

The understanding with Russia as to the integrity of Afghanistan was a most important step forward in central Asian politics, and, had it not been for later European complications, a difficult and dangerous question might have been finally settled. From about 1870 General Kaufmann, Governor of Russian Turkestan, began a correspondence with the Amir, and though his letters were mainly complimentary and harmless enough, many have thought that Great Britain might well have asked that they should be discontinued. The Indian government would have had good reason for doing so, since Russia had given a pledge that she would regard Afghanistan as outside her sphere of influence, and Sher Ali himself was only embarrassed by these communications which he invariably sent on to the Governor-General. Lord Mayo, however, instead of requesting the Russian officials to communicate with the ruler of Afghanistan only through the British government, assured the Amir that Kaufmann's letters were mere matters of courtesy, and deprecated his uneasiness.

In internal matters Lord Mayo was called upon to undertake the unpopular and thankless task of the financial reformer. The deficit left by his predecessor had to be met, and supported by Sir Richard Temple and the Strachey brothers he set himself resolutely to bring about an equilibrium in the finances. Drastic measures were taken. It was reluctantly decided to increase the salt duties in provinces where they had hitherto been lightly imposed; and the income tax was raised from one to two and a half and then to three per cent.—an expedient which was extremely unpopular even among economists, for at this time it was contrary to fiscal orthodoxy to employ direct taxation as a normal means of raising revenue. In this particular case the levy of the tax was said to have been harsh and unjust and the expense of collection unduly great. It was discovered that the great spending departments, through want