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1869

OUR NORTHERN FRONTIER.

BEING

OBSERVATIONS

ON

THE RECENT ADVANCES OF RUSSIA TOWARDS HINDOOSTAN,

AND

THE PROSPECTS OF TRADE WITH CENTRAL ASIA.

BY

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LONDON :

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY JAMES MADDEN,
3, LEADENHALL STREET.

1869.

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

From the "Friend of India."

THE fall of Samarkand, and the visit of the Ameer of Affghanistan, have deluged both England and India with pamphlets on the question of Central Asia. The most useful we have seen is a very careful compilation by Captain A. F. P. Harcourt, the Assistant-Commissioner of Jullundar. In 27 pages the writer succinctly traces the rapid progress of Russia in Asia since 1840, and discusses her present position in relation to our frontier. He makes good use of the writings of Davis, Michell, Cayley, and Forsyth on the subject of trade, and closes with the practical recommendation that there should be a Governor General's Agent for the N.E. frontier, whose head-quarters might be at Cashmere, with an Assistant at Leh, while everything points to the advisability of a similar appointment for the N.W. frontier.

From the "Pioneer."

"We have left ourselves but little space to examine the other publications lately received upon this subject. The first, called '*Our Northern Frontier*,' is by Captain A. F. P. Harcourt, an Assistant Commissioner in the Punjab. '*Our Northern Frontier*' seems to us to strike a mean, in the justice of its views, between the wisdom of some, and the extravagance of others, of those put forward in the '*Advance of Russia towards India*.'"

THE Russian boundary up to 1840, ran from the mouth of the River Aral, on the N.E. of the Caspian Sea, in a northern direction to Orenberg, then N.E. to Petropalovsk and Ormsk, and following the course of the River Irtysh, reached Semipalatinsk, beyond which it is unnecessary to trace it. During the previous hundred years, no particular changes in this line of frontier had taken place. It will be observed that the Russian outposts in 1840 touched Persia, on that State's northern side, swept half round the Caspian, and then flanked the vast Steppes, over which roamed the Little, the Great, and the Middle Hordes, the River Irtysh probably forming their boundary to the East. Fort Alexandrovski on the N.E. shore of the Caspian had been run up by them in 1833.

Intrigues were carried on with Persia for possession of Herat, then, as now, under the rule of the Affghans, and the events of that period led to the Cabul campaign and the subsequent occupation and desertion of Cabul by our forces. The advance of Russia had however been checked; but it was only temporarily stayed, for in 1847 they commenced a line of forts from Ormsk to the Sea of Aral, and from thence to Lake Balkash; their line thus running along the west shores of the Caspian and Aral Lake to Lake Balkash, and in 1848 forts were constructed on the River Syr Daria (or Jaxartes) which empties its waters into the N.E. of the Sea of Aral. In 1853 their steamers were plying on that river; the town of Ak Mechet 400 miles from its mouth, was, after a long resistance, taken, and the Russians therefore had the command of the river up to that point. (Vide the Russians in Central Asia, translated from the Russian by John and Robert Michell.)

From 1854 to 1856, no further advance was made, as the Crimean war interfered; but in April 1861 the fort of Djulek on the Syr Daria was built, and the town of Yany Kurgan was destroyed.

Russia had now entered the field as the antagonist of a well-known power, for the Khanat of Khiva stretched to the

Syr Daria at least, on which river there were at this period four Russian forts: Fort No. 1, Fort No. 2, Fort Perovski, and Fort Djulek; and by 1864 the Russian frontier ran from Fort Alexandrovski on the Caspian, direct to the Sea of Aral, embracing the northern coasts of the latter, and the countries to the north of the Syr Daria, as far east as longitude 67° N. where Fort Djulek stands. The continual advance of their power caused alarm in Europe, which it now became their part to allay, and, accordingly, Prince Gortschakoff issued a diplomatic circular to all European Courts. He therein stated, that their original line of frontier on the Syr Daria to Fort Perovski on one side, and Lake Issik Kul on the other, had the disadvantage of being nearly on the border of the desert, and was interrupted for an immense distance between the extreme points; and he announced that Chemkend, which lay betwixt, had been taken, and would be fortified; and proceeded to state: "We find ourselves with a race of people more solid, more compact, less changeable, and better organised; and this consideration marks with geographical precision the limit which both interest and reason prescribe for us to reach, and command us to stop at."

It would appear then that Russia in 1864 was at last satisfied with her boundaries; for, at this period, she had not only possession of the River Syr Daria, but had steamers plying on the River Amu Daria, which empties itself into the Sea of Aral on its south shore—and which river was estimated by Burns to be navigable for over 1500 miles—passing close by Khiva city and the Bokhara Emir's lands, till it flows 30 miles from Balkh in Affghanistan, and is traced past Faizabad (or Badakshan) and up among the lower ranges of mountains to the east. Long before this, Fort Ashourada, at the S.E. corner of the Caspian, was also in their possession.

In 1865, Russia once more moved southward; the cities of Tashkend and Khojend were captured in 1866, but the conquest of Bokhara was, the Russian organs distinctly declared, quite out of the question; and here again we find a boundary line fixed by themselves. But in 1867-68, their troops were again in motion. Kashgar was threatened (and

may, for aught we know to the contrary, be now in their hands), the right to navigate the Amu Daria and erect forts on its banks was conceded, the existence of the Kokand Khanat was menaced, and every endeavour was made to annex the territory of the race that Prince Gortschakoff had termed "their immediate neighbours, the fixed agricultural commercial populations of Kokand." That Russian advance in that quarter is not a mere myth we know from the letters of Mr. Shaw, dated 20th November, 1868, from the neighbourhood of Yarkand, who had written to say that at that date the Kooshbegee of Yarkand was then contending with the Russian forces.

Briefly then, the Russian position may be described as follows:—With a strong fort at Ashourada (on the south east of the Caspian) but 800 miles from Herat by a well known route, they have a large fleet of steamers on the Caspian, and in truth, the entire command of that sea. By an indefinable line their boundary crosses the Oust Ourt plateau and reaches the Sea of Aral, between which and the Caspian there are sandy deserts not worth annexing. They have the full command of the Syr Daria and of a great portion of the Amu Daria, and, of course, of the Aral Sea, the sides of which are virtually Russian, and in Central Asia itself their forts stretch from the mouth of the Syr Daria to Chemkend, sweeping S.W. embrace Tashkend and Samarcand (thus placing the Bokhara Emir quite in their hands), penetrate to the Thian Shan range, and then retire N.E. towards Fort Vernoe (to N.E. of Lake Issik kul).

