

Sir,—Even at a time when the “pure and simple” acceptance of the *Ultimatissim* Five Points is securing for Europe an honourable and permanent peace, there are individuals inquisitive enough to ask, “What is become of the Five Points of Asia?” A highly commendable politeness prevents our politicians from obtruding such theme upon a people courteous, yet susceptible withal, like our friends the French. But, Sir, although we naturally blush to own it, there is a place called India which England conquered in the semi-barbarous ages that preceded railways and peace-policy, electric telegraphs, and “sham wars;”—there is moreover, an out-of-the-way nook named Persia, where some millions of a coin termed rupees have been spent for other purposes than the general diffusion of British bullion; and, sad contrast to the amenities of diplomacy! certain honest, but deluded, persons, somewhat after the fashion of “the Duke,” cannot discover the policy of not hitting one’s enemy as hard as one can, and in the most vulnerable place. They loudly declare that they have lavished blood and treasure, not simply to prop up the tottering old Porte, to smash the Twelve Apostles, and to dismantle the southern suburb of Sebastopol, but with the end and aim of crippling *bonâ fide* the resources of Russia, and thus of rendering active aggression on her part in Asia as well as in Europe, for some years at least, impossible.

The neutralization of the Caspian Sea, still a Russian lake, is deemed worthy of consideration by these unpolitical people, who have been suspected of discussing *en petite comité* the subsidizing of Schamyl, the exclusion of Muscovite influence from Kurdistan, the re-establishment of British *prestige* in Persia, the salvation of Khiva, and the curious, though scarcely the delicate, question,—What are the frontiers of Russia in Central Asia?—The Araxes? Or the Persian Gulf? Or the River Indus?

Early in the present century two great military routes—according to Sir J. McDonald, connected Russia with Northern India. The line of least resistance, if we may trust Eldred Pottinger, lay through Mushed, Herat, Cabul, and Candahar, to Peshawur. The other, passing by Bokhara, Balkh, and the Hindoo Kush, was deemed impracticable until General Harlan’s Paropamisan march with artillery in 1838. This subject engrossed the attention of Stirling, Conolly, Burnes and Abbott, Mouravieff, Orloff, Zimmermann, and a host of others. Captain Grover complained that the British public believed Bokhara to be in Persia. But in 1836 Mr. McNeill went to Teheran as Minister, and Mr. David Urquhart became Secretary of Embassy at Constantinople, while Mr. B. Fraser remained as Oriental Reporter in Downing-street. The Eastern question was written up, skirmishers were thrown out in the daily papers—the monthlies swept the field in serried files, cavalry and artillery succeeded in pamphlets and reports, the heavy quarterlies acted as support, and a huge portfolio the reserve; the Guards’ charge was the “Progress and Present Position of Russia in the East.” McNeill, Chesney, and their followers proved the northern apophthegm—“The road to the English lies through Persia.” They showed that an invasion of India was not only possible but probable. To the frigid apathy of 1828 succeeded the fever fit of 1838, and relapses of Russophobia through the five subsequent years.

Presently the question of Indian invasion *viâ* Persia, chameleon-like, changed its colour. In 1839 Perofsky advanced upon Khiva, “to strengthen in that part of Asia,” said his master’s manifesto, “the lawful influence to which Russia has a right.” *Honneur oblige!* At the same time, England prepared to push a spider’s web beyond the Hindoo Kush, for the purpose of entangling Dost Mahommed. It is printed that Baron Brunow then remarked to Sir J. Hobhouse,—“If we go on at this rate, Sir John, the Cossack and the Sepoy will soon meet upon the banks of the Oxus;” and that the President replied with a spirit, “Very probably, Baron, but, however much I should regret the collision, I should have no fear of the result.

In this year of grace, 1856, the Proteus once more alters shape. The sun of Circassia, Persia, Kurdistan, Khiva, and Afghanistan has sunk below the political horizon in England. Russia has pushed on her lines through the dark. The first parallel, the Caucasus, is, and is to be, purely Russian. The second, Persia (allowed in Nasir el din Shah’s day peacefully to occupy the Herat for which Mahomed Shah was all but invaded), is also exclusively Russian. The third, Afghanistan, remains, but the head of the Russian sap, diplomacy, is firmly planted in the land.

