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**A 'COMPLIMENTARY MISSION' FROM  
NAWAB NASIR-UD-DIN HAIDER TO  
KING WILLIAM IV  
MALCOLM BROWN**

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On Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> August 1835 two gentlemen called, without an appointment, at the Leadenhall Street premises of the East India Company (EIC). Ushered into the Secretary's office, they told Peter Auber that they had landed a week previously from Calcutta, with presents from Lucknow intended for King William IV and Queen Adelaide. They explained that although they carried no formal accreditation, they could be contacted at the Burlington Hotel. Later that day Auber sent word of this news to Sir John Hobhouse, President of the Board of Control of the EIC, adding that the Company was "wholly uninformed of the object of the[ir] mission". Hobhouse's angry reaction is evident from his letter addressed to Sir Herbert Taylor (the King's Private Secretary) at Windsor the following morning. "Pray inform His Majesty", he wrote, "that a person calling himself Colonel du Bois de Tavigny [sic] has arrived in London stating that he has come on a special mission, bearing valuable presents from the King of Oude to H.M. He has not yet sent me any copy of his credentials, nor has any despatch reached this office [the India Board], which gives me information as to his character or objects; but I have learnt from Lord William Bentinck quite enough to justify me in wishing to put H.M. on his guard against any representation which may be made by this person previous to a complete investigation of his claims to H.M.'s attention".<sup>1</sup> Hobhouse's diary reveals his worst suspicions. The purpose of this mission, he felt, was "to remonstrate against the Company who have threatened to assume the administration of the Oude territories in consequence of continued misrule."

If there is any one point about which historians of Lucknow could be said to agree, it would be the political incompetence of Nasir-ud-din Haider, King of Awadh (referred to above as the King of Oude) from 1827 to 1837. Part, certainly, of the political weakness endemic to Awadh must be blamed upon its position as a nominally independent but in fact subsidiary state of the Company. The Governor-General, the Marquess of Hastings, had persuaded Ghazi-ud-din Haider to assume the title of King as a counterpoint to the Mughal dynasty at Delhi. In gratitude for this change of status, the Nawab, on Hastings' retirement, sent him handsome presents, and others still more handsome, for George IV. By Company custom those presents intended for Hastings would have had

to have been paid for by the Governor-General himself, should he have wished to retain them: since he did not, the authorities at Calcutta consigned them to public auction. Those intended for the King reached London soon afterwards. As no indication of their reception reached Lucknow, the Nawab sent another and far more magnificent selection of presents to George IV. The King acknowledged his "friendly and acceptable letter and the splendid presents with which it was accompanied", and asked him to accept a thoroughbred horse "as a token of our friendship and regard."<sup>2</sup> George IV's letter was dated 30th January 1828, by which time the Nawab had been dead for several months. As soon as the Treasury realised the true state of affairs, they asked the Company to sell the horse (and the silver harness sent with it) on its arrival in India, and to remit the proceeds to public funds. But events had already overtaken that scheme.

As Dr. Llewellyn-Jones has well shown in her recent book, *Engaging Scoundrels* (OUP, 2000), the new Nawab exhibited many of the symptoms usually associated with extreme Anglophilia. When informed of the death of George III's eldest daughter, Queen Charlotte of Wuerttemberg, Nasir-ud-din Haider instantly sent his court into mourning for three days. At other times, he preferred to concentrate on the pleasures of mechanical instruments, the joys of the chase, and to indulge in a measure of cultural patronage. Baron Joseph von Hammer-Burgstall, the celebrated Viennese orientalist, sent one of his books to Lucknow as a token of respect. On being asked whether he would accept the horse sent from England, the Nawab did not hesitate. A second horse, destined by George IV for the Lucknow stud farm, did not survive the voyage; the first, complete with pedigree, was joyfully received and became one of the sights of the city. Some form of reciprocation was now due.

