

Chastening of Herbert Spencer 219

Whether or not the Russians, by attacking India, would ever bring upon the world the most appalling calamity which could befall it as an outgrowth of present international jealousies, we may not know. That reasonable precaution should be taken even against this improbable atrocity, no responsible officer would doubt. But there has been wide difference of view among enlightened English statesmen—not all of them stay-at-homes either—as to the wisdom of constantly advancing and lengthening a frontier whose character is now frankly military. It has been strongly argued that strategical advantage lay in the way of leaving upon an enemy the burden of approaching over long lines which are among the most difficult known in the world. Even if the natives be more or less friendly to an advancing European army, yet the natural obstacles remain to wear away the force of the intended blow. “Let us meet such an onset,” say the advocates of this policy, “on a shorter front, drawn within countries which are self-supporting, and near to the great rich plains which are the only regions worthy, in themselves, of permanent occupation. Let us at least await the attempted seizure of the unprofitable border-lands by our northern rival; let us await some clearer evidence of Russia’s intent to dethrone us, before spending the treasure of our subject-races, their bodies, and some precious lives of our own people in the conquest of barren mountains.

“If the attack is being prepared, it cannot be done in a day or a week or a month; the sudden foray of the mountain wolves against the defenceless lamb