The practicability of further encroachment may now be dwelt on, and here we may fitly consider what the southward routes may be, and the forces that can be brought in opposition. If there is one fact more patent than another, it is the incohesiveness of the Central Asian Khanats or States which touch the Russian border. A Russian writer (see Michell) declares that Central Asia is a mournful spectacle. The country is one vast waste, intersected here and there by abandoned aqueducts, canals, wells, and ruined cities, over which the miserable hovels of the peasantry are reared; and in Bokhara, Khiva and Kokand (in the 14th and 15th centuries the richest and most enlightened regions of the East),

ignorance and poverty reign supreme. The two great rivers the Syr Daria and Amu Daria, which might be rendered a fertile source of wealth to the countries they traverse, pour down, year after year, their almost unused waters into the Sea of Aral; and, for want of firm and settled governments, cultivation languishes, and predatory hordes are allowed to sweep over the land and almost stifle the trade, which yet, with all these drawbacks, still dares a passage through an unfriendly nation, in the hope of meeting a better market. The instability of the Governments of the Khanats renders an advance by the Russians far from uneasy; it is, indeed, but in the usual course of things, that the more civilized race, from the very necessity of their position, become forced to extend their frontiers, and thus town after town, city after city, and district after district is added to Russian territory, and the humbled and defeated potentates, in hopes to save something out of the fire, enter into treaties which give Russia the virtual control of their territories, and ensure for their armies a passage along their great highways. Commencing, then, from the southernmost point of Russian soil, Fort Ashourado on the south-east of the Caspian, we find that, at any moment, by aid of the many large steamers plying on that sea, a very considerable Russian force might be there located. From thence to Herat, in Cabul, is 800 miles, by a route in constant use, which may, at some future day, be utilised by the Russians. The next point we may take up is the Sea of Aral, and the rivers Syr Daria and Amu Daria. The southernmost of these, the Amu Daria, is known to be over 800 yards wide not 150 miles below Balkh in Cabul, and is probably navigable up to Faizabad (Badakshan). Russian steamers now ply on it, and could, in an emergency, land troops where necessary; and it must be remembered, that the southern bank of this river, up to Chardjui, where, it is said, the Russians have received permission from the Bokhara Emir to build cantonments, is flanked by a desert, and there is, apparently, nothing that need deter an invading force from proceeding past Kerki, were the fort on its banks reduced, and it is not to be believed that that place could long hold out against the heavy cannonading which would be brought to bear on it; just as Ak Mechet, on the Syr

Daria, fell in 1853, so may Kerki, whenever the Russians determine to take possession.

The river Syr Daria is an essentially Russian river, and, beyond pointing out that it can at any time be used as a highway for the passage of an army, and warlike material, nothing further need be urged here.

Samarkand, in Bokhara, is now held by Russian troops (if, indeed, the latter have not penetrated further into the country), and from Samarkand to Balkh is but 220 miles, and a place which is only just over the borders of Bokhara would, under a weak government in Cabul, fall easily, it may be supposed, into the hands of a foreign power. If Russia advances from the west, it must be from Fort Ashourada to Herat, where there is, undoubtedly, difficult ground to traverse; or, if from the north-west, her route would be from Samarkand to Kish, through the Derbend pass (Iron gate), and so on to Hissar and Affghanistan.

As far as our knowledge of the geography of the country goes, it is to be understood that the great Pamir Steppe, over 16,000 feet in height, which is but a connecting link, if it may be so called, of the great Thian Shan and Hindu Koosh ranges, effectually bars the way to eastward, though, probably enough, there are tolerable passes over it. Turning to the north-east of this point, we find the Russians now threatening Kashgar, on the southern slope of the Thian Shan mountains, and their frontier line carried on in a north-easterly direction to Fort Vernoe, close to Almaty, where there is a very considerable cantonment, connected by a regular route with Semipolatsk. Thus their most advanced posts in that region receive, both from Tashkend on the north-west and from Fort Vernoe on the north-east, continual supplies. From Kashgar to Yarkand there is a distance of 150 miles, a hilly country intervening; from Yarkand to Khotan, by an easy road, is 250 miles, and from Khotan to the foot of the Kuen Lun range is less than 200 miles by a perfectly practicable line of communication. The ruler of Yarkand is now contending with the Russian armies, and who can doubt the result? the immense force of the great northern empire, if brought to bear on one point, must ensure success, and thus this State also will crumble away, and slowly, but surely,

the green line will advance till it touches the red, where, it has been asserted, the mountains rise in an unbroken line to a height of 17,000 feet. It cannot be denied that for the Russians to force their way right up to the British frontier would be a work of immense labour, accompanied with fearful loss of life; but that they can push their boundary further south than they have already, is unquestionable, and the matters connected with this subject will be dwelt on hereafter.

We may next refer to the boundaries of British India. To our north-west lies Cabul, whose ruler is at present well affected towards us. His capital, Cabul, lies only 190 miles from Peshawur, but the people he governs are so fierce and warlike, that any foreign army could hardly meet with success if an attempt was made to force a way. The route, however, from Herat to Cabul, and from thence to British India viâ Peshawur, certainly exists, and has been trodden, not once but many times, by invading armies very much inferior to the Russians in point of discipline or equipment, from the days of Mahomed Ghori, in A.D. 1160, to those of Nadir Shah, in 1738; though on these, and other occasions also, it is probable enough that Affghanistan was subjugated before an attempt to pass through it was made. From Herat there is also a route to Candahar, and from thence a passage over the Soliman range to the banks of the Indus; but this, for the present, is far removed from possibility of transit by a foreign force.

Joining on to Affghanistan is the dependent state of Cashmere, which constitutes our northernmost boundary, and presents on its northern side a line of lofty mountains through which there are but few pathways. A direct road runs from Chaitral in Cashmere, to Yarkand, but it may at once be inferred, from reports deemed authentic, that no invading force could ever make much of this track, which has been given up in despair by traders. Between Yarkand and Khotan there is, about half way, a place called Guma, of some commercial importance, which is the starting-point for such few merchants as may care to brave the tracks over the Kuen Lun range by the Kara Korum and other passes. Although there are no actually insuperable difficulties by

any of the routes which here open out India to Central Asia, yet the absence of fuel and fodder, and the intense cold of those high altitudes may safely be held to prevent the advance of any large force in that direction.

