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No so well balanced
or thoughtful as
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19132

THE PROBLEMS OF THE NORTH-WEST
FRONTIER.

A 11

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO VOLUME 1 OF
THE SIMON REPORT.

"Per ardua ad astra"

The East! It has a magic sound to some, arousing a host of romantic thoughts, yet to others who know the facts, the name signifies one of the greatest complexities with which Western civilisation has to grapple.

Many centuries ago, India suffered waves of invasion from the great Aryan race, which swept the aborigines southward into the Deccan. The sea and the passes of the North-West are the only entrances to India, for elsewhere she is guarded by towering mountains and impenetrable jungle. Throughout the ages, race after race, from the Aryan to the Mahomedan, has poured its hordes into Hindustan from the North-West. So, as of old, the potential dangers to-day are the passes of the North-West Frontier.

After the death of the faithful British ally, Ranjit Singh, the Sikh wars ensued, resulting in the annexation of the Punjab in 1849.

Later, a danger became apparent, in the friendliness of the Afghan Amir, Sher Ali, to Russia, and the Second Afghan War was declared. It was during this campaign that Quetta was occupied by an amicable agreement with the Khan of

Kelat. This strategic town at the western end of the Bolan Pass has been under British control ever since; so at the present time the more vulnerable points of the frontier lie to the north.

In 1893 Lord Lansdowne, then Viceroy of India, augmented the friendly relations with the Amir, by sending, "as a special envoy on a temporary mission," Sir Mortimer Durand, who travelled without an escort, a fact which greatly enhanced friendly feeling. The result was a success, many difficulties being settled in an amiable manner; but the most important feature was the demarcation of the boundary of southern and eastern Afghanistan by "the Durand line".

In 1895, Chitral, being a strategic point near the Dorah Pass, was occupied, and thus another inlet was made secure.

When he had assumed office in 1899, Lord Curzon withdrew excessive forces from the frontier, and substituted native levies as a frontier police force, backed by movable columns of regular troops, at strategic points with increased facilities for communication. Expensive campaigns against tribesmen were abandoned, and the blockade was resorted to with marked success, first applied to the Mahsud Waziris.

It was in 1901, on King Edward's birthday, that the "North-West Frontier Province" was separated from the Punjab,

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the old North-West Provinces being re-named "The United Provinces of Agra and Oudh". In 1905, Lord Curzon, the man who had at last placed the frontier on something like solid foundations, resigned.

We must now consider the general topography of the frontier to-day. A general impression is obtained by looking at the palm of the right hand extended before us, considering Peshawar to be at the base of the first finger. The thumb represents the Swat Valley extending north to Chitral and Kohistan. The index finger is the Khyber, and the second finger the Kurram Valley with Thal at its entrance. The third finger represents the Tochi Valley with Bannu before it, and the little finger the Gomal Pass guarded by Tank. Further to the south, in Baluchistan, we come to Quetta, at the western end of the Bolan Pass, and on the road to Kandahar. The frontier is mountainous, pierced by five passes without lateral communication. The ground is very rocky in the mountains and has very little growth. What comparatively level country exists, is dry, with stunted growth and split by frequent "nullahs" or dried-up stream beds. The only cultivation is found beside the rivers, and extends but a short way from the bank. The only practical routes for travel are along the "nullahs" and through the passes.

Both the Khyber and the Bolan Passes possess modern roads and railways. Quetta being at the western

end of the Bolan Pass, is not such a source of apprehension as the Khyber Pass, although the adjuncts of both passes permit the passage of a modern army with a minimum of difficulty. Accordingly, though in tribal territory, the road and railway through the Khyber Pass have been declared British territory, and are protected by a chain of forts, supplemented by "Khassadars," as guards, levied from the tribesmen. These Khassadars are controlled by the Political Agent, who has charge of this narrow strip of British territory. The tribesmen are forbidden to indulge in their feuds within the bounds of the road, and if crimes occur, as they do frequently, the Agent takes steps for the punishment of those guilty.

Such precautions are not exercised in the remaining passes, but they have roads built through them and the towns at their entrances are suitably garrisoned. These are good military roads, built by voluntary labour levied from tribesmen who have revolted, and into whose territory the road is being constructed to ensure future peace. The road must be built and, as the tribesmen do not wish to see alien labour employed on the road, they readily volunteer. Such a road is the recently constructed Waziristan circular road.

Since the demarcation of the Durand line, there have been advocates of two opposing policies on the North-West Frontier. One urges a "Forward Policy," i.e. to advance

British administration right up to the Durand line on the Afghan borders, completely subduing the intervening tribal territory. The Forward Policy in Baluchistan has been most successful, and at the present time the tendency is growing. For example, since the occupation of Waziristan in 1919, there has been a marked improvement in the general behaviour of tribes in independent territory.

