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Echoes from Old Dacca.

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"The Life and Work of Haji Mahomed Mohsin"

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

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To The Hon. Sir Herbert Risley
with the author's respects

Sudhokan
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Foreword.

Echoes from Old Dacca, embodying a succinct history of Dacca from its foundation to the present day, appeared originally in the *Englishman* during 1906 in a series of special articles. This is an adaptation from those articles, and the author's grateful thanks are due to the Editor of the *Englishman* for permitting the reproduction.

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May 1909.



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Echoes from Old Dacca.



FTER the lapse of over two hundred years Dacca has once more been restored to its ancient dignity of a capital town. The selection of Dacca to be the capital of the new Province was an exceptionally happy one, for Jehangirnagar, to give the place its classic Moslem name, is extremely rich in historical associations, and can boast of a glorious antiquity. It was one of the centres of art and commerce during the old Moghul days, and even before the incursions of European adventurers had begun was famed in Europe for its exquisite muslin. An European traveller who visited India at that time wrote that "all the wealth of Bengal, the richest Province of the Delhi Emperor, is concentrated in this spot."

The etymology of Dacca—or, as the native pronunciation has it Dhaka—is wrapped in obscurity and has been variously ascribed to a tree called Dhak (*Butea frondosa*), and a temple of the goddess Durga named Dakeswari. But these suggestions would seem to be purely traditional and therefore uncertain. The one which is most probable and has most historical basis is that which ascribes the origin of Dacca to Islam Khan, the Moghul Governor of Bengal, who, worried by the constant encroachments of Afghans and Mughls from the eastern outlying frontiers of the Province, decided to move his capital from Rajmahal further towards the eastern boundary of the Nizamut.

The story as recorded in Rahman Ali's *Tarikh-i-Dhaka* * has it that "Shaikh Alauddin Islam Khan, the then Moghul Governor of the Province, came out in 1608 in a state-barge accompanied by a fleet of boats, in search of a site for his future capital. When the boat came opposite the place where the city now stands, the Governor found it to be a spot of great strategical importance, and accordingly chose it for his future capital. The boats were brought near the bank of the river and moored, and Islam Khan landed and inspected the site. The place where he landed is still called after him Islampur, and is an important quarter of the city. On his way back he met a party of Hindus performing their Puja with the accompaniment of music and Dhaks (drums). An idea struck him. Calling the drummers together, he made them stand at a central place, and ordered

* Persian MSS.

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them to beat the drums as hard as they could. At the same time he commanded three of his attendants to go, one to the east, another to the west, and the third to the north, each with a flagstaff, and plant it at the place where the sound of the drums would cease to be audible. This being done, he called the place Dhaka, from *Dhak*, a drum, and ordered boundary pillars to be erected at the places where the flagstaffs had been planted. These he fixed as the boundaries of the city to the north, the west, and the east, the river Buriganga forming the southern boundary. Here he fixed his capital."* This account is very credible because there is no mention of the city of Dacca prior to this in any published historical records, and the story finds further confirmation from the fact that when in 1612 Islam Khan became the recipient of Imperial favours from Jehangir as a well-deserved reward for his valuable services he changed the name of his capital from Dhaka to *Jehangirnagar* in honour of his patron. Thus it was that Dacca came to acquire its classic Moslem name which Mussalman chroniclers and poets† have delighted to perpetuate, and which is still remembered and used as the more literary designation of the city.

"He had grown up with me from youth and was one year my junior," wrote the Emperor Jehangir about Islam Khan. "He was a brave man, of most excellent disposition, and in every respect distinguished above his tribe and family. Up to this day he has never tasted any stimulants, and his fidelity to me was such that I honoured him with the title of Farzand (son)." The above expression of opinion sufficiently indicates the high esteem in which the Founder of Dacca was held by his master, the Emperor of Delhi. Islam Khan came of a very respectable stock. His father was Shaikh Badruddin and his grandfather the celebrated saint, Shaikh Selim Chishti of Fatehpur, who was held in the utmost veneration by the Emperor Akbar. The story runs that Akbar had despaired of getting a male heir to the throne, and it was as a result of the Shaikh's prayers and intercession that Akbar was blessed with a son and heir. It was in recognition of this inestimable kindness that the young prince was named Selim after the great Shaikh.

It has already been mentioned that one of the main reasons which induced Islam Khan to resolve on a change of the provincial capital was the unruly and turbulent attitude of the Afghans and Mughls. The Moghuls had, step by step, wrested the Empire from the Afghans, and they were now clinging with the energy of despair to their last foothold on the outskirts of the Empire. Ever a race of warriors, they had no lack of suitable leaders. The statesmanship of Todar Mall and the admirable generalship of Raja

* Cf. translation of the passage by Sayid Aulad Hasan, K.B.

† Cf. the Poetical Works of the late Syud Mahmood *Azad* of Dacca.

Man Singh—the big gun of Moghul militarism—which had hitherto proved an irresistible combination were alike unavailing against the determined and valiant resistance of Kutlu Khan, who had entrenched himself in Orissa with a large number of his hardy followers. The sudden death of Kutlu Khan, however, came as a great relief to the Moghul forces. But the end of the campaign was not yet, and in Osman Khan, the son of the great Afghan Chief, they found a no less staunch and able foeman. Osman was a born leader, and had inherited all the military skill of his father. Besides, the forts of Gauripara, Gonakpara and Doomroy on the river Bunsî were still in Afghan hands. So that the position of the Afghans in the Province was still formidable enough to tax the vigilance and strategy of the Moghuls to the utmost. After having been worsted by Man Singh at Rajmahal, Osman Khan had taken up his headquarters in the eastern section of the Province. He had an army of 7,000 horse and 6,000 foot and was living in almost imperial splendour. Islam Khan began by trying to win over the unruly Afghan Chief, and with this end in view he sent an agent with instructions to negotiate for settlement. Osman, however, was still intractable, and defied the Moghul Governor to do his worst. Islam Khan finding that his overtures for a peaceful termination of the strike had been construed as a confession of weakness, at last despatched a large army under the command of Shujat Khan, a well-known general, against the Afghans. Osman with an army of about 10,000 determined to give battle, and on the 9th of Mohurram 1021 A.H. (1612 A.D.) met the Moghul force on the bank of a small stream near Dacca.

A desperate fight ensued between the two armies. Islam Khan had taken up a position two miles distant from the field of action and was closely following the fierce contest. Seeing that his own troops were getting the worst of it, he sent reinforcements to Shujat Khan, without, however, succeeding in turning the tide against the Afghans. Luck, however, was on the side of the Moghuls. At nightfall, when the fight had all but ended in his favour, a ball struck Osman in the forehead and tore him from his elephant. His devoted brother, Khawja Vali, promptly carried him away from the field, and entrusting him to the care of a few trusty followers sent him to Dacca in a *doli*. Osman died *en route* to Dacca, and the attendants buried him by the wayside. The loss of their leader created the greatest depression among the Afghans. The usual and fatal consternation took possession of the leaderless troops and they threw away the victory which was in their grasp. The Moghuls who had already tasted a bitter defeat suddenly found themselves the victors. The Afghans were completely routed.

Having removed the last traces of Afghan resistance in the province, Islam Khan next turned his attention to an even greater peril which

threatened to lead to incalculable devastation. Profiting from the unsettled nature of Moghul rule in the province, consequent upon the protracted and desperate struggle with the Afghans, as a result of which Eastern Bengal had been practically left to its fate, the Mughls, a race of born freebooters given to piracy as a profession, sailed out of their haunts in Arracan, and began plundering and oppressing the helpless inhabitants to their heart's content.