Our one weak point is Cashmere; and it cannot be denied, it is our weakest point of all. Closed up, as that State is, against all Europeans for the winter, it is impossible for us to know what may be going on there. It may be granted that the present ruler, though an Asiatic, entertains a friendly feeling for the British power, and would not play us false; but, as he owns, though only as a feudatory, the whole of the mountain ranges which constitute our boundary to the north and north-east, it is none the less necessary that the entrances to the passes should be carefully watched. Eagerly as we may desire to annex Cashmere, it would be our very worst policy to do any thing of the sort; the step would cause an alarm that nothing we could say or do would allay; and the partial independence of that State is a continual assurance, and valuable guarantee on our part, to the races beyond our border, that the English have no wish to extend their territory; but that Cashmere should be closed, as it is to us, for nearly half the year, is a state of things that cannot be tolerated much longer, for we are so utterly ignorant of what Russia is doing in Central Asia, that, without our knowledge, that power might lodge a small force in the lower valleys of the Kuen Lun, and be permitted to enter Cashmere itself! The immense difficulties of such an undertaking are not under-rated, but were the game worth the candle, is it to be believed that Russia would stop at difficulties. Such an advance could, of course, only take place if we were at war with the Northern Colossus; and the difficulties, after all, would not be so insuperable, were Russian armies lying ready, as assuredly they will be ere long, at the foot of the mountains which bound our frontier.

And now what do the Russians themselves say?

“Judging, therefore, by historical precedents, we cannot but foresee that the occupation of the mouth of the Amu Daria, will necessarily be followed by the appropriation of the whole river. * * * Sooner or later it will come to

pass of itself"—in other words, the Russian line will be advanced to the north bank of the Jaxartes (Amu Daria) and will stretch from the Sea of Aral to Faizabad. "The Amu Daria is, for many reasons, of greater importance to Russia than the Syr Daria." The question of eventual war with the British was openly discussed in 1862. "With respect to a military expedition to India, the Amu Daria may be used for despatching a small force to its upper course, not with an idea of conquest, but for making a demonstration with the object of alarming the enemy, and diverting his attention from other points. The close proximity of the Anglo-Indian Empire to Russia need not be feared; as it is no easy matter to penetrate to or from Russia from this quarter. She is fully justified, in seeking to be rewarded for her labours and losses, extending over a hundred years, and in endeavouring to secure her frontiers, by pushing them forward to that snow-capped summit of the Himalayas, the natural conterminous boundary of England and Russia. From this stand point, Russia can calmly look on the consolidation and development of British power in India" (*vide* page 404 *et sequitur* of Michell's work). This surely is plain enough.

Undoubtedly the advance of the Russian boundary line has, as may be presently shown, immensely furthered her commercial interests, and it is by no means the case, that all that that power has annexed is in itself valueless, for many of her newly acquired districts are rich in vegetable and mineral products. She presses southward from Samarkand and the Thian Shan range, and the effect of her immediate neighbourhood to India, has been well conned over by her politicians. The *Saturday Review*, last December, stated that "Central Asia, like the Confederate States Sherman marched through, is an empty shell; not barren or desert enough to make the march of great armies impossible, or even transcendantly difficult, but sufficiently destitute of people to make resistance out of the question. Meshed, Herat and Candahar would fall without a blow, to an army of 20,000 men; and twice and thrice that number could be taken through the country," and further on, remarking that the accumulated forces on the Volga, (which flows into the

Caspian) may be transmitted via the Amu Daria to Chardjui, and Balkh it uses this forcible language which, coming from a paper of so much weight, deserves every consideration. "It is not a power strong at the centre, but weak and feeble at the distant frontier, stretching toward us a long arm that can scarcely bear its own weight, with which we have to deal; but a power, whose central force can be placed with ease almost at our gates." Couple this with the Russian declarations before quoted, as to their determination to push on to the very border of our Anglo-Indian possessions, as a means of diverting us from other points of attack, and the most bigoted opponent to all chances of Russian advance, will surely feel inclined to reconsider his previous conclusions. It may still, however, be deemed that too great a stress has been placed on the probabilities of Russian forces approaching India; but to those who have studied this really imperial question, the feeling will be that the case is hardly over stated. Every allowance may be made for a great kingdom, which, from the very exigencies of its position, is apparently forced to advance, and as long as that advance but sweeps away the foolish and wicked rulers that lie beyond our territories, and restore peace and plenty to nations once celebrated for their wealth and position, we cannot but rejoice; but we have also to look after our own interests, and it is not for our interests, that a power so colossal as is Russia, should be at our very gates, threatening by her presence, the actual stability of British rule in Hindoostan.

CENTRAL ASIAN TRADE.

As the fact of there being any trade in Central Asia worth drawing into this country, has been but too often treated as an idle chimera, it may be well here to enter upon this question, and to see for ourselves whether commerce to any appreciable extent passes along the Central Asian highways. The Russian traveller, Captain Valikhanoff, in a paper prepared expressly for his own government, drew up an account of an extensive tour he made in Central Asia in the capacity of relation to a caravan leader, and as it was his

object to faithfully state what he saw and heard, his evidence may be relied on. In chap. 3 of Michell's translations, Valikhanoff says, "Notwithstanding the great risk, I constantly kept a tolerably full diary during my travels. . . . Through my acquaintance with merchants of different tribes and from various countries, I procured a collection of itineraries, with statistical, ethnographical and commercial notes, relating to the neighbouring countries. Mixing, moreover, continually with merchants, and living in the caravanserais, I became accurately acquainted with the commerce of Central Asia, the articles forming the caravan trade, and in particular with the commodities most in demand at Kashgar. The information collected during my journey consists, firstly, of my own personal observations; secondly, of oral narratives by individuals on whose trustworthiness I can confidently rely; and, lastly, of written accounts received from merchants and officials, and of extracts from local official documents and books." Scarcely a better guide could be obtained, and the information he affords will be largely availed of in these pages.

A brief account, and it must necessarily be brief, of some of the principal cities of Central Asia, through which trade flows, may here be acceptable. Commencing then to the North-East we find between Lakes Balkash and Issik Kul, Fort Vernoe or Almaty, a Russian settlement through which Caravans travel, and the town was, long before Russian occupation, used by the Genoese and other merchants, who proceeded to and from China, but the most important city in the East is Aksu, situated under the Alatagh range in $41^{\circ} 9'$ North, $78^{\circ} 46'$ East. It contains 12,000 houses and 25,000 inhabitants, and is surrounded by a wall with 4 gates. It has no less than 6 Caravansaries. Aksu city is the point of divergence for all the roads of this region, and is the centre point of the Chinese trade, the main roads from China and Ili, meeting within its walls. From Aksu to Pekin is 2,546 miles regularly traversed by Caravans, which take from 4 to 5 months on their journey. From Aksu to Kuldja (Ili) to the N.E. is $407\frac{1}{2}$ miles, the road traversing the Djeparle or famous Glacier pass. Caravans take some 20 days by this route. The district of Aksu is very fertile,

and the soil produces lentils, wheat, barley, millet, apricots, grapes and melons, and a very fine species of felt is manufactured in some of its outlying towns.

