

considerably increase his wealth and security, in both of which advantages the Company would partake. On the other hand Hastings saw, and said plainly, that the expedition would be sharply criticised in England, and that "an unusual degree of responsibility was annexed to such an undertaking."<sup>1</sup>

No political act of Hastings has been more severely condemned than his share in the Rohilla war. Parliamentary orators have thundered against the sale and extirpation of a whole nation, as if a conqueror had depopulated Rohilcund, slaying and expelling all the inhabitants, or driving them like the ten tribes of Israel into exile and captivity, and utterly annihilating an able and admirable dynasty. Macaulay has contrasted "the golden days when the Afghan princes ruled in the vale of Rohilcund" with the unjust and cold-blooded bargain for their ruin and spoliation; and Mill, who dissimulates strong prejudice under a tone of judicial impartiality, has passed a stern sentence upon the whole transaction. The business, in short, has been so curiously misrepresented, that it is necessary here to give a short account of the origin and nature of the Rohilla domination in the province to which their name has become attached.

The word Rohilla, or mountaineer, seems to have been indiscriminately applied in India to the Afghans who during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries came down in bands from their highlands to offer their services to the Delhi emperors. Dáud Khan and Rehmat Khan, the sons of one of these soldiers of fortune, entered the imperial army early in the eighteenth century, and

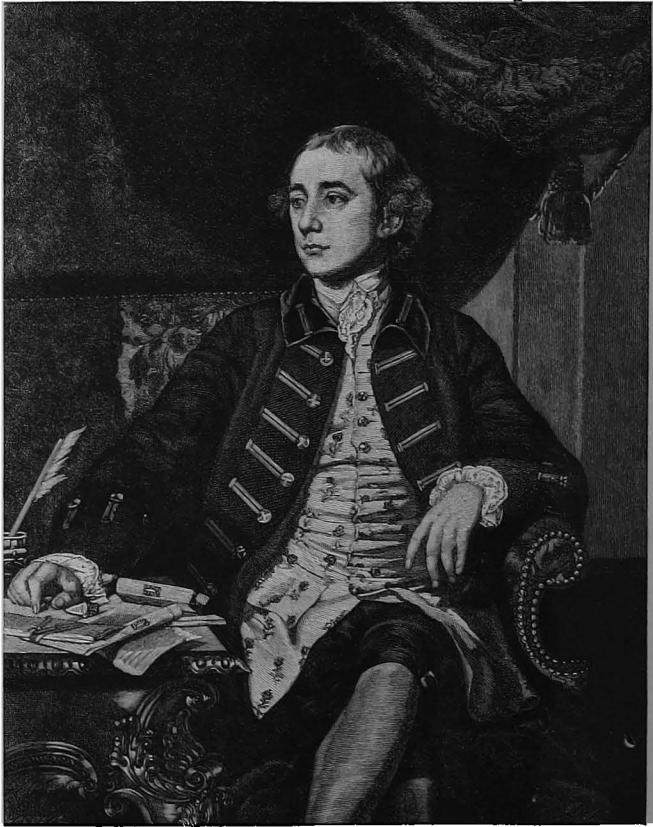
<sup>1</sup> Appendix 23. 5th Report.

obtained a grant of land in the province of Katehur, afterwards called Rohilcund. The son of Dáud Khan, Ali Mahmud, said by native historians to have been an adopted Hindu boy, raised himself to rank and consequence by seizing more land, enlisting Afghan retainers, procuring warrants of dignity and office from the court, and lastly by defeating a body of troops sent against him from Delhi, and killing the imperial commandant. This exploit so enhanced his reputation that all the roving blades and mercenary fighting men of the country side joined his company ; he was able to bribe powerful officials at court, to enlarge his estates at his neighbours' expense, to amass rich booty by lucky expeditions, and after this time-honoured fashion to settle himself down into something like independent rulership over the greater part of Rohilcund. But in one of his continual broils and snatchings at contiguous property he unhappily fell into collision with the much more powerful founder of the Oude kingdom, Sefdar Jung, who was carrying on the same business on a larger scale, and who was also Vizier of the empire. The shark very nearly swallowed the pike ; for Ali Mahmud was beaten, deserted by his banditti, surrendered, and was sent on parole to Delhi ; his satrapy was broken up ; and Rohilcund might never have existed at all if Ahmed Shah's descent upon India from Afghanistan had not drawn northward the armies and great officers of the empire. Ali Mahmud escaped back to his country, raised fresh levies, recovered his estates and authority, crushed out the resistance of the Hindu landholders ; and in 1746 he was again in a position to extract from the demoralised ministry at Delhi his investiture with

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English territory in India, for Benares and Ghazipur were taken in spite of his remonstrances. He took no provinces and won no victories ; he maintained unbroken peace in his own provinces while the Mahrattas were routing the Bombay troops, and Hyder Ali was devastating Madras ; so that his strength was wasted and his reputation tarnished in the inglorious business of providing money for carrying on distant, calamitous, and unproductive wars.

pany. The commotion in Benares had disturbed the whole country round ; the roads were beset ; the armed peasantry and banditti swarmed out to attack outlying posts and troops on the march ; communications were cut off ; all the postal lines were broken ; travellers were robbed and murdered ; the banks of the rivers, which were the great highways in those days, were lined with armed men who fired upon and boarded all boats ; and the news of a great catastrophe spread rapidly to the Company's stations in the vicinity. Alarming rumours went flying through the bazaars, and authentic information came in only through scouts and disguised messengers. There had set in one of those floods of anarchy and confusion that formerly rose with incredible rapidity in a country where up to 1858 all the peasantry carried arms, and instinctively welcomed a suspension of government as a relief from vexatious tax-gathering and police interference, and as an excellent opportunity for settling local differences and clearing off old scores. Some of the Company's detachments in Oude were very severely handled, and Hastings believed that the rising against the English in this quarter was actively fomented by the Nawab's mother at Fyzabad, the famous Bhow Begum, who highly disapproved of the purposes with which he was going to Lucknow, and would naturally use a promising opportunity of making the journey unpleasant for him. The high governing qualities possessed by Hastings, his calmness in danger, his capacity for collecting and employing vigorously all his available strength, his address and dexterity in handling all the springs of administrative resource, were never more conspicuously exhibited than at this crisis.



WARREN HASTINGS

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BY

SIR ALFRED LYALL, K.C.B.

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