Emboldened by the absence of any resistance worth the name, the Mughls started to carry on their depredations on an extensive scale. The whole province was laid waste and hundreds of inhabitants were carried off as slaves. Their cup of misery, however, was not yet full. The prospect of plunder appealed to yet other freebooters who saw in the unprotected province a source of limitless prosperity. The early Portuguese settlers in Bengal were a pack of irreclaimable dare-devils and desperadoes. They lived on piracy and plunder. Their skill in navigation and their instincts of seamanship found free play in the Gangetic Delta, and they revelled in the luxury of Eastern Bengal rivers. Francois Bernier, the famous French chronicler, writing in the seventeenth century, gave a detailed description of the life led by these Portuguese "interlopers" in Bengal. The picture he draws is the reverse of complimentary. "They were such," he writes, "as had abandoned their monasteries, men that had been twice or thrice married, murtherers" (*sic*.) According to Bernier "their ordinary trade was robbery and piracy," and he thus describes their pernicious operations: "With some small and light gallies they did nothing but coast about the sea, and entering into all rivers thereabout, and after penetrating even so far as forty or fifty leagues up country, surprised and carried away whole towns, assemblies, markets, feasts, and weddings (*sic*) of the poor Gentiles, and others of that country, making women slaves, great and small, with strange cruelty; and burning all they could not carry away. This great number of slaves, which thus they took from all quarters, behold what use they made of. They had boldness and impudence enough to come and sell to that very country the old people which they know not what to do with; where it so fell out, that those who had escaped the danger by flight and by hiding themselves in the woods, laboured to redeem to-day their fathers and mothers that had been taken yesterday."

'*Do badshahey dar aklimey na gunjund*'—two kings cannot live together in the same kingdom—says the Persian proverb. As may be imagined the Mughls could ill brook these rival adventurers so near home. The king of Arracan, with characteristic statesmanship, conceived the fine plan of destroying, or, at any rate, expelling from the "dominions" as many Portuguese as he could lay hands upon. The work was to have been done at one fell swoop, and, as is the case so often with a



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coup d'etat, it fell flat. The Portuguese escaping, put themselves out of reach of Arracanese treachery. They had unanimously selected Sebastian Gonzales as their leader. This person was the personification of all the worst characteristics of his followers, and he was unscrupulous and dare-devil to a degree which none amongst them dreamed of emulating. Having treacherously slaughtered, so the story runs, one thousand Mahomedans he had set himself up in the Sundip Island as a kind of Lord Protector whose authority and unlimited powers none dared question. Sundip Island became the headquarters from where all his piratical operations were directed, and the fame of his nefarious exploits drew a large number of kindred spirits to the place irrespective of creed or colour. He now counted among his followers 1,000 Portuguese, 2,000 Indian soldiery, 200 cavalry and 80 sails thoroughly well manned and equipped.

The common danger of a growing determination on the part of the Moghul Governor, Islam Khan, to extirpate these turbulent elements from his province, first of all caused the Portuguese and the Mughls, hitherto rivals in iniquity, to think of one another as possible allies. Ultimately an unholy alliance was patched up between Sebastian Gonzales and the Raja of Arracan against their common enemy the Moghuls. Their plan of operations was to be offensive, each of the allies making up the deficiencies of the other. The maritime skill of the Portuguese was unquestioned, while the Mughls could hold their own on land. It was settled that Dacca, the seat of Moghul viceroyalty, should be vigorously attacked and, if possible, captured. That would have placed the whole province in their hands and at their mercy. Accordingly, it was decided that while the Arracanese should proceed by land, the Portuguese were to sail up the river Megna, the allies meeting below Dacca and combining for the attack on the capital. The Moghul Governor, however, rose to the occasion. Having come to know of their designs, he despatched a strong body of cavalry to catch up the Arracanese before they could join forces with their allies. This was done and in the fight which ensued the Arracanese were completely routed, the Moghuls obtaining a decisive victory. Sebastian was not anxious to pit himself against Islam Khan, who had already proved himself a shrewd strategist, singlehanded, and he discreetly retired to his stronghold at Sundip, where he could feel himself secure even from the long arm of the Moghul Viceroy.

Islam Khan died in Dacca in the year 1022 A.H. (A.D. 1613) after a short term of rule of five years in which nevertheless he had succeeded in crowding several signal achievements.*

* The details of the origin and career of Islam Khan here set forth have been excerpted from my article on *The Founder of Dacca* in the *Statesman* of July 17, 1908.



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On the death of Islam Khan his brother Kasim Khan succeeded to the Governorship, but was recalled in 1618 and Ibrahim Khan appointed in his place. It was during the *régimé* of Ibrahim Khan that the English first visited Bengal with a view to establishing a factory in this Province. "Some years previous to this time, agents had been sent overland from Surat to Agra where they had established a factory; and on their representation two persons were sent (A.D. 1620) to Patna to purchase clothes and to establish a house of business in that city; but the great expense of land carriage, first to Agra, and then to Surat, so enhanced the price of the articles, that in the following year the trade was abandoned."*

Prince Shah Jehan's rebellion took place about this time, and after defeating and slaying Ibrahim Khan, that Prince entered Dacca where the fort surrendered and "all the elephants, horses, and 4,000,000 rupees in specie belonging to the Government were delivered to him." After a short stay at Dacca, Shah Jehan marched on towards Patna and was shortly afterwards defeated by the Imperial Army near Allahabad.

Mahabat Khan, Mukarrum Khan, and Fedai Khan became Viceroys in succession, till the accession of the Emperor Shah Jehan. The new Emperor put his own nominee Kasim Khan on the Musnud of Bengal who inaugurated his Governorship by the wholesale and treacherous slaughter of the Portuguese at Hughli. Kasim Khan died in 1632 at Dacca and was succeeded by Azim Khan whose administration is rendered memorable as the one in which the foundations of English trade were laid in this Province: 'A Phirmund (*sic*) had been obtained on the 2nd February 1633-34, for liberty of trade to the English in the Province of Bengal, without any other restriction than that the English ships were to resort only to the port Piplly.'†

The Emperor Shah Jehan had granted the *firman* formally conferring the liberty of trade on the English, but restricting their vessels from entering any ports other than that of Piplly near Balasore. This precaution was no doubt promoted by the past experience of the Moghul Government which had felt the risks and danger of leaving the European traders too much to themselves and of allowing the Portuguese to settle at Hughli and have unchecked communications across the Ganges.

Six years later, when in 1639 Sultan Mahomed Shuja, the second son of the Emperor, became Viceroy of Bengal he moved the capital of the Nizamut back to Rajmahal after a lapse of over thirty years. Prince Shuja extended great commercial facilities to the European merchants who were

* Cf. Messrs. Hughes' and Parker's letter, Vol. I. of India Records A. D. 1620, cited by Stewart.

† *Annals of the Hon. East India Company* by John Bruce, p. 320.



THE EMPEROR SHAH JEHAN.

*(From an old Murakka in the possession of
Nawab Syud Mahomed.)*



permitted to export large quantities of saltpetre, the value of which at this time had considerably risen on account of the civil war then raging in England. His reign was further marked by the establishment of factories at Balasore and Hughli by the English in 1604, who were also granted Letters Patent for freedom of trade in the Province of Bangala. The Viceroyalty of Prince Mahomed Shuja was signalized by the introduction of many reforms into the various departments of state. The *Bara Katra*, a building of considerable architectural beauty, was also erected during his time and has endured to the present day.

The illness and death of Shah Jehan led to the internecine warfare in which the unfortunate Shuja after several defeats by the Imperial and rival armies, was pursued to Dacca, and shortly afterwards met with his death through the monstrous treachery of the Raja of Arracan. Meer Jumla, who had greatly distinguished himself by his pursuit and defeat of Shuja and throughout had actively supported the cause of Aurangzeb, now received the Viceroyalty of Bengal as a reward for his services from the successful rival. His first act was to remove the seat of Government from Rajmahal back to Dacca in 1660. From this time onward Dacca continued to be the capital of the Province until Murshid Kuli Khan, the Nazim of Bengal, removed the court to Murshidabad in 1704, and Dacca became the seat of a Naib Nazim or Deputy Governor, which it continued to be till so late as 1843, when the last Naib Nazim leaving no heir, the office ceased to exist.

Meer Jumla was succeeded by Amir-ul-Omra Shaista Khan, nephew of the Empress Nur Jehan, and his Governorship is memorable as one of the most prosperous and notable in the annals of Bengal. One of the first acts of his administration was to complete the subjugation of the Arracanese who had in their employment the Portuguese settled at Chittagong. After the Arracanese had been compelled to beat a retreat, the Moghul army laid siege to Chittagong. On its fall they changed the name of the city to *Islamabad* (City of the Faithful).

