

## The Trials

CYNTHIA GUNN awoke abruptly. She raised her head and listened . . . while within her a disturbing dream sank and became blurred . . . and deep countryside silence filled her bedroom. Her pink and white cheeks were imprinted with striped patterns from the candlewick bedspread which she always forgot to remove, because she liked the companionship of its weight. But the innocent colouring of her complexion (as well as the innocence of her expression) didn't blend with the first hints of greyness in her hair, which was rather coarse and crinkly, more akin to upholstery stuffing bursting from a chair than hair growing from a head—at least that was its usual appearance, until yesterday, when she had had it permed, especially for tomorrow.

"Move over, chaps. Leave some room for mother", she addressed the dog and two cats who shared her bed. Violet, an elderly Pekinese who snored, settled herself into the small of Cynthia's large back while Digby, a Siamese cat, lay across her legs, clamping them down. Cynthia, gazing round at all the fur which surrounded her, noticed how the animals appeared to grow in size and weight during the night, almost metamorphosing into different creatures. She lay down, stretched to her full six-feet-two-inches (when her cream-coloured feet stuck out of the end of the bed) and endeavoured to rebury herself in the safety of sleep. But the sunken dream rose again: in it she was being chased by a dog; she was being hypnotised by it. She pressed her face into the pillow, squashing the dream. Obviously, she counselled herself, she was just nervous about tomorrow, even though it was her favourite day of the year.

At that moment, she felt the vibration of sheep's hooves running across the field outside her bungalow. The stampeding feet were followed by a low growl. She sat up, looking, with her tightly permed hair and buff viyella nightgown, not unlike a startled sheep herself.

"What stupid creatures sheep are. It's only Girly in her kennel." Girly was the collie she had saved up for and finally bought, fully-trained, for sheep-dog trialling. Tomorrow they were going to compete in the County Championship which last year, to her amazement, she had won. The triumph of her success had lasted all through the year.

Next door, Jones, her parrot, whistled a few bars of *Strangers in the Night*. She tapped on the wall.

"It's still the middle of the night, laddie", she informed him kindly. Jones became silent.

At six a.m. the sharp morning light squeezed itself

between her closed eye-lids. Digby and Humphrey, who watched over her like male nurses, tip-toed over the hills and valleys of her body, kneading her with their thumb-tip-sized paws. Through the narrow slit in her window came the sound of cat calls—gurgling, minor-keyed noises which were strong, almost scented, and disturbing. As though blindfold, her arm delved under the dusty bed for one of her size nine shoes, which she flung against the wall.

"Shut up, Please!" Neutered Digby and Humphrey (his uncle) sat up and looked at Cynthia, who saw herself reflected twice in the intense blue of Digby's unblinking oriental eyes. She put her hand out to stroke him, but something about his expression made her withdraw.

It was time to get up. Cynthia washed bits of herself in a small hand-basin which was just large enough for her hands and a guest-size piece of soap. She cleaned her teeth; she had a lot of teeth and so had her younger brother Ginger. That so many teeth should have been distributed between only two people seemed over-generous. Now, she didn't see Ginger, or many other people. People were so difficult to get on with . . . except of course for her sheep-dog-trialling friends. Animals were easier, she thought. And plants. Cynthia Gunn worked in a market-garden.

SHE WENT to her wardrobe, part of which was occupied by cricket bats left over from her Leeds University days when she'd attempted to get a degree in chemistry. Several bats clattered to the floor, startling Cynthia who always took time to wake up properly. Sleep (the only place where she felt completely safe) acted upon her like a drug, pulling her down into its depths from which, in the morning, she had to clamber painfully out into the even more painful reality of the day. She put on a garment which was made of wool from her own small flock of Jacob sheep. Despite the smallness of the flock, the garment was very long, so it was difficult to tell whether it was a jumper which had slunk downwards or a dress which had shrunk upwards. Like most of the clothes she wore, it smelled very faintly of biscuits—Digestive. She then put on a pair of trousers which she had converted from a party skirt her mother had helped her to make, before she had left home to go to university.

