

A SCIENTIFIC

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JOHN DACOSTA

PRESENTED BY

Dr. Dadaabhai Naoroji.

A SCIENTIFIC FRONTIER.

A SCIENTIFIC FRONTIER;
OR,
THE DANGER OF
A RUSSIAN INVASION OF INDIA.

BY
JOHN DACOSTA.

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P R E F A C E

THE apprehension of a Russian invasion of India through her north-west frontier has long been a source of anxiety to the British Government, and that feeling has been growing in intensity as the conquests of the Czar pushed the borders of the Russian Empire nearer and nearer to those of our neighbours, the Afghans. Under these circumstances our policy towards Afghanistan has been prompted chiefly by the consideration as to what line of action would best protect us from the apprehended danger.

When the annexation of the Punjab carried our frontier to the foot of the mountains which form the eastern boundary of Afghanistan, Lord Dalhousie, referring to the prevailing fear of an eventual attack from Russia, declared in a Minute, dated the 30th April 1855 :—“The treaty gives to the Government of India on its western frontier as complete security

against a foreign and distant enemy as it is possible for us in the nature of things to encompass."

This sense of security was inspired by the barren and difficult nature of the country which an army, entering Afghanistan from the north, would have to traverse before it reached India; and by the character of the Afghan tribes, a knowledge of which we had acquired during our invasion in 1838-42.

In 1867 certain opinions found expression in military circles to the effect that our means of successfully encountering a Russian advance would be greatly improved if we held advanced posts in Afghanistan, whence we could meet our northern foe at a distance from the Indian frontier. These opinions, however, as soon as they were promulgated, were pronounced by high authorities to be fundamentally wrong; but the scheme had meanwhile found favour with members of the Cabinet, and has ever since been the subject of much discussion and of controversy between the political parties in Parliament.

It is proposed in the following pages to review, in the light of the events of the last fifty years, the main arguments adduced on each side.



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