The reign of Shaista Khan marks another step in the progress of English trade in Bengal. At this time the English had no regular house of business at Dacca—a deficiency which was telling on their trade every day. The woven stuff from Dacca was in great demand, and the English traders could only now and then visit the place with their merchandize and “with the sale proceeds purchase was made of Dacca muslin and piecegoods for export per Company’s ships at Hooghly and Balasore.” Not only commercial exigencies but also political reasons—due representation of the English traders at Court to advance their own interests and keep in check the incessant rivalries of the Dutch and Portuguese—made it imperative that the English should have a factory at Dacca. The Court of Directors wrote to the Council at Hughli under date 24th January 1667-68:—“We observe what you

have written concerning Dacca that it is a place that will vend much Europe Goods and that the best *Cassues, Mullmuls*, etc., may be procured. It is our earnest desire as before intimated that as large a quantity of broadcloth as possible may be vended by you. Therefore if you shall really find that the setting a factory in that place will occasion the taking of some considerable quantity of our manufactures, and that (as you write) the advance of their sales will bear the charge of the factory, we then give you liberty to send two or three fit persons thither to reside, and to furnish them with cloth, etc., proper for that place." *

In 1668 Shaista Khan granted permission to the English to establish a factory at Dacca. Stewart in his *History of Bengal* writes: "During the Government of Shaista Khan, the commerce of the English, notwithstanding the alleged oppression of the Governor, continued to flourish. Besides their factories at Balasore and Hooghly, they had established agencies at Patna, Cossimbazar and Dacca; and their exportation of saltpetre alone in some years amounted to 1,000 tons, and their importation of bullion, in a single year, to £110,000: further, although no English vessels were allowed to sail up the Ganges before his time, *viz.*, A.D. 1664, yet it appears, in the year 1669, the East India Company had, by his permission, formed a regular establishment of pilots, for conducting their ships up and down the river. He also, in the year 1672, granted them an order for freedom of trade throughout the province, without the payment of any duties."

Shaista Khan's administration was remarkable for its manifold activities and achievements, and it proved peculiarly eventful in regard to the condition and prospects of the European traders—more especially of the English. As we have noticed an English factory had been established at Dacca, and the prosperity of the traders was unprecedented. But this state of things was not to last long: a period of stirring incidents and great vicissitudes followed, and the governorship of Shaista Khan saw the English started on that career of assertion and activity which was ultimately to wrest the Empire from Moghul hands. Up to this time the meek traders had been content to court Imperial and Viceregal patronage and toleration, but soon the force of circumstances caused territorial occupation and fortifications to be regarded not only as possible, but even necessary. From this time onward the history of Dacca is bound up with the history of the rise of the East India Company as a political force in the country.

After the first term of Shaista Khan's viceroyalty, when he resigned in 1677, Fedai Khan and Sultan Mahomed Azem, the third son of the Emperor Aurangzeb, became governors in rapid succession. Such quick changes of

* *Diary of Sir William Hedges*, Vol. III., p. excv.



administration, as might be imagined, entailed no little hardship on the European traders. So "the factors of the English Company, having found it exceedingly troublesome and expensive to procure a fresh order for freedom of trade from every succeeding governor, had, upon the removal of Shaista Khan, sent an agent with him to the Emperor's camp, to solicit an Imperial *firman*, to settle this business for ever; and the agent after much expense and perseverance, succeeded in procuring the Emperor's order, with which he returned to Hooghly, on the 8th of July 1680. The English factors wishing to make a great display of their success, caused the *firman* to be received with much ceremony, and to be saluted with 300 guns from the factory and the ships anchored opposite the town."*

The procuring of the above *firman* coupled with the great increase of the Bengal investments "induced the Company to render Bengal independent of Madras; and, in consequence, they appointed Mr. Hedges, one of their Directors, to be chief agent, or governor, of all their affairs in the Bay of Bengal, and all other factories subordinate thereto (1681). His residence was fixed at Hooghly; and, in order to give dignity to the office, a guard of a corporal and 20 European soldiers was sent from Fort St. George for his protection. This was the first military establishment of the Company in Bengal, and the foundation of the English power in that country." But as the Imperial *firman* proved an ambiguous document, having been "purposely drawn out in a vague and obscure style," it is hardly surprising that it should have given rise to disputes and "involved their affairs in great difficulty."

Matters indeed had come to a deplorable pass, and trade was seriously hampered. Mr. Hedges, the new governor, decided to go to Dacca in person to represent matters and lay before the Nawab all the grievances of the Company and secure redress. But his mission was a failure: "In 1682 our Chief Agent in Bengal journeyed to the Viceregal Court at Dacca and humbly remonstrated against 'the general stop of our trade'—still in vain."†

In consequence of the above, Mr. Hedges was compelled to retire after a short term of less than two years.

The troubles of the English were aggravated by the arrest of Mr. Peacock, the head of their factory at Singee, near Patna, who, incurring the unjust suspicions of the Nawab, was thrown into prison "whence it was with much difficulty and intercession that he was released." The encroachments of the interlopers had been another source of constant worry and trouble to the English about this time, in consequence of which Mr. Gyfford, the Governor at Hooghly in 1685, "made an application, in the name of the

* Stewart's *History of Bengal*, p. 195.

† Sir William Hunter's *History of British India*.



Company, to the Nawab Shaista Khan, for permission to erect a fortification in the mouth, or on the banks of the Ganges—to prevent the ships of those persons, whom they denominated interlopers, from entering the river; and for the better protection of their own property.”*

But it was hardly to be expected that so shrewd and experienced an administrator as Shaista Khan would readily place such power in the hands of foreigners. He not only declined to make the concession, but also demanded, notwithstanding the Emperor's *firman*, 3½ per cent. duties upon all their imports from the English, instead of the annual payment of Rs. 3,000 which had been received from them formerly.

“In 1685 the Hugly Council feeling their position so high up the river to be unsafe, fruitlessly begged leave to quit it for a landing-place further down. For the first time in its history, the Company found itself under a Moghul oppressor whom the Emperor's *firman* failed to control and whom its petitions and presents were powerless to appease.” Matters had come to a head, and the inevitable rupture occurred between the Nawab and the English “which so injured the trade of the latter, that their ships were obliged to leave Bengal without obtaining cargoes.” The only alternatives now for the English were either to abandon their trade with Bengal, or by having recourse to arms, “effect by force what they could not obtain by entreaty.”

The days when aggressive self-assertion became necessary had come and the English had no course left but to adopt these methods. In 1684 the Court of Directors “had got so far as to declare that ‘though our business is only trade and security, not conquest,’ yet we dare not trade boldly or leave great stocks, where we have not the security of a fort.”†

“The Roe doctrine of ‘quiet trade’ had obviously ceased to apply to Bengal: as it had never really applied to Madras or Bombay, nor indeed anywhere outside the provinces in which the Imperial authority could secure Imperial protection.” In 1685 the Court of Directors “ordered the black Town of Madras to be walled in and fortified at the expense of the inhabitants, ‘whether it displease or please them or anybody else.’ They also desired a defensible position in Bengal where ‘our great ships may lie within command of the guns of our fort.’”

“The future policy of the East India Company had been thus determined and ‘the solemn renunciation of the Roe doctrine of unarmed traffic was resolved on in January under the governorship of Sir Joseph Ash.’ In pursuance of the above policy warlike preparations began, but ‘as a matter of fact the Company possessed neither the information nor the officers for the

* Stewart's *History of Bengal*, p. 196.