Ush Turfan is a small town (with some 5,000 houses) not walled in, but there is a citadel near, which used to be occupied by a Chinese garrison. It lies some 80 miles to the West of Aksu, and is celebrated for its trade in cattle and excellent tobacco.

Kashgar:—This very large and important town with its 16,000 houses, surrounded by a clay wall 6 fathoms high and about 12 miles in circumference, is situated to the South of the Thian Shan range in $39^{\circ} 25'$ North and 74° East. The walls are protected by six towers, and on the East and West sides of the city there are gates. This town “stands in the same relation to Central Asia that Kiakhta does to Siberia and Shanghai—and Canton to other European nations,” and is the resort of Asiatic merchants from all quarters.

Bazaars are held once a week. The climate is pleasant, and the winters are not very severe, nor do they last long. Around the city are fruit gardens, and vines, pomegranates, apples, quinces, pears, peaches, and figs, all flourish, while rice and cotton crops grow well.

From Kashgar, routes lie to Yanyshahr, Yarkand and Khotan to the South, and over the Terekty pass to Kokand and the region beyond; there are also, from it, two routes to Ush Turfan.

Khokand, or Kokhandi Latif (enchanted Khokand) according to Vambéry. “It lies in a beautiful valley, and is in circumference six times as large as Khiva, three times as Bokhara and four times as Teheran.” It is situated to the North-West of Kashgar, about longitude 70° E., and is celebrated for its native silk and woollen manufactures, and its “tasty articles in leather—saddles, whips and equipments for riding.”

Yanyshahr lies 47 miles south of Kashgar, has 8,000 houses and is surrounded by a stone wall, and has two Caravanserais. Weekly bazaars are held. The village Terektik near it, is celebrated for its superior hashish.

Yarkund, the largest city of East Turkistan, stands between the branches of the Yarkand Daria river, to the South East

of Yanyshahr, about longitude 71° East by latitude 42° North, and is 247 miles from Aksu, 270 from Khotan, and about 200 from Kashgar by regular routes. It is surrounded by a wall 8 fathoms high and 17 miles in circumference, and has 4 Caravanserais. A weekly bazaar is held every Friday. The population is estimated at considerably over 100,000, and the Cashmeerees and Hindoos have a regular quarter of their own in the city.

Khotan, Iltsa, Ilchi or Ili, lies to South-East of Yarkand, from which it is distant some 270 miles, by an excellent road, which runs along the banks of the Yarkand Daria, it is said, but the geography of this part of East Turkistan is but little known. It is surrounded by a low wall, has 18,000 houses and 8 Serais, 3 of which are occupied by foreign merchants. It communicates with Northern Turkistan through Yarkand, and with India by the passes over the Kuen Lun mountains, and is famous for its thin felts, carpets, silkwork and jade, which last used to be formerly exported in large quantities to China. Its settlements are well-known as places of commerce, and the city itself is important to us, as being the nearest large town to British territory, from which it is distant by some 250 miles.

Copper is found at Aksu and its neighbourhood, and sulphur and saltpetre at Ush Turfan. To the East of Aksu there are also valuable salt mines, and throughout all East Turkistan the jade stone is found in quantities.

Between Karatogin and Kokand, gold in nuggets forms the staple of trade; and lapis lazuli, turquoises and rubies are regularly transmitted between Yarkand and Badakshan (Faizabad). Gold is said to be plentiful in all the mountain streams.

The following cereals are grown in East Turkistan or little Bokhara as it is sometimes termed:—Wheat, barley, rice, jawary, red and black lentils, sesamum, madder and tobacco, and melons, water melons; while carrots, radishes, onions, beet root, mint, pears, poppies, saffron, wild apples, olives, bergamot peaches, apricots, quinces, figs, grapes, prunes, cherries, and walnuts, are to be found nearly everywhere.

Turning now to the line of the Syr Daria and the towns

adjacent, in which, properly speaking, Kokand should have been included, we find Tashkend and Khojend, the one to the North and the other to the South of that river.

Khojend the Cyropolis or Alexandria Ultima of classical writers, has, according to Vambéry, 3,000 houses, and many manufactories for Aladja (a sort of cotton stuff). It lies on the south shore of the Syr Daria, and is equidistant between Tashkend and Kokand, being about 100 miles from each.

Tashkend to its North and on the other bank of the Syr Daria, is the first commercial town of these regions, says Vambéry, and is the residence of many affluent merchants,* who have "extensive trading relations with Orenburg and Petropalovsk." It "has the transit trade between Bokhara, Kokand, and Chinese Tartary, and is one of the most important cities of Central Asia."

Tashkend has a population estimated at over 100,000, and from its position it has been termed the key of Central Asia. Caravans from it go to Kokand (above which town the Syr Daria is navigable) and to Orenburg and Petropalovsk over a route rendered dangerous by the probabilities of attacks from robbers. From Tashkend to Troitsk, in Siberia, there are 40 stages, but this road is not so easy for wheeled traffic as the direct route to Petropalovsk.

Bokhara and Samarkand,† capital cities of the Bokhara State, have been fully described by Vambéry, in his interesting work, "Travels in Central Asia," and Caravan routes stretch from them towards Balkh and Faizabad (or Badakshan, to the South) and Herat and Meshed to the South West—also to Khiva—and to Kashgar and East Turkistan, by Khokand. From Bokhara to Khiva the tract lies over a vast desert of sand, and, for the most part, the roads, leading in a southerly direction, run through the same description of soil. From Bokhara, however, there is direct communication with Orenburg, in Siberia, and two Caravans start annually, the journey taking from two to two and a half months, the

* NOTE.—Since he wrote his travels, the place has been taken possession of by the Russians, but that does not alter the fact of its commercial importance.

† Samarkand is now in the hands of the Russians.

average hire of a camel carrying 576lbs., avoirdupois, amounting to £1-10-0 for the whole distance.