The earliest plan for this can be found in a letter addressed by Colonel Low (the EIC Resident at Lucknow) to William Macnaghten (the EIC Political Secretary at Calcutta) on 15<sup>th</sup> December 1833. During a conversation with Low concerning a successor to the late Captain James Herbert at the Lucknow Observatory, the Nawab mentioned his intention to write a letter to William IV, adding that provided the Governor-General had no objections, he (the Nawab) would send with it, a young elephant and an Arab horse. All he wanted in return was a portrait of the English King. There matters rested until permission came from Calcutta to address such a letter and send "some presents": in the formal language of the day, Macnaghten wrote that the authorities were "not aware of any objection to the gratification of the King of Oude's wishes". On a visit to Calcutta, Low had instanced as presents "some specimens of Lucknow workmanship the chief article of which is I believe a set of armour". The next stage was for the Nawab to gain authority to send the presents in the charge of one of his European aides de camp and a Lucknow native, Maulvi Mohammed Ismail Khan, who had previously been attached to Herbert at the Observatory and had "made considerable progress in the sciences of mathematics and astronomy". A European aide de camp was vital because the Nawab was "anxious to have minute accounts of all that was to be seen

at the English court" and the mission would be "incomplete without a European officer of rank" to accompany the President of the Board of Control at the Court presentation.<sup>3</sup> Colonel Adolphe Philibert Dubois de Jancigny was named as "the most distinguished and confidential" of the Nawab's aides de camp, who was also "fully conversant with the Hindustani language". Again, Calcutta harboured no suspicions of intent and permission was forthcoming.

Once before, in 1831, Nasir-ud-din Haider had attempted to send an ambassador to London. Thomas Maddock, the man chosen for this task, was actually serving as Resident in Lucknow, and so furious was the Governor-General on hearing of Maddock's proposed change of career that he relegated the Resident to Kathmandu. There could, however, be few obstacles to a "complimentary mission"—the Nawab's habitual extravagance had long proved unstoppable, but in this instance the British Crown would be the sole beneficiary. Even so, the quantity and value of the gifts exceeded all expectations. "As soon as the presents are finished they will be despatched", the Nawab assured Bentinck. Just two months later, orders arrived at Calcutta for the Company to assume the provisional administration of Awadh, the fourth such set of instructions sent from the EIC's Court of Directors. Three times previously, the authorities at Calcutta had decided not to act as instructed. Now, and in view of the increasing confusion in Awadh, they might well have felt inclined to implement the orders of the home authorities. At this point, while the fate of himself and his country hung in the balance, the Nawab obtained information of the envisaged takeover from Dubois, who in turn had derived the news from a certain Mrs Mackenzie, a lady who had travelled to Lucknow with the ostensible purpose of offering for sale "sundry articles of European manufacture". Dubois promised her a substantial sum for a copy of a secret despatch. Had that promise been fulfilled, all might have continued as before. Instead, and denied any reward, Mrs Mackenzie reported the details of her case to the Resident. By this time, however, the presents had been despatched under armed guard to Calcutta and Dubois had taken shelter in the French enclave of Chandernagore.<sup>4</sup>

Low, who had known and trusted Dubois for over thirty years, was aghast at this turn of events. Furthermore, Mrs Mackenzie's evidence showed that one of the purposes of the mission was to reopen the vexed question of a loan to the Company from a firm of Calcutta bankers. He challenged Dubois on his role in obtaining the secret despatch; Dubois denied any guilt, but while the matter was under investigation, he offered to accompany the presents to London, only on the understanding that should he be found to be implicated he would resign his post. Meanwhile, the Nawab appointed, as Dubois' second in command, Philip Friell, previously employed as Herbert's assistant at the Lucknow Observatory, who had acted as a translator of Persian texts and was a colleague of Maulvi Mohammed. Unlike Dubois, who had failed in spectacular fashion as an indigo planter at Cawnpore (Kanpur) but had been recommended by Bentinck himself as an aide de camp, Friell came from a family with

many connections to the Company. Born in Calcutta and orphaned early in life, two uncles had paid for his schooling in England; on his return to India he worked with the Survey Department for many years. Of all the Europeans attached to the Lucknow court he was clearly the least ineligible to play the part now required of him. Nobody could have imagined how much trouble he was about to cause. His most influential uncle was N.B. Edmonstone, a supporter of "conservative" policies on the Board of Directors and an occasional dissenter from the corporate letters sent out to Calcutta. As Dubois joined the ship carrying the presents at the last possible moment, with funds for the mission but with doubts about his future and without official status, Friell was already on board. Neither man could have failed to realise that Low, so far from having their interests at heart, had been greatly disturbed by accusations of Dubois' duplicity, and had already begun to impede the progress of the mission by warning Calcutta of the envoy's true motives.