† Hunter.



effective prosecution of a war in India.' They easily obtained the royal sanction for an armament from James II, who was a large shareholder in India stock, and an expedition was fitted out in England, which consisted of six companies of infantry and ten ships of twelve to seventy guns (some of them mere tenders) under Captain Nicholson with the title of Admiral until he reached the Ganges, when the Agent in Bengal was to act both as Admiral and Commander-in-Chief. The troops sailed with only lieutenants, as the Colonel, the Lieutenant-Colonel, Majors and Captains were to be supplied from the factory gentlemen. On the west coast of India the squadron was to cut off the native shipping and declare war on the Moghul Emperor. On the east coast, after obtaining, if possible, 400 additional soldiers at Madras, it was to bring away the Company's servants from Bengal, lay hold of all Moghul ships at sea, capture and fortify Chittagong at the N.E. extremity of the Bay, establish there a mint, then advance up the Ganges to the Viceroy's capital at Dacca, and extort from him a treaty by force of arms. It was also to take vengeance on the King of Siam, by seizing his vessels for wrongs done to the Company; and it was to give tardy effect to the Marriage Treaty of 1661 by driving out the Portuguese from the dependencies of Bombay. Of this vast programme, conceived in ludicrous ignorance of the geographical distances and with astounding disregard of the opposing forces, not a single item was carried out. Misfortunes and miscalculations dogged the expedition. At length in the autumn of 1686 two ships and their light-armed tenders entered the Hughli River with 308 soldiers, to make war on an Empire which had at that moment an army of at least 100,000 men in the field. The Viceroy of Bengal alone could lead out 40,000 troops and the garrison of the single town of Hughli numbered 3,300.*

The Madras Government had, in the meantime, sent round 400 soldiers; "and had directed Mr. Charnock to raise a second company of Portuguese infantry to be officered by the Company's servants." "The arrival of such a force in the Ganges immediately roused the suspicions and fears of Shaista Khan. He offered to compromise the differences with the English, and to submit the whole of their dispute to arbitrators appointed on both sides; but in order to be prepared against any acts of hostility, he ordered a considerable body of troops to encamp in the vicinity of Hughli."†

The negotiations, however, were prematurely cut short by a trivial affray between the troops of the two parties which unfortunately developed into a regular fight with a fairly heavy casualty and led to the bombardment of the town by Admiral Nicholson. As a result of the cannonade 500 houses

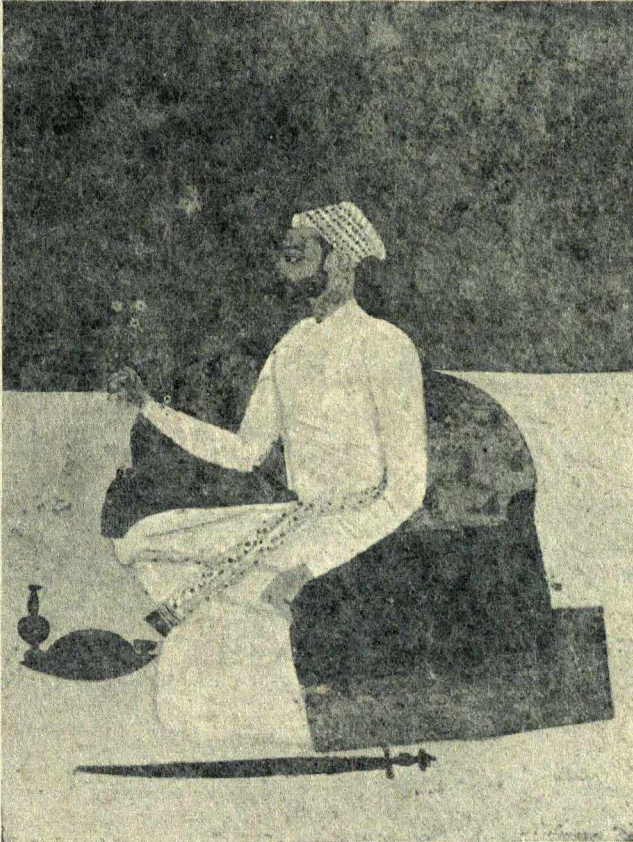
* Hunter's *History of British India*, p. 252.

† Stewart. *Op. Cit.* p. 198.

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were burnt down including the Company's factory worth 300,000 with the goods stored therein. The Foujdar or Military Governor made a temporary truce, but Shaista Khan being apprised of the circumstances "directed the English factories at Patna, Malda, Dacca and Cossimbazar to be confiscated; and ordered a very considerable body, both of infantry and cavalry, to proceed immediately to Hughli, and to expel the English from the country." In the midst of hostilities overtures of peace were made several times only to end abruptly. At last Mr. Charnock, the agent, "being neither in a condition to oppose the Nawab by arms nor to appease him with money, sent two members of his council to Dacca, to try if he might be softened by submission." While the English deputies were still at Dacca negotiating peace (1688), Captain Heath arrived with his reinforcement, and despite the protestations of Mr. Charnock decided to renew the war. He "landed with a party of soldiers and seamen on the 29th of November, attacked and took a redoubt of thirty guns, and plundered the town of Balasore. The English factory, on this occasion, was burned by the Governor; and the Company's servants, who had been previously taken prisoners, were carried up the country, where all subsequent efforts for their release were unavailing. This outrage unfortunately was committed on the very day that the Governor of Balasore received a copy of the treaty which the Nawab had made with the two deputies at Dacca."

The aggression of Captain Heath coupled with the fortifications of Bombay and Madras by the English, and their alliance with the Mahratta free-booter Sambhaji so incensed the Emperor Aurangzeb against them that he "issued orders to his commanders to extirpate the English from his dominions: and to seize or destroy all their property, wherever it might be found. It was in obedience to these orders, that the factory at Masulipatam was seized by the Governor of that district, and that the warehouses of Vizagapatam were plundered, and all the English gentlemen put to death." Shaista Khan also carried out the Emperor's commands to the extent of "sequestering the whole of the English property in Bengal, and to place the Company's agents at Dacca in chains." The Amir-ul-Omra finally resigned in 1689, and died a few years later at Agra. "It is related," says Stewart, "that, during his government, grain was so cheap that rice was sold at the rate of 640 lbs. weight for the rupee: to commemorate which event, as he was leaving Dacca, he ordered the western gate, through which he departed, to be built up, and an inscription to be placed thereon, interdicting any future Governor from opening it, till he had reduced the price of grain to the same rate: in consequence of which injunction, the gate remained closed till the Government of the Nawab Sirferaz Khan." His Viceroyalty was the longest, and, on the whole, the most memorable in the annals of Dacca. He erected



MIR MEERAN.

*(From an old Murakka (picture album) in the possession of
Nawab Syud Mahomed.)*



NAWAB SIR K. ABDUL GHANI, K.C.S.I.
(Photo. by Messrs. Johnston and Hoffmann.)



several mosques and other public buildings, their particular style of architecture being known as the "Shaista Khani," whose traces are still very evident in the city. The famous French traveller Tavernier visited Dacca more than once during his Governorship and has left interesting accounts of his observations and experiences. Shaista Khan was succeeded by Ibrahim Khan, whose "first act of authority, after assuming the government, was one most congenial to his feelings, *viz.*, the liberation of the Company's agents, who were confined at Dacca."

Sir John Child, the Director-General of the Company's settlements, had sent two English Commissioners from Bombay to negotiate a treaty of peace with the Moghul ministers, while the Emperor was encamped in the Deccan. On the treaty being formed, the Emperor sent the following *firman* to Ibrahim Khan at Dacca under date April 23rd, 1690: "You must understand, that it has been the good fortune of the English to repent them of their irregular past proceedings; and their not being in their former greatness, have, by their *vackeels*, petitioned for their lives, and a pardon for their faults, which out of my extraordinary favour towards them, have accordingly granted: Therefore upon receipt hereof, my Phirmaund (*sic*) you must not create them any further trouble, but let them trade freely in your Government as formerly: And this order I expect you to see strictly observed." Ibrahim Khan accordingly wrote letters to Mr. Charnock at Madras inviting him to return and re-establish all the Company's factories; with an assurance of a perfect oblivion of everything which had passed, and that the English should be placed on a footing with the most favoured foreign nation. On the 24th August, Mr. Charnock, with his Council and factors, and attended by an escort of thirty soldiers, returned to Chuttanutty, where Meer Ali Akbar, the Governor of Hughli, in obedience to the Nawab's orders, received them with much civility.

In 1691, Ibrahim Khan forwarded to Mr. Charnock a *hush-ul-hookm* from the Emperor Aurangzeb "authorising the English to trade to Bengal without paying any other duty than an annual present of 3,000 rupees." Five years later on the breaking out of the rebellion of Soobha Singh and Rahim Khan, the English factory at Chuttanutty, along with those of the Dutch and French at Chinsurah and Chandernagore respectively, was fortified by the implied sanction of the Nawab. These were the first three European forts "which the Moghul Government suffered foreigners to build in any part of their Empire."