Khiva, to the South of the Sea of Aral, and very close to the river Amu Daria, is connected with the Persian frontier, as with Bokhara, by routes across deserts where water is seldom to be found, and all accounts agree, that the difficulties attending the passage of Caravans are enormous. Indeed, along all the lines of traffic, merchants are subject to be plundered and carried into captivity by the hordes of savage tribes, which gain but a living, by a brigand career, and the dangerous nature of the passes encountered in the mountainous tracts, the great distress occasioned by want of water in the enormous stretches of desert, and the heavy imposts each petty chief exacts from every Caravan, must also be borne in mind. Yet, with all these drawbacks, trade goes on ; and as the governments there are, cannot give aid to travellers, they combine together and journey in large bodies, such as are described by Vambéry in his trip from Samarkand, southwards, where there were 400 camels, several horses, and 190 asses as beasts of burden attached to his caravan, which number were doubled, he narrates, before they left Andkhui, on the borders of Affghanistan.

The enormous distances traversed by these Caravans is not the least remarkable circumstance in connection with trade in Central Asia ; and when merchants will convey goods from Asku to Pekin, a journey which cannot be completed under five months, it surely must be seen that commerce, to a very appreciable extent, goes on in Central Asia.

Annexed* is a description of the hardships, merchants undergo, on the routes between Bokhara and Russia, and Russia and China, from Michell's Travels in Central Asia.

“Overcoming in this manner the obstacles which the barbarous Asiatics place in the way of the development of Russian trade, the natural impediments by which nature has cut Russia off from that rich oasis, watered by the Syr and Amu, remain to be considered. The chief obstruction is presented by a vast extent of barren steppes, traversed, however, by five principal routes, *viz.*, 1st, from Khiva to Mangyshlak on the Caspian; 2nd,

* NOTE.—Quoted by Mr. Forsyth in his pamphlet on the subject of Trade routes.

from Khiva to the western shore of the Sea of Aral towards Orenburg; 3rd, from Bokhara northwards to Orenburg; 4th, from Tashkend, along the eastern border of the Kirghiz Steppe to Troitsk; 5th, to Petropavlosk; of these, the first named is the shortest, not exceeding 1,000 versts, but it passes through waterless regions, infested by pillaging Turkmen, and is for these and other reasons unfrequented. The second route, which is 1,300 versts long, is open to much the same objections, and is, therefore, equally neglected. The third road, that in ordinary use, leads from Orenburg to Orsk, 225 versts, from thence to Fort No. 1 on the Syr Daria, 721 versts, offering a safe traversable road for vehicles; further on, again to the Yany Daria river, about 200 versts, and lastly treads southwards through a completely waterless steppe, for 300 versts, from whence to Bokhara there remains a distance of about 200 versts, over sandy but less arid localities. The whole distance from Orenburg to Bokhara is reckoned at 1,700 versts. From the fortress of Orsk to Bokhara, there are forty stages, and as many from Troitsk to Tashkend. Along this last route, good pasture for cattle is found. Still better, however, is the road from Tashkend to Petropavlosk, which is, throughout the whole distance, passable for wheel carriages, and though it extends across a barren steppe, wells are to be found along it."

"The length of this road is 1,600 versts. It is only lately that certain kinds of goods are transported from Russia into the steppe, as far, even, as the banks of the Syr, by means of oxen and carts. The ordinary mode of carrying goods is on camels, which animals are alone capable of supporting the want of water, or of drinking water of bad quality, while they can also subsist on the prickly shrubs of the steppe. Goods are despatched by caravans, and only at those seasons of the year when snow hurricanes in winter, and the sultry heat and aridity of summer do not render the steppes impassable. Owing to these circumstances, only two caravans pass between Bokhara and Orenburg during the year, and the number of cattle and men forming the caravan is in proportion to the difficulties to be encountered on the journey. The number of beasts of burden in the caravan is also governed by the supply of water and pasture along the road. The route from Khiva to the Caspian has been abandoned on account of the scarcity of water and pasture. Caravans are from two, to two and a-half months performing the journey from Orenburg to Bokhara, and *vice versa*. The cost of transporting goods is from five to fifteen roubles, or, averaging ten roubles = £1 10s. per camel, carrying a lode of sixteen puds, or, 576 lbs. avoirdupois. From Orenburg to Bokhara the price paid is 60 copecks per pud, or 5s. 8d. per cwt.

"A considerable proportion of the tea destined for the Kiachta overland market is sent direct from Hankow down the Yang-tse-Kiang to Shanghai; some is also sent from Foochow and Canton to Shanghai; but most of it is collected in the province of Fukien, to the north-east of Canton, from whence it is despatched by land or water to Chuh-Chan. Thence it is conveyed by coolies, in the manner described by Fortescue, over the mountains to Kin-Chan. Here the tea is loaded in small boats, taking about 200 chests each; it is then conveyed, 40 versts down a stream, into the Chan-tang, where it is re-loaded into boats carrying 500 chests. Passing the town of Hankow, the

boats emerge into the Eastern Sea, and coasting along, reach the river Kisiang, up which they proceed to the town of Shanghaie. Here the tea is re-loaded into larger vessels, carrying as much as 1,500 chests, besides other goods. These vessels, after leaving Shanghaie, proceed along the coast to Tientsin, which place they reach, if the weather is favourable, in about fifteen days."

"The tea is once more re-loaded at Tientsin into small boats taking about 200 chests, which follow the windings of the stream Barboe, and reach Tienshat, about 22 versts from Penkin, in the space of ten days. From this point, this tea is transported by land on camels and in bullock carts to the frontier fortress Changkea or Kalgan, at the great wall, a distance of about 252 versts, and thence across the steppe or desert of Gobi, 1282, to Kiachta."

"The transport of tea from Fukien to Kiachta occupies two or three months according to circumstances."

Between Bokhara and Orenburg there are three large deserts to be crossed, and the journey takes nearly $2\frac{1}{2}$ months; and between Yarkand, which is a still more celebrated entrepôt for trade than is Bokhara, and Palumpore, in the Kangra valley, but 55 days are required. Over this last route, caravans would proceed in summer, when the passes are free from snow, and the advantages as to water, fodder, and fuel are all on the side of this line, in comparison with that between Orenburg and Bokhara.

Statistics from Russian sources may be relied on, for they would hardly be anxious to overstate, and it has been ascertained that their Custom-House Returns for tea imported into Russia do not show one-tenth part of the actual quantity that finds its way into the country; and, probably enough, much the same will hold good as regards other produce. By their Custom-House Returns, then, we find the value of goods exported beyond the Orenburg and Siberian lines are as follow:—

In 1835, £277,000.

