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SHER SHAH SURI.



CONSULTATION ONLY SHER SHAH SURI,

Emperor of India.

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Dedicated by permission to
His Excellency The Earl of Reading,
Viceroy and Governor-General of India.



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FOREWORD.

In asking me to contribute a Foreword to the present work, the Honourable Nawab Sir Zlficar Ali Khan has paid me a compliment of which I am deeply sensible. It is an honour for any man to associate his name with that of Sher Shah, in many ways the most capable figure that ever occupied the imperial throne of Delhi. I personally have always resented Lane-Pole's assertion that the bloody and unscrupulous Balban "perfectly understood the conditions of kingship in India." Blood-thirsty tyranny does not indicate *understanding*, whether in India or elsewhere. Sher Shah's administration of his brief empire, on the other hand, does reveal a most phenomenal understanding, not only of the conditions of kingship in India, but also of the hearts of the people—if, indeed, the two are not merely different aspects of one and the same thing. The fact that the peasantry for whom Sher Shah was so consistently and unstintingly concerned, and whom he so greatly benefitted by his regulations, were in the main



Hindus, immeasurably enhances his claims to honour, in an age before any large fusion of the races had taken place, and before the broad-minded tolerance of Akbar had been exhibited. The latter, indeed, appears from all the available evidence to owe his reputation for wisdom almost as much to the example and precept of the Afghan Sher Shah as to his own sagacity; and for this reason alone, every additional work which tends, like the present one, to make the merits of Sher Shah more widely known and appreciated, is most cordially to be welcomed. Less spectacular than Muhammad ibn Tughlak, less picturesque than Babur, less showy than Shah Jehan, Sher Shah has obviously been thrown too much into the shade by these more dazzling personalities, a fate the more readily comprehended, when the shortness of his reign is remembered. Just as the mausoleum of the Afghan, tucked away in the obscure background of a remote province, is completely overshadowed by the more gorgeous and more conspicuously placed tombs of his Moghal rivals, despite the fact that, as architecture, it is considered by many competent authorities to surpass them all, so is the man whose remains



that mausoleum holds overshadowed by lesser personalities more favourably situated in regard to the lime-light of modern interest and modern travel. Many of the principles evolved by this untutored Afghan are of immortal application, and the success of all rulers in India must always depend to a surprising extent upon how far they succeed in adapting them to the conditions of the times. This being so, it would seem difficult indeed to overstate the merit of him who evolved them unaided from nothing but the innate sagacity of his wise and beneficent mind, and in helping, therefore, to bring the qualities of the relatively forgotten emperor more prominently before the public in the present work, Sir Zulfiqar Ali Khan has done a service which will be widely appreciated.

SIMLA :

The 19th November, 1924.

} BRAINERD SPOONER.



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AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

In 1914 I read a paper before the Panjab Historical Society on Sher Shah which I now present to my readers in greatly expanded form. My original idea was to publish the paper immediately with additions, but the world-shaking experiences of the fateful war prevented the execution of this design. Ten eventful years have elapsed since I first wrote it, and during this period Empires and Nations have been overwhelmed with disaster, and democracy has obsessed the minds of the nations in the old world. But, the one thing which has remained unchanged, and which even the hideous suffering of humanity has not altered is the fact that right is still made to yield to force. The titanic war therefore has not ushered in a new world as was predicted, with different ideals of justice and freedom. It is depressing to realise that after such colossal sacrifices in behalf of lofty ideals the mentality remains the same as before the war. In this book recording the life story of Sher Shah, the reader will discover that his five years of constant



activity in war and administration transformed the chaotic world of India into one in which the highest order and justice prevailed, and in which the strong could not prey upon the weak, and right was mightier than force. Such priceless examples of lofty public deeds and of magnanimous men may inspire the present age. Heine said that when he read Plutarch, he felt a vehement impulse instantly to take post horses for Berlin, and turn a hero. But the materialistic tendency of the present age strives to repress the ideal forces of the human soul and consequently heroes, such as former ages produced, do not appear in this sultry atmosphere.

The impression which the reader of Sher Shah's life invariably receives is that the secret of his power lay in the love of his subjects, who felt convinced that his unwearied daily labours were dedicated to their contentment and prosperity. They felt that he was one of themselves and that they could approach him without ceremony for the redress of their grievances against the strongest in the land. It lay besides in that sense of justice which thrilled his



soul, in that great intuition of benevolence which commands all sympathy, all courtesy to be its fruits, bringing together emperor and peasant on the same level of human harmony and oneness. Thus high and low became one in the great new energy that enraptured the nation, making the humblest peasant in the country glory in the splendour of the period like a grandee of the highest rank.✓

It is interesting that this splendid period like all brilliant periods in history contains the complete self display of those developments in the life of Indians which in the times of later rulers fructified this great country. His daily life which was the true expression of his justice, wisdom and benevolence would reach its full significance if those who control the destiny of any country in the world realised that the sword is not the only power in the world which can pacify a living people. What others seek to attain by fear, by severity, by majesty, he accomplished by kindness. It is possible that the principles of Sher Shah's policy may be carried away from their natural environment and be understood and developed in some sense true in itself even if it be contradictory



of another stream of thought which at present overflows the minds of the rulers in this materialistic age.

It is pleasing to see that this Pathan king was actuated by those Islamic sentiments which Sultan Salahuddin impressed on the mind of his heir. "My son," said the great Sultan, "I commend thee to the Most High God, the fountain of all goodness. Do His will, for that way lieth peace. Abstain from the shedding of blood ; trust not to that, for blood that is spilt never slumbers. Seek to win the hearts of thy people, and watch over their prosperity, for it is to secure their happiness that thou art appointed by God and by me. Try to gain the hearts of thy Amirs and ministers and nobles. I have become great as I am because I have won men's hearts by gentleness and kindness."

I have dedicated this book by permission to His Excellency the Earl of Reading, the present Viceroy and Governor-General of India. My readers will discover a strange coincidence in the fact that at the time this book is presented to the public the destiny of India is controlled by one who, like Sher Shah, has

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risen to this position of mighty rulers by the force of his genius. The message of Sher Shah is thus delivered into worthy hands. Dr. Spooner, the Deputy Director of Archæology in India, has laid me under a deep debt of gratitude by contributing an excellent foreword to this book. For this I desire to offer him my cordial thanks.

LAHORE :

10th December 1924.

} ZULFIQAR ALI KHAN.



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CORRIGENDA.

Page.	Line.	Read.
8	16	inert.
42	6	obnoxious.
46	24	This sudden.
59	22	bitted.
67	16	distracted.
68	5	sortie.
72	20	the height.
73	17	wrest the hegemony.
78	13	contented.
85	18	our own.
93	11	gilded.
104	18	that reverence.



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“Half of History,” said Doudan, “is made up of unexpected events that force the stream into a different course,” and like one of Mrs. Rudcliffe’s novels, “’tis at a door hidden in the wall, that the important personages in the drama make their entries and their exits.” When Babar extinguished the last hope of Pathan domination in India on the historic field of Panipat, which had witnessed the wreck of mighty armies as well as the exultant march of the conquering hosts, the fates obviously made it sufficiently clear that a new order of things had been ushered in and the old took its departure in a chaos of blood and agony.

Babar—that romantic figure of Indian History swept on to the wide plains of India and laid the foundation of the Mughal Empire. Ibrahim Lodhi redeemed his disgraceful past by an heroic death. His body was found under a heap of slain over whom marched the conquering army of Babar—the favourite of fortune who was oppressed by a genius which could not be satisfied except by the possession of an empire.



It was the close of the 15th century when everywhere old barriers were breaking down and new worlds opening out to the adventurers. The Portuguese had rounded the Cape of Storms, while Columbus seeking another way to India had found instead a new Continent. The Turks had given the death blow to the Moribund Empire of the East, while Ferdinand and Isabella had driven the last Moorish King from Granada.

The revival of classical learning in Europe in general and in Italy in particular was working upon literature, upon art, upon religion. What we call modern History was beginning in the West, when about the end of Bahlol Lodhi's reign comparatively obscure parents gave birth to a son who as he grew into boyhood manifested unmistakable signs of early and remarkable precocity. This was Sher Shah, the subject of this book.

Before he reached manhood he developed a wonderfully comprehensive intellect. Men of eminence who came in contact with him felt strongly impressed by the force of his character and predicted that he was destined to play a



prominent part on the disturbed stage of the Indian Empire. Before I proceed with the story of his life, I may be allowed to make a brief survey of the times which produced the extraordinary man—superior in many respects to the greatest personalities that have moved across the pages of Indian History—who was to knock at the hidden door of fortune and rule an empire.

In the 15th century the number of European visitors to India was few and their evidence scanty, both as regards value and amount and unfortunately none of these travellers ventured upwards into northern provinces and the information which they supply confined as it is to the Deccan, cannot be laid under contribution for the purposes of this book. The Indian historians on the other hand never treated History as an exact science and therefore one can only attempt a general survey.

About this period there was no one kingdom in India overwhelmingly superior in power to the rest, and the capital from which India was governed became the centre of an insignificant sovereignty. The Syeds from 1414 to 1450 and



the Lodhis from 1450 to 1526 are dismissed by Elphinstone in but five out of his six hundred pages which deal with Hindu and Mohamadan periods. From the days of Timur to those of his great descendant Babar, India presented a congeries of small and often mutually antagonistic kingdoms. While India remained in this distracted condition she had no history. The annals of these kingdoms, says Lanepool, are either unwritten or unworthy of record. This was the uninspiring state of affairs in this country at the opening of the 15th century, and it remained unchanged in all but minor details till the invasion of Babar profoundly modified the situation and paved the way for a drastic rearrangement of political power.

"Clemency is a virtue which descends from God," observes Farishta, "but the degenerate children of India of this age did not deserve it." This sounds like too severe an historical verdict, but when we see that in other countries both in Asia and Europe the moral fibre of people had become strangely relaxed about the same time, we cease to wonder at the degradation of the people of this country in which the powers of destructive elements were more



active than those of integration. While this was the pitiable state of India, as described by Mr. Lanepool and Farishta in such a graphic manner, that of the western world was not much dissimilar. Montague tells us that when he finished a book, he committed his ideas about it to writing. In commenting on Guicciardini's History of Italy he praises the historian's diligence, his freedom from the bias of hatred, favour or vanity and then he proceeds to deeper criticism. "I have also remarked this," he says, "that of so many characters and results on which he pronounces judgment, of such diverse counsel and movements, he never refers a single one of them to virtue, to religion or to conscience, just as if such things were gone clean out of this world." Of all the acts that he describes, however fair they may look in themselves, he always traces back the cause to some vicious course or to some hope of selfish advantage. That was probably no more than the brand of Guicciardini's time and school in the 16th century. Again a celebrated writer of the same period expresses his disgust of the prevailing vice, "what" he cries, "can redeem an age from the extremity of misery, shame,



reproach, where there is no regard to religion, to laws, to arms, where all is tainted and tarnished with every foulness? And these vices are all the more hateful, as they most abound in those who sit in the judgment seat, are men's masters and seek men's reverence." Yet it is a strange paradox that private depravity and political debasement went with one of the most brilliant intellectual awakenings in the history of the western world, and whatever the disadvantages of despotism, its power to foster the temperament that made the renaissance is undeniable. The courts of the petty tyrants expressed the highest note then attained in luxury and splendour. Poets, wits and men of learning entertained the great man's leisure, and no matter how factions may rage without, the court of the Italian despot was a haven of rest for those who sought quiet to pursue intellectual life, and it is thus that the age of the despots coincides with the period of greatest activity in the revival of intellectual life. Any survey of the Renaissance, however brief and incomplete must help to show the extraordinarily stimulating character of the movement. It urged the most diverse people to



labour to one end, the freedom of the spirit of man. It was a dawn following the night that fell when the vandals of the fifteenth century swept away all traces of culture, and buried so many records of past civilization beneath their track. In the larger sense it gave birth to a spirit of progress that is yet living. It turned the rude strength of the middle ages to sweetness. It produced those men of genius in every sphere of life who worked as pioneers of modern civilization. It projected currents of thought which ultimately achieved such momentous results as the Revolution in France, Unification in Italy, Unification in Germany, the disappearance of temporal power, the principle of nationality, the idea of an Armed People. This wonderful upheaval which the Renaissance brought about had an enormous creative force, which remained hidden through centuries disfigured by every kind of violence, and in no way distinguished for morality. An earlier revelation would not have served any useful purpose since it was necessary that the minds of men should be prepared through long years to welcome the revival. But during the process which in other words is the period of transition since



minds respond early to the impulses that are silently at work below the surface, the richer and more impatient spirits start forth, in sharp antagonism to their times, to realise, often with startling completeness, the ideals of a later age. In short it was the opening of a new world with different ideals of freedom and equality.

The breath of spring which came to Italy and other countries of Europe with the Renaissance was felt in a very slight manner in the remote valley of the Ganges. Curiously it did not so much influence the plebians as those who wielded the destinies of the people in their hands. It was perhaps more suitable to local condition in India; the ignorant masses being invert the movement must necessarily originate with the men in power. For Keen says, "let a ruler clothed and armed with the attributes of power say blankly to his subjects, 'Do this, for it is my will,' in the East there will be an immediate disposition to obey."

In 1490 when the Renaissance in the West was in full blaze, Northern India was ruled by Sikandar Lodhi, a poet and a great patron of letters. It was typical of the times that when marching against one of his brothers, a Kalan-



dar addressed him with prayers for his success on which he said, "Pray for victory to him who will best promote the good of his subjects." A better illustration of the welfare of the people being given preference over self interest cannot be easily imagined. On another occasion a holy man of his own religion remonstrated with him on his prohibition of Hindu pilgrimages, Sikandar drew his sword exclaiming, "Wretch do you defend idolatory?" He was appeased by the answer:— "No but I maintain that kings ought not to persecute their subjects."

Opposition in the interests of public justice could not provoke even absolute kings in those days. Incidents of this nature which were full of thrilling significance announced revolutions in human thought, new conceptions of duty and responsibility were taking place, ancient landmarks of oppression were visibly crumbling everywhere, at any rate for the time being "Ah" said Marie Antionette, when the thunderbolt fell around her, "the time for illusions is past." It was the great awakening which had helped the passage of the illusion in her time.