"You probably won't need it for parties, dear", Mrs

Gunn had said, finding it difficult to imagine her daughter being invited to parties. "Of course I will", Cynthia had replied. But she had quickly apologised, while her mother, crouching far below her, had struggled with the two-and-three-quarter yards of sale material, printed with large leaves from different deciduous trees. Mrs Gunn, who had felt her colossal daughter towering above her (more like a building than a daughter), could have hit her, her height made her so angry. Nothing fitted! And she had tugged at an elm leaf. "What a lump you are", she had said, from the side of her mouth which wasn't occupied by pins. But the sentence had still been audible. Cynthia, perhaps accustomed to Mrs Gunn's bark being worse, apparently, than her bite, had looked down into her mother's steel-grey hair and thought how strong she was.

Cynthia combed her hair; at least she tried to, but the comb couldn't cope with the dense undergrowth of tightly permed curls which looked and felt as though they'd been screwed into her head, giving her a flushed, ferocious expression. She glanced shyly in the mirror: the overgrown grey-haired schoolgirl who looked back didn't appear to own or be comfortable inside her body.

"You look rather like a lady farmer", she chortled to herself; but it was almost as if she regretted laughing, the way her laughter creaked out.

"Come on, boys. And you, Violet dear. It's breakfast time and Girly and I must soon be off." Violet, who was overweight, prepared herself for the drop from the bed to the floor, the fear of the eighteen-inch precipice almost overwhelming her desire for food. Cynthia removed an assortment of fur from the sheets, oblivious to what the Cheltenham branch of the Sunlight laundry might think when her mixed-fur sheets arrived to be washed.

From the front room came the sound of barking. Cynthia looked round, a mixture of fear and anger in her eyes: surely Girly hadn't escaped from her kennel? She went into the front room whose only occupant was Jones. Jones was an experienced mimic. Feeling both relieved and ridiculous, she raised the cover from his cage.

"'ello, 'ello!" Jones said in a provocative old man's voice (inherited from his previous owner), while eyeing Cynthia with his grey, knowing eyes.

"'ello, my darlin'", she mimicked affectionately, her wide knees cracking like firewood as she bent to look at him.

She then prepared the boys' breakfast. They always had raw meat for a treat on Saturdays. While she cut it up they moved to and fro between her legs, weaving an invisible web in which her two solid feet were implanted.

"Oh you are a couple!" she said. The cats bit voluptuously into the bright red meat, their eyes closed, their tails flat on the ground. Violet, who suffered from chestiness, watched, breathing heavily, her *retroussé* nose damp and her Bette Davis eyes watery and emotional. Then, miraculously defying gravity, she jumped on to Cynthia's lap and ate her Good Boy Choc Drops.

Cynthia kissed Violet's moustached face, smelling her milk-chocolate breath. In response, Violet hiccuped.

"Pardon!" Cynthia Gunn liked good manners. Violet gazed back, her expression replete and forlorn.

Cynthia peeled Jones's grapes and ate the skins; they were good roughage, she'd informed him, but the fruitarian gourmet ignored the information and just perched upside down.

From the garden, small whimpering noises came from Girly's kennel.

"Wait! Your turn will come", Cynthia called out. After Digby and Humphrey had washed each other, they watched Jones, from a distance—fur and feathers separated. She then prepared herself some sandwiches, on her lap, using sardines, which she boned. With one large hand she pressed the bread down and with the other she absent-mindedly swung the sardines' backbones between her fingers. She enjoyed these community meals with the animals. They made *her* feel motherly, and her bungalow feel homely—or how she imagined a home would feel.