During the months that elapsed before the ship reached its destination, several changes had been made that would affect Indian affairs. Late in April, a change of government propelled Hobhouse, a leading exponent of Whig doctrines, to the Presidency of the EIC Board of Control, and Bentinck returned home after a period of seven years as Governor-General. Hobhouse had recently lost his young wife and took to the business of office with exceptional application. He twice met Bentinck, when there would have been every opportunity to discuss Awadh. Both men were aware that Low had advised against implementing orders for a takeover of the administration, and Bentinck's general experience may have led him to minimize the significance of the mission that was approaching London. But as we have seen, absence of formal notification caught Hobhouse off guard when Dubois and Friell first made themselves known, and there began a period of inactivity until advice had been received from Calcutta about the personnel escorting the precious cargo.

Every scrap of news from Awadh was eagerly awaited by Dubois and Friell, whose time must have hung heavily on their hands. At least William IV did not refuse the livestock sent from Lucknow: two horses were transferred to the stud at Hampton Court, and two elephants went to the Regents Park and Surrey Zoos. Dubois and Friell, hoping that this humanitarian gesture might be the prelude to the transfer of all the presents, adopted informal approaches. As Taylor told Hobhouse in November 1835, "various indirect attempts have been made since our first correspondence on the subject to effect . . . delivery to the order of His Majesty".<sup>5</sup> Dubois, fearing that before long the report of his misconduct would arrive at Company headquarters, took temporary leave of absence to join his family in Paris, and as Hobhouse's diary reveals, William IV began to discuss the presents in the course of his regular meetings with the President of the Board of Control. It was at this point that a domestic incident concerning the Maulvi's home life came to public notice. The Maulvi's wife, who was trying to adjust to her bewildering surroundings, had employed a man to teach her English whom she then summarily

dismissed for stealing (so she alleged) silver teaspoons. When she appeared before the Marylebone magistrates the accused maintained the true reason for his leaving the Maulvi's household was his refusal to agree to the lady's suggestion that he procure a number of young girls who would be welcome at the Lucknow court.<sup>6</sup> Whether reports of the case reached Hobhouse is not known. Almost everything that he had heard or read about Awadh would have prejudiced him in favour of the defendant and William IV still could not come to a decision about the presents. On 3<sup>rd</sup> February the King again mentioned them to Hobhouse and also mentioned a battleship recently offered by the Imam of Muscat. "His Majesty," wrote Hobhouse, "said that he thought of declining the one [Awadh] valued at fifty thousand pounds and accepting the other". Two days later, William IV made up his mind not to accept the Awadh presents and instructed Hobhouse to arrange their return but to send with them a portrait of himself to the Nawab. Hobhouse seems to have neglected to take any action on this last point. Now, he felt, was the time to tell the worst to the envoys, and to conclude an unwanted interruption in the Government's Indian policies.