"Everywhere and always" said Armond Carrel, "it is the wants of the times that have



created the conventions called political principles, and the principles have always been pushed aside by the wants." So it is with men who shape the destinies of nations and countries. It was surely such a need which produced a man like Sher Shah who was followed by the Great Akbar to rehabilitate political life and to realise the new ideals which were taking hold of the minds of men.

The death of Ibrahim the last of the Lodhi dynasty on the field of Panipat in 1526 loosened the bonds which restrained the disruptive forces always ready to operate in India and allowed them to produce their normal result, a medley of petty states, with ever-varying boundaries, and engaged in unceasing internecine war, and it took Babar some time to establish his authority even in places which came into his possession immediately after the victory.

"The many chiefs of Rajputana" says Mr. Lanepoole, "were cowed but not subdued and in most of the outlying parts of the kingdom the Moghul power was but slightly recognised. Numerous Afghan officers still held powerful fiefs, and these men had not forgotten that the kings of Delhi had been Afghans but a few years



before." It was at this juncture that Sher Khan in whom the misfortunes of the fallen Afghans had kindled a spark of national virtue appeared on the scene as a servant of the Moghuls, their ally and finally as their master.

This extraordinary man was the grandson of Ibrahim Khan, a native of Afghanistan who immigrated to India in the reign of Sultan Bahlol Lodhi. It was a clever policy of the Sultan to attract Afghans of good families by liberal gifts to establish a strong colony in his dominions to consolidate his newly acquired power. This prudent step contributed materially to the restoration of the Afghan rule nearly half a century after Bahlol's death.

The exact date of Sher Khan's birth is unknown, but it must have taken place in the last ten or fifteen years of the fifteenth century. His original name was Farid Khan. Hasan, his father held in jagir the parganas of Sehasram, Hajipur and Tanda in Bihar for the maintenance of 500 horses. Hasan had eight sons from several wives, but Nizam Khan was the only brother of Farid Khan by the same mother. In such a household jealousies and dissensions were inevitable and the boy Farid Khan was driven



away from home by the malice of his step mother who was the favourite of his father and the mother of Suliman. Hasan was evidently too submissive to his wife. He does not seem to have done anything to protect the poor boy from his cruel step mother. This threw the boy on himself and her haughtiness proved a blessing in disguise. Farid went to Jaunpur to his father's patron Jamal Khan, the governor of the province. A severe and yet benevolent destiny sent the impetuous youth just at the right moment to gain the requisite knowledge and experience in the brilliant society of Jaunpur, so that when he returned home with the wealth of enlightenment produced by many years of residence and association with the learned world he was able to fertilise his parochial homeland with an abundance of new ideas. Hasan's paternal instincts appeared to have asserted themselves at last. He wrote to Jamal Khan requesting him to send back the boy to Sehasram where he wanted to instruct him in religious and polite learning. Jamal Khan failed to persuade him (Farid) to return. "If my father wants me back to instruct me in learning," he said, "there are in this city many



learned men, I will study here." He evidently spent several years at Jaunpur in quiet and studious life, regarding self-knowledge and self-culture as the highest aims of existence. From the point of view of exact knowledge his strength lay in his comprehensive acquaintance with history, but religious studies he also pursued with great deliberation. He thus grew up under the spell of religious ideas which sweetened his disposition and made him susceptible to the sorrows and needs of the poor. No student of history can fail to see that it was due to the influence of this period which enabled him to hold the torch of life for the rest of his days. After some years Hasan went to Jaunpur to visit Jamal Khan. On this occasion some of his kinsmen interceded with him on behalf of Farid Khan and represented that his son young as he was gave promise of future greatness. His father was persuaded to take him into favour again and offered to Farid the management of the Parganas. The reply he gave shows that even at that early age he was imbued with those lofty ideals which in later years contributed to the wonderful prosperity of his kingdom. "I shall devote myself to increase the



prosperity of the district, and that depends on a just administration," he said. Hasan realised the meaning underlying his son's remarks, and gave him a *carte blanche* in the management of the estate. On assuming charge of his district he summoned the headmen (Mukaddaman) and the cultivators (Muzarian), as also the accountants (patwaris) to his presence and addressed them with an earnestness which carried conviction. He explained his policy in a simple but firm language. He said that he had set his heart on the prosperity of the estate and that in his success their own welfare was as much concerned as his reputation. He specially warned the officials against their corrupt and oppressive treatment of the poor cultivators who he said were the real supporters of all administration. His greatest achievement even as a manager of his father's estate was to define and equalise land revenue. He assessed the revenue on the measured area of the land which was based on a careful calculation of the produce. He fixed a commission for the collecting officials. (Moharrirana) whom he again addressed and said, "If the people complain that you take more than is so fixed," he said to his officers,



shall myself audit the accounts and shall debit the excess to you." Then turning to the cultivators he said, "This day I give you your choice as to your mode of payment. Do accept whatever is most advantageous to your interests in every possible way." "It is right," he said, "for a ruler to show leniency to the cultivators at the period of measurement and assessment which should be fixed on the average of produce and making full allowances for the needs of the producer, but when the time of payment comes, he should collect the revenue with all strictness." He then dismissed the cultivators bestowing on them the dresses of honour and assured them "Whatever matter you have to represent bring it always yourselves to me. I will suffer no one to oppress you." Our estimate of his personal merit and purity of motive is enhanced when we consider his age and environment and the standards then obtained. In a condition of society in which the peasants were rack-rented and their life and property were without protection it showed sure insight and sense of justice to have an equitable system of land tax. His devout sentiments, the purity of his life, the quality of his mental and emo-



tional culture, the richness of his pastoral experience found ample scope in the work of ameliorating the condition of the peasantry who for centuries had been the sport of an endless succession of self-indulgent rulers." He said clearly to his father's officers, "The cultivators are the source of prosperity. I have encouraged them and sent them away and shall always watch over their condition that no man may oppress and injure them, for if a ruler cannot protect humble peasantry from the lawless, it is tyranny to exact revenue from them," a truth which cannot be denied. The language of sincerity and truth has seldom failed to impress and the people felt safe under him.

"In a very short time the Parganas became extremely prosperous and the soldiers and the peasants were alike contented." He instituted a quite peculiar tie between himself and these poor people, an extremely intimate personal relationship such as we find related in ancient legends. The fame of Farid's wisdom was noised abroad over the kingdom of Bihar. He gained a great reputation among the people and satisfied and pleased all his friends. But the intrigues of his step-mother again disturbed



his peace and when he saw that Hasan was contemplating a change in the management, he himself showed his willingness to resign. "The Parganas are my father's, let him give their management to whomsoever he will." Strict as he was in enforcing discipline, he never hesitated to submit to it himself. It was then that Farid left his father and went to Agra which was then the capital of the Empire under Ibrahim Lodhi. Here he attached himself to Daulat Khan who commanded 12,000 horses and rendered such good service to his patron, that he often said, "I am ashamed to look Farid Khan in the face. If he will only say what I can do for him, I will not fail to use my utmost endeavour to accomplish his desire, only let him say what he wants." Farid Khan remained at Agra till his father died when through the good offices of his patron, the king conferred the jagir on him. For the next few years he lived on his estate in the forcing atmosphere of strife having to defend his pleasant heritage against the powerful sympathiser of his half brother Suliman, who in the end proved too powerful for him and drove him from his estate. Thus again for the third time fortune got the better



of virtue. Farid Khan however won Junid Barlas as his ally and turned the tables on his brother. He occupied not only his paternal jagir but added to it several Crown parganas. Being now relieved of all apprehension regarding his jagir,*Farid Khan went to Sultan Junid Barlas at Agra and accompanied him to the presence of the Emperor Babar. He was present during the affair of Chanderi. Here he remained for some time among the Moghuls and made himself familiar with their military organisation, their mode of governing and the character of their nobles. Talking to a friend he said, "If luck and fortune favour me I will very shortly expel the Moghuls from Hind, for the Moghuls are not superior to the Afghans in battle or single combat, but the Afghans have let the Empire of Hindo slip from their hands on account of their internal dissensions.* Since I have been amongst the Moghals, and know their conduct in action, I see that they have no order or discipline and that their kings from pride of birth and station do not personally superintend the government and leave all the affair and business of the state to their nobles and ministers, in whose sayings and doings



they put perfect confidence. These grandees act on corrupt motives in every case whether it be of a soldier or a cultivator, or of a rebellious zemindar." *Continuing to address his friend he declared in a prophetic strain, "You shall soon see and hear how I will bring the Afghans under my control and never permit them again to become divided." * Only a profound student of human nature with the spark of genius in him can have the courage to penetrate the future and say things in such a peremptory and commanding tone. There is no stronger bond between human beings than injustice suffered in common. By their maltreatment of [the Afghans the Moghuls hopelessly alienated their friendly feelings from themselves. * When people heard Sher Khan's remark that he was determined to drive the Moghals away and to re-establish the Afghan domination they thought it was only an empty boast; but they did not know that fate had already crowned him king. * Though Sher Shah knew his own mind and was prepared to attempt a life and death struggle with a seasoned warrior flushed with new triumph and commanding all the resources both in men and money, he put his



faith in a higher power that meets out to nations what they deserve. National vice leads to ruin and victory is the fruit of moral as well as military virtue. The prince and even the people are held responsible for the crimes which they neglect to punish.

* After some time Sher Khan waited upon the Emperor and it was on this occasion that an amusing incident happened which showed his ready wit. One day when dining with the Emperor, they placed before him a dish which he did not know the customary mode of eating. So he cut it into small pieces with his dagger and putting them into his spoon easily disposed of them. Babar wondered at Sher Khan's ingenuity and said to his minister Khalifa who was at his elbow, "Keep an eye on Sher Khan, he is a clever man and the marks of royalty are visible on his forehead. I have seen many Afghan nobles, greater men than he, but they never made an impression on me, but as soon as I saw this man, it entered into my mind that he ought to be arrested for I find in him the qualities of greatness and the marks of mightiness." Sher Khan suspecting foul play escaped to his own jagir in 1528. Not feeling



secure even there, he determined to place himself under the protection of some powerful chief. He went to Sultan Mahmud in Bihar, whom he had already served. He was there received with open arms and was appointed guardian to the Sultan's son Jalal Khan. On the death of Sultan Mahmud he virtually became regent and administered the kingdom on behalf of Jalal Khan. Jalal Khan chafed under his control and escaped to Bengal. This left Sher Khan virtually the master of the whole of Bihar. Jalal Khan plotted against Sher Khan's life and was discovered. Sher Khan was advised by his friends to take revenge. "My object is my own safety," he replied, "out of regard for one's own life, it is not good to confirm the hostility of one's enemies." With the possession of Bihar, the fort of Chunar also fell into his hands, but this was affected by peaceful and clever negotiations with Lad Malika the widow of Taj Khan.

Acquisition of the Fort of Chunar (1530.)

On the death of Ibrahim Lodhi his Eastern provinces which were not subdued by the Moghals experienced great confusion. In most cases the governors appointed by the late



Emperor remained in possession, but for a short period they owed allegiance to no paramount authority. The Fort of Chunar and the territory attached to it was commanded by Taj Khan Sarang Khani who was confirmed in his command by Babar in the beginning of his reign. He continued to preserve loyalty to the Central Government. Chunar as the key to the province of Bihar was an important stronghold from strategical considerations. Sher Khan as a military genius knew the value of this fort for the consolidation of his power in Bihar, he was consequently hard pressed by necessity to obtain its possession. Luck put a rare opportunity in his way and like a man of action he utilized it to the full and entered upon the possession of his desideratum without much ado. The story of this transaction is romantic and may be cited here to show that war and romance are sometimes strangely mixed together. Taj Khan the Governor of Chunar had an intelligent and fascinating wife who knew how to kindle the vital spark in him. The loving husband was completely under her sway and virtually ignored his sons by his former wife. On his death dissensions naturally arose between the widow who



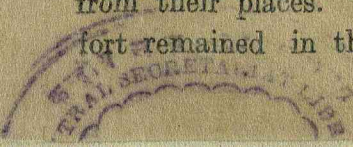
had no issue and her step sons. The unfortunate lady who was called Lad Malika or the favourite queen excited the cupidity of these young men by her immense wealth which she had amassed during her husband's lifetime. Finding that there was no escape from the rapacity of these men for want of a protector she listened to the sage advice of her late husband's three servants who were devoted to her interests and consented to give her hand in marriage to Sher Khan, who enjoyed a great reputation in the country for wisdom and valour. Negotiations were secretly opened with Sher Khan who happened to be in the vicinity of the Fort. He appears to have greeted the proposal with alacrity and was clandestinely conveyed into the fort where the nuptial ceremony was duly celebrated. All this was done with despatch and secrecy so that the sons of Taj Khan might be kept in the dark concerning what was happening in the fort. It was thus that the impregnable fort of Chunar fell into his hands. His able and beautiful wife Lad Malika made a munificent gift to him consisting of 150 of the most valuable jewels, seven maunds of pearls and 150 maunds of gold.



Mr. K. Qanungo the author of the excellent life of Sher Shah gives no credence to this account supplied by Abbas Sarwani. In a rare mood of rhapsody he says: "The whole story is unskilfully got up with the object of convincing us that Sher Khan obtained Chunar by legitimate means, from its virtual mistress Lad Malika." It is a serious matter to throw aspersions on a chronicler without citing any reliable authority to prove the contrary. Imagination performs no function in history and a priori reasoning is a deadly sin against historical accuracy. Mr. Qanungo's arbitrary dictum constitutes no fresh tributary of living water flowing into the stream of Sher Khan's biography from the main currents of research work. We pick precious truths and knowledge out of the histories written by Abbas Sarwani and others and although a later historian enjoys great prerogatives in criticising and sifting evidence before him on such subjects, he cannot altogether repudiate what several eye witnesses agree on; as otherwise there would be no material left with which to build our own thought edifice. It cannot be denied that Sher Khan's matrimonial alliance with Lad Malika was a marriage of con-



venience. It suited him as it brought him the much-covetted fort and an immense treasure. To her it brought relief from the malice and persecution of her step sons who were daily gaining strength against a helpless and bereaved widow. It is easy to imagine her dire plight if she did not wisely seek the co-operation of a man who could effectively save her from utter ruin. Mr. Qanungo naively rejects a self-evident fact which served the common interests of the contracting parties and unjustly surmises that in order to take the fort he resorted to foul play. The question of legitimacy which troubles Mr. Qanungo does not arise in this case. The worthless step sons of Lad Malika were never expected to succeed their father who was not an independent potentate and held the commission from the Moghal Sovereign whose authority was essential for the sons to step into their father's position. Sher Khan was engaged in hostilities against the Moghals and was consequently entitled by the laws of war to flout the Imperial authority and to drive the officers holding appointments by its sanction from their places. Taj Khan having died the fort remained in the custody of his widow





against whom Sher Khan did not wage war out of chivalrous considerations, but took possession of the fort by capturing the heart of its mistress.

