

THE PAMIR FEATURE OF THE EASTERN QUESTION.

On the 11th inst. official dispatches were received in London from Calcutta, stating that there had been fighting between British forces and the tribesmen in the neighborhood of Gilgit, near the Pamir frontier. The locality where the hostilities occurred is also close to the boundary line lately claimed by Russia. The tribesmen with whom the British troops are face to face in arms are stated to be under Russian protection.

We have made occasional comment upon the Russian movements, and held that they were a direct menace to British India, to the border of which the Pamir region is closely contiguous. The *New York World* of the 12th inst. contains an interesting and elaborate statement of the latest developments, including some details of the fighting, concerning which there were only bare allusions in the regular dispatches.

According to the *World* there is at Gilgit a British agency, which is garrisoned by Kashmiris, Indian Goorkhas and a battery of artillery. The tribesmen of Hunza and Nagar, two towns on the River Indus, almost opposite to each other, have for some time been threatening the Chalt fort, held by a detachment of Kashmiris. This caused Col. Durand, the British agent at Gilgit, to make an advance upon the Chalt fort for the purpose of relieving the garrison. This advance was made early during the present month, for on November 29th Colonel Durand wired the Commander-in-Chief that he should move upon the enemy on December 2nd unless he was previously attacked by the tribesmen. He also telegraphed that he feared that a serious conflict was inevitable.

Later information announced that Fort Chalt was actually captured on December 2nd and that seven sepoy were killed and twenty-six wounded. We here present an extract exhibiting some unusually interesting features of the fighting:

"Colonel Durand, Captain Aylmer and Lieutenant Babcock were seriously wounded. Several other officers, including Lieutenant Gorton and others, were slightly wounded. Captain Aylmer and Lieutenants Boisragon and Babcock displayed extraordinary gallantry. Captain Aylmer led a storming party carrying a gun-cotton petard, and in the face of a shower of bullets he dashed up to the iron-bound gate of the fort, affixed the petard to it, lit the fuse, retreated a short distance and then had the pleasure of hearing a deafening report. The petard had blown the gate to pieces. Captain Aylmer and Lieutenants Boisragon and Babcock, followed by a handful of Sepoys, then made a dash into the fort, and, after some desperate fighting captured a field gun which had been used effectively against the attacking party."

The British officers and Sepoy sol-

diers also succeeded in capturing nine prisoners. The remainder of the tribesmen fled, leaving a number of dead in the interior of the fort as well as a good many on the outside.

The arrival of the news of the conflict having taken place on the Pamir frontier caused much excitement in the London clubs. Many old Indian officers regarded it as the most serious news that had come from India for a long time. Young officers were greatly elated and expressed the hope that the long anticipated war with Russia was about to begin. It is claimed that one officer of high rank, recently returned from India, said "there could be no doubt that affairs on the frontier of Pamir district had reached a most delicate and dangerous stage. The claims made by Russia," he said, "must be greatly modified before even a basis for negotiations can be established between the three nations concerned—Russia, China and Great Britain."

The importance of this "affair of outposts" grows out of the fact of its being recognized as "an open move among many secret ones in the great game that is being played between Russia, England and China, with Eastern supremacy at stake."

In order to fully understand the nature of the conflict described above, it is necessary to be familiar with circumstances preceding it. They are revived by the *World* in connection with the account given by that journal of the capture of Fort Chalt. The notorious character of the intrigues of Russia in the Pamir region was so pronounced some time back that Col. Durand, whose forces have just had the encounter with the tribesmen near Gilgit, was summoned to Simla for a conference with the Viceroy of India. This conference took place in October, and as a result Durand received orders, based upon probable events, which authorized him to extend the military road from Gilgit to Chalt. This work was begun as soon as the Colonel returned to his command. It is considered possible by military men that the present hostilities originated in some chance encounter between the tribesmen and the forces which were at work building the road. Reinforcements have been pushed forward to Gilgit ever since the Viceroy became convinced, in his conference with Durand, that an outbreak could not long be averted. Their advance, however, has been hampered by the prevalence of snow-storms of unusual severity.

The commencement of the difficulty was in what will perhaps be remembered as the Younghusband incident, which is thus described:

"Late last summer a party of Russians, numbering eight officers, sixty horsemen and forty infantry soldiers, made an exploring expedition towards Afghan Chitral and the Chinese boundaries, which all approach each other on the Pamir. Capt. Younghusband, a British officer, and probably a British agent, was then on a journey to Chinese Turkestan, and hearing of the presence of the Russian detachment in question he started out to meet it. At Bozal Gumbaz he met a Russian advance post and sent word of its presence to Gilgit, the nearest British fort. The Russian party met by Capt. Younghusband consisted of ten Cossack infantry soldiers in charge of supplies. Five Russian officers, a surveyor and an escort of thirty mounted Cossacks, he learned, had gone forward in the direction of Chitral. This last party soon after returned to Bozal Gumbaz and treated Capt. Younghusband very well. The officer in command, however, informed the British officer that Russia claimed the whole country up to the Khore Bahat Pass. This party, under Col. Yanoff, then went on to join a Russian advance party of sixty men and officers who were on the Great Pamir."

"On the following day a number of Russian horsemen rode up to Captain Younghusband's camp, surrounded his tent, and their commander, Colonel Yanoff, informed him that orders had been received that morning from the Russian Governor General that Captain Younghusband and another British officer with him, Lieutenant Davison, were to be deported to Chinese territory."

"Colonel Yanoff, however, informed Captain Younghusband that if he would undertake to proceed thither without re-entering 'the newly-annexed territory' by certain passes which he named, the captain would be permitted to go alone, otherwise he would be escorted by a detachment of Cossacks. Under protest, Captain Younghusband agreed to do as suggested and retired to Taghdumbash Pamir, where he took precautions to see that the Russians did not move forward on Hunza or send arms to the Kanjushis without his being aware of it. It would appear, however, that arms have reached Hunza, for it is from that locality that the present trouble commenced."

"When Captain Younghusband started for Bozal Gumbaz he sent Lieutenant Davison, who is said to have been traveling in Eastern Turkestan during his leave of absence, to the Alichur Pamir to report to him the state of affairs there. At the Alichur Pass Lieutenant Davison was found by Colonel Yanoff and his Cossacks, and in spite of the protests of Chang, the chief Chinese official there, the lieutenant was taken prisoner by the Russians, carried to Osh and thence to Marghlian. At the latter place he was liberated at the request of Mr. Elliott, secretary of the British embassy at St. Petersburg, who happened to be traveling with the Russian Governor General."

"Lieut. Davison eventually reached the Taghdumbash Pass, where he rejoined Captain Younghusband. They both reached Gilgit on October 14th and reported the whole affair to Col. Durand."

The latter had in the meantime been active and vigilant. He despatched two officers and ten men each to communicate with the Afghans for the purpose of inducing the latter to block the passes into Chitral. Both of these expeditions, however, failed to accomplish the object of their missions.

We have presented the foregoing details of an important international difficulty with considerable fulness, not