"Well, that's that, fellows. Now it's Girly's turn." Cynthia fetched a bowl of dog biscuits. She ate one; she'd always liked them and wondered why people didn't serve them with drinks. "DARLING" was dribbled in blue glaze on the dog bowl, because "Darling" was what she had originally called Girly. Cynthia had always longed to call someone, anyone, "Darling". And no one, especially her parents who were against displays of extravagant emotion, had called her this. The closest she had got was being called "Luv" in Leeds. "Darling" had been rejected by the Sheep Dog Trial Authorities. "What is the dog, anyway?" they had asked her on the telephone, "A dog or a bitch?" "It's a girly dog", she had replied, strenuously avoiding the word bitch. What she had thought might be laughter had filled the earpiece of her telephone, so she had joined in, and called the dog Girly.

CYNTHIA went into the garden. Peering through the gap between the door and the floor of the kennel was Girly's long shining nose, and above it her watchful eyes. One was blue and one was brown, which was why Cynthia had bought her. At times, though, as she looked at each eye individually, this gave her a curiously uncomfortable feeling, especially when Girly was in her kennel, its dark creosoted walls resembling a hood on a bird of prey. As soon as Girly heard Cynthia, she leapt up inside the kennel which sounded as if it would burst apart with her restrained energy and enthusiasm.

"Down girl!" commanded Cynthia, in the tone she had been taught by Girly's original owner. Girly sank obediently to the ground. Cynthia rewarded her submission with dog biscuits, while stroking her smooth warm head judiciously. She felt in charge—as her mother must have felt when instilling discipline into her children, rewarding only when rewards were due. She

had learnt a lot from her mother, she thought—even though the Gunns had never allowed animals into their house, considering them dirty and risky. Marvellous old mother, thought Cynthia; her thoughts, tenderised by time and the need to love, circumnavigating the rock-like Mrs Gunn.

It was time to leave for the trials. In case some of the lads came back with her after the show (as they had last year) she did a little tidying (as she had not done last year). She blew the surface dust from some of the more prominent objects and adjusted her birth certificate on the mantelpiece. Since its edges had started to disintegrate, she had put it into a frame, the sight of it apparently confirming, to her, that she had in fact been born.

She closed the door of Jones's cage, through the bars of which he looked at her, making her feel she was being observed by a solicitor. She popped Violet into a sleeveless reversible cardigan which had a pocket. For what? Then she picked up Humphrey and stroked him, wiping the purr from his body as she stroked—until she saw Digby watching. Eight eyes from four corners of the room observed her, the animals' presence suddenly making the room feel smaller and fuller, and Cynthia feel uneasy.

"Cheerio, chaps, see you later", she called out brightly, as half-guiltily she locked the front door. I wish, she said to herself, I could leave a note for the animals to say I've gone to the trials but *will* be back later.

She opened the door of her van, which had a metal grid to separate her from the animal passenger, similar to that in a police van.

"Car!" she commanded and Girly, her tail between her legs, leapt like a guilty prisoner from her kennel to the car.

The drive to the trial field reminded Cynthia of her time at university, "being broadened out at a considerable cost to the nation", as the Gunns senior had frequently reminded her. (The guilt of her failure to pass her second year examinations still made her feel crumpled inside, so she tried to avoid remembering it.) Although, during this time, she had longed to be visited or go home, she had seen little of her parents; they said it was for the sake of her independence, and because her visits disorganised things. However, they had arranged for her to go out walking with their friends and contemporaries the Aitchisons, and occasionally Mrs Gunn had sent her a food parcel which she had enjoyed unwrapping, undoing all the knots with her big athletic fingers, while imagining her mother taking part in a knot-contest with her. The parcel generally contained what Cynthia called a "fudge cake", the recipe for which required a large quantity of elderly biscuits and not a lot of skill in the culinary arts.