Occupation of the Fort of Rohtas.

There are conflicting versions with regard to the occupation of the fort of Rohtas by the soldiers of Sher Khan. Nizamuddin and Ferishta say that Sher Khan captured the fort by a strategem. According to these writers Sher Khan came to an arrangement with the Raja whereby he allowed the families of the Afghans to take refuge in the fort during the time of insecurity. Sher Khan instead of these families concealed soldiers in the covered litters, and sent them to the fort, and as soon as these desperadoes got access to the fort they jumped out of their conveyances and overpowered the garrison. The Raja escaped by a postern. Whereas Abbas Khan Sarwani maintains that this cock and bull story of the soldiers being concealed in palanquins was "altogether erroneous and false." "Sher Khan" he says "had given orders to his men that none should go out who once went in. After Sher Khan himself went in, examined the fort and thanked God



giving this fortress into his possession. And he said to the guards of the fort "You better go to the Raja and say that you cannot remain in the same place with the Afghans or it will be the worse for you. And he ordered his own men if the guards did not obey the order to leave the fort, to eject them by force." (Elliot, p. 360).

Before I throw the light of criticism on the plausibility of these accounts of a much disputed point, I may for the easy comprehension of the situation by the reader explain the dire position of Sher Shah at this fateful moment. * The Moghuls having established their rule in Upper India as far as Benares were anxious to pacify the Eastern provinces of Bihar and Bengal which were still held by some disunited Afghan chieftains. Sher Khan the most enterprising and able of them all held Bihar and threatened the Moghul Empire in India when it was still in the process of consolidation. Humayun, suspicious of Sher Khan's hostile designs moved his army towards the East in order to crush him. He reached Chunar in due course and after a council of war he decided to invest this fort and oblige



to surrender before rushing on to Gaur. Sher Shah left the fort in charge of some of his officers and himself hurried off with the families of his Afghans to find some place of shelter for them. While he was thus tormented by anxiety for the safety of the Afghan women, news reached him of the capture of Chunar by the Imperial Army. This was an overwhelming calamity which upset all his plans. With the fort of Gaur still holding out against his army and the loss of Chunar he became practically a fugitive whose capture and destruction by the Emperor's forces was only a question of time. He knew that as long as he was encumbered with these helpless women he could not devise any scheme to retrieve the situation. In this desperate condition he implored the Raja of Rohtas, with whom he was on friendly terms, to allow the women to remain in safety in the fort as they had done once before ; and had quitted it when the storm had passed over. This request was accompanied by a douceur in the form of valuable gifts which tempted the Raja who gave his consent to the temporary use of the fort by the families of his officers and followers. Sher Khan relying on this promise brought his convoy of families to



prohtas, but the capricious Raja retracted his promise. Sher Khan's plight was now most pitiable, in utter despair he wrote to the Raja "On the faith of your promise, I have brought my family from Bahrkunda. If the Emperor Humayun hears this news he will send his army and all the families of the Afghans will be taken and enslaved. This misfortune will rest on your head." Here the stream of the narrative parts into two different channels. One, of the soldiers being smuggled into the fort in litters in the disguise of women, and the other, of Sher Khan ordering the Hindu guard of the fort to evacuate it in their own interests. Even if we accept the former, the charge of treachery is certainly mitigated by the inconstant behaviour of the Raja, whose refusal to permit Sher Khan's party to enter the fort after giving a solemn promise of asylum left Sher Khan in the lurch, and although the Raja was persuaded by means of heavy bribes to admit the women, he inspired Sher Khan with great distrust of his good faith. After this exhibition of deplorable vacillation Sher Khan could not possibly repose implicit confidence in the Raja who might have betrayed his trust by accepting



a bigger bribe from Emperor Humayun. Sher Khan's previous honourable conduct in leaving the fort with every demonstration of gratitude would have been repeated on this occasion if the Raja had not polluted the spring of his confidence by behaving so meanly towards a friend and neighbour of such high principles.* Whatever blame may attach to Sher Khan his conduct was not more indefensible than that of the Germans and allies in occupying Belgium and Persia respectively during the Great War. ^That there were extenuating circumstances for this drastic action no one will deny ; his necessity was great, he was encumbered with the families of his Afghan officers who were fighting the Moghuls. He had a high sense of honour and was anxious that the families of his officers should be placed in a safe place before resuming active operations against Humayun. If we apply rigid cannons of morality to his behaviour on this occasion than I doubt if many commanders of renown before or after him in any country would show a perfectly clean record. But unless the Raja's misconduct was unpardonable, fairness demanded that Sher Khan made amends to him for the losses which he incurred on account



his ejection from Rohtas when he sat on the Imperial throne of India.*

It would not be devoid of interest if I quote here the description given by Mr. Martin of this celebrated fort. "Rohtasgarh" he says 'occupies a part of the table land about four miles from east to west and five miles from north to south ; but among the natives it is usually reckoned 28 miles round, and following the windings of the hills, it may be so. The area is very hilly and much of the surface consists of bare rocks A deep and wide recess, called Kariyari Kho, separates it from the table land to the north and a branch of the recess, called Guluruja Kho, separates it from the table land on the west, leaving only between its south end and the rock that overhangs the Son (which flows by the eastern side of the fort) a rocky neck of about two hundred yards wide. The two sides of this neck are perpendicular and the sides of the whole circumference are not only everywhere exceedingly steep, but in most places have in some part of their height a perpendicular rock from 50 to 150 feet high Rajaghat towards the south, which is the easiest ascent



is a very steep and long hill, and even there it has been necessary for a very considerable way to ascend a perpendicular rock by means of a stair. The works even there are numerous and strong ; and being scarcely visible from below, in all probability could have been little affected by cannon."

* It was in the early part of Humayun's reign that Sher Khan was consolidating his power but about this time he was threatened with a formidable combination of some Afghan nobles headed by Sultan Mahmud, a son of Sultan Sikandar Lodhi. Sher Khan could not cope with the enemy, so made peace with him and was compelled to accompany him to Lucknow to try conclusions with Humayun. Hamayun met them near Lucknow and in the battle that ensued Sultan Mahmud was defeated. During the progress of the fight Sher Khan drew off his contingent and the loss of the battle was due to his defection. His action is indefensible though there certainly are some extenuating circumstances. He joined his enemy Sultan Mahmud under compulsion.

He was apprehensive that in the event of the Sultan's victory his own possessions would



He divided up among the Afghan nobles. In a letter to a friend with Humayun he had written, "These people have brought me by force, but in the day of battle I will not fight. Tell the Emperor Humayun the true state of my case, and that I will serve him in the day of battle and will cause the defeat of this army." Humayun at once wrote in reply, "Act as you have written, if you do so it will be for your advancement." It is strange that Sher Khan should have ignored his own opinion of the character of the Mughals, but it was perhaps a choice of evils. In any case his day of retribution was not far, as Humayun immediately after this victory laid siege to Chunar. Fortunately for Sher Khan an insurrection broke out in Gujrat and Humayun was constrained to abandon the siege and to hurry back to Agra. Sher Khan humbled himself by surrendering his younger son as a hostage. Relieved of the presence of Humayun, the ever active Sher Khan annexed a good portion of Bengal to his dominions and laid siege to Gaur. Meanwhile Humayun having suppressed the revolt in Gujrat repaired with all haste to Bihar and invested Chunar a second time against his understanding



With Sher Khan who dauntless as ever ordered that the seige of Gaur should be vigorously prosecuted. Humayun, however, soon captured Chunar and advanced to relieve Gaur. Sher Khan was much depressed with the loss of Chunar. He had laid seige to Gaur which was holding out with the imminent prospect of being relieved by the Emperor. Sher Khan was reduced to great strains. He became practically a wanderer but he soon rose above his misfortunes and opened negotiations with Humayun and offered to surrender Bihar if the Emperor would leave him Bengal. Humayun approved of the arrangement and Sher Khan was informed accordingly. The capricious Emperor however soon infringed the treaty. Sultan Mahmud whom Sher Khan had deserted in the battle near Lucknow diverted him from his purpose. Fortune meanwhile smiled on Sher Khan. Gaur fell into his hands with an enormous treasure, the fort of Rohtas also came into his possession about the same time. Humayun's march on Gaur was retarded by the seasonal rains. He was caught in a trap between Patna and Monghyr. There he lost his baggage, carriage, tents and men who were in charge of these.



Eventually he took Gaur but it was no more than a barren triumph. Sher Khan had already removed the treasure. Here he spent some months, as the state of the country could not allow him to move. Sher Khan in the meantime vastly improved his position. Issuing from his retreat he took possession of Bihar and Benares, recovered Chunar and laid seige to Jaunpur and pushed his detachments up the Ganges as far as Kanauj. The Emperor's line of communication was cut off. To add to his misfortune he received intelligence at the end of 1538 of a serious trouble at Agra where his presence was urgently needed. He had either to patch up peace or to fight with his demoralised troops. He chose the former. Terms this time were offered by the Emperor and accepted by his alert adversary.

Sher Khan, however, entered into a treaty with Humayun only to break it. He knew the sad plight of the Imperial army and was determined not to miss his opportunity. Khawas Khan hurried down from Jaunpur with his reinforcement and joined him. The junction of the two armies having been completed, Sher Khan suddenly fell on Humayun's army at a



place called Chausa and utterly routed it. The Emperor escaped with great difficulty. He would have perished or made prisoner but for the timely and providential help rendered by a water-carrier. The Imperial army was either destroyed or scattered. The Harem of the Emperor with thousands of Mughal women fell into the hands of Afghans, but they were treated with scrupulous delicacy and attention by Sher Khan. It is related that as soon as Sher Khan saw Humayun's Queen, with other noble ladies, coming out from behind the pardah, he alighted from his horse and showed them every respect and consoled them. They were all sent shortly afterwards with every care to join Humayun at Agra. This incident alone is sufficient to show what a tender and chivalrous heart Sher Khan possessed. Sher Khan has been blamed for violating the treaty by destroying the army of his unsuspecting enemy at Chausa, but no better explanation is possible than what is contained in his own address to his officers. He said, "I have promised peace to the Emperor Humayun, but have considered that all the good service I have rendered has produced no good fruit, and after all my loyalty to him in producing the



defeat of Sultan Mahmud, he demanded from me the fort of Chunar. When I refused to yield it, he sent a force to take it, and when that failed he came himself to seize the fort by force, but abandoned his intentions when he heard that Zuman had escaped from prison, and had raised sedition in the country. Moreover Sultan Bahadur king of Gujerat was coming to invade the country of Delhi, and so he was compelled to return. I sent my son Qatab Khan with him throughout the Gujerat campaign. Though I could have taken possession of the country of Jaunpur, etc., yet I did not commit any act of hostility, for the Emperor was mighty, and though I had the power I would not do any disloyal and evil act that the Emperor might perceive I was his faithful servant, and desisted from seeking to injure him. When he returned from Gujerat he got his army in readiness and without regarding my loyalty, did his best to expel me, but as my fortune was great he did not achieve his desire. I made every submission but it was all fruitless. When in violation of his promises, he attacked Bengal I lost all hope of his goodness, and apprehending evil from him was compelled to declare hostilities against him, and



Expelled his governors and spoiled his country as far as Sambhal and have not left a single Moghal in these parts. Now with what hope can I conclude this peace with him? He makes peace and manifests a friendly disposition towards me, because his army is in want of horses and cattle and of every equipment and because his brothers have rebelled against him. He is but playing with me, and eventually will not abide by this peace, but having appeased the rebellion of his brothers on his arrival at Agra and refurnished his army he will not fail to uproot and destroy me." Who can say Sher Khan was wrong?

After this signal victory he seated himself on the throne in 1539 and unfolded the umbrella over his head and assumed the title of Sher Shah, Sultan Adil (just King). (Never before or since have title and character been in greater harmony either in the lustre of their combination or the beauty of their setting than in his case.) The choice of the title was happy and the sound pleasing especially when it expressed the yearnings of his noble soul to be known as just. A little incident on this occasion showed how instead of being an object of jealousy he became



universally beloved for the frankness and generosity of his disposition. The great noblemen who belonged to former reigns assembled round him and urged him to write letters describing his victory in the style of Firmans. The ideal prince knew how to acquire the personal devotion and affection of his nobles by that speech of the heart which never fails to subdue even the harshest nature. "You who formerly were nobles of Sultan Bahlol and Sikandar," he replied, "have, for the cause of the Afghans, done me the honor of joining yourselves to me. It does not become me to send Firmans to you and to seat myself on the throne while you stand round me." To this they all replied with one voice, "The Moghals have been kings for two descents, they despise the Afghans and consider them as not their own equals in the day of battle, yet by the excellence of your wisdom and your conquering fortune the Afghans have overthrown them." Sher Khan was much delighted to see what an unbounded confidence the Afghans had in his leadership and said, "The king's name is a very exalted thing, and is not devoid of trouble but since the noble minds of my friends have decided to make me king, I



agree." Sher Khan evidently was more resigned to his elevation than the unwilling Maximus the Roman Emperor, who envied his predecessor when he exclaimed:—"O fortunate Democles! thy reign began and ended with the same dinner."

★ On his return to Agra Humayun pacified his brother Prince Hindal and collected a large force with which he once more turned towards the East. Sher Shah having settled his affairs advanced to meet the Emperor near Kanauj. Both armies were encamped on the opposite banks of the Ganges apparently unwilling to come to grips immediately. But the early rains precipitated the action. Humayun fearing desertions determined to bring the contest to an issue. He crossed over to the other side with his army and forthwith engaged the forces of his rival. The disparity of numbers was great. Sher Shah commanded only 15,000 while Humayun had 40,000 with abundant artillery. The affair was a very brief one. Haider Mirza, an officer in the Moghal army, says, "Twenty-seven chiefs entitled to *tugh* or horse tail, who led the left of the Imperial line, concealed those insignia from fear of attracting the enemy.