1845, £300,000.

1855, £387,000.

1860, £735,000.

And the Imports from Central Asia are as below:—

In 1835, £360,000.

1845, £278,000.

1855, £6,268,000.

1860, £1,200,000.

From Michell's work we learn—"The condition of the Import trade to Russia is more remarkable. From 1835 to 1860, its value has increased to 333, while, during the same period, the exports only rose to 260 per cent. Relatively, the different items of the Import trade have altogether changed, as will appear from the following data. The value of the cotton goods brought to Russia, from Central Asia, formed, in 1835, three and sixth-tenths, and in 1845, one quarter of the general imports, in 1855 it was only one-tenth, and in 1860 less than one-twelfth. . . . The total value of silk and northern fabrics imported in 1835 amounted to 35,000 silver roubles, while in 1860, it reached 135,000 silver roubles, £5,250 to £14,730. The importation of fruit has increased ten fold during the last twenty-five years, and amounted in 1860 to 6,820,000 lbs. . . . Russian manufactures cannot compete in point of cheapness with the productions of Western Europe, and are driven out of all the markets in which they meet."

This, be it remembered, is a Russian statement.

Enough, it will be allowed, has been urged to prove that trade in Central Asia does certainly exist, and that it would be worth our while to induce merchants to bring their wares into British India, and we may now proceed to take up the question of our own routes through the mountainous ranges which encircle our territory.

Trade enters India by means of Caravans from Candahar and the Cabul side, but it is not proposed to discuss this point of our line. In the approaching interview, which will take place between the Viceroy and the Ameer of Cabul this month, probably the interests of commerce will be furthered; but the wild and fanatical tribes, which own but a nominal sovereignty to the Ameer, are ever on the watch, and heavy blackmail is enforced, before any caravan can pass on, into or out of India; nor can it be hoped that this state of things can be remedied for some time to come; and until a firm Government is established all along the line of the Indus.

We will now proceed to examine the points where the Hindu Koosh may be said to join the Kuen Lun, and the latter's rocky barriers stretch out towards the East and South-East. A succinct memo. of trade routes from the

Punjab to East Turkistan, was drawn up by Mr. Forsyth* in a paper already alluded to, and in his pamphlet he quotes as follows, from Mr. Davies' report on Trade:

"There are several routes from the Punjab to Eastern Turkistan, but three only are ever likely to be available for traffic—the first is *via* Kashmir and Leh; the second *via* Mundeë, Kullu, and Leh; the third *via* Simla, Garoo, and Rudok. The Kashmir route is either direct *via* Skardo, or by Ladak; the Mundeë road, starting from Noorpore, Umritsar, or Loodinah, goes by Kullu; and the Simla route either *via* Sooltanpore, Kullu, and the Baralacha Pass, or by the Parunz La (Pass), or avoids Ladak altogether, traversing the Chinese territory, but all, except the latter, cross the Karakorum Pass."

"The route *via* Jhelum, Kashmir, and Leh to Yarkund is, in Captain Montgomery's opinion, 'not only the shortest, but the best and cheapest route for the traffic from the sea to Eastern Turkistan.' From Jhelum to Leh (Ladak), the route through the mountains is better than any other that traverses the Himalayas; the road between the plains and Leh crosses the Himalayan range by a very remarkable depression of only 11,300 feet, and none of the passes on it exceed 1,300 feet in height, and they are, moreover, open for at least seven or eight months in the year, and could be crossed at any season in fine weather. There is, moreover, between the plains and Leh but one, or at the most, two halting places, without a village in the vicinity, in itself a very great advantage."

And as to the route *via* Mundeë and Kooloo;—

"The greater part of the traffic between the Punjab, Leh, and Turkistan, is carried on by this road, and after the road *via* Kashmir and Leh, it is decidedly the best route from the Punjab to Eastern Turkistan, Yarkund, &c., though the passes between the Chenab (Chundra Bagha) and the Indus are very high on this route, yet the slopes are so easy, that there is but little difficulty in crossing. The route is open for about five or six months, being nearly two months less than the Kashmir route. There are, moreover, nine or ten marches over very elevated bleak mountain land, without any villages. To the east of the Baralacha, there is no route well adapted for traffic with Eastern Turkistan."

The Cashmere road, it appears, offers "great facilities for allowing camels to pass, and a very small expenditure would be sufficient to make the present road passable for camels; the double humped camel, has been brought to Leh several times, and it is capable of carrying burdens over the highest passes. Ladakh itself offers but few obstacles to the passage of camels."† A cart road is now

* Published by the Punjab Government.

† From a Memo. of Captain Montgomery, R.E., furnished to Punjab Government.

being made to Palumpore, in the Kangra valley, and will, through the exertions of the Munde authorities, be taken on to Goomah, from whence a new road has been made to Sooltanpore, in Kooloo, by the Bubboo pass. Over this, camels can go with ease, and once in Kooloo, there is nothing to prevent their reaching Pulchan, at the foot of the Rotang Pass, which leads into Lahoul. From Pulchan to Leh, the line of communication is constantly traversed by mules (yaks, sheep and goats, are also largely employed as beasts of burden), and Serais, as far as funds will allow, are being commenced. Our boundary ends, and Cashmere territory, commences on the further side of the Bara Lacha pass at the river Tschérap, and from here to Leh the road winds over two passes over 17,000 feet in height, but whose gradients are easy.

Laden animals proceed without difficulty by this track. From Leh, the road goes by the Karakorum passes, over 18,000 feet in height, and very dangerous, and through a country utterly destitute of fuel or fodder for days together, till it reaches the extreme limit of Ladakh, and strikes into the line to Yarkand; but another route to the east of Leh, termed the Changchenmoo route, has been lately inspected by Dr. Cayley. This passes over mountains as lofty as any in the Karakorum range; but they present no formidable obstacles of any sort, and throughout the entire line, with the exception of three encamping spots, fuel, fodder and water, are found in abundance. The Yarkand Vakeel returned from Leh to his own country by this road; and it is said, he was highly satisfied with it; and more lately, Mr. Shaw and Lieutenant Hayward, the latter accredited by the Royal Geographical Society, journeyed towards Yarkand, by the same route, and are known to have reached in safety the outer slopes of the Kuen Lun range.

