

OBITUARY NOTICE

Sir Mortimer Durand, G.C.M.G., K.C.S.I., K.C.I.E.

The death of Sir Mortimer Durand removes from among us the leading figure of the Indian Civil Service of the pre-war period. He held high offices as Ambassador in Spain, and again in America, but the work by which he will be remembered was done in Asia. As a young civilian he was appointed Political Officer to Lord Roberts in the Afghan War, and won a mention for gallantry in heading a dash which resulted in the rescue of a battery of artillery. In his heart he ever yearned to be a soldier, and probably this was the honour he prized the most.

At the early age of 35 he was chosen by Lord Dufferin to be Secretary to the Foreign Department, and well he justified the choice. Among many important measures was the statesmanlike step of raising the Imperial Service troops, which policy Durand induced Lord Dufferin to initiate, and which proved of considerable value in the Great War, from more than one point of view.

But his greatest task was the creation of the Durand Line, which laid down British policy on the North-West Frontier of India, and resulted in the actual delimitation of both the administrative and the political boundaries. This achievement was crowned by a mission to Abdur Rahman, the great Amir of Afghanistan. At first the Amir was suspicious, but Durand's knowledge of Persian helped to impress his strong personality on the Afghan, who finally realized that he was dealing with an English gentleman and ended by trusting him and becoming his friend.

This was the culmination of Durand's career, and his so-called promotion to the Legation at Tehran was almost a waste of his great qualities, more especially as the policy of the London Foreign Office was one of drift at the period. The turning-point of Persian negotiations for a loan was the

refusal by the Foreign Office to support British capitalists, who were ready to find the money, with the result that the Russian Government stepped in and gained the leading place in Persia. After his retirement, Durand devoted himself to literary work, writing the biographies of his two friends, Sir Alfred Lyall and Field-Marshal Sir George White. It was characteristic of his thoroughness that, in connexion with the latter work, he spent six months in South Africa to study the terrain. Both these works are models of what biographies should be. But these were not his only literary achievements, for he wrote a fine historical novel on Nadir Shah, the last great Asiatic conqueror, and other works. Some day, too, his poems, which have much spirit and feeling, may be published. In addition to his literary tasks, Durand was a dignified and courteous Director of the Royal Asiatic Society from 1911 to 1920; he also worked hard during the Great War in charge of the Badge Committee. His character was one of reserve, which concealed qualities and knowledge of the highest order, and made his friendship of great value. By way of conclusion I quote the opinion of that great Viceroy Lord Dufferin, who wrote of Durand, then a young man: "He is certainly the loftiest-minded man I have met in India.—brave, cool, proud, absolutely disinterested, very industrious, and with a tremendous sense of the obligations and of the dignity which should attach to an English gentleman."

P. M. SYKES.