

The Central Figure of the War.

THE Quarterly Review, in a suggestive survey of the war in the far East, points out how, before the battle of Liao-Yang the Japanese had taken everything into consideration except one decisive factor, the rapidity with which the Siberian railway had been made an efficient channel of supply for the Russian army. The writer says that Prince Khilkoff, Russian minister of ways and communications is, in a measure, the central figure of the war.

It has been almost solely due to his American training and abundant personal energy that Russia has been hitherto spared one of those overwhelming disasters that occur but once or twice in a century of war. When the campaign opened the condition of the railway was deplorable from a strategic standpoint. It was broken at Lake Baikal into two sections. Eastward of the lake rolling stock was deficient, while shops and repairing machinery were inadequate, and sidings wanting for the heavy traffic of the line. It was also certain that with the thaw Lake Baikal would be closed to traffic for three weeks. Prince Khilkoff journeyed to Irkutsk, and at once displayed his remarkable powers as *deus ex machina*. He hurried forward the completion of the line around the southern end of the lake, and directly the surface was hard set, laid down rails across the ice and transported to the east bank large numbers of locomotives, trucks and wagons. A sledge service was improvised from local resources, and throughout

the spring a continuous flow of troops, stores and supplies was maintained. Not content with this, he collected thousands of men and women along the whole length of the railway, and set to work to improve the facilities for troop transport by doubling the line in certain sections, by the construction of sidings, the improvement of stations, and the collection of supplies of fuel and water. This great national effort proved the salvation of the Russian army of Manchuria. In six months, Prince Khilkoff had practically doubled the output of the line: while upon the sections west of Irkutsk it was found possible to raise the number of trains to a maximum of eighteen.

The writer points the moral for the rest of the world, referring to England's imperial defense in particular:

In ten months no less than 250,000 men have been transported from western Russia to Manchuria over a single line of railway, and across a distance of from 5,000 to 6,000 miles. This railway has, moreover, proved capable hitherto of maintaining the military efficiency of a total Russian force of 400,000 men east of Lake Baikal, as well as providing for the wants of the civil population throughout the districts traversed by the line, and of carrying construction materials for the extension and improvement of the line itself.

The Quarterly Review writer believes that it behooves England to watch her Indian frontier.