Dubois' guilt in the affair of the secret document having been proved, the Nawab dismissed him with messages to transfer the funds of the mission to Friell, who would now play the major role in carrying out the anxious demands of the man he called "the King, my master". On 16 March 1836 Hobhouse presented Friell to William IV. A fortnight later Friell received official notification that although the Nawab's letter had been accepted, the gifts had been rejected. Friell next asked for an audience with Queen Adelaide. Captain Robert Grindlay, who had very recently helped the Maulvi during another well publicised breach of diplomatic etiquette, acted as Friell's escort at the Drawing Room, much to Hobhouse's displeasure. In May 1836 Friell appeared no less than five times at the Court of St James, hoping perhaps that sheer persistence might induce William IV to change his mind. He may even have spoken to those politically inclined to sympathise with the aims of the mission. There can be no question that the rejection of the Lucknow gifts was a major diplomatic affront: as Hobhouse wrote to William IV, he "thought that the present opportunity could be available for conveying ... a timely reproof, which may prevent the necessity of reverting to harsher measures [and] expressing His Majesty's grief and regret at the previous conduct of [the Nawab] ... some such qualified indication of His Majesty's sentiments [might] add weight to warnings already given".<sup>7</sup> In fact, the final text of the letter was worded comparatively mildly. As Sir Herbert Taylor told Hobhouse some weeks earlier, "the King would be extremely sorry to hurt the feelings ... of any person, but he cannot encourage acts of courtesy and friendship which circumstances prevent him from reciprocating, still less deceive [the Nawab] by appearing to hold out expectations of support which may be inconsistent with the views and policy of the Government of India".<sup>8</sup> Official attention now turned from Friell to the Maulvi, part of whose brief was to obtain the services of a principal of a new college the Nawab intended to found in Lucknow.

As the Maulvi, whatever his domestic trials, became better known at the Royal Observatory, so Hobhouse's opinion of him rose. A week before the Nawab's astronomer was presented at Court, a note in Hobhouse's diary records that Airey, the Astronomer Royal, had provided the Indian with a certificate of proficiency, but that the Maulvi had refused to breakfast with Friell for fear of being poisoned (a fear shared, not without some justification, by the Nawab himself). It has to be added that once the Maulvi realised that William IV would not accept the gifts, he showed only marginally more inclination than Friell to return to Lucknow. Perhaps he occupied some time in inspecting the latest scientific devices. "The Maulvi", wrote Hobhouse to the Governor General in October 1836, "has behaved with great propriety [and given] entire satisfaction to the King as well as the home authorities with whom he has been in communication". Early in 1837 the Maulvi embarked on the *Atalanta*, bound for Bombay, accompanied by a suite that included an English lady who now called herself his wife, together with a mysterious Mr de Walmer, who was travelling as the Maulvi's self-styled secretary. During the voyage, de Walmer bragged about his future plans. He claimed to be the partner of a man who had invented a particularly lethal form of ordnance, a model of which he demonstrated to the commander of the *Atalanta*, Captain Campbell. On disembarking at Bombay in April, Campbell reported de Walmer to the authorities there who wrote off de Walmer "as either an impostor or visionary", but delayed the Maulvi's departure to Lucknow until fresh passports could be issued. In the event, these were not needed. The Maulvi fell ill. He had sent his Indian wife, the cause of such embarrassment in London, to Mecca on pilgrimage. That lady now arrived at the Maulvi's quarters in Bombay, whereupon a terrible scene took place when she and the English wife quarrelled about the future ownership of the sick man's property. As his English doctor bore witness, the Maulvi hastened his own end by drinking brandy to excess. When the authorities examined the goods that he had brought back with him, an orrery was found to be the sole object of scientific interest.

What meanwhile of Philip Friell? It is unlikely that his uncle Edmondstone, however critical he may have been of some aspects of Company decisions, would have wished to be seen to support the manifestly obstructive attitude of a young man whose prolonged stay in London Hobhouse described as "extremely reprehensible", and whose funds from East India House were supplemented on the security of goods the return of which could only be a matter of time. Whether or not Dubois had in fact transferred to Friell all the sums that the Nawab intended for the mission must remain an open question, but it is certain that the original sum set aside included an entertainment allowance of 20,000 rupees, plus 5,000 rupees for the purchase of foxhounds and a further 15,000 rupees for engraving a double portrait of the Nawab and Low.<sup>9</sup> Friell was several times reproached for failing to keep the Maulvi in pocket and the Maulvi himself applied to the India Office for funds. Not until February 1837 did Friell abandon his efforts to prevent the removal of the presents