From this conduct of the officers may be formed some notion of the courage of the men. Before the enemy discharged an arrow we were virtually defeated, not a man being wounded either friend or foe. Not a gun was fired." Any further resistance on the part of Humayun was hopeless, he fled towards Sindh and reached Persia in the course of his wanderings. Sher Shah with his usual energy set about consolidating his new possessions. He cleared the Punjab of his enemies and built the fort of Rohtas as a check for any hostile design from the north. After this he returned to Agra, but had soon to rush off to Bengal to quell the insurrection raised by his own governor. But says Elphinstone, "He made such a division of that province for the future as to guard against a repetition of disturbances."

Pacification of Gakhars.

When Humayun was chased out of the Punjab Sher Shah while organising the administration of this buffer province felt the great need of securing his Empire by the construction of a strong fort commanding the routes from Kabul and Kashmir where the remnants of the Moghal army were still hoping to win back a lost domi-



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Inspired with statesmanlike prudence he saw the urgency of reducing to subjection the turbulent and recalcitrant tribe of Gakhars who inhabited the country now consisting of Rawalpindi and Jhelum districts. These people had always proved themselves abnoxious to the former rulers of India. On this occasion the menace to the peace of India appeared imminent, for Prince Kamran in Kabul and Hyder Mirza in Kashmir were ready to take immediate advantage of any error which Sher Shah might commit by neglecting to block their way into the plains of the Punjab. Sher Shah as usual desired to avoid bloodshed and sent a summons to the chief of the Gakhar tribe to come and pay homage to him as the overlord of India, but the luckless chief forgetting that he was one of those rare leaders in war and administrators in peace who, from time to time, have appeared on the stage of the Indian world to remould its destinies, sent an insolent reply which greatly incensed Sher Shah. The impudent chief is said to have sent several quivers full of arrows and two tiger cubs as a reply to him. This symbolic language used by this chief of the Indo-Scythian tribe is strangely similar to that used by



his compeer in Europe more than two thousand years earlier. It shows how the characteristics of a race endure throughout the ages, in spite of totally different environment. It would not be devoid of interest if I quote the delightful description given by Herodotus of the campaign of Darius against the Scythian King in the region of the Danube in 514 B. C. Darius after vainly pursuing the elusive King for several months sent him this message : "Thou strange man why dost thou keep on flying before me, when there are two things thou mightest do so easily ? If thou deemest thyself able to resist my arms, cease thy wanderings and come, let us engage in a battle. Or if thou art conscious that my strength is greater than thine, even so shouldst thou cease to run away : thou hast but to bring thy lord earth and water, and to come at once to a conference." To this message the Scythian King replied : "This is my way, Persian, I never fear men or flee from them.....Earth and water I do not send ; but thou shalt soon receive more suitable gifts." These were sent by a herald, and proved to be a bird, a mouse, a frog, and five arrows. The herald, questioned as to their signification, replied that the Per-



wise, would find out themselves. At a council, Darius expressed the opinion that the Scythians intended to surrender, and that the mouse and frog symbolised earth and water respectively. His father-in-law Gobryas, however, explained that the real meaning was as follows: "Unless, Persians, ye can turn into birds and fly into the sky, or become mice and burrow underground, or make yourselves frogs and take refuge in the fens, ye will never make your escape from this land, but die pierced by our arrows."

He warned the agent in these strong words: "Be at your ease. By the grace of God, I will thrust such a wedge in the hearts of you all that till the day of Resurrection no man shall be able to pull it out." That this was not an empty threat is proved by the stern measures he adopted against the tribe. He marched through their country and laid it waste and carried many Gakhars as captives. While marching in force through the adjacent hills he selected a strategic place where he built a strong fort called Rohtas, perhaps in memory of another fort of the same name at the other end of his Empire.



The Tarikhi Daudi says that it cost 8 crores, 5 lakhs, 5 thousand and 2 and a half dams, which means Bahlolis, all which is written over the gate of the fort.

To keep the Gakhars in peaceful order and to meet any emergency arising out of the movements of the Moghals he left 50,000 troops in the Punjab and himself dashed off in the direction of Bengal to chastise his Governor who was supposed to have shown signs of treason.

In the course of the next two years he conquered Malwa and Raisin.

Attack on Raisin and its Capitulation.

The chequered story of Raisin invests it with a glamour of medieval valour and historic importance which claim the close attention of the student of Indian history. Bahadur Shah of Gujerat after shattering the resistance of both Moslem and Hindu rulers of Malwa annexed it to his Kingdom and advanced on Raisin in 1532. Rumi Khan, a well known-artillery officer trained in the military academy of the Grand Signeur of Constantinople, used his guns against the walls of the fort with deadly effect. The



speeches made by the cannon balls so disconcerted the Rajputs that they resorted to their ancient custom of Johr (putting the females to the sword) and hurled themselves with mad fury against the Moslems, their desperate valour however proved unavailing. Bahadur Shah sacked Raisin as a reprisal for the outrages committed by the Rajputs on Moslem women. Actuated by the same feeling of vengeance he punished Chitor in the same manner in 1535. After the death of Bahadur Shah Puran Mall at the connivance of Mulla Khan recovered the territory which had been conquered by the King of Gujerat, showing great malignaty towards the Moslems. It was alleged that he did not spare even the honour of their women. This was an act of inconceivable folly, as the survivors of Puran Mall's frightfulness cherished the most deadly hatred against him. A large number of these unhappy people realising that such wild excesses were less dishonouring than the stillness and moral degradation of servitude, migrated to the neighbouring Moslem states. The sudden exaltation intoxicated Puran Mall's understanding, and he exhibited failings entirely incompatible with his elevated condition. In

a stage of empire so little consolidated as that of Sher Shah, and under circumstances of such incessant peril, the fortunes of a nation chiefly depended upon the wisdom and valour of its sovereign. Sher Shah therefore was not the man who would entrust the safety of his empire to blind chance, and would permit the undisciplined spirit of presumption which was beginning to derange and undermine Puran Mall's descretion, to prevail against strong public expediency.

When Sher Shah heard the tragical stories of the sorrowful Moslems he said, "I did wrong when I said I would go towards Bengal. If Almighty God would vouchsafe me a recovery from this fever I will return with all speed, and Puran Mall who has enslaved the families of the Musalmans in Chanderi and has made dancing girls of their daughters and did not accompany my son Qutab Khan—him will I so punish that he may be a warning to others."

Before resorting to the arbitrament of the sword Sher Shah offered Benares to Puran if he would give Raisin to him, but Puran Mall refused to listen to any proposal of compromise. Sher Shah was therefore compelled to



enter upon the campaign on grounds of expediency and the inner necessity of his nascent empire. His sense of justice insisted on the redress of the grievances which the helpless Mussalmans piteously repeated before him. And the public security demanded that an insolent adversary who was constantly intriguing against this rising power should not be allowed to remain in close proximity to the Imperial Metropolis. Sher Shah at this time was confronted with yet another defiant Rajput state. Marwar whose ruler Maldev had invited Humayun to Jodhpur in order to use that simple monarch as a cat's paw for the furtherance of his own ambitious designs was a compact state inhabited by the flower of Rajput chivalry. In addition to the valour of the Rathors, the skill and prudence of Maldev had so studded it with strong fortifications that an invasion of its territory was considered a most hazardous enterprise. An alliance of Maldev and Puran Mall against Sher Shah would at any moment have rendered his position extremely perilous; but the elemental energy of his will combined with his resourceful diplomacy made it impossible for his rivals to



make a common cause against him. Political necessity as well as moral responsibility found the prevailing oppressive atmosphere intolerable of endurance any longer and the storm burst first on Raisin in 1543. Jalal Khan led the vanguard of the army of invasion and reached Bhilsa without any difficulty. Sher Shah joined him at this stage whence they swept along with great rapidity till they reached the vicinity of Raisin. Sher Shah besieged the fort and by his ceaseless activity gave no rest to the garrison. An interesting incident which occurred during the siege operations is related in "Tarikh Sher Shah" (translated by Elliot). It shows how the Rajputs and Afghans felt inspired by their war like traditions and fought with true heroism. "One day certain followers and retainers of the Afghans were sitting together, when the conversation turned on the gallantry and valour of Bhaia Puran Mall's soldiers. Most of those present said that no one in those days was a match for Puran Mall's soldiers in these qualities, who daily came out of the fort and said, "There is no one in the army of Sher Shah who can fight with us," and that it was from fear that none of the Afghans



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approached them. When the Afghans amongst these retainers pondered on these remarks, the reproach thus thrown upon Afghan honour overcame them, and they said, "Though Sher Shah should cut our throats or banish us from his kingdom, yet we will for once encounter the soldiers of Puran Mall, that we may test their gallantry and valour." The next day before sunrise, 1,500 horsemen assembled at an appointed place, and drawing up in order of battle, sent to Puran Mall saying, "Your men every day boast of their valour. We, 1,500 horses, against Sher Shah's command, have come and are drawn up in order of battle, do you also collect your men and come out of the fort, that we may fight, and the valour of either side may be made manifest." Bhaia Puran Mall had great reliance on the valour and gallantry of his men, and did not think the Afghans were at all equal to them in bravery. He sent out to answer the challenge the most famous of his soldiers, veterans in battle, and he himself took his seat above the gateway. The Afghans and Rajputs joined battle, and the fight continued till the first watch of the day, upto which time neither party had succeeded in driving the other



from their ground. At length the Afghans got the advantage, and began to make the Rajputs give ground, when such bravery was displayed on both sides as surpasses all description. In the end, All Mighty God gave the victory to the Afghans, and they drove the Rajputs from their position to near the gate of the fort. The Rajputs again made a stand near the gate of the fort, but the Afghans made a headlong charge upon them which they were unable to resist and fled within the gate, and the Afghans returned triumphant to their camp." (Elliot).

For six months the siege operations were pushed on with great vigour, and at last when his heavy guns battered the defences beyond repairs Puran Mall sued for peace. Sher Shah magnanimously accepted all the conditions proposed by him. The terms of capitulation consisted of :—

- (1) Free passage to himself and his family with their belongings.
- (2) The retirement of Sher Shah to a distance of two marches from the fort.
- (3) Adil Khan and Qutab Khan to bind themselves by solemn oaths that



Puran Mall and his family will not be molested in any way.

It is very strange that Puran Mall asked Sher Shah to give pledges for the safety only of himself and his family. It is nowhere mentioned that a similar treatment will be meted out to his soldiers and their families. His exact words are these: "I dare not again face your presence, but do you first go away two marches from the fort. I will come out and give up the fort to your soldiers, and go myself to other countries. And if your eldest son Adil Khan and Qutab Khan Banet will bind themselves by promise and oaths that I shall suffer no injury in property and person I will come with my women and family out of the fort." All this does not give the reader the idea that the garrison of Raisin was also to march out with all the honours of war. The specific stipulation for safety insisted upon by Puran Mall was confined only to himself and his women and family.

It appears that Puran Mall when he saw that Sher Shah and his army had withdrawn two marches from the fort issued with the whole army in full panoply of war and marched off without any harassment from the Afghans.



Sher Shah evidently wished to adhere to the covenant he had made with Puran Mall but the rancour of the hot blooded Afghans caused by the savage persecution of the Moslems by the Rajputs precipitated a disaster which must be regretted by all who deplore unnecessary bloodshed. The spark which kindled the fire appeared in this way: "After some days the widows of the chief men of Chanderi and others waited for Sher Shah by the roadside, and cried out to him. Sher Shah asked who they were, and ordered them to be brought to him. They said, 'we have suffered from this inhuman and malignant infidel all kinds of tyranny and oppression. He has slain our husbands and our daughters he has enslaved, and made dancing girls of them, and has seized our lands, and all our worldly goods for a long time past. . . . If you do not give us justice, hereafter, in the day of Resurrection when the first and the last of all men shall be collected together, we will accuse you.'" It is related that Sher Shah when he saw with his own eyes the ruined remnants of Moslem families and heard their piteous cries for justice, tears dropped from his eyes. Sher Shah's detestation of oppression was the most prominent



feature of his character and from the very beginning of his career he was inspired by the holy mission of uprooting this evil from the land. These stories of oppression were frequently repeated in the camp and had inflamed the passions of the ignorant soldiery but the ocular evidence of the miseries of their co-religionists caused an explosion. The soldiers supported by the Ulema angrily demanded justice from Sher Shah. The situation must have caused great embarrassment to him. We can imagine what conflicting passions must have tormented his mind ! On the one hand his word of honour was given to Puran Mall for his and his family's safety ; and on the other his strong sense of justice added to the Fatwas which Shaikh Rafi-ud-din Safavi reputed for his sanctity had given for the forfeiture of his life, clamoured for the performance of his moral duty. There was probably yet another weighty consideration which could not be ignored. In those days the Muslim population of India was sparse and scattered all over a vast country, and if the crimes committed against them went unpunished the right of the minority to live would have been greatly jeopardised. In our own times the manifestation



of any criminal and revolutionary spirit is repressed with exemplary severity. India, Egypt, Morocco and Mesopotamia present instances in which the ruling caste has maintained itself by methods which are not above reproach. In fact the most approved maxims of rule in these days teach us that there are no crimes in politics, only blunders, and that "reasons of state" condone a multitude of sins.

Smarting under a sense of outraged feelings the refugee Moslem lords and the Afghan army exhibited such an ugly temper that Sher Shah's determination, already shaken by his ideas of justice, collapsed in the face of this mutinous spirit of his army. "Sher Shah could not refuse," says Mr. Qanungo, "to respect the Fatwa of so eminent and holy a person without incurring the danger of a serious discontent, verging on rebellion among the Afghans. In that frame of mind the Afghans armed with the sanction of religion, could not be restrained by any earthly terror. It appears that he was constrained to break his faith to avert a great danger." A division of the Afghan army under the command of Isa Khan Hajjab made a forced march and overtook the Rajputs at dawn the next day.