As has been noticed, the rebellion of Soobha Singh and Rahim Khan indirectly led to the erection of the first English fortifications along with those of the Dutch and French in India. This same event was destined to have other far-reaching results on their subsequent history. The necessary

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precedent had been established, and from this time onward, their right of military defence remained unquestioned—a concession which proved invaluable in the sequel.

The rebellion had assumed appalling proportions, and was daily becoming more and more threatening, but the Governor, Nawab Ibrahim Khan, was strangely apathetic towards it, and declined to take any definite steps to nip it in the bud. To the remonstrances of his son and counsellors he replied that "a civil war was a dreadful evil, in which the lives of God's creatures were wantonly expended : that the rebels, if let alone, would shortly disperse of themselves ; and the only consequence would be the loss of a small portion of his Majesty's revenue." Rahim Khan, who after the tragic death of Soobha Singh was chosen as the head of the rebel army, and had assumed the royal title and style of Rahim Shah, continued his progress through the country, compelling the population to join him, and plundering whatever he could lay his hands on. The rebels marched to Mukhsoosabad and after defeating the royal army of 500 strong, took and plundered that town. A band of rebels, about the same time, advanced to Chuttanuttty and set the villages on fire. A third party of the rebels laid siege to the fort of Tanna (a few miles west of Calcutta on the opposite side of the river), but as the English, at the request of the Foudar of Hughli, had sent a frigate to support the fort, the rebels were compelled to retreat. "In the meantime, the Europeans worked day and night in fortifying their factories at Chinsura, Chandernagore and Chuttanuttty : at the latter place, the English constructed regular bastions, capable of bearing cannon ; but to avoid giving offence, the embrasures were filled up, on the outside, with a wall of single brick." In the month of March, 1697, the rebels captured Rajmahal and Malda, and plundered the Dutch and English factories at the latter place, thereby obtaining considerable property. Clearly, these were not the times for any pseudo-ethical qualms of conscience on the part of the Governor. It only remained for the rebels to enter Dacca and depose Ibrahim Khan as a fitting end to his policy of astounding inactivity. Moreover, this was not exactly the sort of policy which would have recommended itself to the Emperor Aurangzeb, who was then encamped in the Deccan. "The first intelligence which the Emperor received of these events was through the newspaper." As may be imagined, his indignation and astonishment at the conduct of Ibrahim Khan was great, and to mark his disapproval of the Governor's policy he forthwith appointed his grandson, Prince Azim-ul-Shan, the second son of Bahadur Shah, who was then in the Royal camp, to the United Government of Bengal, Behar and Orissa. Orders, however, were sent to Ibrahim Khan to remain in Dacca until the arrival of his successor, but in the meantime "to place his son, Zubberdust Khan, at the head of the

Bengal forces, and send him immediately against the rebels." The Emperor also issued commands to the Governors of Oude, Allahabad and Behar, "to co-operate by every means in their power, with the Governor of Bengal, in quieting the insurrection and extirpating the rebels."

"On the receipt of the Imperial orders, Zubberdust Khan, who had long beheld with regret the apathy of his father, quickly equipped an army consisting of both cavalry and infantry, with a good train of artillery and attended by a number of war-boats. As soon as everything was in readiness he marched from Dacca, and proceeded up the right bank of the Ganges."*

In the meantime the resources of Rahim Shah had greatly increased : "Governor Eyre, in his letter of December, 1696, says, that the country in possession of the rebels was estimated at 60 lakhs of rupees per annum ; and that their force consisted of 12,000 Cavalry and 30,000 Infantry." †

"When informed of the approach of the Imperial troops from Dacca, he (Rahim Shah) encamped his army on the banks of the river, in the vicinity of Bogwangola, resolving to risk his fate in a pitched battle." But during the time that Zubberdust Khan was advancing, by short marches, with his artillery and infantry, he detached the greater part of his cavalry to beat up the quarters of the rebels, who were in possession of Rajmahal and Malda. This service was ably performed ; the rebels were defeated at Rajmahal ; an Afghan Chief named Ghyret Khan was killed, and the greater part of their plunder retaken. That which belonged to the Dutch and English was reclaimed by the agents of those nations ; but the Moghul Commander refused to restore it without the orders of the Governor.

"Zubberdust Khan having arrived within a few miles of the rebel camp landed his infantry and guns from the fleet ; and after reconnoitring the position of the enemy, ordered his war-boats to harass them from the river while he attacked them by land. The first day was spent in a cannonade, during which the guns of the Imperial army, being served by the Portuguese in the Royal service, dismounted most of those of the enemy and silenced the redoubts which he had thrown up along his front. The next morning, both armies being drawn out in battle array, the attack was commenced by the Imperial infantry ; but in a short time the engagement became general and continued for several hours. At length the rebels were overcome, and compelled to retreat, leaving their camp to be plundered by the Royalists."

In the meantime, no sooner had Prince Azim-ul-Shan received the investiture of his office, than he marched with a select corps of 12,000

* Stewart. *Op. Cit* p. 210.

† *Rast Inaia Records*, Vol. XIX., p. 263.

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cavalry towards Allahabad. "Upon the Prince's arrival at Allahabad, he sent orders to the Governor of Oudh immediately to join him, with all his forces : he also issued his commands to all the zemindars in that neighbourhood, and to those of Benares and Bihar, to join his camp as soon as he should enter their respective territories, on his route to Bengal."*

When the Prince arrived in Patna, the reports of Zuberdust Khan's successful campaign reached him, and "fearing that so active an officer would gather all the laurels before his arrival at the scene of action and leave him nothing by which he might gain credit with the Emperor, he sent positive commands to the General not to risk another engagement until he should join him with his victorious Army." Zuberdust Khan accordingly cantoned his army in the vicinity of Burdwan, and patiently awaited the arrival of His Royal Highness. On his approach to the city, Zuberdust Khan advanced several miles to receive and welcome the grandson and representative of the Emperor, "but so cool and distant was the reception he met with from His Highness, that he resolved immediately to quit the army, and proceed with his father, the deposed Governor, to Court."

"Having delivered over the command of the troops, he made known his request to His Royal Highness, who, jealous of the fame that Zuberdust Khan had so justly acquired, was graciously pleased to comply with his wishes, although by so doing, he greatly reduced the strength of his own army ; as nearly 8,000 of the best troops were the dependants, or followers, of the General and his father, and went away with him." Thus it was that the "famously just and good Nawab Ibrahim" and his gallant son left Dacca, carrying with them the good wishes of all.

The new Viceroy made Burdwan his temporary headquarters, as being the centre of disturbance, and all his energy for the next couple of years was devoted to the quelling of the insurrection which, however, was not suppressed till the death of Rahim Shah in 1698, which occurred in the following manner : in the course of negotiations for his surrender on the understanding that he would be forgiven for his past misdeeds, Rahim Shah ordered his troops to mount, and to make a sudden and vigorous attack on the Royal camp. This movement was executed with such rapidity, "that Azim-ul-Shan had barely time to mount his elephant before he was surrounded by a party of the Afghans, headed by their chief, Rahim Shah ; and would certainly have been taken prisoner, had not a brave Arab officer, named Hamid Khan, called out, that he was the Prince, and challenged the Afghan to single combat ; at the same time discharging an arrow, which penetrated the rebel's side : a second arrow from his hand wounded his antagonist's horse in the head, who thereupon reared up, and threw

* Stewart *Op. Cit.* p. 216.



his rider on the ground : the Arab instantly dismounted, and, having cut off Rahim Shah's head, held it up on the point of his lance. The Afghans seeing the catastrophe of their chief, were struck with panic and fled on all sides. After which they offered to submit to the Prince, provided he would take them into his service ; which being agreed to, a general amnesty was passed, and peace restored to the harassed Province."

At this time the English secured a concession from Prince Azim-ul-Shan which requires to be noted, as it gave them a new status in the country, and was the first step towards territorial acquisition. "By a suitable present the English obtained a grant of the three villages of Chuttanutty, Govindpore, and Kalicotta. The importance of this grant is liable to be overlooked. It raised the English to the condition of a zemindar."*

"The Prince, after a residence of nearly three years in Burdwan, having regulated the affairs of the western part of Bengal to his satisfaction, ordered the state-boats which had been built during the Government of Sultan Shuja, to be collected in the vicinity of Hooghly ; and embarking at that place, proceeded with great pomp to Dacca and took possession of the Royal palace."

