

MEMOIR.

MACNAGHTEN, Sir WILLIAM HAY, the second son of Sir Francis Macnaghten, for many years a Supreme Court Judge at Calcutta, was born in August 1793. He came to India as a Cavalry Cadet on the Madras Establishment, in September 1809, and did duty with the Body Guard of the Governor of Madras, with whose family he continued to reside for some months. From the very beginning of his Indian career his mind was eagerly bent upon the pursuit of Oriental literature, and so the leisure hours of his easy appointment were devoted to the study of Hindustani and Persian. In May 1811, he obtained a prize of 500 Pagodas, (£175) for passing a successful examination in Hindustani. There was no reward appointed at that time for the study of Persian, but the Political Department holding out bright hopes for junior officers, Macnaghten was one of the number who aspired to enter it, with which object in view, he studied and passed a most satisfactory examination in Persian. Soon after, he was appointed to a Cornetcy in the 4th Cavalry, stationed at Hyderabad, where he remained a year, during which time having opportunities of visiting the Nizam, in company with the Resident, Mr. Henry Russell, he eagerly became acquainted with the policy and feelings of Native Courts. About a twelvemonth after, Government held out a prize of 500 Pagodas for eminent proficiency in Persian, when Macnaghten passed a second examination in it and secured the reward. He had in the meantime made considerable progress in Tamil and Teloogoo. About the middle of 1813, he accompanied the escort of Mr. Cole, Resident of Mysore, in which country he took the opportunity of gaining a knowledge of Canarese and Mahrattah. He was at this time employed by Mr. Cole, as Political Assistant, though not formally recognized as such by Government.

In 1814, Macnaghten was appointed to the Bengal Civil Service, and arrived at Calcutta in October, with most flattering testimonials from the Governor of Madras and the Resident of Mysore. In the College of Fort William, he applied himself with greater ardour than ever to the study of Oriental literature, and on the sixteenth anniversary of the Institution, Lord Hastings, in noticing Macnaghten's exertions, stated, that "there was not a language taught in the College in which he had not earned the highest distinctions which the Government or the College could bestow." In May 1816, he was appointed Assistant to the Registrar in the Sudder Dewanny Adawlut, the highest Court of Appeal in the Presidency; in November 1818, he was deputed to officiate as Joint-Magistrate of Malda. In February 1820, he was appointed Judge and Magistrate of Shahabad. In January 1822, he returned to Calcutta as Deputy Registrar of the Sudder Court, when he requested that a Committee might be appointed to examine him in Hindoo and Mahomedan Law; this was granted and the report of the Committee spoke in the warmest terms of the extraordinary proficiency he had evinced during a very searching examination. The Marquis of Hastings, in his last address at the College of Fort William, said, "For these distinctions a successful candidate has recently presented himself and enrolled a name already honorably familiar in the Annals, and associated with the best eras and efforts of the Institution. Mr. William Macnaghten has shown in his bright example, and even amidst the engrossing duties of public station, that industry can command the leisure, and genius confer the power, to explore the highest regions of Oriental literature and to unravel the intricacies of Oriental law. The Committee of Examination appointed to report on that gentleman's proficiency in the study of Mahomedan and Hindoo Law, have expressed a very high opinion of his attainments, and have pronounced him eminently qualified to consult, in the original, any work on the subject. It is time, indeed, that his labours have been prosecuted beyond the walls of this Institution; but within them was the

foundation laid on which Mr. Macnaghten has reared so noble a superstructure." On the 5th September 1822, within a fortnight of this commendation, he was gazetted as Registrar of the Sudder Dewanny, which appointment he held for eight and a half years, and during that period in addition to the daily labours of the Court, he carried through the press three volumes of the Reports of Decided Cases, more than two-thirds of which were reported by himself. They are of standard authority on all legal questions to which they refer, and enjoy the same reputation in Indian Courts as the most esteemed and authentic reports do in English Courts. Two other works also emanated from his pen during this time, "Considerations on Hindoo Law" and "The Principles and Precedents of Mahomedan Law;" the latter is now in its fourth edition. At the close of 1830, Lord William Bentinck determined to make a tour through the Upper and Western Provinces of India, to look into many questions of great interest and importance relative to the revenue, the police and judicial systems, and more particularly to expedite the survey and settlement of the North-western Provinces. He chose as his Secretary to accompany him, Macnaghten, and from this date his political career may be said to have commenced. He was present at the meeting of his Lordship with Runjeet Sing at Roopur, where he obtained his first insight into the mysteries of Lahore policy, and on his return to the Presidency at the beginning of 1833, he was entrusted with the Secret and Political Departments, a post he continued to occupy for four years.