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The Rajputs fought with desperate courage, characteristic of their race, but as usual it did not prevail against the solid valour of the Afghans. The Rajputs perished to a man but asked for no quarter.

This occurrence has excited much adverse comment by some Indian historians. Elphinstone says, "No motive can be discovered for this act of treachery and cruelty." Another writer Professor Dowson stigmatizes this as "The cold-blooded massacre of the prisoners of Raisin." If there was want of motive then a man about whom Keen says "A devout Moslem, he never oppressed his Hindu subjects," could not be guilty of this so-called wanton cruelty. Professor Dowson's stricture is unworthy of a well-informed historian. "The Rajputs," says Mr. Qanungo, "who evacuated Raisin were not 'prisoners.' They surrendered the fort but not their persons to Sher Shah. They carried their arms and no restraint was put upon their liberty. They were like a hostile garrison in arms allowed to march out with all honours of war. They did not die in 'cold blood' and their death was not a 'massacre.' They died in a hotly contested battle amidst heaps of



their slaughtered enemy." Professor Dowson's remark is similar to that of a speculative historian who elicited a contemptuous remark from Walpole. "According to a well-known legend, Walpole begged him not to read history to him, 'For that I know must be false.' "* This is the sad fate of all those who study history superficially and fill themselves with wrong and empty notions, and consequently bring obloquy on the science of history. Indian history is yet to be written and all what has been attempted by European authors is based on insufficient research work and personal prejudices of Western writers.

Mr. Qanungo does not exempt Sher Shah from a charge "of perfidy and treachery." "But the act," he says, "is less condemnable than the dangerous principle avowed, *viz.*, No faith need be kept with the infidels; which was advanced by the venerable theologian to remove the moral scruples of Sher Shah." Whatever we may think of it, no one can deny that statesmen in every age "Strive with varying gifts of vision to penetrate and guide the immediate task of their own particular time and

* Lord Morley on Guicciardini.



country." It is therefore difficult to explore the motives of those who have to choose and to act. Different historians present the diverse aspects of a case according to their mental illumination. Sher Shah's conduct on this occasion may appear at first glance reprehensible to some, but those who feel the need to see as clearly as they can what men did and why they did it, will not fail to pronounce that his breach of faith is by no means an outrage on modern standards of international morality. Is there anything more disgusting than the woeful prevarication shown by Dr. Wilson with regard to his famous fourteen points? and is there anything in modern history comparable with the ambitions, the greed, the unmanliness and the fraud of the big four after the greatest war in history which swept away the flower of youth in every belligerent Empire. This war was moreover avowedly waged for the vindication of those ideals by which societies subsist and governments are strong, but the result of the great sacrifices was an example of all the shame and reproach in the world. Another momentous period in history preceding our own is equally distinguished for want of moral



scruples. "You are always talking to me of principles," said Alexander I to Talleyrand, "as if your public law were anything to me. I do not know what it means. What do you suppose that all your parchments and your treaties signify to me?" Yet all these men retained a place in the literature of modern political systems and of Western morals. If Miss Cavell's sad fate aroused a storm of righteous indignation and anger in the entire British nation and young men in tens of thousands came forward to fight the authors of the crime, could the proud Afghans remain apathetic when they heard that the wives and daughters of their compatriots had been subjected to inhuman atrocities? If the unspeakable Hun required the use of force for his conversion to the ways of civilized men and to respect the claims of humanity, Puran Mall and his followers sorely needed correction for their misdeeds. "Man is what he is," says Machiaville, "and so he needs to be vitted and bridled with laws, and now and again to be treated to a stiff dose of *medicine forti* in the shape of fire bullet, axe, halter and dungeon." Machiaville's name may curiously stink



the nostrils of hypocritical men who base their policy precisely on what he preaches. It cannot be gainsaid that he takes full count of human nature in the above sage reflection. We should not condemn Sher Shah wholesale for extraordinary acts to which he was compelled to resort in order to save the country from internal commotion and revolution. The menacing temper of the army, the force of the fatwa and the exasperated public opinion on account of the miseries of the Moslem refugees placed him in a position in which only that course was to be followed which might preserve to the nation its existence and its freedom. He had only lately reunited the dispersed forces of the Afghans and rekindled the expiring flame of their political supremacy in India, any attempt to strangle a legitimate and seething discontent would have been fatal both for himself and the future hopes of his nation.

Mr. Qanungo displays a strangely cramped and contracted knowledge of Moslem polity when he complacently attributes the "principle" that "no faith need be kept with the infidels" to Islam. Individual rulers may have acted against the teachings of Islam, but Islam



inculcates the imperative necessity of abiding by the covenants made between Moslems and the followers of other religions. When the first Moslem army marched out of Arabia to encounter the Romans in Syria, Caliph Abu Bakr issued among others the following imperative instruction. "Remember," said the successor of the Prophet, "that you are always in the presence of God, on the verge of death, in the assurance of judgment, and the hope of paradise. Avoid injustice and oppression. Consult with your brethren, and study to preserve the love and confidence of your troops When you make a covenant or article, stand to it, and be as good as your word."* That the Moslems have implicitly obeyed these instructions is testified by history. No saint or sage can override these commands, and Sher Shah as a devout Moslem well versed in the principles of his religion could not have considered them as inoperative in his solitary case. Shaikh Rafi-ud-din also could never be expected to put himself in opposition to the successor of the Prophet, what he probably did was the issuing of a declaration forfeiting the life

*Edward Gibbon.



Puran Mall as the persecutor of the Moslems. It is self-evident therefore that the so-called principle that "No faith need be kept with the infidel" did not control the action of Sher Shah in this matter. Neither he nor the Shaikh could establish a contrary and contradictory principle in the face of precise injunctions of the first Caliph. Those who know the Moslem polity know also that no such principle has ever existed to influence the dealings of Moslems with other peoples.

Conquest of Malwa.

In the general confusion which supervened the extinction for the time being of the Mughal domination in India, there were displayed almost everywhere those centrifugal tendencies which had long been supposed defunct. Like hydra's head they again rose after Humayun's flight to proclaim the chronic fate of India to be divided into petty kingdoms constantly at war with one another. Different governors set themselves up as independent rulers as soon as they saw that the restoration of the Moghals was beyond repair. The miracle of creative energy however soon convinced the people that



their weary and joyless life was of brief duration. A world-transforming destiny broke over Northern India and violently disturbed the dream life of weak heads which had become utterly immersed in foolish fantasies. The despondent children of India sprang to life and activity once more. Sher Shah lost no time in moving in the airy regions of political romanticism; but his practical genius urged him on to definite goals and made him reveal the true aims of his policy.

Malwa which was a source of great anxiety to Sher Shah on account of the endless intrigues of its various rulers with the Moghals against him was his next objective. The flickering hope of Humayun was not yet extinguished. He still entertained the design of establishing himself in Gujerat; and with the willing co-operation of these potentates he intended to threaten Sher Shah's empire by a strong push from the South. The capture of Delhi would again have swung the balance in favour of the Mughals and with the revival of *anti* Afghan elements the position of Sher Shah would have become exceedingly precarious. But his alertness and sagacity soon turned the tables on his



enemies. In 1542 he invaded Malwa in order to uproot this nest of malignant adversaries.

The celerity of his military movements soon frustrated their design of creating a coalition of all the neighbouring states against him with perhaps Maldev as the head of the confederacy. The first blow fell on the fort of Gwalior which was reduced to submission by Shujaat Khan. This removed the danger of his being outflanked if he rashly advanced into Malwa. After receiving the homage of Abul Qasim Beg, the Mughal Governor at Gwalior he marched with his army towards Sarangpur. Mulla Khan (Qadir Khan) offered no resistance. Like a sinking ship he was deserted by his vassals and at last when no hope of escape from a dire fate remained he threw himself on the mercy of Sher Shah who accorded him a magnanimous treatment. Although Sher Shah nursed an old grudge against Mulla Khan who had once wounded his *amour propre* by sending him a communication couched in language used for inferiors, he yet soothed his distress by presenting him with valuable gifts and ordering a red tent for his accommodation. Kind-hearted as Sher Shah was he applied to a fallen foe those



principles of generous and broad minded tolerance which invariably won for him the love of his people. He generously offered a fife to Mulla Khan in Bengal in place of his state in Malwa which he could not safely leave in the possession of one whose fidelity he suspected. Any error of judgment or sentimental weakness on this occasion would have greatly imperilled the tranquility of his Empire. We recognize in this chivalrous treatment of a bitter enemy the possession by Sher Shah of those qualities which are competent to raise the spirits of those in misfortune. Sher Shah's liberal offer however was distasteful to Mulla Khan who evidently did not relish the idea of being transplanted from Malwa to Bengal. Sher Shah divined his secret musings and instructed Shujaat Khan to keep a vigilant eye on him, but Mulla Khan eluded his watch and fled towards Gujerat. Shujaat Khan's hot pursuit of him proved a failure. Sher Shah returned to Agra after having regulated the administration of the new territories which were added to his Empire. But before returning to Agra he made peaceful acquisition of the fort of Rantambor, which he gave into the custody of his eldest son Adil Khan.



Shujaat Khan who was left in charge of Malwa had to bear the brunt of the fight with Mallu Khan and Nasir Khan who attempted to recover their lost possessions. Shujaat Khan with greatly inferior forces met and inflicted a crushing defeat on them. During the progress of the sanguinary conflict he performed prodigies of valour. Since by the valiant defence of the Empire Shujaat Khan had given a rare example of military virtue and loyalty to the king, the latter spontaneously determined to bestow the great dignity of 12,000 horses on him and created him governor of these consolidated territories.

The annexation of these territories contributed to the security of his empire and finally removed some of those elements which threatened the repose of his capital. The frontiers of the empire were now pushed far into the south where any hostile demonstration would not affect the vital centres. His utilisation of strategical points was so masterly that no apprehension of a foreign menace loomed large any where.



Conquest of Multan and Sindh.

After his victories over Humayun Sher Shah visited Panjab and annexed it to his Empire. He appointed Haibat Khan Niāzi and Khawas Khan joint governors of this province, but as usual dual authority proved a miserable failure. Sher Khan recalled Khawas Khan who served in the campaign against Puran Mall with conspicuous gallantry and ability. Haibat Khan was left in sole charge of the Panjab with 30,000 cavalry. He was stern and energetic, wielding great influence over the frontier tribes consisting mostly of his own clansmen. Sher Khan was a great discerner of men and his choice of this man fitted supremely with the prevailing conditions in this distracted land. One Fateh Khan Jat a truculent robber fearlessly carried on his depredations between Lahore and Delhi.

Sher Shah received numerous complaints of his high handedness which threw this region into a state verging on anarchy. The king whose solicitude for the welfare of his subjects was great ordered Haibat Khan to eradicate this evil from the Panjab. He accomplished his mission with such energy and skill that



Fateh Khan was surrounded in a mud fort near Fatehpur. The savage robber finding no way of escape surrendered to Haibat Khan, but the garrison under Hinda Baluch made a sortie and cut their way through the besieging army and regained their liberty. But Hinda Baluch was captured by Bakhshu Langah and handed over to Haibat Khan. Haibat Khan immediately sent dispatches to Sher Khan describing the true state of the country, and reporting the capture of Fateh Khan, Hindu Baluch and Bakhshu Langah. "Sher Shah was exceedingly rejoiced, and made him a Masnad 'Ali and gave him the title of Azam Humayun. He also gave him a red tent, and wrote to him to repeople Multan and to observe the customs of the Langahs, and not to measure the land but take a share of the produce. He ordered him to put Fateh Khan and Hindu Baluch to death, to keep Bakhshu Langah or his son always with him, but to confirm his districts to him. As soon as Azam Humayun received this order at Multan, he left Fath Jang Khan in Multan and came to Lahore, and put Fath Khan and Hindu Baluch to death. Fath Jang Khan so re-peopled Multan and showed



such benevolence to the people, that Multan flourished more than it had done even under the Langahs, and in the country of Multan he founded a city which he called 'Shergarh!'"*

It is incomprehensible how quickly the waves of oblivion swept over the Afghan Conquest of Sindh, for Abbas, Nizam-ud-din, Badayuni and Abul Fazal have all studiously omitted to make any mention of this important historical fact. Haibat Khan most probably was the conqueror of this province. After the capture and execution of Fath Khan and Hindu Baluch the Panjab was thoroughly pacified, and his veteran army was ready to add more laurels to its great deeds. Haibat Khan was not the man who would seek repose after his labours. His soldier like qualities of bravery and activity evidently impelled him to find new fields of glory in Sindh, which being contiguous to his province was the most vital point for the security of his master's Empire. It would surely have served as a point d'appui for any army of invasion which Humayun might have led through Siwi for the reconquest of his old heritage. "Two coins of Sher Shah," says Mr. K. Qanungo

*Elliot, page 399.



are extant (in the Indian Museum, Calcutta), issued respectively in 950 H, 951 H from the mint town "Shergarh urf Sakkar Bakkar" (see pages 84—109 Catalogue of Coins in the Indian Museum by H. N. Wright). The importance of this numismatic discovery cannot be exaggerated. The most minute research in old MSS, could have perhaps never given us this piece of information." Mr. Qanungo quotes from Mirza Kalich Beg's "History of Sindh" the following account which possibly corroborates the story told in the coins. "Two months after this (Humayun's departure for Qandahar) Bakhsho (u) Langah collected people of the tribes of Langah, Baloch, and Nahir (Ahir?) in a fort near Multan on the bank opposite Jaunpur, to march against the fort of Bakhar as he was informed that Shah Husain had gone to Tatta and all his governors and chiefs had assembled there under him. With that object in view he put his troops in 50 boats and sent them ahead to fall suddenly on the island at night.....The assailants were at length repulsed and driven back to their boats.....The next day about noon Bakhsho (u) Langah came on



beating drums hoping to see the fort already in the possession of his men. But as soon as he approached guns and muskets were fired at him from ramparts of the fort and he was obliged to go to Lohri where he spent about three days and then went back to Multan, after plundering some of the villages in the country." This event is said to have taken place on the Friday night of 14th Jamad II 950 A. H. (14th September 1543 A. D.); Humayun having started for Qandahar from Siwi on 8 Rabi II (11th July 1543; Akbarnama, I 389). Now it is impossible that a petty chief like Bakhshu Langah without powerful support dared to provoke a quarrel with Shah Husain Arghun, who had razed to the ground the fort of Uch, conquered Multan and taken the fort of Dilawar in Bahawalpur. This in all likelihood was a reconnoitring party of Afghans who had got access to the fort of Bakkar and Bakhshu Langha wanted to dislodge them from that position. Bakhsho Langha evidently hated the Afghans to whom he had made himself odious by offering petty annoyances. It is inconceivable that while Sher Shah was adopting drastic measures to protect his Empire