Sir, the honest individuals to whom I referred labour under another strange hallucination. They assert that active and efficient measures might have broken up these parallels, and crushed Trans-Caucasian Russia even in the last campaign. I will briefly glance at their delusion.

They say that early in 1855 Schamyl sent his Naib, or managing man, to Constantinople for the purpose of securing what all such people want—a subsidy; that the Naib returned to the Caucasus in disgust; that Schamyl, abandoned by the Porte and Great Britain, shook hands with his old enemy, and that when Omar Pasha advanced upon Georgia the Daghestani threatened to fall upon the Turkish rear.

Diplomatists will readily discern that Schamyl, a brigand, who flogged his mother, put to death Russian prisoners, and believes himself an incarnation of the Deity, could not, in an age of perfect respectability, be recognized publicly as the ally of a highly moral nation. On the other hand, people not versed in these humanities assert that the *Revue des Deux Mondes* has thrown doubt upon the “Prophet’s” ill conduct; that at any rate an agent or agents, recognized by Government, might have been sent to inspect and report upon the possibility of a “Pancaucasian Empire;” and, lastly, that the history of alliances contains some holy, but many unholy, ones contracted with potentates whose private character was none of the prettiest, who have not been averse from a little murder and hypocrisy, and, in fact, whose principal merit was the being *en grand* what Schamyl is said to be *en petit*.

The principle of non-intervention—so truly worthy of a great nation—as laid down for Central Asia by Sir G. Barlow, has been duly carried out in Kurdistan. The Porte cannot levy soldiers in the country of the Spahis, once the flower of Eastern cavalry; but the Russians have officered Kurdish regiments, and their spies have diffused discontent through the land. The diplomatist knows that these Kurds—a scurvy set of saintless fellows who live by violence and rapine—are not to be encouraged; that the cause of Turkey is well-nigh hopeless around Lake Van, and that one I “daurna name” has threatened to withdraw the light of his countenance from Britannia should she attempt “establishments” in Central Asia. On the other hand, the clique, never without a *dernier mot*, declares that among the records of the Foreign-office lies an excellent plan by General (now Sir W.) Williams for energetic action in Kurdistan; that officers of note have volunteered for service in a Kurdish Contingent; and that, had Kars been provisioned and Omar Pasha enabled to reach Kutais, in another month a column of mountaineers might have been marching upon Tiflis.

It is not to be expected that the head of either party—initiated, or uninitiated—should know aught beyond generalizing concerning such corners as Georgia, Abasia, Imeritia, Mingrelia, &c. Yet, sad to relate! they are not agreed upon the course to be pursued there. Politicians assert that those provinces declined under their own princes, fiefdoms of Turkey and Persia, and flourished under Russian dominion; they could not resubject Christians to the Moslem; they respect the Czar’s avital unwillingness to yield territory—no matter how won;—and they insinuate that the exalted personage to whom I tremblingly alluded hesitates, in the plenitude of his traditional kingcraft, to make the Porte too powerful. The unpolite cavillers at these decorous doctrines retort, with some stale proverb concerning the fiat of justice, and would even rather fight single-handed than swim peaceably with the stream when it sets the wrong way.

If Abasia and its vicinity be *terra incognita*, Khiva and Afghanistan labour under the imputation of being subjects exclusively Indian, fit themes to narcotize the House of Commons, and for the “own correspondent’s” column of a *Guzerat Courier* or a *Punjab Times*. No stress, however, is laid upon English supineness in those Eurasian lands, even by the loudest of the clamourers. But they are not slow to blame India, which might have taken a more patriotic part in the present struggle, and might easily have excluded Russian influence from Persia and the contiguous regions.

Having made by study and observation some acquaintance with those countries, and being convinced that the subject now so neglected will again become momentous, I shall be tempted to devote a second letter to the present state of Persia, and suggest a remedy for the little disorder now afflicting her.

Your obedient servant,
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