Lord Auckland succeeded to the Government of India 1836, and in October of the following year, proceeded on tour to the North-west Provinces, taking with him as his predecessor had done, Macnaghten. From Simla, Macnaghten was sent on a mission to Runjeet Sing and Shah Sujah, the object of which was to depose Dost Mahomed and re-instate Shah Sujah on the throne of Cabool, the expedition being assisted by contributions of money, the

presence of an envoy and a sufficient body of officers to discipline and command the troops, by the English Government. Macnaghten returned with the tripartite treaty to Simla on the 17th of July 1838, and found that during his absence there had been a further development of the expeditionary project. It had been decided that a British army should cross the Indus and plant itself in the centre of Afghanistan. In November the army of the Indus as it was called, assembled at Ferozepore, on the banks of the Sutlej and Macnaghten accompanied it, as envoy and Minister at the Court of Shah Sujah. Ere the army marched, news arrived that the siege of Herat had been raised and as there was no necessity to proceed thither, its strength was reduced by one-half. A more delicate or difficult office had never been before conferred on a subordinate functionary, such as Macnaghten was now appointed to. There was a long and dreary march before the army, through mountain defiles and sandy deserts, into an unknown country. He accompanied a prince, who was very unpopular, and a prince, who, even if restored to the throne of his ancestors, could only retain it by the gleam of British bayonets and gold. The diplomatic arrangements were placed in one hand and the military in another, the sad sequel of which will be related further on.

Military history has told with what brilliant success this enterprise opened, and how disastrously it ended, but it is Macnaghten's conduct throughout it, in his difficult and responsible post that this memoir must deal with. Candahar was taken, Ghuzni, Mahmood's celebrated fortress was captured, and Cabool, the key to India was occupied (2nd August 1839), and Shah Sujah installed in the Bala Hissar on the 7th August 1839. Half the forces were sent back to India. Honors were showered on Lord Auckland, Sir John Keane, Macnaghten, Pottinger, Willshire and Wade. Macnaghten was created a Baronet. Dost Mahommed surrendered on the 3rd November 1840, by riding up to Macnaghten and giving him his sword and claiming his

protection. The next course the Government adopted, was retrenchment. The stipends allowed to the Afghan chiefs for relinquishing the immemorial practice of levying contributions on the highways in their respective districts were reduced. These stipends were guaranteed to them on our entering the country, and they had performed their portion of the contract with exemplary fidelity. Now they all rebelled, pillaged, plundered convoys of every description and blocked up the passes—in fact the whole country was soon in a blaze of rebellion. Macnaghten had been rewarded for his services by the Governorship of Bombay and was making preparations to leave in November 1841, but while all seemed calm and unruffled on the surface of the Afghan race, a general confederacy was being organized for the expulsion of the British. Information of this movement poured in from all sides, but the envoy indulged in a false security, and believed it was a mere local *émeute* which might easily be suppressed, and not a national revolt. On the 1st of November Sir Alexander Burnes called on Macnaghten whom he was to succeed in his Political appointment, and congratulated him on leaving Afghanistan in a state of profound tranquillity. On the following day Sir Alexander Burnes was assassinated! The adjoining house, Captain Johnson's, the Paymaster of the Shah's forces, was next attacked and plundered of Rs. 170,000, (£17,000). The insurgents were scarcely a hundred in number at this time, while a British force of 5,000 men was lying idle within a mile and a quarter of the spot, and yet no active measures were taken to nip the revolt in the bud. The General-in-Chief was General Elphinstone, a gallant old Officer, but weighed down by physical infirmities, who had been pitchforked into this post by Lord Auckland, contrary to the advice of Sir Jasper Nicholls, the Commander-in-Chief. The envoy had received a note at seven on the morning of the 2nd November from Sir Alexander Burnes; he instantly called on the General, but made light of the *émeute*, and the General was only too glad to acquiesce in his views. The procrastination and inactivity of the authorities encouraged

the small band of insurgents and swelled their ranks to immense numbers, and after a succession of military blunders, Macnaghten was informed that the only course left open to him was negotiation. Akbar Khan, one of the sons of Dost Mahommed, next arrived upon the scene, and was at once accepted as the leader of the national confederacy. Cut off from supplies by the energetic measures of this fiery and impetuous young man, starvation stared the garrison in the face, and on the 11th December when only sufficient food was left for one day's consumption, the envoy was compelled to negotiate. A conference was held, the salient points of which were "that the British troops at Candahar and Cabool, at Ghuzni and Jellalabad, should evacuate the country, receiving every possible assistance in carriage and provisions, and that Dost Mahommed and his family should be set at liberty. Shah Sujah was to be allowed the option of remaining in Afghanistan with a pension of a lac of Rupees a year, (£10,000) or of accompanying the British troops to India. The army was to quit the cantonments within three days, and in the meantime to receive ample supplies of provisions, for which due payment was to be made, and four officers were to be delivered up as hostages for the performance of the stipulations."