from the West India Company Dock, and against all probability, he stayed in London with the set purpose of embarrassing Hobhouse politically. The *Morning Post*, which could be relied upon to ventilate anti-Whiggish sentiments, ran a series of articles between 27<sup>th</sup> February and 13<sup>th</sup> March on the refusal of the presents and called for a full enquiry into the whole affair. Although neither the articles nor the subsequent correspondence were signed, it is plain that only Friell's detailed knowledge could have provided such information. The "Short Statement" that he published in May 1837 in fact reprints the substance of much that had appeared in the *Morning Post* and it led to a final attempt to raise the matter publicly, in the House of Commons. This was not successful. Postponing his departure to India until after Nasir-ud-din Haider's death, Friell found the Nawab's successor deaf to pleas for a further hearing. In November 1843 his appeal for a settlement of an alleged deficit in his previous allowances was rejected. He appears to have left India for Australia soon afterwards, for he published a pamphlet on "The Advantages of Indian Labour in the Australasian Colonies" at Sydney in October 1846, from which it can be inferred that he had settled down to a comfortable existence as a sheep farmer at Port Macquarie, New South Wales.

The later career of Colonel Dubois is rather better recorded. Having returned to France just before the Company in London received evidence of his misdeeds in Lucknow, he protested his innocence of any wrongdoing as early as March 1836, but the weight of information that reached Paris delayed his efforts to be readmitted to the General Staff of the French Army. In vain his wife, still at Lucknow, appealed to the Governor-General to reinvestigate the case. In 1841 he was appointed head of a French mission to Canton, with the object of extending trade in the Far East. Although the Chinese were then engaged in the first Opium War, they realised that France had neither the power nor the will to intervene in Anglo-Chinese affairs and in 1845 Dubois was recalled to France. Ignoring the bidding of his superiors he returned only when his funds were exhausted a year later. He was posted to Baghdad in 1849 and finally, as head of mission, to Chandernagore where he died in 1860. His widow was one of the "poor whites" who were pensioners of the last Nawab of Awadh. Nasir-ud-din Haider died in July 1837. Late in October 1838 Low reported to Calcutta that he had been present when the gifts sent to London so long ago were unpacked in Lucknow. "Every article," wrote Low, "was as bright and new as when the packages were made up at this place in November and December 1834". At least the Company could be said to have kept intact its reputation for honesty. The most important missing objects were two diamond necklaces—one perhaps being lost at some point when Friell was in attendance at the Court of St James. "We must impress upon you" wrote Hobhouse to Calcutta in March 1836, "that such [complimentary] missions are almost always intended for the furtherance of some political object, undesirable in itself, and which they cannot in reality conduce to accomplish", and later that year on the same topic he observed that "no such unusual proceedings are requisite to ensure a due attention to the



true interests of all persons. The Court of Directors . . . will do their utmost by their own justice and impartiality to show that any appeal or reference from this authority is altogether superfluous and unnecessary.”<sup>10</sup> Even had the authority of the President been less overwhelming, it is doubtful whether the Nawab’s mission would have encountered a different fate. “The King . . . burst out laughing and asked me what I was doing with the Oude presents”, Hobhouse recorded in his diary on 5 April 1837, adding “He said he never would have accepted those presents”. If the President’s “timely reproof” made no political impact on the government of Awadh, the goods returned to Lucknow in 1838 surely restored to the Nawabs a measure of their dwindling fortunes before the annexation of 1856.

#### NOTES

Apart from the newspaper cited, all the documents below are in the Oriental and India Office Collections, British Library. I am most grateful to Ian Baxter and Andrew Cook of the British Library for advice on various points in this paper, and to Dr Rosie Llewellyn-Jones for reading the typescript.

1. MS. Eur. F 213/4 f. 75.
2. L/PdS/14/1, p. 31.
3. Bengal Polit. Cons. 21<sup>st</sup> August 1834, P/127/22.
4. Colln. 60291, F/4/1526.
5. MS. Eur. F 213/4 f. 83.
6. *The St. James' Chronicle*, 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> December 1835.
7. MS. Eur. F 213/4 f. 66.
8. MS. Eur. F 213/4 f. 91.
9. ‘Short Statement relative to the presents transmitted to England in 1835 . . .’ (London, 1837).
10. India and Bengal Despatches 16<sup>th</sup> March 1836, E/4/747, and 28<sup>th</sup> September 1836, E/4/47.