She eyed Girly through the rear mirror and smiled proudly. Girly yawned, her white teeth gleaming behind the metal bars. They were nearly there. Cynthia felt pangs of stage fright. She might not have been successful in getting a degree, but surely her parents would

have been proud about her winning the trial cup. So, no doubt, would the Aitchisons. They were between sixty and seventy years old—even then—and on every third Sunday of the month they had collected her in their car. She had always had to rush to finish her breakfast before they arrived. They always walked in a circle over the moors (Mr Aitchison had a compass), during which time Cynthia had battled with her indigestion. But it had never been chronic, and she had felt privileged, even though Mrs Aitchison, on the rare occasions when she spoke, called her husband Mr Aitchison in front of her. But Cynthia had counteracted this by using their Christian names (Maud and Arthur) privately to herself. After the walk they returned to the Aitchisons' home where they all had a bath, Cynthia last. But she hadn't minded about the tepid water—because it was in their home. After the baths, they ate a light salad supper on their laps and watched the television instead of talking.

CYNTHIA turned off the road and bounced across the trial field. She let out Girly who rushed round and round—a gale on a lead. The triallers and dogs greeted each other, laughing and barking. She peered round for her friend Percy. It was Percy who had told her, when she had asked how long it took to train a dog, "A 'ear to train each leg and if it's a bad dog another 'ear for the tail." He hadn't explained that some people can never train a dog: to her shame Cynthia was one of them. In the same way that she didn't know why she couldn't get on with people, she also knew that she was not too good with animals. Part of her feared them, which was why (despite trying) she had had to buy a trained dog, thinking that the purchase was her best route into local life. Now, though, she had almost forgotten the particularities of the purchase, and hoped that the other triallers had, too. They had not.

"ello, my old gel", said Percy and they felled blows on each other's backs, despite the difference in height.

"How's Perce?" She tried, not very successfully, to imitate the local dialect. Percy was a dapper man who wore a speckled hat, yellow leather shoes and a thick, faded gold wedding-ring which had embedded itself in his finger.

"ows the winner, then?" Claud, another trialler, asked Cynthia who, never quite certain if people were joking or not, always heralded the mere signal of a joke with hoots of merriment—for safety's sake.

As everyone waited expectantly for the arrival of the judge, the tea-urn became as dry as the triallers' throats, and was refilled over and over again. Inside a canvas-covered trailer, five amber-eyed sheep huddled, shivering in the summer sun, in their 100% virgin wool coats. Through the canvas cover they heard the sound of dogs' barks tearing at the warm silky air. The sheep were pulled reluctantly from the van and led to a pen, where they waited like school-girl hostages.

Finally, the judge arrived. He wore a flat green hat



(as green as the field) which made him appear to be sandwiched between hat and field. The trials began. Percy was the first competitor.

"Thurr goes ol' tin whistle", Claud said playfully, a hot-dog sausage disappearing into the tunnel of his mouth.

Eventually it was Cynthia Gunn's turn. She released Girly from her lead and, summoning her courage, strode, slightly stooping, to the post where she stuck her shepherd's crook into the ground. It stood, silhouetted in the shape of a giant question mark. She whistled. Girly (and surprisingly no other dog) joined her at the post. The sheep were released from their pen. She whistled again and Girly rushed off, low over the ground, like a fox, her fur brushing the short grass as she ran towards the sheep. Keeping a wide cunning distance between herself and the flock, she herded them hypnotically—a cat stalking mice. The sheep trotted forwards sedately and then stopped. Girly stopped, her cocked ears cupping every sound. She crouched, her head parallel with the ground, her mouth open, her pink, lolling tongue dripping saliva, while her mesmeric eyes drove the sheep closer and closer together until they became one ten-legged animal, pinned together by fear. Across the wide field Girly and Cynthia communicated with each other in the language she had inherited, and thought she had mastered. At the slightest whistle, the dog stopped or started, the power contained within her body released or restrained by an invisible cord. Cynthia knew that it was only her commands which held in check the instinct in the hungry, murderous dog. It was the epitome of discipline, an extension of the code which her parents had taught her and from which she hoped she would never deviate.

She was doing well. She felt the spectators' admiration behind her, warm and supporting—like a vast family. Inside closed cars, envious dogs of other breeds sat upright in the drivers' seats, resembling chauffeurs. The sheep were now approaching the pen. Cynthia felt in her element, and moved slowly towards the pen gate, ready to close it. But then, suddenly, the sheep scattered and Girly was racing towards the other side of the field, the springy turf beneath her paws.

