

at the borders of northwestern Afghanistan during the last six months. Upon representation of the English Government, Russia agreed to a joint commission of Russian and English engineers, to arrange for a line to be officially recognized as the border of Afghanistan and Persia. The Russian military leaders, with their characteristic duplicity and diplomacy have sought to seize upon certain strategical points, viz., Pendljeh and Herat, and have these included in their proposed territorial line. Afghanistan is a natural barrier sufficient to keep back Russia. It is a mountainous country, and peopled by the warlike, cruel and bloodthirsty Pathan, who have hitherto successfully resisted the force of England to reduce them to subjection. The Afghan War of 1878 was undertaken at the instance of Lord Beaconsfield's Government to create a scientific frontier betwixt Russia and India. The massacre at Cabul of Sir Louis Caragnaria and the whole of the British Embassy, proved a second time the insurmountable difficulty, without an expensive standing army, of reducing the Afghan. The internecine quarrels of the claimants to the throne keep the various tribes in constant bitterness and turmoil, but they unite to drive away the invader, whether Persian, Bokharian or English. The policy advocated by Sir George Laurence forty-five years ago, was revived by Mr. Gladstone's Ministry, who changed with this object the Viceroy Lord Lytton for Lord Ripon.

The first was appointed to carry into effect the Imperial ideas so prominently portrayed by Lord Beaconsfield in one of his novels, which ended so disastrously by the massacre at Cabul. Lord Ripon superseded Lord Lytton to initiate a policy of friendship based upon Imperial support and succor to the recognized ruler whom the Afghans themselves should choose to occupy the throne at Cabul. Abdurhaman Khan, who was a refugee under Russian protection, being the recognized claimant, was invested by a majority of the military tribal leaders with regal power.

To-day England, by the treaty engagements made with Abdurhaman, is bound to help the Afghans in the protection of their frontier from the Russian aggression now threatened, if not actually invaded. In face of these facts and of past history, England must put a stop to Russian aggression Indiawards. Herat and Pendljeh, being the two extreme points and cities, and fortified as strategical centres belonging to Afghanistan, at all cost must be kept intact, and in the hands of Afghan rulers. Once in Russian possession, the highway to India would be insecure, and the passes Bolan, Koorum, Shuturgadun and Khyber, at an enormous outlay in money, would have to be fortified, and a large army told off to occupy them. The prospective danger of such a contingency as the possession of these two "points d'appui," by Russian troops cannot be gauged. So the time has arrived when the "Bear" and the "Lion" must settle the difficulty. If the Afghans keep true to their English engagements, and are still possessed of their wild patriotism, Russia will have to deal with a race as warlike and brave—as bloodthirsty as the Circassian.

But if war does really break out, Russia will have a rather extended border to defend. The Baltic and the Black Sea will again become the scenes of naval combats; the whole of the Russian commercial navy would be swept from the sea, besides having all her seaports blockaded; then she has only an outlet by the borders of Prussia and Austria, and these whilom friends will add little if any to aid Russia in her career of conquest and aggression. The fight would include European interests, since Constantinople, with the rapidly decaying Turkish Empire would be a cause of contention, the extent of which cannot at present be estimated.

Any aid Russia may get from France will only be of a sympathetic character, which need not be reckoned at much, because German sympathies are neither French nor Russian, therefore

completely check any desire on the part of French diplomats in that direction.

There is one almost insurmountable difficulty with which Russia has to grapple, viz., the raising the necessary funds. In what market can she float her loans? She is already so heavily weighted and handicapped by the present social and political internecine revolt of Nihilism, that the question of loaning money upon Russian securities is on a par with the South American Republics. If there is any drawing back at all it will be Russia, and more on account of this last difficulty. England will not withdraw, in fact, cannot, and with such a far-seeing diplomatist, so lately from the scene of aggravating Russian diplomacy at the Embassy of the Turkish Government, Lord Dufferin, as Viceroy of India, who, with characteristic firmness and foresight, will brook no supineness or pusillanimity in his dealings with the various interests now at stake in the northwest of India, lively times are likely now to ensue: it is a very important manifestation when Joseph Chamberlain and Sir Charles Dilke, the Radical members of the Cabinet, speak for war. Gladstone, much as he hates war and the spilling of a nation's blood, will have to steer the ship even if it comes to that, which seems a most cruel fate, at the close of a career which has been characterized by the disposition to leave international difficulties to the arbitrament of an International Tribunal, and avoid the recourse of war with all its concomitants, evils and disastrous ruin and sufferings. Let us hope wise counsels will prevail with the Russian statesmen.

VERAX.

THE MODERN SHAKESPEARE.

SOME of our readers have perhaps already heard this title applied to the subject of this article. It seems to convey the idea of a sphere much too elevated for the author of perhaps her best work, "Adam Bede." She was a woman possessed of unusually high intellect, combined with womanly feelings and sympathy. Under her assumed name of "George Eliot," many laughable conjectures as to the real person had been made. Mrs. Carlyle thought it must have been a man with womanly instincts, but Dickens declared if it was not a woman no man since the world began had such powers of vision in the field of thought in which George Eliot roamed.

Mrs. Cross was the daughter of a carpenter, who afterwards became a successful land agent. Her father used to call her "his cute little wench." She was wonderfully fond of Scott's novels at eight years of age, and exhibited great fondness for an only and younger brother. As they grew up she became a consistent member of the Church of England. After her brother's marriage she was thrown into society which had the effect in a short time of preventing her attendance at religious services, which condition of mind gradually developed into the view that man's highest aim is to aid his fellow-man—that sympathy needs no selfish reward of heaven or a coward's respite from punishment. Fellow-feeling was co-ordinate with her existence, and unfortunately it became the sole motive of her powerful intellect—lacking, apparently, in the element which extends human thought and faith into the region of an infinite and eternal consanguinity. If the advancement of man's happiness is to be our chief aim, then man must be the chief factor in this illimitable universe—a mediæval notion for which the Roman Church was scourged by more than one philosopher. The Romish hierarchy only subjected him to the power of an Infinite Being—the Bible and Science point to something further—there is to be a "new heaven and a new earth." The geological record points to a series of life epochs of gradually increasing intellectual power, commencing apparently with an age of Plant life, and reaching the present intellectual status after the