shah Shoojah. The Nij-

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## INTROD.]                      THE NIJROW CHIEFS.                      5

row chiefs formed an almost solitary exception to this show of outward submission; and Sir William Macnaghten had strongly urged upon Lord Auckland, at an early period of the year, the expediency of sending a force into that country as soon as practicable. Since our first occupation of Cabul, Nijrow had become a resort for all such restless and discontented characters as had rendered themselves obnoxious to the existing government. The fact of our having permitted them so long to brave us with impunity, had doubtless been regarded by the secret enemies of the new rule as a mark of conscious weakness, and may have encouraged them, in no slight degree, to hatch those treasonable designs against the state which were so suddenly developed in November, 1841, and which were for the time, unhappily, but too successful.\*

Major Pottinger, having been appointed political agent in Kohistan, arrived from Calcutta in May, 1841, and was one of the first to prognosticate the coming storm. He lost no time in representing to the Envoy the insufficiency of our military force in Kohistan, consisting at that time of merely two 6-pounder guns, and the Kohistanee regiment raised by Lieut. Maule of the Bengal Ar-

\* The reader is particularly referred to a note at the end of the book.

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## 6 MAJOR POTTINGER'S PRECAUTIONS. [INTROD.

tillery; which excellent young officer was, on the first outbreak of the rebellion, cruelly butchered by his own men, or, which is the same thing, with their consent. This regiment was stationed at Charekar, a post of no strength, and ill adapted for making a protracted defence, as was afterwards proved. The Major was, however, considered in the light of an alarmist, and he only succeeded in procuring a few Hazirbash horsemen and a 17-pounder gun, with a small detachment of the Shah's artillery, and a very scanty supply of ammunition.

About the end of September, Major Pottinger came to Cabul for the purpose of impressing on the Envoy that, unless strong measures of prevention were speedily adopted, he considered a rise in Kohistan as in the highest degree probable. His apprehensions were considered by the Envoy as not altogether unfounded, and he was empowered to retain as hostages the sons of the leading chiefs, whose fidelity he suspected. The first interruption to the state of outward tranquillity, which I have described above, occurred early in September. Capt. Hay, in command of some Hazirbashes, and Lieut. Maule, with his Kohistanee regiment, (which had been relieved at Charekar by the Goorkah, or 4th regiment, the Shah's subsidized force officered from the line,

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## INTROD.]      CAPT. HAY'S EXPEDITION.      7

under Capt. Codrington,) and two 6-pounder guns, had been sent into the Zoormut valley to collect the annual revenue, with orders likewise to make an attempt to seize certain noted plunderers, among whom were some of the murderers of Col. Herring, who had long infested the road between Ghuznee and Cabul. The revenue was in the course of being quietly paid, when Capt. Hay was mischievously informed by Moollah Mōmin, collector of revenue in Zoormut (who shortly after distinguished himself as one of our bitterest foes), that the men, whom he wished to seize, were harboured in a certain neighbouring fort of no strength whatever, and that the inhabitants would doubtless give them up rather than risk a rupture with the government. Capt. Hay immediately proceeded thither, but found the place much stronger than he had been led to expect, and the people obstinately prepared to resist his demands. On approaching the fort, he was fired upon; and finding the six-pounder shot, of which he gave a few rounds in return, made no impression on the mud walls, he had no alternative but to retreat.

The Envoy, on receiving Capt. Hay's report, immediately despatched a sufficient force to punish the rebels. It consisted of 200 of H. M. 44th Inf., 5th N. I., 6th regt. S. S. F., 4 guns of Abbot's battery, 2 iron nine-pounders mountain

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train, 2 comp. Shah's Sappers, and 2 squadrons of Anderson's horse. These were under the command of Lieut.-Col. Oliver, and were accompanied by Capt. G. H. Macgregor, the political agent at Gundamuck, who happened to be then at Cabul on business. The force commenced its march on the 27th September, and reached the Zoormut valley without the slightest interruption. On the approach of our troops the rebels had fled to the hills in the greatest consternation, leaving their forts at our mercy. The principal strongholds were destroyed with powder, and the force prepared to return to Cabul.

Meanwhile the hydra of rebellion had reared its head in another far more formidable quarter. Early in October three Giljye chiefs of note suddenly quitted Cabul, after plundering a rich Cafila at Tezeen, and took up a strong position in the difficult defile of Khoord-Cabul, about ten miles from the capital, thus blocking up the pass, and cutting off our communication with Hindostan. Intelligence had not very long previously been received that Mahomed Akber Khan, second son of the ex-ruler Dost Mahomed Khan, had arrived at Bameean from Khooloom for the supposed purpose of carrying on intrigues against the government. It is remarkable that he is nearly connected by marriage with Mahomed

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INTROD.] MAHOMED AKBER KHAN. 9

Shah Khan and Dost Mahomed Khan\*, also Giljyes, who almost immediately joined the above-mentioned chiefs. Mahomed Akber had, since the deposition of his father, never ceased to foster feelings of intense hatred towards the English nation; and, though often urged by the fallen ruler to deliver himself up, had resolutely preferred the life of a houseless exile to one of mean dependence on the bounty of his enemies. It seems therefore in the highest degree probable that this hostile movement on the part of the Eastern Giljyes was the result of his influence over them, combined with other causes which will be hereafter mentioned. The march of Gen. Sale's brigade to their winter quarters at Jellalabad, and ultimately to India, had only been deferred until the return of the force from Zoormut, but was now hastened in consequence of this unwelcome news. On the 9th October the 35th regt. N. I. under Col. Monteath, C.B., 100 of the Shah's Sappers under Capt. G. Broadfoot, a squadron of the 5th cavalry under Capt. Oldfield, and 2 guns of Capt. Abbott's battery under Lieut. Dawes, were sent on in advance to the entrance of the pass at Bootkhak, where, on the following night, it was attacked by a large num-

\* This chief must not be confounded with the ex-ruler of the same name.

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ber of rebels, who, taking advantage of the high ground and deep ravines in the neighbourhood of the camp, maintained a sharp fire upon it for several hours, by which 35 Sepoys were killed and wounded.

On the morning of the 11th Gen. Sale marched from Cabul with H. M. 13th Lt. Inf. to join the camp at Bootkhak, and on the following morning the whole proceeded to force the pass. Intelligence had been received that the enemy, besides occupying the heights of this truly formidable defile, which in many places approach to within fifty yards of each other, rising up almost perpendicularly to an elevation of 500 or 600 feet, had erected a *sunga*, or stone breastwork, in the narrowest part of the gorge, flanked by a strong tower. The advance guard, consisting of the Shah's Sappers, a company of H. M. 13th foot, another of the 35th N. I., and 2 guns under Lieut. Dawes, was met about midway through the pass, which is nearly five miles long, by a sharp and continued discharge of juzails from the strong posts of the enemy. This was returned by our men with precision and effect, notwithstanding the disadvantages of their situation; flanking parties gallantly struggled up the height to dislodge the enemy from thence, while the Sappers rushed on to destroy the above-mentioned breast-