"Girl!" Cynthia's voice boomed across the field. What was going to be applause turned into muttering.

"If a dog don't feel loike it on the day there's nothin' you can do about it", Percy told a spectator. Perspiration trickled down Cynthia Gunn's wide white forehead while she supported herself on her shepherd's crook. She called and whistled, the long and short whistles like some strange bird; the tenor-voiced sheep baaed tremulously. Supposing, she thought in a hot flush of fear, that Girly's gone off and attacked a sheep in another field?

Behind the spectators' rope Claud explained to two visitors about the fine dividing line between a dog attacking or guiding sheep.

"It's loike this. If a dog suddenly becomes a killer, no matter 'ow good 'e is, 'e 'as to be put down, as once 'e 'as a taste furr sheep, furr blood, there's no way of chan-

gin' 'im. And they become so cunnin', too. They'll saunter off, lookin' innocent enough—loike you or me goin' to the pub—go to another farmer's field, catch a sheep and then wash thoroughly before comin' 'ome."

A few minutes later, over the brow of the hill Girly's dark body crept, dark as a storm cloud. Slowly she walked towards her mistress.

The trialling came to an end. The cup was presented to Percy's nephew.

"Never moind", consoled Claud, "you'll save on the silver polish!" Cynthia tried to smile.

"See you at home then, lads, as usual, for some grub", she asked rather than stated, in her least successful attempt at the local dialect. And off she drove, Girly hot and damp in the back. Cynthia Gunn did not look at her in the driving mirror.

When she arrived home she returned Girly to her kennel. Then she opened the front door and nearly fell over the bundle of animals who rushed to greet her, tails wagging and waving.

CYNTHIA prepared a meal for the lads; she liked to give them something manly. This consisted of a khaki-coloured stew from which chicken thighs, and what appeared to be ankles and knees, protruded. (Claud had once told Percy that "our Cynth" was the only cook he knew who bought breastless chickens with three legs.) She worked quickly, chopping and cutting—and cutting out the possibility, which lurked in her mind, that they might not come, because she had failed. The stew was to be followed by a very bright, very stiff jelly which, when entered by the eater's spoon, was apt to catapult forwards, making sucking noises. Certain that she would be the winner of the cup, she had remembered (as she had not done last time) to buy the lads some beer which she considerably, but ill-advisedly, opened in readiness for their arrival.

She then hurriedly prepared herself, dabbing on scent from a bottle which her great aunt had left unopened before she had passed over. Then (many years ago), Cynthia hadn't minded about death and had dabbed the scent on freely. Now, it was nervousness which made her so generous with it.

There was a knock at the door. Percy and Claud entered.

"'ello me old lass. Good smell's comin' from the kitchen, then!" said Percy.

"And from our Cynth, too!" Claud added, in his best party manner. Cynthia tried, unsuccessfully, to suppress a rising blush. Claud went over to the birdcage. "'ello, Smith", he said to Jones who opened his ancient lid a millimetre or two, eyeing him through the slit before closing it.

"He's called Jones", Cynthia reminded him.

"You're a stickler furr formalities, Cynth." And they all laughed, drinking their flat beer while rocking to and fro on their toes.

She brought in the stew. When they had finished it looked, with the plates piled high with bones, as though a dogs' banquet had taken place. For a long time they discussed the trials; Cynthia felt ashamed and small. Not wanting to spoil the evening, she tried to combat these feelings by bringing in the cheerful jelly. But the noises it made didn't assist the party.

"Well, where's the culprit, then?" Claud asked.

"Girly's in her kennel."

"Why not bring 'er in 'ere, for a treat?"

"It's not a treat she needs, and I never bring her inside; she's a working dog."

"Oh go an. Won't 'urt furr once, will it Perce?"