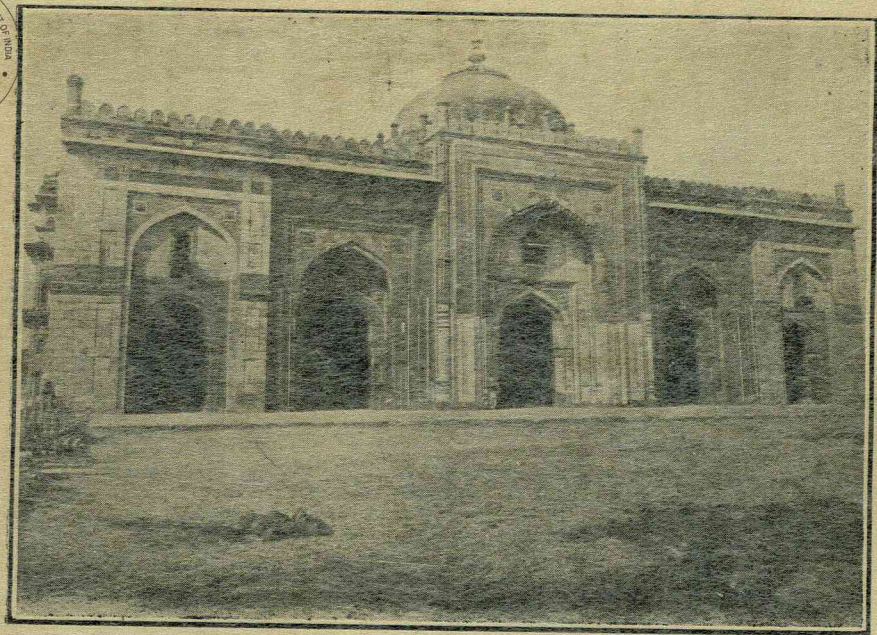
from the South West, he should have neglected to take similar precautions with regard to the frontiers of his Empire towards the North-West which were exposed to great and immediate danger from Humayun's projected invasion *via* Qandahar. But the silence of the historians of the period on this event is most inexplicable. Perhaps the great crisis of the campaign in Malwa and Marwar engaged the undivided attention of these men and they neglected to record the movement of the minor figures on the Indian chess board. In the face of this dazzling light of great victories the votive candle burnt by Haibat Khan did not perhaps attract much attention. The omission however is most deplorable as it has created a gap which can be filled only by drawing upon our imagination.

Conquest of Marwar.

Maldev the ruler of Marwar who rose from a petty position to a height of great power and prosperity by dint of his skill and enterprise had rendered himself obnoxious to Sher Shah by his ceaseless machinations. His open invitation to Humayun to join his forces with his own



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MOSQUE OF SHER SHAH INDERPARAST,
DELHI PURANA QILA.



in order to destroy Sher Shah was an unpardonable offence to the ruler of the paramount Empire. Sher Shah temporised with him till he had successfully dealt separately with Puran Mall and Mulla Khan. Meanwhile Maldev greatly enhanced his own power and by strengthening the defences of his kingdom had rendered it almost unassailable. He constructed new forts at points which were most exposed to invasion. His army of Rathor Rajputs alone numbered 50,000 men. These brave soldiers inspired by their past traditions were well armed and inured to war. Sher Shah knew from the reports of his intelligence department that all these formidable preparations were being rapidly completed for a final struggle with him to wrestle the hegemony of Indian kingdoms from his hands. How could peace and confidence thrive in this sultry atmosphere? The mutterings of the thunder became louder and louder till the thunderbolt fell on Marwar in January 1544.

Sher Shah advanced by way of Narnol and occupied Nagor whence he marched towards Ajmer where Maldev lay entrenched. All along the road to Ajmer he traversed an arid



and waterless country in which no provisions could be obtained, his commissariat was therefore replenished by regular supplies from Delhi. This naturally meant a gigantic transport work, but the inflexible force of his will surmounted all difficulties. It appears however that the Rathor cavalry displayed no activity as the line of communication of the Afghan army with its base at Delhi remained undisturbed. If the Rajputs had shown any enterprise, the position of the army of invasion would have become extremely insecure. Sher Shah exhibited the greatest resourcefulness and determination in this campaign. His fine intelligence was never deceived regarding the dangers of the situation, but his spirit was bold and he never lacked the energy of resolution. Events come to man in accordance with his faith ; and the victorious power of genius which had spoken so convincingly on previous occasions enabled him now to achieve a victory which has made him admired in the great epochs of Indian history.

For a month both armies confronted one another without daring to snatch success from the hands of fate. The Rathor cavalry num-



ered 50,000 seasoned warriors and therefore no surprise tactics were possible such as he employed when fighting Humayun and Sultan Mahmud. Both the Afghans and Rajputs knew that their very existence depended on the issue of this fateful contest—which would inevitably result in fearful carnage. Sher Shah's former campaigns had shown that he won signal battles with the least expenditure of the lives of his own soldiers. The freshness of his mind enabled him again to employ an ingenious strategem which made his implacable enemy fly away in utter panic. Sher Shah addressed fraudulent letters to some prominent chiefs of Maldev's army and had them dropped close to the tent of Maldev's representative, who thinking that they were inadvertently left behind forwarded them to Maldev as a trophy of his vigilance. The contents of the letters scattered to the winds Maldev's resolution, for they disclosed the intended treachery of the men who were the most trusted leaders of his army. Maldev lost faith in himself and in his high command, and in his perplexity ordered a general and precipitate retreat. Sher Shah's ruse proved eminently successful as without losing



a single life he routed a great army eager to come to grips with the Afghans. Some officers however who were apprised of the cause of this debacle gathered together about 12,000 Rathors and hurled themselves on Sher Shah's army and sacrificed their lives in a vain attempt to rescue the Rajput traditions from infamy. Badauni gives a brief though graphic account of this gallant charge. "But owing to their own stupidity or the superior good fortune of Islam, the infidels in a body dismounted from their horses and attacked the enemy with their short spears (which they called barcha) and swords. Sher Shah had given orders saying that if any man ventured to fight with the sword with this swinish horde his blood would be on his own head; he accordingly ordered the elephant troops to advance and trample them down. In the rear of the elephants the artillery (thundered), and the archers gave them a taste of the bowstring" (Ranking's translation). The whole force was thus wiped out. It was on this occasion that Sher Shah is said to have given expression to his fears as to the result of the bloody fight. "I had nearly lost the empire of India for a mere handful



of millet." (Barai ek musht i bajra badshah Hindustan ra barbad dadeh budem). Sher Shah gave no respite to Maldev to cool his heels anywhere, and he continued his ceaseless and vigorous pursuit till he was manoeuvred out of Jodhpur. Ajmer and Abu were also occupied by the Afghans. Maldev took refuge in Siwana where he was left in peace by Sher Shah. After spending a few months at Agra Sher Shah rejoined the army at Ajmer about the middle of June 1544. Mewar was now so cowed down that Chitor was easily taken. Sher Shah now visited the Rajput states with his army. It was a veritable promenade militaire as none of the Rajput chiefs dared oppose his progress through Rajputana. It is obvious that on this occasion he received the allegiance of these chiefs and established the undisputed suzerainty of the Delhi Empire. The possession of the four strong holds of Ajmer, Jodhpur, Mount Abu and Chitor in Rajputana was calculated to overawe these princes and to prevent by force majeure any hostile combination against him. The British Government in spite of its overwhelming military superiority in men and armaments had to follow the same policy what



Sher Shah did in the sixteenth century. The British also had to drive a wedge into the heart of Rajputana by establishing strong garrisons at Ajmer and Abu, and this in spite of the fact that the people are thoroughly disarmed and the means of communication have so wonderfully developed. Sher Shah abstained from interfering in these states beyond the acknowledgment by them of their subordinate position to the throne of Delhi and their acceptance of his Imperial sway. It does great credit to his sagacity and political acumen to see at once that if these princes are contended and loyal to the indulgent rulers of the Delhi Empire any fear of dangerous irruption from the south and south-west would entirely cease to exist. He realised then what the British Government had to do after the disastrous policy of annexations inaugurated by Dalhousie and others that he should bind these Indian states for ever to the throne of Delhi by the bonds of justice, confidence, and gratitude.

The defeat of Maldev was the drop scene in the drama of building up an Empire comprising the whole of Northern and Central India. Sher Shah had no serious rival left now to chal-



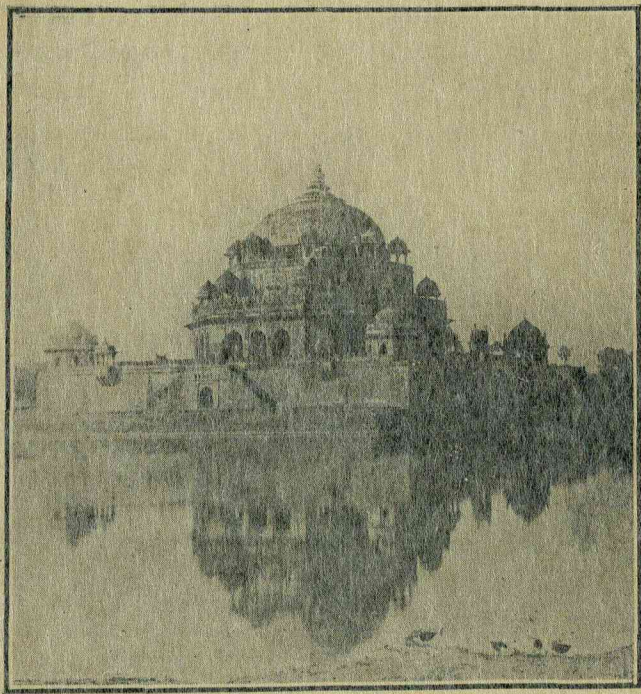
enge his supreme authority. We cannot however forget the desperate nature of the campaign in Rajputana waged against him in an attempt to overthrow the new order of things. Few if any events in Indian history have produced a greater moral effect than the triumphant emergence of Sher Shah from a perilous position. The impression at the time must have been overwhelming, and the news must have resounded like a thunderclap throughout India. The belief in his invincibility would have removed all obstacles from his way to the conquest of Southern India which now lay prostrate before him, but the fates willed otherwise and the formation of common national ideals in India was indefinitely postponed.

It was thus that in 1544 he invaded Marwar where Maldev the Raja of the country was at the height of his power. He conquered his powerful adversary more by art than blood shed. In a year's time Sher Shah established a control over the Empire which was never known before.

It was ignorance which led Goethe the German Philosopher to remark that "Chinese, Indian and Egyptian antiquities are never



more than curiosities." Mr. M. C. Aiyer in his life of Sri Sankaracharya justly says that "India suffers to day in the estimation of the world more through that world's ignorance of the achievements of the heroes of Indian History than through the absence or insignificance of such achievements." If the Western world had been in touch with the Eastern, Sher Shah deserved a prominent place in Comte's Calendar of Great Men for his beneficence and administrative achievements. But it is the same deliberate limitation of vision as shown by the German poet which excluded him from that paradise of brilliant intellects. "Few selections" says Lord Morley "are so hard to swallow as that of Frederick the Great as patron saint of modern statesmanship. Comte extols Frederick as a practical genius who in capacity comes nearest to Caesar and Charlamagne. "This in itself," continues Lord Morley, "will seem a gross exaggeration to anybody. The best modern opinion of Frederick on this side of his career is that, though a great soldier and an intrepid and skilful diplomatist, he possessed little originality in the fields of administration and organisation." If we balance



SHAHABAD SASSARAM, SHER SHAH'S
TOMB FROM NORTH-WEST.



against this all the toil, wisdom, faith, illumination of intellect that were exhibited by Sher Shah in building up the fabric of an empire far greater both in extent and population than that of Frederick the Great, the comparison will not be altogether unfavourable. From a private station he rose by the force of his genius to the throne of mighty kings. And these dazzling successes had no unfavourable influence upon his character. They did not, as in the case of Frederick, increase the tendency to excessive self-esteem and contempt for others. Even in the days of his greatest prosperity he continued to win the hearts of all by his inexhaustible amiability, by his refined understanding of everything that was human. Badaoni says that when an ambassador from Humayun reached Sher Shah's camp at Chausa, he found that Sher Shah "with his sleeves rolled up and with a spade in hand, in spite of the heat, was busy preparing the fort and entrenchment." He sat unceremoniously on the ground to receive the ambassador. This savours of early Moslem simplicity and earnestness. Early in his career he was confronted with the complicated problem of organising and reviti-



lising a corrupt, a divided, a distracted community. How was he to do it? That he found a solution and achieved complete success, no one denies. Clear intelligence backed by aspiring will, unflinching energy, remorseless vigour, the brain to plan and the hand to strike, these were the qualities needed for the salvation of India and these he possessed in a pre-eminent degree, and by these fit means he rebuilt the state in ruins. "This far-sighted man," says Mr. Keen, "even after his death, and the subversion of his dynasty, remained the originator of all that was done by mediaeval Indian rulers for the good of the people." At another place again, he says, "His ordinances touched on almost all the primary parts of administration, and evince a real care for the people's welfare." It is pleasing not to stint praise where it is due and especially when very few really deserve it. Mr. Stanley Lanepoole certainly does not grudge it to him when he says, "His ability and wisdom are unquestioned and in his fiscal and other reforms we see the true origin of many of Akbar's most famous measures," and these indeed have endured in one form or another even up to the present day.



Times have come and gone since Sher Shah issued his benevolent regulations, but in the great cycles of human change the deep thinkers will always give him a place among those who have elevated the conception of the state, have humanised the methods and maxims of government and have preached and practised that the political order must conform to the ethical ideal of what is just.

