

Some delay occurred in getting a reply from the Russian Government, but on April 8, 1903, the Russian Ambassador informed Lord Lansdowne* that he could "assure him officially that there was no convention about Tibet, either with Tibet itself, or with China, or with anyone else; nor had the Russian Government any agents in that country, or any intention of sending any agents or missions there. But, although the Russian Government had no designs whatever about Tibet, they could not remain indifferent to any serious disturbance of the *status quo* in that country. Such a disturbance might render it necessary for them to safeguard their interests in Asia; not that even in that case they would desire to interfere in the affairs of Tibet, as their policy 'ne viserait le Tibet en aucun cas,' but they might be obliged to take measures elsewhere. They regarded Tibet as forming part of the Chinese Empire, in the integrity of which they took an interest."

Count Benckendorff went on to say that he hoped that there was no question of any action on our part in regard to Tibet which might have the effect of raising questions of this kind, and Lord Lansdowne told him that we had no idea of annexing the country, but he was well aware that it immediately adjoined our frontier, that we had treaties with the Tibetans, and a right to trade facilities. If these were denied us, and if the Tibetans did not fulfil their treaty obligations, it would be absolutely necessary that we should insist upon our rights. In cases of this kind, where an uncivilized country adjoined the possessions of a civilized Power, it was inevitable that the latter should exercise a certain amount of local predominance. Such a predominance belonged to us in Tibet. But it did not follow from this that we had any designs upon the independence of the country.

With these very definite assurances from Russia, it might well be asked why we should still have desired to take pronounced measures in Tibet. Anxiety in regard to Russian action in Tibet was the main reason why the Government of India sought to take action in Tibet.

* Blue-book, p. 187.