Macnaghten's own explanation of this disgraceful transaction, is this :

"The whole country as far as we could learn had risen in rebellion ; our communications on all sides were cut off ; we had been fighting forty days against superior numbers under most disadvantageous circumstances with a deplorable loss of life, and in a day or two must have perished of hunger. I had been repeatedly apprized by the military authorities that nothing could be done with our troops. The terms I secured were the best obtainable, and the destruction of 15,000 beings would little have benefited our country while the Government would have been almost compelled to avenge our fate at whatever cost." The historian of the Afghan war describes the position of the envoy thus, "En-

vironed and hemmed in by difficulties and dangers, overwhelmed with responsibility which there was none to share—the lives of 15,000 men resting on his decision—the honor of his country at stake—with a perfidious enemy before him, a decrepit General at his side, and a paralyzed army at his back, he was driven to negotiate by the imbecility of his companions.” There is no doubt that the entire blame rests with the two military commanders, who were quite unfitted for their posts, General Elphinstone, by bodily infirmity and constitutional imbecility, and Brigadier Shelton, by a perverse temper and obstinacy.

The treaty made with the Afghans was violated by them. The aid offered was refused, though the envoy had fulfilled his part of the contract to the letter—and he was drawn into a mesh which resulted in his death, thus related in Marshman’s History of India, “ It was at this critical juncture, while Sir William Macnaghten was tossed upon a sea of difficulties and bewildered by the appalling crisis, which was approaching, that he was drawn into the net which Akbar Khan spread for his destruction. On the evening of the 22nd December 1841, the wily Afghan sent two Agents with Major Skinner, who was his prisoner, to the envoy, with a proposal, to be considered at a conference the next day, that Akbar Khan and the Ghilzyes should unite with the British troops outside the cantonment, and make a sudden attack on Mahomed Shah’s fort and seize the person of Ameenoola, the most hostile and ferocious of the insurgent chiefs, whose head was to be presented to the envoy for a sum of money, but the offer was indignantly rejected by him. It was further proposed that the British force should remain till the spring: and then retire of its own accord; that the Shah should retain the title of king, and that Akbar Khan, should be Vizier receiving from the British Government an annuity of four lacs of Rupees a year, and an immediate payment of thirty lacs. In an evil hour for his reputation and his safety, the envoy accepted this treacherous proposal in a Persian paper drawn up with his own hand. When this wild overture was communicated to

General Elphinstone and Captain Mackenzie the next morning, they both pronounced it to be a plot, and endeavoured to dissuade Sir William from going out to meet Akbar Khan. He replied in a hurried manner, "Let me alone for that, dangerous though it be; if it succeeds, it is worth all risks; the rebels have not fulfilled one article of the treaty, and I have no confidence in them, and if by it we can only save our honor, all will be well. At any rate, I would rather suffer a hundred deaths than live the last six weeks over again." At noon he directed the General to have two regiments, and some guns ready for the attack of the fort, and then proceeded with Captains Trevor, Mackenzie and Lawrence, with the slender protection of only sixteen of his body-guard to the fatal meeting. At the distance of six hundred yards from the cantonment, Akbar Khan had caused some horse cloths to be spread on the slope of a hill, where the snow lay less deep. The suspicions of the officers, as they dismounted, were roused by the appearance of Ameenoola's brother at the conference, and the large number of armed followers who were present. Akbar Khan addressed a haughty salutation to Sir William, and immediately after, on a given signal, the officers were suddenly seized from behind, and placed separately on the saddle of an Afghan horseman, who galloped off to the city. Captain Trevor fell off the horse, and was hacked to pieces. Akbar Khan himself endeavoured to seize Sir William, who struggled vigorously, exclaiming in Persian, 'For God's sake.' Exasperated by this resistance, the fierce youth drew forth the pistol which Sir William had presented to him the day before and shot him dead, when the *ghazees* rushed up, and mutilated his body with their knives. If his own repeated declaration be worthy of any credit, Akbar Khan had no intention of taking away the life of the envoy, but was simply anxious to obtain possession of his person as a hostage for the Dost. Thus perished Sir William Macnaghten, the victim of an unsound and unjust policy, but as noble and brave a gentleman as ever fell in the service of his country."—"*Men whom India has known.*"