Mr. Forsyth, in speaking generally on Trade prospects, remarks:—

“A word, too, may be said on the subject of the great barrier which a mountain, 17,000 feet high, is supposed to offer to trade. Such a remark can only be made by a person wholly unacquainted with the Himalayas. All who have travelled in these regions know that, with the exception of the Rotang, the lowest pass of all, the other passes are approached by long easy

inclines; over the Rotang, a mule road has been made, and may be still further improved, as the increase of traffic shall demand it.

“There is no intention, in putting forward this paper, of endeavouring to create a prepossession in favour of this Himalayan route, over the more popular and easy route *via* Affghanistan. But there is this one present advantage in favour of this mountain line, that no hostile countries have to be crossed.

Particular stress has been laid on the very great difficulties merchants have to encounter in Central Asia, and we have now to compare these with those they meet with in Ladakh. There has been no attempt to conceal the fact of the exceeding cold in the great altitudes the routes have to traverse, and the trouble and annoyance the occasional want of fuel and fodder must produce; but, as is well known, the cold has been no deterrent to travellers, who, for pleasure, year by year, penetrate these glacial regions. Either for sport, or in the interests of science, Englishmen, every season, wander over these gigantic mountains; and, as every Pass and awful height which traders would have to dare, has been crossed over and over again, not only by the merchants, but by ourselves, and no accident of any importance to human life has ever taken place, we may credit the statement of those who assure us that a passage for trade, and not such a one as need deter the hardy travellers of Central Asia, exists, and might just as well be utilized. But, to those who are unacquainted with Ladakh, Passes over 18,000 feet in height, must appear to be simply insuperable. This, however, is far from being the case, for the mountains that represent these great heights, spring from the valleys not 3,000 feet below them, and once the Lahoul boundary is passed, in no place is there a depression of less than 10,000 feet in height above the level of the sea.

Dr. Cayley, our resident in Leh, who proceeded up the Changchenmoo route, particularly dwells on this. He mentions that “the Changchenmoo valley is, in its upper course, wide and verdant, and is a regular winter residence of Pangong Shepherds and Herdsmen. The valley, though 17,000 feet high (!) is sheltered, and contains unlimited wood for fuel. Gunle Pamchalan and Gogra” in it “are all winter camps,” and surely, if shepherds can live at a height of 17,000 feet during the winter, traders can traverse the same

altitudes with tolerable comfort in the summer. Indeed, in approaching this question, it is useless to do so with preconceived notions; and it must be granted by all who do not argue simply for the sake of argument, that practical men, who have gone over these routes, are by far the best judges of their feasibility for trade purposes.

Even with the little that has as yet been done towards encouraging traders to enter British territory, the number of merchants passing backwards and forwards is increasing; and any one who was at the Palumpore fair, last November, could have seen for himself how our kindly treatment of the Central Asia traders was appreciated by them, and with what earnestness they one and all declared that, while it was at the very risk of their lives they ventured with their Caravans in Central Asia, in British India they were welcomed, and protected, and helped in every possible way, and were looked upon as friends whose presence was highly desirable.

Surely our best policy must be to foster this trade, and to induce as many merchants as we can to come into our territories.

GENERAL REFLECTIONS.

To any thoughtful mind it will be manifest, that the questions above mooted should be carefully considered in all their bearings; and while, on the one hand, we should not give too much weight to the views of those who dread an immediate advance of a Russian army into India, or who are certain that unlimited supplies will pour into this country over difficult passes and roads but little known; on the other hand, we must, in fairness, listen to what has been advanced on so many sides; and there will, ere long, be an abatement, it is hoped, of the common desire to thrust the subject aside with an "after me the deluge" cry. We ought to approach the question in an impartial frame of mind; if before doubting, to honestly read what information there is to be had; and, if previously too credulous, to correct impressions raised on false premises. In any case, ignorance is our worst policy; and ignorance, till lately, has certainly existed; and there has not been, and indeed there is not now, much

desire to ascertain what events are transpiring across our border.

In these pages, the frontier of the Russians in 1840, and their gradual and sure advance towards Hindoostan, have been shown, and some brief description of the forces that might bar their onward progress has been entered into. The question of trade in Central Asia was then discussed, and endeavour was made to show that there has, for long, existed a trade in Central Asia in which it would be worth our while to share; statistics such as could be procured, have been advanced, and the difficulties traders would have to experience, over our own lines, have not been concealed, while the policy of encouraging merchants to enter British India, has been urged. But little more remains to be said.

Allowing that the Russians could fight their way to the foot of the Himalayan ranges (and everything points to that contingency sooner or later), it is not pretended to be argued that they would ever use their presence so near us, except to embarrass us; and that they could embarrass us by their very proximity is not to be doubted, for the stationing of a foreign power so near to India would be a fruitful cause of speculation to all ill-wishers to British rule, and our just apprehensions being excited, the concentration of a larger force in the Punjab than any other circumstances necessitated, would be required. That the Russians themselves are relying on the trouble they may hereafter occasion, by a further advance southward, is manifest from the writings of their own travellers previously quoted. "Imbecile or traitorous," says Thornton,* "must be that Government which slumbers when Russia is approaching the border of any of its provinces, even though the approach be slow, and the distance between the invader and the object of his desire, as yet, be great.

It is imperative that information regarding Central Asian events, both on the Cabul and the Cashmere sides, should always be obtainable; for without it, we may at any day be surprised. It then becomes a question to be answered, whether we should have agents beyond our border?—for it is

* Thornton's History of the British Empire in India, Chapter XXX.

against the principles of civilized nations to establish consulships, where there can be no guarantee that they will not be insulted, and, in their persons, the Government they represent ; therefore, as to the appointment of accredited agents in Central Asia, no great stress can here be made ; if, however, something in that way could be managed, the step might be attended with the happiest results.

But it seems highly desirable that there should be a Governor General's Agent for the N.E. Frontier, whose headquarters might be at Cashmere, with an assistant at Leh ; and everything points to the advisability of a somewhat similar appointment for the N.W. Frontier.

There is always a resident appointed to Cashmere for the summer, and Dr. Cayley, we may hope, is a permanency at Leh ; but, in the winter months, not an English official is permitted to reside in Cashmere, the State, in which lie all the passes towards Hindoostan on the N.E. side. It may, at any time happen, that a commissioner may be posted to the Jullundur division, under whom are the outlying districts of Lahoul and Spiti, and the immediate supervision of the routes through Ladak (Cashmere), who may not take the same interest in the chances of Russian advances, or prospects of trade, as does the present Commissioner, Mr. Forsyth ; and as, indeed, the Commissioner's duties, per se, are not actually in connection with Cashmere, any succeeding official might, without the chance of censure, allow great evils to grow up. It would appear, then, that a Governor General's agent for our N.E. Frontier is essential, and his duties would be most important. He would stimulate private enterprise, see that traders were protected and encouraged to enter our territories, and he could treat with envoys from beyond our border ; and the immense responsibilities of his position, which must yearly increase, would ensure a rigid attention to all that concerns our interests in the states which Russia is gradually bringing under her control.