Dacca now became the scene of lively incidents in which the leading part was taken by a new figure, who occasionally overshadowed the Royal Governor himself. As henceforth Murshid Kuli Khan looms large in the political history of Dacca, as well as of the Province, some account of him is necessary.

"This person was the son of a poor Brahman, and, during his youth, was purchased by a Persian merchant named Hajy Suffia, who took him to Ispahan, and, having circumcised him, changed his name to Mahomed Hady and educated him as one of his own children. Upon the death of the merchant, his heirs manumitted the youth, and permitted him to proceed to the Deccan, where, soon after his arrival, he obtained an inferior employment in the service of Hajy Abdullah, Dewan of Berar : in this situation he evinced such a knowledge of accounts and expertness in business, that within a few years he was recommended to the Emperor Aurangzeb, as a fit person to fill the office of Dewan of Hyderabad, then vacant : he was in consequence appointed to that office and dignified with the title of Kar Tulab Khan. A continuation of the same line of conduct which had recommended him to the Emperor, induced that monarch to nominate Kar Tulab Khan, in the year 1701, to the important office of Dewan of Bengal with the title of Murshid Kuli Khan." †

* *Early Records of British India* by J. Talboys Wheeler, p. 163.

† Stewart. *Op. Cit.* pp. 221—2.

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“Murshid Kuli Khan soon after his appointment proceeded to Dacca, and entered with alacrity upon the business of his office. He found that the country was rich and productive, but that the public revenue had been absorbed in improper channels. He therefore appointed his own collectors to the different districts ; and in a short period ascertained that the revenue of Bengal amounted to one crore (10 millions) of rupees.” This official disbanded the Royal household cavalry, which were of little use in a low country like Dacca, and resumed the Jagirs assigned for their support. This and other measures of retrenchment were most distasteful to Prince Azim-ul-Shan, who strongly objected to the control thus exercised over the State expenditure.

Murshid Kuli Khan soon completely overhauled the revenue administration of the province, and raised it to a level of great efficiency and prosperity, the revenue of the State being considerably increased. “This conduct acquired for Murshid Kuli Khan great celebrity at Court : but the haughty spirit of the Prince Azim-ul-Shan could ill brook the constant interference, in all pecuniary transactions, of the Dewan, and his frequent opposition to His Royal Highness's commands. Besides these causes the Prince was exceedingly jealous of the high favour in which Murshid Kuli stood with the Emperor ; and the courtiers and favourites of the Prince, whose extravagance or assumed powers were constantly controlled by the Dewan, fanned the flame and added fuel to his already exasperated temper : Azim-ul-Shan was therefore extremely anxious to get rid of his rival, if it could be effected without risking the displeasure of the Emperor.”

The inevitable sequel which followed is thus narrated by Stewart : “An officer named Abdul Vahid, commanding a long-established corps of horse, called Nukedy, who were entitled to their pay monthly from the treasury, and, therefore, looked with contempt on the other troops paid by assignments on the zemindars—and who were, besides, noted for their insolence and contempt of all authority—proposed to the Prince to assassinate the Dewan, if he would ensure to him, or to his heirs, a large sum of money. The offer having been accepted, Abdul Vahid ordered his men to waylay the Dewan the next time he came to pay his respects to the Prince. An opportunity soon after offered : the Dewan, who was never deficient in etiquette and respect to the Viceroy, left his house one morning to pay his obeisance at the Palace ; but before he had gotten half way, his retinue was stopped in the street by a large body of the Nukedy regiment, who in a clamorous manner demanded their pay. The Dewan, who always went abroad well armed and was attended by a considerable number of armed followers, immediately jumped out of his palanquin ; and, drawing his sword, commanded his attendants to clear the road and drive those fellows away. The Nukedies, seeing his resolution and firmness, shrunk back, and allowed him to proceed unmolested to the Palace ; where,



as soon as he entered, he loudly accused the Prince of being the author of this conspiracy. He then seated himself, in a rude and indecorous manner, opposite to him; and putting his hand to his dagger, said, 'If you want my life, here let us try the contest: if otherwise, take care that nothing of this kind ever again occurs.' The Prince, alarmed by his threats and dreading the severe justice of the Emperor, was very much agitated; and after protesting his innocence in the most solemn manner, sent for Abdul Vahid and severely reprimanded him for the flagitious conduct of his men, threatening him with the severest marks of his displeasure if they were ever again guilty of such disorderly behaviour: these excuses did not, however, satisfy the Dewan; he proceeded immediately to the Public Hall of Audience, and, having sent for Abdul Vahid, examined into the arrears due to the corps; and after giving him an assignment for the amount, on one of the zemindars, discharged him and his regiment from the Imperial service."

On reaching home, Murshid Kuli drew up a complete statement of the whole incident, and after having it duly endorsed by the signatures of the public officers, forwarded it with his own representation to the Emperor. After this rupture with the Governor, in which he had acted with such rare boldness and independence, Murshid Kuli Khan did not consider it advisable to continue living in Dacca, and decided to fix his residence at Mukhsoosabad, as being nearly in the centre of the province, and equally convenient for collecting the revenues from all parts. "Having decided on this measure he left Dacca without taking leave of the Viceroy; and carrying with him all the public officers attached to the Dewani, proceeded to Mukhsoosabad."

"When the well-authenticated statement of the disturbance at Dacca and the attempt on the life of the Dewan reached the Emperor who was then in the Deccan, he sent an order to Prince Azim-ul-Shan, severely reprimanding him; and threatening him, that if the smallest injury was offered, either to the person or to the property of Murshid Kuli Khan, he, although his grandchild, should be answerable for it. He further commanded the Prince immediately to quit Bengal and to fix his residence in the province of Behar. Azim-ul-Shan knew too well the arbitrary disposition of his grandfather to attempt any justification of his conduct, or to procrastinate his departure; he, therefore, appointed his second son, Furrukh Seyer, under the superintendence of Ser Balund Khan, to be his deputy in Dacca; and embarking with the remainder of his family, and all the public officers, on board the Government boats, proceeded to Rajmahal, and took possession of Sultan Shuja's palace. The air of that place, however, not agreeing with his family he some time after removed to Patna, the castle and fortification of which he repaired, and by permission of the Emperor, changed the name of the city to Azimabad"—after himself. The nobility of the place still delight

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to designate their city by this dignified name, and the Mahomedan historians also prefer it to the unclassic "Patna." The young Deputy-Governor, Prince Furrukh Seyer, assumed charge of the administration at Dacca and "made himself universally esteemed by his wise and liberal measures." The removal of the Dewani to Mukhsoosabad as the results of the unfortunate "fracas" between the Nawab and the unbending Murshid Kuli caused Dacca to be shorn of not a little of its dignity and importance. In fact, it was the beginning of the decay of Dacca, and in a few years the work was completed by that same agency.

In 1704 Murshid Kuli Khan personally waited upon the Emperor Aurangzeb, who, as a reward for his successful administration of the Dewani, reappointed him to the post of Dewan of Bengal and Orissa in his own right and as Deputy-Nizam for Prince Azim-ul-Shan. It was not, however, till 1713 when Prince Furrukh Seyer had become the Emperor of Hindustan, that these offices were united, and Murshid Kuli Khan became the Nizam and Dewan of Bengal.

As soon as he had returned to Bengal from the Deccan, Murshid Kuli Khan changed the name of the city of Mukhsoosabad to Murshidabad in perpetuation of his own name. The erection of a mint, a palace, and other public offices of Government soon made Murshidabad the seat of Viceregal Government and the capital of the Province.