"Dou-tit", Percy said doubtfully. Not wanting to be a spoil-sport, she fetched Girly. Girly, astonished by this reversal in her routine, leapt up and licked everyone frantically, until Cynthia said, "Down!" Girly slunk beneath the table and lay there, rug-like. Above her head they continued to discuss trialling.

"Course your Girly's got a strong eye to stare out the sheep. There's dogs with very strong eyes 'ho get so invalved that the trialler loses touch with them. And there's dogs with weak eyes and butterfly minds, who the cunnin' old ewes can run circles round." Cynthia gradually revived and felt proud, as though she'd been the provider of Girly's strong eye. At the same moment she felt something almost touching her. She looked down and saw Girly's head stretched out flat on her paws: the strong beams from the dog's eyes rose upwards, holding her eyes. Cynthia shifted her chair, trying to concentrate on what the men were saying. But she couldn't. No matter where she looked her gaze was dragged down to Girly's, as though she were being pulled inside the animal eyes. She felt hot; and then, strangely for a warm evening, a coldness started to spread through her. She put her hands into the sleeves of her jumper, warming and holding herself. Girly continued to gaze up, while Digby, Humphrey, Violet and Jones looked on silently. Cynthia stood up, feeling she had to do something, anything to move away from Girly's stare. She wasn't frightened, she told herself; she just wasn't accustomed to having Girly in the house and being confronted by her at such close quarters. She was still in command. But her fear continued to leak from her, while in the back of her mind the memory of last night's dream began to surface again.

"Can I 'elp?" Percy offered.

"I . . . I was going to give the dog some biscuits." She felt huge, awkward and naked in the room, in comparison with the seated men and flattened dog.

"I'll get 'em." Percy held a handful of biscuits under the table. Girly didn't move. "I think she's asleep—probably whacked out." Cynthia moved to another

chair. The black and white furred shape in the dim light under the table shifted to face her. Cynthia held her head upright, forcing herself not to look down, while her stomach contracted into a small, hard lump. *Why* can't she look elsewhere, at someone else? she thought in panic and anger. She felt sick, got up and went to the kitchen, closing the door. She leant against it, her long legs feeling wobbly. But I must go back, she thought, or what will they think? What would mother think? Her panic doubled. She tried to breathe deeply. I'll ask them to put Girly back in her kennel—say I'm just feeling a little poorly. Just as she was about to open the door she heard scratching noises on the other side of it. Violet's elderly nails were too brittle to make such sharp, persistent sounds. Cynthia dashed across the kitchen, opened the back door and went out into the night. An unseen owl hooted from the dark branches of a tree. She looked round in alarm. There was nowhere to go. Then she heard the men's voices calling.

"CYNTH? Where are you?" The voices grew louder. "Miss Gunn? You a'right?" They must have opened the front door: Girly would soon be out. Cynthia ran to the sheep-shed and closed the door. Inside, surrounded and blindfolded by the darkness (and with the dog outside), she felt frightened and then angry, hating the fear. She realised that it wasn't a new sensation; her parents had sometimes made her feel like this—and so had most people. Her anger grew until she felt like smashing the shed; but she was immobilised by the blackness. Never, she swore, did she want to feel like this again. She would get rid of Girly, and stop the ridiculous trialling of which she had never been a part. It was hateful, this distortion of a dog's instincts, and abuse of the sheep's fear.

Outside, the men's voices spoke in the dark, punctuated by sniffing sounds from Girly which grew closer.

"Girly!" Cynthia's voice, imitated by Jones, shouted in the house.

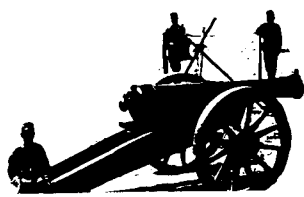
"She's in the 'ouse, then!" the men's voices exclaimed in unison.