Cashmere, indeed, should no longer, by the will of its chief, be closed during the winter, and the whole route from the entrance to the passes to our own territory, should be placed under British supervision.

It will probably be argued, that the formation of roads over the Ladakh passes will but facilitate the advance of a Russian force; but paths quite fit for traffic, are not necessarily fitted for the advance of armies, and with the Governor General's Agent at Cashmere, we should be in a position to close the roads, directly occasion required.

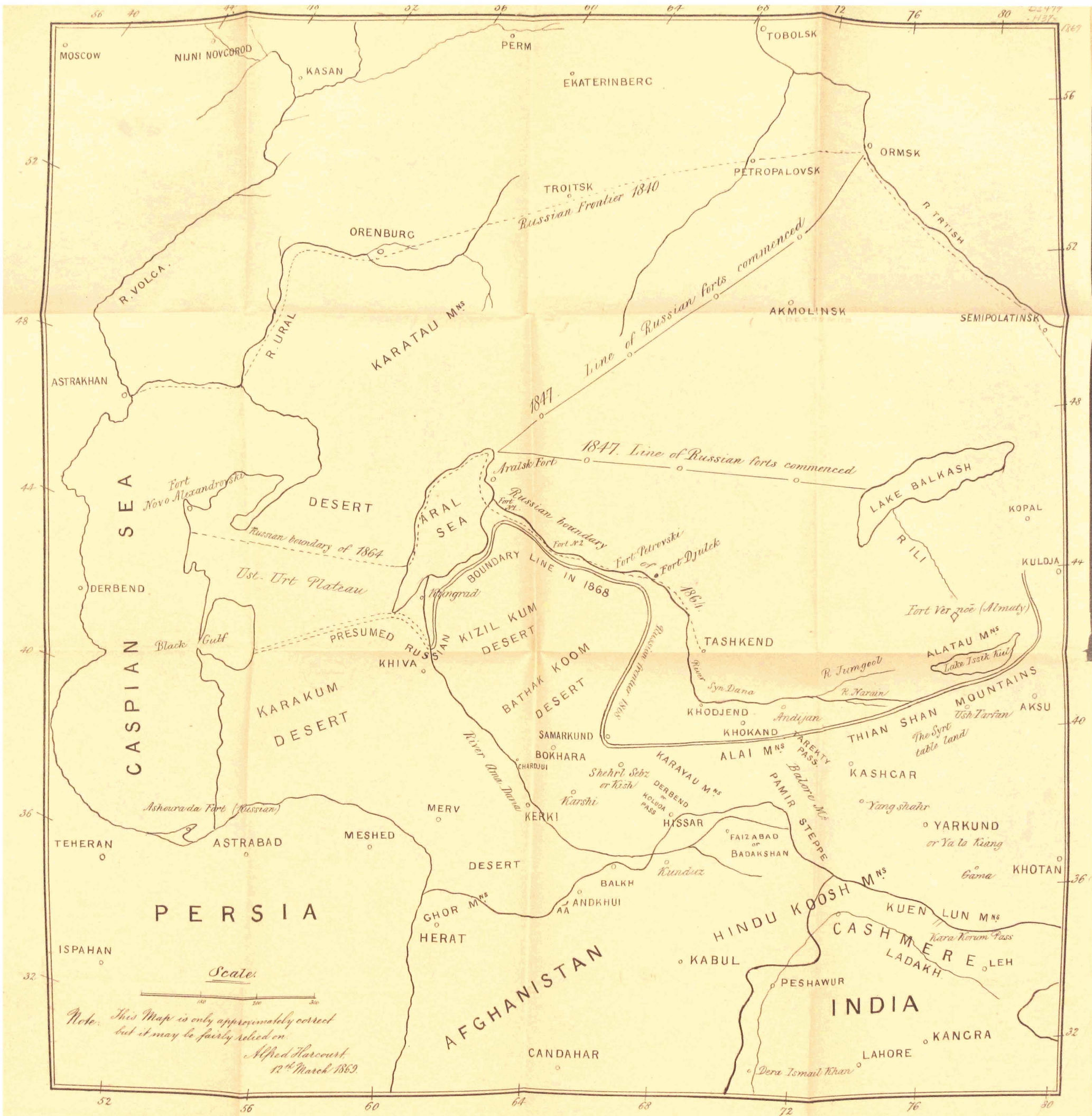
Without lines of communication of a fairly good order, we shall not be able to induce traders in any great number to enter India, and this is the result we have to obtain, for the very fact of bodies of men continually passing backwards and forwards to Central Asia, will be one of our happiest means of acquiring information. The construction of Serais, with supplies at fitting halting places, and the levelling of roads, here and there, is simply a matter of detail, which might be left to those in authority, on the spot, and it is hoped that Government will take a liberal view in this question, and sanction a moderate expenditure.

It is, and may well be, our happy boast, that if a Russian force ever broke over the passes into India, it would only be to meet destruction from the British arms; and the writer of these lines is as convinced of the supremacy of his own countrymen as can be any of his readers; and he believes it is a wholesome and a pardonable pride which places such reliance on the English courage and the English name; but we must not blind ourselves to what is passing at our doors, and lap ourselves into a foolish security. To penetrate beyond our border, *at any rate for the present*, would be to enter on a task where we could never be sure of stopping with honor, and, as Colonel Younghusband put it, in a lecture lately delivered at Lahore, "in the East, where we plant our flags, there must we make our stand—there is no falling back for us," and the boundary limits we have at present reached should suffice; but while confining ourselves to our own borders, and endeavouring to raise the people of India to something of our own level, and fostering public and private enterprise in every possible way, it is also incumbent on us to be on the alert, and to avail ourselves of every opportunity that offers for extending our knowledge of Central Asian matters. A generous treatment of the sovereigns on our borders, would seem to be an indispensable policy; let us

tender them the hand of hearty friendship, accompanied by something more than mere expressions of good will, and let them at the same time understand, that to play false with the great British power, is to ensure their own swift and most certain destruction.

12th March, 1869.

ALFRED HARCOURT.



Note: This Map is only approximately correct
but it may be fairly relied on.
Alfred Harcourt
12th March 1869.