

force which is to be brought from home, according to the Kitchener scheme, is to undertake operations against Russia, or is to meet the Russians, cannot be conjectured, unless it be first assumed that the Russians have conquered the Afghans, and have crossed the Hindu Kush, or first seized Herat, and then advanced by gradual stages from that city.

The ideal defence of India is a desert belt. The next best is that which actually exists—a most difficult country, desert so far as regular operations are concerned, but inhabited by a fierce and almost unconquerable people. The home Government have not been strong enough to resist outright Lord Kitchener's proposals, backed as these were to some extent by his opponents of the Viceroy's Council. It has, however, been admitted by the defenders of the Government at home that the Russians in any hypothetical future advance towards India from Herat will have to be accompanied by their railway. Sir Thomas Holdich has shown that the direct routes are impracticable. From Herat to Kabul there is no direct road, and the mountain tracks are not passable by a regular army. It is necessary to bring the Russian railway or to march from Herat far to the south-east, and then northwards again to Kabul. The distance is great, and, as Sir Thomas Holdich says, even this roundabout but better route crosses "wide spaces, sandy and waterless," and is "flanked throughout by the fiercest and most fanatical tribes of the Afghan community." Those who remember our own last Afghan War will be aware of the fabulous number of camels which were killed in marching a comparatively small army along the good roads of Afghanistan for distances far shorter than those which would face the invader who came by way of Europe.

The new suggested line of Russian advance by way of the Balkh Province must lead to one of three passes, generally described by the name of one of them as "the Bamian Pass." The late Amir made with difficulty a road at this point across the Hindu Kush which allowed some guns of his to pass; but Sir Thomas Holdich does not believe in the practicability of