

two hundred different languages, and a hundred different religions. As we have seen (p. 386), India has been under alien rule from time immemorial. To the mass of the natives, the rule of Britain is strange only in its orderly character. The neighbour in India that Britain most dreads is Russia. The Russian Empire has spread eastward and southward, until now only the independent state of Afghanistan lies between it and the mountain passes leading into northern India. But although the Russian peril has been long in the thoughts of Englishmen in India, the relations between Britain and Russia are now so cordial that no conflict is likely, in the near future, at any rate. The railway now plays a great part in the defence of the north-western frontier, and Britain is in a position to mass troops rapidly at any threatened point.

**British rule in India.**—British rule has resulted in untold benefits to India, for it has brought law and order out of chaotic disorder and unrest. Native princes still rule Indian states, but Britain controls their foreign affairs and their armies, and the British sovereign is universally recognized as the supreme ruler. Everywhere Britain guarantees liberty of opinion; in this respect the natives of India are as free as the British themselves—a condition hardly found in any other oriental country. "Firmly relying ourselves on the truth of Christianity," said Queen Victoria in assuming the direct government of India in 1858, "and acknowledging with gratitude the solace of religion, we disclaim alike the right and the desire to impose our convictions on any of our subjects." To this policy Britain has been true, even at risk to herself; for this liberty has sometimes been used to promote sedition. There is a new movement of ideas in this stagnant East, and it is possible that, by encouraging education and independent thought and action, Britain is forging a weapon which may endanger her own rule in the end. No state has hitherto succeeded permanently in the task of governing great dependencies. But, for the present, Britain's supremacy is secure, and it has brought increased happiness and liberty to those she governs.