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GENERAL SIR THOMAS EDWARD GORDON,

K.C.B., K.C.I.E., C.S.I.

By the death of Sir Thomas Gordon on March 23 the Central Asian Society has lost one of its oldest and most distinguished members, for he was among those who joined in founding it, and he became its first President. He afterwards contributed more than one valuable paper to its records, and until his death he was one of its Vice-Presidents. If he had not been disabled by ill-health, he would in all probability have been asked to resume the Presidency on the retirement last year of the Earl of Ronaldshay.

My object in this paper is rather to speak of Gordon as I knew him than to give a detailed account of his career. It was long and honourable, for he joined the 4th Foot as Ensign in 1849, saw much fighting on the North-West Frontier, in the Mutiny, and in Afghanistan, and held many commands, staff appointments, and "political" posts. The last of these he did not vacate until 1893, after forty-four years of unusually varied service.

I made Gordon's acquaintance in 1874, when I had just joined the Indian Foreign Office as an attaché, and he had been appointed to command the Mewar Bhil Corps, one of the regiments then administered by the Foreign Department, but I did not get to know him well until five years later, in September, 1879. Gordon was then commanding at Ali Khel, from which point General Roberts was about to march upon Kabul to avenge the slaughter of the British Mission. On the advance of the field force Gordon was to remain in command of the Kurram Brigade, holding a long and exposed line of communications through a difficult country. I was then only a young civilian, attached to General Roberts as Political Secretary, but I well remember the kindness and courtesy with which Gordon treated me, taking me with him round the position at Ali Khel, and showing me the various points where night attacks by the mountain tribesmen were most likely to take place. As we went from point to point we talked over the attitude of the Amir and the political situation generally—matters upon which his thirty years' experience of affairs on and beyond the frontier made his opinions specially interesting. Then, as always, I found him wholly free from any assumption of superiority, or impatience for the views of others. He seemed to me a typical Scottish gentleman, with a pleasant northern speech, and the quiet humour which, whatever Englishmen

may think, characterizes so many of his countrymen. In after-years he was consistently the same, ready to talk over anything and give one the benefit of his wide experience, but never laying down the law, or showing the smallest sign of temper, and, above all, never saying an ill-natured thing about anyone. This unfailing good humour and kindliness were of the essence of his character. Possibly the Spanish blood which he had inherited from his mother helped to give him his pleasant manners and readiness of speech, and to soften the dourness of the Scot; but the same quiet humour was always present with his friend and countryman Donald Stewart, and William Lockhart and many others of the Scottish officers of their day.

Early in his career Gordon had made himself a good Persian scholar, and this, among other things, soon marked him out for political service. He was employed in 1869 with the Amir Sher Ali, when that ill-fated ruler came to meet Lord Mayo at Umballa; and afterwards he was several times selected for duties of a similar kind. In 1873 he was second in command of the mission to Kashgar, after which he published his well-known book, "The Roof of the World." In 1879 he was political officer in Kurram. In 1885 he was in attendance upon the Amir Abdurrahman at Rawal Pindi. From 1889 to 1893 he was Oriental and Military Secretary to the Tehran Legation, under Sir Henry Drummond Wolff and Sir Frank Lascelles. In all these positions, and others, Gordon did excellent service. He was in many respects peculiarly fitted for dealing with Oriental rulers, and Orientals generally. Not only could he speak Persian—the *lingua franca* of Asiatic Mahomedans—but his character and manners were of great advantage to him. No one perhaps appreciates as thoroughly as an Oriental ruler does unfailing courtesy and good temper on the part of an Englishman. I have once or twice heard men who ought to have known better criticize Gordon's innate pleasure in conversation as a love of "gossip." But, in truth, there are few things more useful for a political officer than a capacity for "gossip" of that class. Only by being always ready to talk pleasantly, and listen with patience to others talking—sometimes not very pleasantly—can an Englishman get upon friendly terms with Asiatics. And it enables a man to acquire much valuable information which is to be acquired by no other means. Both in 1885 as Foreign Secretary in India, and later as British Minister in Persia, I had special opportunities of understanding the value of Gordon's work in that respect. At Rawal Pindi I saw the excellent relations he had established with that "strange strong creature," Abdurrahman—to quote the words of Lord Dufferin. Though the Amir was then in a very suspicious frame of mind, and apt to take offence, it was evident that he liked Gordon, and was inclined to trust him more than others. So much was this the case that if it had been decided to send another British Resident to Kabul at that time, Gordon would, I believe, have been selected by Lord Dufferin for

the post. Nine years later, when I went to Tehran, Gordon was no longer in the Legation, but I found many traces of his good work. Twice after that he paid a visit to Persia and stayed some time in Tehran. It was most interesting and satisfactory to see the welcome which he then received from high and low. One could not fail to recognize the fact that he had made himself greatly liked, and also that he knew the country and the people as few Englishmen knew them. He was a storehouse of information on all sorts of matters, and his judgment on any doubtful point was of exceptional value.

Nor had he ingratiated himself by shirking his duty when it was right to speak the plain truth. His training as a soldier was of much use to him there, and on occasion he could speak as plainly as anyone. It was done pleasantly, in considerate language, and with the touch of humour which never deserted him, but there was no shirking of facts. I can say this with certainty, because he more than once gave me an opinion which he knew to be distinctly opposed to my own views, and he stuck to it, politely but firmly.

Gordon wrote several books which attracted and deserved attention. He could express himself clearly, and what he wrote was always easy reading, with trustworthy information underlying it. He had also some skill with the pencil, and could illustrate his books himself.

I have said nothing about Gordon's love of sport. He did much shooting in his Indian days, especially when in command of the Mewar Bhil Corps, the country about his headquarters at Kherwarra being one of the best in India for tigers and other game. As a younger man he was fond of pig-sticking, and at one time "ran" the Poona Tent Club. To the end he had a good seat on a horse, and when he was staying with me in Tehran, though considerably over sixty, he enjoyed a gallop across country as much as anyone.

In short, Gordon was an accomplished soldier political, of a type which will not, I hope, become extinct in India. Such men are of great value to England, and it would be well if there were more of them. The training of a soldier, with the high sense of honour and loyalty which it fosters, is a fine foundation for an Englishman who has to deal with Asiatics—or, indeed, with any men. I have often thought that our diplomatic service all over the world would gain materially if it were more largely recruited from the same source, and from the Navy.

The "gay Gordons" have always been proverbial for cheery courage. And none of them ever faced death more gallantly than the old soldier, who, feeling its hand upon him, sent word to his friends one by one, and sadly worn, but pleasant and interested as ever, spent a few minutes with each in quiet impersonal talk "before I leave." It was like Tom Gordon, and it was an example which his friends are not likely to forget. He had always lived like a gentleman, and he died like a gentleman.

H. M. DURAND.