"*No I'm not*, I'm in here, in the sheep-shed. Take Girly away. *Please*. I'm frightened of her—she needs another home—and I don't want to do any more trialling." She opened the door ajar. A few tufts of wool were attached to her permed hair. The men looked at her and she looked back at them. They felt it was the first time they had really seen her: suddenly they could feel her presence. And her frightened, yet determined, voice had more conviction in it now than it had ever had on the field.

Michael Charlton

# The Great Game Replayed

## On the Russians & Afghanistan



THE ARCHITECT of the Soviet Union's greatest political and military defeat was the late President Zia of Pakistan, whose assassination on 17 August 1988 must be seen, says Zbigniew Brzezinski, as "an event of great geostrategic importance". Writing this epitaph in *The Times* soon after Zia's death, Brzezinski—who was National Security Adviser to President Carter at the time of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan—went on to recall the alarm that had been aroused at that time by "the uncertain scope of Moscow's final objective in its sudden southern plunge. . . ."<sup>1</sup> The Russian invasion was indeed unpredicted, and inevitably therefore sudden. But *unpredictable*?

It is now a century and more since the shadow of the Russian eagle first began to darken along the line of the Indian frontier. That "sudden plunge" by the Soviet Union on Afghanistan in 1979 was another step in a journey—the long, slow, but continuous historical thrust by the Russians in Central Asia. The British are joint-custodians of the larger part of this history, and in consequence of an important institutional memory. In the last century, the enormous development of Russia towards the East jolted Britain into revising a judgment about the natural and moral laws of the Russian Empire. While it had been thought that "her slope was to the East", and it was noted that her rivers slackened as they rolled lazily through the endless steppes to stagnate in the marshes around the Caspian Sea, so, it was believed, did her means and her forces.

Once the curtain had gone up on the aggressive Russian drama in Central Asia, however, the whole position was

recast. The history of that period discloses the particular circumstances encountered by the Russians, which meant that each advance made necessary another advance, as conquests followed one upon the other. Before the 1840s there was no Russian presence south of the Caspian or the Aral Sea. In the course of the next 60 years, Imperial Russia had conquered and colonised all the great Khanates, including the Little, Middle, and Great Hordes of the Mohammedan world;<sup>2</sup> she had taken Tashkent, Bokhara, Samarkand, Khiva (at the second attempt), and finally Merv, before arriving on the northern frontier of Afghanistan by the turn of the century. "It is instructive to note", Lord Roberts wrote at the time, "how remarkably similar were the circumstances which brought about the first and second Afghan wars, that is, the presence of Russian officers in Kabul."<sup>3</sup>

IN THE LAST HALF of the last century, therefore, the phantom that loomed behind was Russia, then just beginning to rally after the exhaustion of the Crimean War in the years 1854-56, and showing perhaps her first tendency to retaliate by the increased activity of her movements and the strengthening of her position in Central Asia.

The record of this advance is not one of uninterrupted success. It includes military defeat—indeed disaster, as with General Perofski's expedition to Khiva in 1839—but once defeat or reverse was digested, and then retrieved, always the advance was resumed. It is a history which includes specific episodes concerning the conduct of the Russian Generals, like Romanofski and Kauffmann,<sup>4</sup> who appeared to carry forward with impunity the imperial design in Central Asia in opposition to the wishes of Czar Nicholas I, and in defiance of assurances about Russian intentions and ambitions which were given by Russian Ministers to the Legations and Embassies of Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, "The West's Debt of Honour", *The Times* (London), 26 August 1988.

<sup>2</sup> According to their oral history, the Kazakhs—a Turko-Mongol nomadic people, traced their descent from three brothers. The tribes of the Great, Middle, and Little Hordes occupied the eastern, central, and western parts of what is now modern Kazakhstan.

<sup>3</sup> Field-Marshal Lord Roberts of Kandahar, *Forty-One Years in India* (Macmillan, 1898). The Afghan Wars took place from 1838-42 and 1878-80.

<sup>4</sup> Constantine von Kauffmann, Governor-General of Turkestan from 1867; he died in Tashkent in 1882.