Thus formally ended the capitalship of Dacca ; its history so full of stirring vicissitudes, and, on the whole, so glorious. The eastern districts were now placed in charge of a Naib Nazim or Deputy of the Governor. The post of a Naib was "considered the highest and most lucrative appointment under the Nizamut." The jurisdiction of the Naib extended from the Garo Hills on the north to the Sunderbans on the south and from the Tipperah Hills on the east to Jessore on the west, "thus comprising a far greater extent of country than the present Dacca District." At the height of its splendour, the limits of Dacca, including the suburbs, extended from the Buriganga in the south, to the Tungi River in the north, a distance of nearly fifteen miles ; and from Jafarabad in the west to Postgola in the east, a distance of nearly ten miles. Its population then was estimated at about 900,000.*

Mirza Lutfullah, who was appointed Naib in 1713, annexed the Tipperah territory, which had hitherto been only nominally subject to the Moghul Government, to the Province. Latterly, the Naibs began to reside at Murshidabad, and, in their turn, appointed Deputies and entrusted them with the government of Dacca. Some of these deputies administered well, but "others made it their chief object to amass wealth at the expense of the

* Rahman Ali's *Tarikh-i-Dhaka*. (Persian MSS.)



THE EMPEROR FARRUKH SEYER.

*(From an old Murakka (picture album) in the possession of
Nawab Syud Mahomed.)*



provinces committed to their charge." Among these latter may be mentioned Rajballabh, Peshkar, of the Nowwara, and subsequently appointed Deputy Governor, who is said, during his short term of office, to have amassed the enormous sum of two crores of rupees. He also acquired a great quantity of land, which afterwards constituted the valuable zemindari of Rajnagar. Near a village of the same name, on the south side of the Pudda, are still to be seen the ruins of the splendid residence erected by this Raja Rajballabh, whose descendants were mentioned to have been living, though greatly reduced in circumstances, as late as 1868.* A great portion of the money amassed by this man was conveyed out of the district by his son Kishen Dass, who was supposed to have taken it into Fort William. It was in search of this treasure, it is said, that Serajud-doulah was induced to commence hostilities against the English, which ended in their obtaining possession of the country in 1757. With this date, the history of Dacca, under the native dynasties, virtually ceases.

Up to the time of the East India Company's accession to the Dewani, in 1765, the "administration of the Dacca province was carried on by two departments—Huzuri and Nizamut; the former was under the Provincial Dewan, who resided at Murshidabad and carried on the business at Dacca by deputy. The jurisdiction of this officer extended to the charge of the crown finances and the settlement of all disputes relating to revenue. The department of the Nizamut related chiefly to civil and criminal suits, and the collection of a portion of the revenue, which was assigned to defray the expense of this establishment."

In 1765 Lieutenant Swinton, on behalf of the East India Company, came to Dacca and assumed charge of the Dewani from the then Naib Nazim, Nawab Jasarat Khan. From 1768, Nawab Jasarat Khan carried on the administration of the Province in conjunction with a member of Council representing the East India Company. On the death of the Nawab, the English assumed sole charge of the Government, and his five successors nominally remained Naib Nazims, receiving a pension of Rs. 6,000 per mensem from the East India Company.

The year 1769 saw the appointment of a Supervisor of Revenue to whom was entrusted the sole control of the departments of *Nizamut* and *Huzuri*. Three years later, in 1772, that officer's title was altered to that of "Collector;" and that same year after the East India Company had formally taken over the Dewanship in succession to Mahomed Reza Khan, a court of *Dewani Adalut* was established, the Collector becoming its Superintendent. A Provincial Council was instituted in 1774. The collection of revenue was entrusted to Naibs who also presided over the court of *Dewani Adalut*, from

* Cf. History and Statistics of Dacca Division, 1868.

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whose findings an appeal was permitted to the Council. The year 1781 was a memorable one, as it saw the abolition of the Council, and the establishment of a Court of Judicature of which Mr. Duncanson became the first judge. The same year Mr. Day was appointed Magistrate and Collector of the district. The British period of the history of Dacca had thus commenced.

The French Factory, which was situated at the place where the zenana quarters of the present Nawab of Dacca stand, was taken possession of by the English in 1778, and the Dutch Factory, which stood at the south-west corner of the Mitford Hospital compound by the river, three years later in 1781.

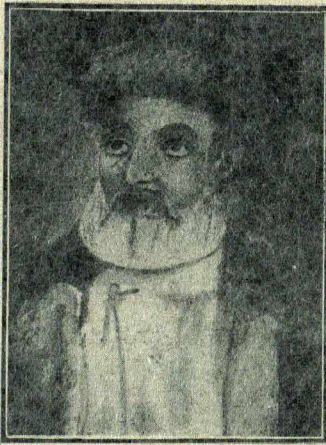
Thus those old-world associations of keen rivalry and commercial competition were destroyed, and there was left neither a foreign nor native disturbing element to interrupt the smooth administration of the country.

Three-quarters of a century were to elapse before a wave of trouble and excitement swept over Dacca, and the most memorable period in the history of Modern Dacca was, beyond doubt, that of the great Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 which extended to the native troops then quartered in the town.*

After the last traces of the mutiny had been wiped off, the proclamation of the transfer of the Government of India to the Queen was read in English and Bengali in the open space in front of the Dacca College in 1858. The telegraph line between Calcutta and Dacca was also completed in that year.

Dr. Reginald Heber, the Lord Bishop of Calcutta, visited Dacca in 1824, and has left an extremely interesting account of his impressions and experiences in his well-known "*Narrative of a Journey, etc.*" He wrote :—"Dacca, Mr. Master says, is, as I supposed, merely the wreck of its ancient grandeur. Its trade is reduced to the sixtieth part of what it was, and all its splendid buildings, the castle of its founder Shahjehanguire (*sic*), the noble mosque he built, the palaces of the ancient Nawabs, the factories and churches of the Dutch, French and Portuguese nations, are all sunk into ruin and overgrown with jungle. But the Hindu and Mahomedan population, Mr. Master still reckons at 300,000, certainly no immoderate calculation, since, as he says, he has ascertained that there are above 90,000 houses and huts." Regarding the climate of Dacca at the time, Dr. Heber wrote :—"The climate of Dacca, Mr. Master reckons one of the mildest in India, the heat being tempered by the vast rivers flowing near it, and the rapidity of their streams discharging

*For a detailed account the reader is referred to my article entitled *Dacca during the Mutiny* in the *Indian Daily News* of the 14th May 1907.



MEER ASHRAF ALI.
(From an old Painting on Ivory.)



the putrid matter of the annual inundation more rapidly than is ever the case in the Hooghly." Writing under date July 5th, Bishop Heber says :—"I had also a visit from Mr. Lee, a sort of Secretary to His Highness the Nawab Shemsheddowlah, to congratulate me on my arrival, and to appoint a day for his calling on me.

"This potentate is now, of course, shorn of all political power, and is not even allowed the State palanquin, which his brother (whose heir he is) had, and which his neighbour the Nawab of Murshidabad still retains. He has, however, an allowance of 10,000 rupees per month, is permitted to keep a court, with guards, and is styled 'Highness.' The palanquin, indeed was a distinction to which his brother had no very authentic claim, and which this man could hardly expect, having been very leniently dealt with in being allowed the succession at all. He had in his youth been a bad subject, had quarrelled with Government and his own family, and been concerned in the bloody conspiracy of Vizier Ali.

"For his share in this, he was many years imprisoned in Calcutta, during which time he acquired a better knowledge of the English Language and Literature than most of his countrymen possess. He speaks and writes English very tolerably, and even fancies himself a critic in Shakespeare.

"July 6th.—The Nawab called this morning according to his promise, accompanied by his eldest son. He is a good looking elderly man, of so fair a complexion as to prove the care with which the descendants of the Mussalman conquerors have kept up their northern blood. His hands, more particularly, are nearly as white as those of an European. He sat for a good while smoking his Hookah, and conversing fluently enough in English, quoting some English books of history, and showing himself very tolerably acquainted with the events of the Spanish war, and the part borne in it by Sir Edward Paget.

"I went from the palace to the house of Meer Ashraf Ali, the Chief Mussalman gentleman in this District. He is said by Mr. Master to have been both extravagant and unfortunate, and therefore to be now a good deal encumbered. But his landed property still amounts to above 300,000 *bigahs*, and his family is one of the best (as a private family) in India. He was himself absent at one of his other houses. But his two eldest sons had been very civil, and had expressed a hope that I would return their visit. Besides which, I was not sorry to see the inside of this sort of building. Meer Ashraf Ali's house is built round a courtyard and looks very much like a dismantled convent, occupied by a Corps of Uhlans. There are abundance of fine horses, crowds of shabby looking servants in showy but neglected liveries, and on the whole a singular mixture of finery and carelessness."