Mirabeau, the great Frenchman, said of Frederick that "he was a great character in a great position rather than a great genius raised by nature high above the common level." Sher Shah on the other hand did not inherit any position with his birth, in fact he had to struggle against very adverse circumstances to keep what came to him as a legacy from his father. But as Gibbon says, "He who is born in the purple is seldom worthy to reign; but the elevation of a private man, of a peasant perhaps, or a slave affords a strong presumption of his courage and capacity."

"Are we to test the true civilization of a state," asks Lord Morley, "by anything else than the predominance of justice, right, equality in its laws, its institutions, its relations to



neighbours?" Let us see if the great Frederick's cannons of administrative policy conform to any of the above cited essentials as laid down by one of the foremost thinkers of modern England. "His rigours," says Lord Morley himself, "may have been justified by the exigencies of his kingdom, but it is idle to cover with fair words the harshness of a government that was in the strictest sense military and despotic." And again the same eminent authority says, "Dictators have their place in the universal scheme, no doubt, but one can only hold up one's hands in amazement when Frederick who is more responsible than any other European ruler of the eighteenth century for the spread of those principles of violence, fraud and robbery which were only carried further by Napoleon." And to give a final touch to his judgment of the great emperor he says, "Frederick had not been twenty years in his grave before the work of his life was in ruins." When we review the work of Sher Shah we at once observe that the institutions which he founded gave prosperity to many millions of mankind and produced effects which are never likely to pass away. Discussing Sher Shah's



revenue policy Keen says, "All this has an importance extending beyond the immediate time." Again he says, "Not content with the administrative side of the social reform he went beyond most rulers and attempted a certain crude legislation. All that Sher Shah is known to have done," he continues, "shows reflection and principle." The great historian of India Mr. Elphinstone says about him, "Sher Shah appears to have been a prince of consummate prudence and ability towards his subjects, his measures were as benevolent in their intention as wise in their conduct. Notwithstanding his short reign and constant activity in the field, he brought his territories into the highest order and introduced many improvements in his civil government." No person wearing the diadem before had so victoriously refuted the darling illusion of own days, which seeks freedom and happiness in forms of government as Sher Shah did. "Freedom and despotism" says Savigny, "are possible in every kind of constitution. Freedom is found everywhere where the state authority respects nature and history in the living energies of the people: despotism is found everywhere where the government proceeds in accordance



with the dictates of subjective arbitrariness.

Consequently the proud doctrine which is so easily accepted by this age of the "constitutions," the doctrine of the exclusive beneficence of democracy has the value merely of an unproved assertion. For a ruler of Sher Shah's high character it is possible by virtue of his unrestricted royal authority to endow his beloved people with more true freedom than any written constitution can bring. Experience proclaims the truth that freedom depends far more upon administration than upon constitution.

When a ruler sees that his time is the property of his people, he must labour day and night as did Sher Shah who said, "It behoves the great to be always active." In the first hour of sunrise Sher Shah performed his devotions and then turned to the business of the day, beginning with parade, after which he conversed with his officers and men. He then went over his accounts and gave audiences. After two and a half hours of such work came breakfast in the society of pious and learned men. He participated with keen zest in the lively conversation of these brilliant men of learning. The repast thus refreshed his mind



which was worn out by incessant devotion to duty. After the meal more business came, but after the noonday prayer he took a little rest, on rising he read a portion of the scriptures and then fell to work once more.

It was Sher Shah's attitude towards life which helped him to recast the whole polity of the Indian administration. Early in life he recognised a ruler's duty towards the subject races, and strove with all the strength of his will to promote the happiness of the masses. The credit is solely his, since those generous impulses were not suggested to his imitations by the customs of his age or the example of his predecessors. His regulations about the revenue policy are remarkable for an original cast of thought, and faithfully represent the character of a sovereign who loved his people, who sympathised in their distress, and who diligently studied all the causes that afflicted them. In our own day the accepted theory that "Ideal system of taxation is one that expresses justice and that justice is to be attained by taxing individuals to their ability" was realised by Sher Shah in the 16th century. Under the protection of these wise laws and the



personal supervision of Sher Shah himself his subjects who could not look back without despair might now labour with hope and gratitude for himself and for their country. In the assessment and collection of taxes Sher Shah afforded every advantage to the cultivators and suppressed all extraordinary commissions. He removed those collectors from office who were insolent and arbitrary in their behaviour and demand.

To give an idea of the abuses which prevailed about the same time in Southern India and which probably he himself inherited from former rulers, I quote Nunig who was in Vijyanagar between 1520 and 1545. "All the land," he says, "belongs to the king and from his hands the Captains hold it. They make it over to husbandmen who pay nine-tenth to their lords, and they have no land of their own, for the kingdom belongs entirely to the king." From this it is clear that the rural classes in southern India suffered almost intolerable economic slavery at the hands of their rulers. Mannucci also gives us an interesting side-light on the condition of the ryots in his time. He says, "All land belongs to the crown, no individual



has as his own, field or estates, or any property whatever that he can bequeath to his children. At the beginning of the year which is June, the officers come from the Court to the villages, and compel the peasants to take up land at a certain rate. This bargain made, they must give notice at harvest time to the king's officers, for without their permission they may not harvest the grain. As soon as notice is received the officers proceed to the spot and before allowing the crop to be cut they ask the cultivators whether they are willing to give half or one-third more than they have contracted for at the beginning of the year. Should the cultivators agree to this, writings are drawn up and security taken, but after having made the bargain they usually find that what they gather in, does not suffice to meet the king's rent. It thus happens more often that they find themselves ruined by this revenue payment." This is indeed an unhappy and pitiful picture, and it was this fatal land system which was responsible for most of the evils which afflicted the masses in India in those days and brought ruin and downfall to Empires. In suppression of this oppressive policy Sher Shah inaugurated his own



humane and equitable land revenue system for which he is so celebrated. "It was Sher Shah," says Mr. Keen, "who first among those rulers perceived the benefit that might be expected from leaving a definite margin between the state demands and the expenses of the cultivator. The determination of this margin and the recognition of the person who should be secured in its enjoyment formed the basis of that system which under the name of settlement still prevails in most parts of India." It is impossible to give an adequate account of the system worked out by the Shah but his threefold object was (1) to obtain correct measurement of the land, (2) to ascertain the amount of produce of each half acre and the proportion it should pay to government, and (3) to settle the equivalent if possible in cash. The share of Government he fixed at $\frac{1}{4}$ th of the produce which the cultivator paid according to his own convenience either in cash or in kind. The $\frac{3}{4}$ th which the cultivator received was absolutely free of all cesses and fees, if we add to this the very substantial gain accorded to him from non-payment of forensic expenses the proportions secured to the cultivator shoot



up to an amazing degree. In order that the honesty, industry and providence of the tenant may be fully rewarded he exercised the greatest care in the selection and appointment of revenue officers who before his time were looked upon as something worse than plague. His own experience of the officials compelled him to regard them as a parasitic growth which was sucking the vital juice out of the vigorous rural stock. "I have examined much," he says, "and accurately ascertained that there is no such income and advantage in other employment as in the Government of a district." He therefore when appointing such officers strove to remove the mask which is usually worn in the presence of authority. He wished to substitute the natural order of talents for the accidental distinctions of birth and fortune. He professed in the clearest possible language his intention to prefer those who carried the poor in their bosoms and to banish corruption from the seat of justice.

Some people erroneously believe that the revenue system in British India was bequeathed by Akbar. Mr. Keen speaking of Todar Mal says, "originally in the service of Sher Shah, he had become imbued with that ruler's princi-



ples of benevolent assudity" at another place talking of Akbar the same author says, "In all this care for the people so unusual under despotic eastern governments, we cannot err in tracing the example of Sher Shah and the influence of ministers trained in his school." It cannot be denied that his noble policy laid the foundations of that revenue system which to-day brings prosperity to the agricultural classes all over India. He deserves the thanks and blessings of its beneficiaries. I can give quotations from other histories also to show that Sher Shah was the originator of this as well as many other valuable reforms and that he did all this wonderful work in an extremely short time of 3 or 4 years in a spirit of true benevolence. He certainly accomplished that great task in the sixteenth century which Mr. Disraeli even before the Irish famine, expected from the statesmen of the 19th century when in a famous speech, he said, "It was the business of a statesman to effect by policy what revolution would effect by force."

We thus see that in all departments of public life this benevolent dispenser of popular happiness effected a revolutionary transforma-



tion. Considering the vastness of his Empire it was indeed a colossal task which only the elemental energy of his will could accomplish within an amazingly short period.

Pataliputra, that beautiful capital of Asoka the Great, which fell into ruins in the seventh century, was rebuilt by Sher Shah and named Patna. "The Royal palace of Asoka although chiefly constructed of timber was considered to excel in splendour and magnificence the palaces of Susa and Ekbatana, its glided pillars being adorned with golden wines and silver birds. Here the Imperial Court was maintained with barbaric and luxurious ostentations. Basins and goblets of gold, some measuring six feet in width, richly carved lattices and chairs of state, vessels of Indian copper set with precious stones, and georgeous embroidered robes were to be seen in profusion, and contributed to the brilliance of the public ceremonies." By restoring this old capital he forged a link between himself and that matchless figure of the ancient Hindu period. Sher Shah assembled round his person all that was great in Indian art and learning, his court was therefore distinguished for brilliancy and simplicity charac-



teristic of a good Moslem sovereign. He desired to be scrupulously just to all the fresh energies of his country's life : to commerce, to industry, to communications.

In the days of Sher Shah.....The Mukadams used to protect the limits of their own villages, lest any thief or robber, or enemy of their enemies, might injure a traveller, and so be the means of their destruction and death, and he directed his Governors and Amirs to compel the people to treat merchants and travellers well in every way, and not to injure them at all, and if a merchant should die by the way, not to stretch out the hand of oppression and violence on his goods as if they were unowned ; for Shaikh Nizami (may God be merciful to him) has said, " If a merchant die in your country, it is perfidy to lay hands on his property." Throughout his whole kingdom Sher Shah only levied customs on merchandise in two places. *Viz.*, when it came from Bengal, customs were levied at Gharri (Sikri Gali) ; when it came from the direction of Khurasan, the customs were levied on the borders of the kingdom ; and again a second duty was levied at the place of sale. No one dared to levy other



customs, either on the road or at the ferries, in town or village. Sher Shah, moreover, forbade his officials to purchase anything in the bazaars except at the usual bazaar rates and prices. (Tarikh-i-Sher Shah).

For the convenience in travelling of poor travellers, on every road, at a distance of two Kos, he made a sarai ; and one road with sarais he made from the fort which he built in the Punjab to the city of Sunargaon, which is situated in the kingdom of Bengal, on the shore of the ocean. Another road he made from the city of Agra to Burhanpur, which is on the borders of the kingdom of Dekhin, and he made one from the city of Agra to Jodhpur and Chitor ; and one road with sarais from the city of Lahore to Multan. Altogether he built 1,700 sarais on various roads ; and in every sarai he built separate lodgings, both for Hindus and Mussalmans, and at the gate of every sarai he had placed pots full of water, that anyone might drink ; and in every sarai he settled Brahmins for the entertainment of Hindus, to provide hot and cold water, and beds and food, and grain for their horses ; and it was a rule in these sarais that whoever entered them received



provision suitable to his rank and food and litter for his cattle from Government. Villages were established all round the sarais. In the middle of every sarai was a well and a Masjid of burnt brick; and he placed an Imam and a Muazzin in every Masjid together with a custodian (shhna), and several watchmen; and all these were maintained from the land near the sarai. In every sarai two horses were kept that they might quickly carry news.....

.....On both sides of the highway Sher Shah planted fruit-bearing trees such as also gave much shade that in the hot wind travellers might go along under the trees, and if they should stop by the way might rest and take repose. (Tarikh-i-Sher Shah).

Food was freely supplied and Mannucci says that even clean linen figured among the articles of comfort furnished to the travellers. Turning to his other reforms we notice that it was Sher Shah who first established the public works department. A system of popular postal service was arranged and 3,400 horses were maintained to ensure speed and regularity. Besides building roads, sarais, hospitals and other institutions of public utility and benevolence he adopted the



admirable Islamic measure for the first time in India of granting old age pensions to such as the blind and old, infirm and the sick. These stipends were paid from the treasury of the town in which they were resident. This measure of relief benefitted all without distinction of caste or creed.

Elliot in his History of Sher Shah says, " Sher Shah made certain laws, both from his own ideas, and by extracting them from the works of the learned, for securing relief from tyranny, and for the repression of crime and villany ; for maintaining the prosperity of his realms, the safety of the highways, and the comfort of merchants and troops. He acted upon these laws, and it was proved by experience that they became the means of procuring tranquillity for the classes above mentioned. Sher Shah often said, " It behoves kings to inscribe the page of their history with the character of religion, that their servants and subjects may love religion ; for kings are partakers in every act of devotion and worship which proceeds from the priests and the people. Crime and violence prevent the development of prosperity. It behoves kings to be grateful for the favour



that the Lord has made his people subject to them, and therefore not to disobey the commandments of God."

"Sher Shah attended to every business concerning the administration of the kingdom and the revenues, whether great or small, in his own person. Nor did he permit his temporal affairs to be unmixed with devotion; day and night he was employed in both works. He had his dependents in waiting to awake him when two-thirds of the night was passed; and bathing himself every night he employed himself in prayer and supplication until the forth watch. After that he heard the accounts of the various officers, and the ministers made their reports of the work to be done in their respective departments, and the orders which Sher Shah gave they recorded for their future guidance, that there might be no necessity for enquiry in the future. When the morning had well broken, he again performed his ablutions, and with a great assembly went through his obligatory devotions, and afterwards read the *Musta'ab-i'ashr*, and other prayers. After that his chiefs and soldiers came to pay their respects, and the heralds (*naqibs*) called



out each man by name, and said:—"Such and such a one, the son of such a one, pays his respects." One full hour after sunrise, that is to say about the first hour of the day, he performed the Namaz-i-ishrak."