The other party demands a Backward Policy, which maintains the tribesmen as a buffer region between Afghanistan and British India; for any hostility amongst the Afghans is invariably reflected in the attitude of the tribesmen. This principle can be applied in the case of Afghanistan which is in reality a buffer state between Soviet Russia and British India, just as the tribesmen are the buffer between Afghanistan and the North-West Frontier Province. Certainly the Backward Policy deplores the expense that would be entailed in the complete subjugation of the tribesmen, giving sound and logical reasons for its adoption for the present; yet the Forward Policy is of proved success in the districts in which it has been applied, and has many supporters. This difference of opinion is only a repetition of the old controversy which existed, when British territory was bounded by the Indus. But, unfortunately, as we know, the tribesmen live by warfare, and being always the buffer state, they rebound as instanced in

April 1930, compelling military operations against them at most inconvenient times. This is another factor in favour of the Forward Policy and the subduing of tribesmen for all time. At present, 13,400 square miles of the province are administered by the British, out of a total of 38,900 square miles, populated by some 5 millions of people.

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These frontier tribesmen are a hardy race, accustomed to open air living, "unable to extract more than the barest pittance from the stony ground where they live and quarrel". They are well armed and possess strong fanatical beliefs by heredity, which is only in accordance with their mode of living. Within their own prescribed limits, these tribesmen are allowed to do practically anything they wish, but are kept in reasonable check by means to be explained, later, when dealing with the methods of administration. Their home is the mountains, with perpetual contest the byword of life. If there are no caravan trains to plunder, they are looking covetously at the riches stored on the plains below. Fortunately, when a rising takes place, it can be easily suppressed, for the tribesmen are still in a primitive state, as regards community spirit, and only under the exceptional circumstance of a "Jehad" or holy war, will anything like a large united body be formed. The tribesmen then assemble at the fanatical incitement of the Muslim "mullahs" or priests, who call upon them in the names of Allah and Mohammed.

The aristocracy in the British administered territory is represented by the Khans, while the chief

personages in the actual tribal area are the "maliks" or headmen of villages, but the term can be applied generally, to the leader of any small following.

It is now necessary to describe clearly the two methods of administration as exercised, firstly in the British administered territory, and secondly in the tribal area. The British governed portion of the province comprises five districts- Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan, and Hazara. The population of this area is about $2\frac{1}{4}$ millions, and the religion is Mohammedan by an overwhelming majority. Here exist the normal methods of maintaining law and order, and giving justice. There is an organisation of civil servants, with local government by municipal commissioners. A system of land assessment is in existence and revenue is collected from landowners. In fact, the administration of this part of the province is practically the same as that to be found elsewhere in India, though, perhaps hampered a little by the nature of the country in which it has to be applied.

But in the tribal territory and the political agencies of North and South Waziristan, the Kurram, the Khyber, and the Malakand (which embraces the Indian states of Dir, Swat, and Chitral), a different system exists, as demanded by different conditions. The special case of the Khyber Pass has been mentioned before, and the functions of the political Agent and method of administration in the tribal tract will now be described,

There is no organised magistracy in these further regions, but the Political Officers have considerable influence over the tribes because any hostility is countered by a stoppage of the annual subsidy. At the same time no taxes are levied and consequently the individual tribesmen have no cause for complaint in that respect. These Political Agents do not reside within the tribal territory, but exert their influence through interviews with Pathan chieftains. To these the Agent comes as a guest, a most important branch of his work being to induce the headmen of districts to bring to justice men who have committed violent crimes in the province and have fled to the tribal area to escape. He also endeavours to have stolen property returned "and even to return inhabitants of a district who may have been kidnapped. It follows that there must be the closest co-operation between the police in the districts, the Frontier Constabulary (which is an allied force under a Commandant, who is responsible to the Chief Commissioner, and which guards the frontier of the districts), and the Political Agencies". There is still another difficulty with which the Political Agency has to cope, and that is the fact that the tribesmen are always in motion; in summer they are with their herds upon the higher ground in their own territory, but when winter sets in, they naturally move to the warmer regions below, and perhaps enter the Province itself, where they may commit a crime, and then retreat

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to their own region. Here again, through the Political Officer, justice endeavours to punish the culprit. And, in many similar ways, the Political Agency exerts its influence for the benefit of the community in general.

There is another form of control, being purely local in origin, which exists not only in the North-West Frontier Province and Baluchistan, but in tribal territory also. These are "Jirgas". "The essential point to bear in mind is that the Jirga system has its origin in tribal custom, and is recognised and applied by the tribesmen themselves in areas where the agents of the government of India make no attempt to intervene". In the administered districts it is preserved in a regulated form and in the Political Agencies, the tribal Jirgas, in a number of cases, are kept in hand by the Political Officer. It is obvious that it is a wise policy to retain the Jirga system.