The Meer was the premier nobleman of Eastern Bengal in his time. In *Tarikh-i-Nusrut Jungi* (Persian MSS.) * by Nawab Nasrut Jung, the Naib Nazim, it is stated that his monthly income was Rs. 20,000 and that "there must be few men in the city who have not become the recipient of his favors or have turned away disappointed from him." During the first Burmese War he rendered valuable services to Government, by providing supplies to the British troops, and by proceeding in person to the frontiers of Tippera, accompanied by some thousands of his ryots to aid the British authorities. The Government offered to pay him his expenses or to grant him some title or mark of distinction, but he declined both. The Government thereupon conferred on his two sons, Syud Ali Mehdy and Syud Mehdy Ali, *khilluts* and the title of "Khan Bahadur."† It may be mentioned that in those days this title was not what it has since become. Subsequently, at their request,

* Since ably edited by my valued friend Professor Harinath De, of the Imperial Library, and published in the *Memoirs* of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. The passage in the original will bear quotation :

"بعد فوت نواب نصرت جنگ جنگ مکان تا غازی الدین محمد خان مغفور که عرصه بسست سال شد از عماید و رؤسای این دیار یک یک فوت نمو دند - خانهای که همسری دولت خانه نواب صاحب میکرد نیست و نابود گر دید چنانچه میر اشرف علی مرحوم که آمدنی در صاه بسست هزار رپیہ داشتند زمینداری شان بلده کمال بود - صد هاکسان پرورش می یافتند و از مردمان شهر کمتر باشند که مضمون احسانش نگر دیدند و از ارد و صادر کسی محروم نمی رفت - کارخانه عالی و خرچ فراوان بود و فرزند ان جوان علی مهدی خان بهادر و علی حسن خان بهادر را گزاشته فوت نمودند - باوجود بودن فرزند ان قابل و زمینداری بزرگ فلک کم رفتار چنان نیرنگیا بر انداخت که علی حسن خان بهادر غریق دریای رحمت یزدانی شدند و مکانات عالیشان چنان نیست و نابود گر دید که نشان هم باقی نماند و تمام زمینداری بسرکار کمپنی بسبب باقیات خزانه خاص شد - سید علی مهدی خان بهادر اگرچه تاحال در قید حیات اند لیکن زنده بگور توان گفت عدم و وجود شان بوابر -"

† In this connection we are indebted to *Reis and Rayyet* for unearthing an interesting piece of information. In the course of an editorial in its issue of July 7th, 1906, *Reis* wrote :—

"The writer in the *Englishman* appears to have missed the following facts in connection with the loss of the Bulda Khal Pargana, one of the most valuable properties of Meer Ashraf Ali, which we extract from a letter in the *Sumachar Durpan* of the 5th July 1834. The *Durpan* was an Anglo-Bengali paper, started by the famous Serampore Missionaries, and one of the earliest journals published in Bengal.

"The Editor of the *Durpan* further says, that 'no purchasers having appeared at the former sales, there was an order issued to purchase it (the Bulda Khal Pargana) for a single rupee on the part of the Government; but this is all fudge. That any order was given to purchase so enormous an estate for



NAWAB SYUD MAHOMED.
(Photo, by Messrs. S. Nasiruddin.)



they were granted the privilege of using silver sticks, and in this connection Bishop Heber records a characteristic conversation which he had with the two young gentlemen. He says (Vol. I, p. 151):—"At last out came a wish for silver sticks. Their father, they said, was not in the habit of asking favors from Government, but it was a shame that the *Baboos* of Calcutta should obtain badges of nobility, while true *Seyuds*, descendants of the Prophet, whose ancestors had never known what trade was, but had won with their swords from the idolaters the lands for which they now paid taxes to the Company, should be overlooked." On this the good Bishop "reminded them that an old family was always respected whether it had silver sticks or no, and that an upstart was only laughed at for decorations which deceived nobody." "Yes," replied the younger, "but our ancestors used to have silver sticks, and we have got them in the house at this day."

"We then parted, after their bringing 'pawn' and rose water in a very antique and elegantly carved bottle, which might really have belonged to those days when their ancestors smote the idolaters. The young men called afterwards to see me to my boat, and brought me some toys for my children and a travelling cap often worn by Mussalmans in this District."

It may be mentioned here that the eldest surviving lineal descendant (a great-grandson) of Meer Ashruf Ali of Dacca is the Hon'ble Nawab Syud Mahomed, Khan Bahadur, * the present Inspector-General of Registration, Bengal.

No account of Modern Dacca can be complete without some mention of the present Nawab Family which, under the ægis of the British Government, has in some measure replaced the Old Nawabs and become the premier landholders of the Province. The following account of the family is taken from Mr. Buckland's *Bengal under the Lieutenant-Governors*:—"The 'Dacca Nawabs' have long held the leading position in Eastern Bengal. In wealth,

one rupee is out of the question. Government is anxious that the estate of Bulda Khal should be improved. When the British Government were engaged in the Rangoon war, Meer Ashraf Ali Khan, the father of Mehdy Ali Khan, made great exertions to supply the troops with provisions and procured food for them all the way from his own estate to Chittagong, save while they were passing through the estates of other Zemindars. As a reward for which Government bestowed on him a *khilat* of seven *parchas*, a pearl necklace, a *jogah* (*choga*) and *surposh*, a sword and shield, and silver sticks, and the drum, and invested him with the title of *Khan Bahadur*. When the Treasurer of the Collector had purloined money from the Treasury, although two other securities of his existed, yet Government demanded and received from Ashraf Ali Khan the sum of a lakh and a half of rupees, and this sum he paid without any discussion or objection. The sum of Rs. 1,15,000 for which this estate was sold is extremely inadequate; which will appear evident from the fact that a half-anna share of it has been sold for Rs. 50,000. At the lowest it ought to fetch eight lakhs."

* For a detailed sketch of the Nawab's life and career see the *Pioneer* of February 8, 1907. Also contribution in the series entitled *Moslem Men of Letters* by the author of *Mahomedans of Note* which appeared in the *Englishman's Journal* of July 15, 1906.



in liberality, in founding works of public utility, and in loyalty to the British Government, the family has stood and stands pre-eminent. Khawja Abdul Hakim, its founder, some generations ago, came to India from the Bonda family in Kashmir and held a lucrative appointment at the Moghul Court of Delhi. On the overthrow of the Moghuls, he had to seek his fortune elsewhere, and somehow found his way to Sylhet; there he embarked on business, built houses on the present site of the Collector's office, took up his residence, sent for his father and brothers from Kashmir, and died. The family has since remained in Bengal and dissolved all connection with Kashmir. Its next head removed to Dacca and settled in Begum's Bazar. One of his successors, Khawja Hafizullah abandoned trade, acquired landed property in the districts of Dacca, Barisal, Tippera and Mymensingh and thus established the family as wealthy zemindars. Another head of the house (Nawab Bahadur Sir Khawja Abdul Ghani, K.C.S.I.) made the arrangements which have united all the members in a joint estate, inseparable and indivisible." The family has been steadily gaining in position and influence up to the present time and both the late Nawab Bahadur Sir Khawja Ahsanollah, K.C.I.E., and his son and successor, the present chief, the Hon'ble Nawab Bahadur Sir Khawja Salimollah, K.C.S.I., have rendered conspicuous public services.

Such has been Dacca in the past; its regal traditions, its military and commercial associations, the fame of its wealth and art,* the memory of its nobility, all have survived its decay. That it has a brilliant and prosperous future before it is conceded by all. Even as we write the new provincial Capital is in the making. A new era is dawning over the classic city: it will once again be a centre of art, commerce and government; its glories will be revived, and its associations renewed; its future will be worthy of its past.

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*For a historical sketch of the celebrated Dacca muslins, Cf. my article on *A Famous Indian Industry* which appeared in the *Indian World* for November 1907.



NAWAB SIR K. AHSANOLLAH, K.C.I.E.