Sher Shah's prosperity had now attained that height which in the unpitied flight of time is never of long duration. In 1544 he conquered Marwar and subsequently laid siege to Kalinjar.* "On 22nd May 1544 this marvellous man," says Keen, "met the petty fortress and dubious hand from which no hero can count on immunity. While the siege operations were in progress he was hit by the splinter of a tumbril and received a dangerous wound. He was taken to his tent. He lay for two days conscious and thinking of his duty

* The summit of the rock (upon which Kalinjar stands) is in structure a kind of a table land slightly undulated and between four and five miles in circuit. Throughout its whole extent it is fortified by a rampart rising from the very edge in continuation of the scrap of the rock; and at places where the difficulties of the ascent in its natural state might be overcome, access has been guarded against by a facing of masonry. The fortifications are massively constructed of large blocks of stone laid generally without cement and about 25 feet thick,..... Access to the vast circumvallation of this hill is by a pathway sloping up the face of the rock in an oblique manner at the south-eastern side. It is a rough and narrow track through brushwood; and in some places almost perpendicular up to the first or lowest gateway, which leads into the fortified part and is situated at about a fourth of the ascent.

(Bandelkhand Gazetteer, p. 459.)



to the last. When intelligence was brought to him that the place was taken, he exclaimed "Thanks be to God Almighty" and never spoke again." That disastrous destiny which invariably arrested Indian state construction at a stage of half completion exercised its sinister influence again on this occasion. India lost an age long opportunity to become a nation under such a commanding genius as Sher Shah.

"Sher Shah was buried at Sasiram where his stately mausoleum is still to be seen standing in the centre of an artificial piece of water, a mile in circumference, which is faced by walls of cut stone, with flights of steps descending to the water." (Elphinstone.)

So hopelessly were the Afghans divided among themselves by their jealousies and dissensions, for which they have acquired an unenviable notoriety, and the strength of these lavishly endowed people was so aimlessly dissipated in the arid struggles of faction that to weld them into a strong nation with an enthusiastic self confidence both in their own and their leaders' resourcefulness is the work of those whom nature sometimes selects to reconstitute society. Under his leadership a strong national



life soon became manifest, which led the nation through freedom back to the attainment of its ancient power. He realised in good time that a ruler whether hereditary or a usurper can have no safety unless he secures himself in popular favour and good will. "Better far than any number of fortresses is not to be hated by your people."

In spite of constant active operations which required his personal direction we see that he himself attends to the complaints of his humblest subjects and dispenses justice and gives free audience to people, which won for him the devotion of all classes. His own experience taught him that if society suffered from state's neglect, still more must the state suffer by losing the chief means of connecting itself with the thoughts and affections of the people.

Well may the soul of India apply to Sher Shah what Goethe originally composed for Hardenberg.

"Thought transcends the power of speech,
When we contemplate your life,
Spirit free, spite bonds of earth,
In action firm and confident."

*Sher Shah as an apostle of Indian unity.*

In contemplating the career of this man of exceptional gifts whose horizon was far wider than that of most of the rulers before or after him, the student is profoundly impressed with the idea that he has never come across the account of any other ruler who has occupied a mighty throne with so admirable a combination of heart and intelligence, nor one so uncontaminated by false political doctrine, nor one so honest and so joyful in his laborious mission. Had he lived longer the foundation would have been firmly established upon which the structure of a common nationality in India would have been erected. This has not come to pass. This hidden tragedy is due to some malignant influence which broods over the destiny of this distracted land. But his efforts to reach the luminous goal of national unity deserve the highest praise. "To the extraordinary man" says Mr. W. Crooke, "who had driven Humayun from the throne, it can hardly be said that the ordinary histories do sufficient justice He was the first Mussalman ruler who studied the good of his people. He had the genius to see that the



Government must be popularised, that the King must govern for the benefit of his subjects, that the Hindus must be conciliated by a policy of justice and toleration, that the land revenue must be settled on an equitable basis, that material development of the country must be encouraged. All this and more Akbar strove to do later on.....He relaxed the oppressive Mohammedan law code and provided for the administration of justice. That he introduced such extensive reforms in his short reign of five years is a wonderful proof of his executive ability. 'No Government not even the British has shown so much wisdom as this pathan' as Keen says." (Memoirs of the Races of N.-W. Provinces II 97).

All this was the result of his consummate statesmanship, and it is in this respect that we distinguish him from the normal type of ruler. He stands among civilising conquerors such as have come into intimate contact with the great forces of destiny. His intellectual suppleness was the result of his Islamic education which had produced dazzling personalities at Baghdad and Cordova. Plato and Socrates indeed claimed to put right conduct on a basis of know-



ledge and therefore of education. He translated noble thoughts into noble actions and attained his splendid power of bringing consolation to heavy laden hearts because he had himself suffered so greatly. His conception of Empire embraced the gospel of higher justice and wider tolerance, and he realised this ideal in actual practice. The intricate problem of India which baffles the astute statesmen of the present era he attempted to solve by giving the Moslems, the Rajputs the Bengalis an Indian mind, thus giving strong impetus to the evolutionary process of Indian nationality. Even his detractors cannot suppress the fact that he was the enunciator of this ideal which later on Akbar endeavoured to realise. In dealing with this problem he exhibited reverence and boldness which characterised Alexander the Great. The incident which illustrates Alexander's laudable conduct is thus related in Greek history. On the night before Alexander of Macedon started for the East on that career of conquest in which like Achilles, his great exemplar, he was to find his glory and an early death, he had a farewell interview with the man who had been his tutor, now the



master of a rising school of thought in the shades of the Lyceum. And towards the close of the interview Aristotle said to the Macedonian: "You are about to start upon an enterprise which will bring you into many lands and amongst many nations, some already celebrated in arts and arms, some savage and unknown. But this last counsel I give you. Whithersoever your victories lead you, never forget that you are a Greek, and everywhere draw hard and fast the line that separates the Greek from the Barbarian." "No" answered the youthful conqueror,—he was barely two and twenty "I will pursue another policy. I will make all men Hellenes. That shall be the purpose of my victories."

The wisdom of a soldier for once went deeper than the wisdom of the great architect of thought that Time has known. (J. A. Cramb)
"Sher Shah" says Mr. Qanungo, "was born to reconcile religion and politics, and create a bracing atmosphere in which the Indian nationality might thrive like an organic growth..... Sher Shah's attitude towards Hinduism was not contemptuous sufferance but respectful deference, it received due recognition in the



state." How well Dante's noble verse was most strangely, most greatly realised by Sher Shah.

"Se tu segui tua stella

Non puoi fallire a glorioso porto."

(If thou follow but thy star

Thou shalt not fail of a glorious haven).

JUSTICE.

Sher Shah's Institutions.

Sher Shah when he ascended the Imperial throne of India assumed the title of "Sultan al Adil," i. e., the just monarch. In history we find many high sounding titles appropriated by great rulers which express the glory or might of these exalted personages. But when we study their lives we see the sorry spectacle that in numerous cases the glittering significance of these titles does not correspond with their practice in life. But in the case of Sher Shah we see his daily labours fulfilling the promise contained in his title. It is rare that the divine attribute of justice finds manifestation in the rulers of the world whether ancient or modern; in truth the recent experience of distressed humanity tells us that modern rulers pay attention to considerations of policy or convenience where claims of justice are



involved. Everything that policy requires, justice sanctions. Success is the test. Even as Goethe says "The man of action is essentially conscienceless." The modern Imperialist enjoys the full benefit of what is called the evolutionary beatitude. He boldly says, blessed are the strong for they shall prey on the weak. But the supreme human trait in the policy of Sher Shah was that he enforced the authority of moral law equally against high and low. He may well have cried with Vincke "As high as heaven is placed above the earth, so high does right stand above expediency." "He always ascertained the exact truth regarding the oppressed, and the suitors for justice; and he never favoured the oppressors, although they might be his near relations, his dear sons, his renowned nobles, or of his own tribe; and he never showed any delay or leniency in punishing oppressors." (Elliot iv, p. 411).

The Khulasat-ul-Tawarikh relates the following interesting story: Prince Adil Khan made some amorous advances (throwing a bira of pan) to the wife of a townsman of Agra, while she was taking her bath. The woman resented it, and her husband complained of it



to Sher Shah, who at once summoned the prince and pronounced judgment that the law of retaliation was to be enforced, i. e., the citizen must throw a bira of pan to the prince's wife when undressed and preparing for the bath. Everyone was staggered to hear it and vainly solicited him to relent. He remained obdurate saying he knew no difference between a prince and a peasant; and it should not be said that a man, because he was the King's son, could injure a subject whom he was bound to protect." What would those who forget moral scruples in pursuit of political aims say to this unexampled sense of justice? It is generally the fashionable tendency of the men of this new era to plume themselves upon moral superiority to all who have lived in earlier centuries, but those who cherish this happy illusion appear in comparison with Sher Shah as nothing more than dilettante in the art of statecraft who have debased the ethico-political ideal of the state. They fail to see that an attack on the sanctuary of justice would dissolve the bonds of human society.

One instance out of so many would be enough to show how Sher Shah rectified the



arrogance and arbitrariness of his officials. "Sher Shah had ordered Shujaat Khan to distribute some lands in his province (Malwa) to the common soldiers serving under him. But he was induced by his corrupt officials to appropriate them to himself, thereupon two thousand men determined to represent the case to the Shah, marched away in body from Shujaat Khan's army, and halted one stage off from it. They took counsel together and resolved: It is not proper to go ourselves to Sher Shah. He has posted us with Shujaat Khan in this country of Dakhan, and it is not right for us to move out of these parts, without his order. Let us send a Vakil to Sher Shah..... whatever he orders let us act up to it. And if any business of the King should in the meanwhile occur, it behoves us to exert ourselves in its settlement more than all others." But before the Vakil of the soldiers reached the Imperial presence, Sher Shah's spies reported everything to him. Shujaat Khan was reprimanded in severe terms and ordered to appease the remonstrants, on pain of the forfeiture of his jagir and imprisonment. Shujaat Khan felt the earth fast sliding off beneath his



feet. He himself went to the encampment of the seceders and, appeasing them with promises and oaths that he would do no harm and encouraging them with gifts and presents, brought them back to his own camp. For having escaped the King's wrath Shujaat Khan offered sweetmeats (*shukrana*) in Dargahs (of Pirs) and mosques and distributed alms to the poor. (Elliot iv, 425-427). This explodes the doctrine of trusting the men on the spot which is incomprehensible to an oriental. An officer appointed by the Crown deserves confidence but he has his faults like other men, and if some one aggrieved against him takes a complaint to the headquarters he is mystified beyond description when without any enquiry being held into his complaint he is blankly told that no interference is possible in the conduct of the offending dignitary or ruler. This modern conception of justice is essentially sullen and frigid whereas that of Sher Shah was benign, firm, and of tender mercy. How truly it might be said of him "to be forgotten is the true annihilation; man's future life lies in being remembered with honour." He will be remembered till the end of time not only with honour



but also with gratitude. His noble enthusiasm for justice and his keen solicitude for the poor was no doubt due to an inner grace of nature and to an instinct of the soul which was permeated by the chastening influence of religion. His training in the school of adversity filled him with that sympathy for the suffering humanity which the rulers born in the purple so sadly lack.

Revenue Policy.

The revenue policy which the previous rulers of India bequeathed to Sher Shah was notorious for rapacity, so much so that extortionate demands sometimes drove the miserable peasantry to the jungles. The system of assigning land to soldiers in lieu of pay was in most cases responsible for this deplorable condition of the cultivators who were mercilessly treated by these hungry wolves. Peculiar conditions created by the existence of almost chronic civil wars in which the soldier was considered a highly valuable commodity prevented these poor men from getting redress. "The license of the Moslem soldiery" says Mr. Qanungo "and the exactions of the Hindu Muqqadams were the bane of the peasants life." But the distressed world of India now witnessed the



dawning of a glorious day, in which the bond of affection and confidence between a noble prince and a suffering people would be established more firmly than ever before. After ascending the throne Sher Shah's first care was for the welfare of his afflicted subjects. He applied to the whole of the Empire the same beneficent measures which had ensured the contentment and prosperity of his parganas at Sasaram. Lands were measured according to an uniform standard. One *jarib* or *bigha* consisted of 3,600 square *gaz* (yard). Every cultivator had his holding correctly measured and the Government demand fixed at the rate of $\frac{1}{4}$ of the gross produce. "The work of survey and assessment of every village within a pargana was done under the direct supervision of the *Amin*. A *Kabaliyat* (agreement) which contained a short account of the *rayats* holding, and the amount he agreed to pay to the Government, was taken by him from every individual *rayat*, duly signed and attested; and he in return, gave a *patta* (title deed) to the *rayat* stating the demand of the state." (*Qanungo* p. 347). The *rayats* were given the option to pay the Government dues either in cash or in



and but so far as possible the former method was encouraged. With incisive boldness he eliminated the agency of the Muqqadams for the collection of state demands and required the payments to be made at the treasury of the pargana, he thus established direct relations with his subjects and saved them from the speculation of the middleman. His standing order to his revenue officers was, "Be lenient at the time of assessment, but show no mercy at the time of collection." This was a sound principle as the arrears of revenue paralyse the industry of the cultivator. He was familiar with every detail in the conditions of life in the provinces, and the peasants knew very well that they had not a better friend in the world than him. "One of the regulations Sher Shah made was this: that his victorious standard should cause no injury to the cultivation, and stationed horsemen round it to prevent people from trespassing on any one's field.....he used to look out right and left, and if he saw any man injuring a field, he would cut off his ears with his own hands and hanging the corn which he had plucked off) round his neck, would have him to be paraded through the camp.



And if from the narrowness of the road cultivation was unavoidably destroyed, would send Amirs, with a surveyor, to measure the cultivation so destroyed, and give compensation in money to the cultivators. If unavoidably the tents of his soldiery were pitched near cultivation, the soldiers themselves watched it, lest any one else should injure it, and they should be blamed and be punished by Sher Shah." (Elliot iv, 422). The magnitude of his powerful personality raised the tone of the whole hierarchy of officials who under him were just, conscientious, and laborious. He thus restored to his afflicted subjects the blessings of a careful Government such as they had seldom experienced before. His eyes were everywhere, like a physician at a sick bed he supervised the moods of the officials, their malice, their egotism. He punished them most severely if they dared to act against his regulations. His revenue policy rehabilitated the harassed *rayats* and brought great prosperity to his Hindu subjects both in the rural and urban areas. In those early days the cultivators were entirely Hindus as the Moslems were mostly professional soldiers.