A Jirga or "Council of Elders" may be called together by the Deputy Commissioner in cases of civil dispute, which are likely to create a breach of the peace, and he may act upon their decree "provided that at least three-quarters of the members of the Jirga have concurred in the decision". Ordinary law courts need not, therefore, be occupied with such matters as questions of local custom, matrimonial infidelity, or money matters. "It is significant

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that there is less challenge of notorious fact, and more frequent admission of the truth, before Jirgas than in ordinary courts where professional advocates are engaged."

When the Commissioner or the Deputy Commissioner deems it more expedient for an accused person to be tried in a regular criminal court, he refers to the Jirga for a decision. The members of the Jirga are nevertheless open to challenge, and when the tribunal has been decided upon, the Commissioner places the matter forward in the form of simple questions. Then the Jirga draws up an elaborate statement of what it finds to be the truth. If the accused is reported innocent, the matter is closed there and then; if the verdict is guilty, there may be appended the recommended punishment. However, even for capital offences, a Jirga is not permitted to recommend more than "14 years rigorous imprisonment". The finding of a Jirga is generally unanimous and reliable, but the Deputy Commissioner always has the right to order further investigations and overrule convictions, when in his opinion it is not to be relied upon.

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Baluchistan in the south borders on Persia. There is the usual type of Jirga in existence there, as described before. As well as this kind there exist four other types of Jirga; firstly the District Jirga, where members are composed of leading men from over the district; secondly the Inter-District Jirga, where each of the two parties comes

from different localities; thirdly the Special Jirga, which is called in when the accused claims that he will not receive a fair trial from the usual Jirga; in this case the Extra Assistant Commissioner may permit both parties to select some members of the tribunal, while he himself nominates a "sarpanch" or president. The fourth and last kind of Jirga, is Shahi Jirga (King Jirga) which meets twice a year, once at Quetta and once at Sibi, the only other town of importance in Baluchistan. This body has the last word in matters which cannot be decided in, or are too immense a task for, the lower Jirgas. The formal courts are reserved for questions of trade and for the trial of foreigners.

Before finally reviewing the situation, it would not be out of place to give some idea of the operations of expeditions sent against tribesmen, who have been so troublesome as to demand drastic measures. The forces move along the valleys, endeavouring to stir the tribesmen to a decisive battle, by burning their villages. Such steps are necessary, for the tribesman is essentially a guerilla fighter, and nothing short of these methods will make him come into the open. The punitive force must have a strong line of communication, for the tribesman will harry this rather than the main force.

The blockade system is usually a success when applied to stubborn tribes. Usually a line of forts is spread around the higher ground where the tribes are passing

the summer with their herds. The Royal Air Force is most useful in aiding this operation, and for bombing inaccessible portions of tribal territory; for which purpose air-landings have been levelled out at frequent intervals along the frontier. But aircraft, as yet, can only be used as an auxiliary body, not being able to bring a determined tribe to surrender without reasonable assistance of land forces. Invaluable work is done in spite of the nature of the country, as was instanced by the rescue of the foreigners from troubled Kabul by the huge Vickers' Victoria troop-carriers after the flight of Amanullah. The Air Force is permanently stationed at Peshawar and Quetta, either post easily able to receive assistance from the station at Lahore. To resume, when winter comes, the tribes who are under blockade seek the lower levels, but are prevented from doing so, and usually, capitulation quickly follows. Suitable punishment such as a fine, is imposed and in order to ensure future good behaviour a road is built. On the North-West Frontier the road is the true guardian of the peace, for if the tribesmen contemplate misbehaviour, they know that retribution will soon be marching along the road. The system of paying for the labour, although it meets with much disapproval from the taxpayer of India, is good policy, leaving no resentment in the minds of the tribesmen.

Thus we have seen the history of the frontier, advancing through the ages until we arrive at it to-day, with its modes of living and customs very little changed during the centuries. The British administration does not interfere, unless forced to do so, with that which is well left alone. The directly governed area has no reason for discontent, being allowed to retain all of its old customs which are not repulsive to the Western mind. The area is a problematical one, and if it has not progressed as much as other parts of India, no blame can be attached to the government for its justifiable caution.

The future has yet to bring the time when the Province and other parts will be responsible enough to elect their own representative government; but this time is still far away. As of old, the danger of the frontier is the ever watchful invader. Our best policy is to keep on friendly terms with the Amir of Afghanistan, for his state is the buffer, allowing us time to prepare, when the invader, whoever he may be, commences his advance. Russia openly boasts of her anti-imperial designs and so "forewarned is forearmed". Sovietism is directly opposed to the Faith of Islam, which is the religion of the Afghans to a man, yet one can never be too sure as to what the next turn of politics in this land, restless from time immemorial, will be.

Thus the matter stands, and any Briton may feel proud of the patience and tact with which Britain's representatives handle the vast enigma of the North-West Frontier.

"It ain't the individual,
Nor the army as a whole,
But the everlasting teamwork of every blooming soul!"

Kipling.

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Kindly Note.

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