

counts from various people, some distinguished and some not, of "books that have helped me," and in this form it bids fair to last indefinitely. Nearly everybody who can read can make out a short catalogue, if not exactly of books that have helped him, of books which he thinks, or would like other people to think, have helped him.

The number of those who wish to tell the world about these helping books, too, seems to be practically unlimited, so strong and widely diffused is the desire to let other people into one's personal experience on almost any subject. It has been said that every man, and for that matter every woman, can furnish the plot of one novel constructed out of the principal events of his own life; and there is one story which even the most uneducated body who can talk freely, loves to tell, namely, the story of his own doings, what he has seen, or suffered, or accomplished, and especially the victories he has achieved in argument. There is, in fact, nothing more enjoyable in the narratives of unlettered people than their accounts of contentions they have had, in which the adversary was reduced to hopeless absurdity and shut up by a few pregnant remarks.

When one gets up among the literates, one finds a corresponding readiness to let the public into the secret of their intellectual growth. Hardly any one who has risen in the smallest degree into public notice is above the harmless vanity of telling the utterly obscure man how fame is achieved, or the foundation stones of even moderate greatness laid. The millionaire recalls his diligence as a boy in sweeping out the store on cold winter mornings, the lawyer his wonderful assiduity in copying papers and reading very early editions of law-books by the firelight, and the literary man the toil expended on his first verses, and his secret joy at seeing them in the "poet's corner" of the country newspaper. There is nothing sweeter than the reflection that one's own career is a standing encouragement to the young and friendless to be up and doing, with a heart for every fate.

There is probably, however, no more melancholy fact in human affairs than the infrequency with which any individual man's experience is of use to anybody else. If we profit by experience at all, it seems to be mainly by the experience of the human race, or of our particular nation, rather than by that of any individual friend, or relative, or preceptor. No matter how much we may respect or admire Brown or Jones, or even father or uncle, we generally take care not to follow his advice in the management of our own lives. Everybody who has had much experience as a counsellor knows well that people usually seek advice in order to get encouragement in pursuing a course on which they have already determined. In truth, it may be said that most of us are constitutionally incapable of doing well what other people think best, unless we also ourselves think it best. To follow successfully a plan traced for us by somebody else, it has generally to be a plan which

does not concern us except as another man's agent or servant, and has his satisfaction for its supreme object.

Much the same thing may be said about "the books that have helped me." All the articles which have been written about them tacitly assume that what helps me will help you, or that Brown, on learning where Jones got his mental provender, will order home a supply of the same, and live on it. Nothing can well be further from the truth. Wherever these articles do not gratify a harmless vanity, they are interesting simply as the literary experience of one more or less respectable human being, and nothing more. Every man who loves books and reads them, and makes any good use of them, reads in the line of his own tastes and temperament and pursuits. He is not, and for the most part cannot be, helped by another man's books, supposing books to be anything more than repertories of facts. All must, of course, go to the same sources of information, or, in other words, must consult the same books of reference, but every man who reads for culture, or for encouragement, or inspiration, or power, must choose his own books. Books that have helped Brown may be interesting to Jones because he loves Brown and likes to watch the working of his mind; but they will not necessarily help Jones. In fact, the time he spent on them might be time utterly wasted, unless there existed the closest similarity in pursuits and in character between the readers.

We wish most sincerely that the subject were of more importance than it is, because we fear that although the reading of books grows, the search for books that will help one does not greatly increase. By far the larger portion of the increased sale of books is due to the demand for books that will amuse or kill time. By far the greater portion of whatever love of reading exists in the world, is gratified by newspapers and periodicals. It was when books were scarce and little known that readers hesitated and sought counsel in choosing them. The general testimony of publishers is that the books which really help people are not sought after by any means in proportion to the growth of population and the spread of the reading art.

THE TRANS-CASPIAN RAILROAD.

SEVEN years ago Mr. O'Donovan made his celebrated journey to the Merv Oasis—a district up to that time practically untrodden by civilized men, and separated from the Caspian Sea by stretches of half-desert country inhabited only by robber tribes. To-day the region from the Caspian to Merv, and beyond it as far as the Oxus, is traversed by a well-built railroad, with over 600 miles of line already open for traffic, and 1,500 cars in actual use; with a large station in each oasis, and with smaller ones scattered along the route. A journey which seven years ago could not have been made by any traveller under any conditions is now regularly accomplished in twenty-eight hours. The Oxus—but yesterday a practically unknown river—is now crossed

by a twelve-span railroad bridge which is fast approaching completion. The year 1888 will see the ancient Tartar cities of Bokhara and Samarcand brought within three days' journey from the Black Sea, or within a week from St. Petersburg. American enterprise has done wonders in the way of building railroads in advance of civilization, but it has done nothing like this.

The district east of the Caspian Sea—bounded by Siberia on the north, by Persia and Afghanistan on the south, and reaching eastward as far as the somewhat vaguely defined line of the Chinese Empire—is still marked on most of our maps by the general name of Independent Tartary, though the greater part of it now belongs to Russia. It is, roughly speaking, 600 miles from north to south, and 1,200 from east to west; its area is therefore about one-quarter that of the United States. It has formed a most important neutral ground between the British and Russian possessions in Asia; for though it barely touches the northern extremity of India itself, and that at a point secure from attack, it has been the chief protection of Afghanistan from Russian invasion.

In the northwestern part of this district lies the land-locked Sea of Aral, into which the Amu or Oxus—the two names are used indiscriminately—flows from the southeast. The region to the north and east of the Oxus is comparatively fertile and not altogether uncivilized. It contains at least two cities of some importance—Bokhara and Samarcand. But western and southern Tartary is a desert—not even a region of steppes, like other parts of central and northern Asia, but a sand desert without vegetation, except in a few oases like those of Gök-Tepe and Merv in the south.

It is the custom of English writers to represent Russia's vigorous policy in this region as being due to a desire to attack India. What may be the motives which actuate Russian diplomacy at present, it is impossible to say; but there is no trace of any such premeditated plan in the early steps by which Russia was led into her present position. Making all due allowance for the partisanship of Russian reports, there is every reason to believe that she was forced to advance in this direction by the impossibility of maintaining either a peaceful or a purely defensive attitude towards the Turkomans of this region. The Turkomans would come out and plunder the Russian settlements at the north of the Caspian Sea. On the approach of regular troops they would run away. There was no way to chastise them except to follow them into their homes, where they would be forced to fight. This was what led Russia into this region. The first expeditions of this kind were in 1871 and 1872; they were apparently not ill-managed, but the forces were too small to accomplish the object in view. A larger expedition, in 1877, was discreditably beaten. The Russian Government was now aroused to the fact that it had an enemy of some power to contend with, and, as soon as the Turkish war was over, Gen. Skobelev was sent to bring the matter to a conclusion. Against such an officer the Turkomans had no chance. He forced his way to the strong-

hold of Gök-Tepe, and destroyed the fighting power of the tribes of southwestern Tary by what was little short of a wholesale massacre.

It was in this campaign of 1879, and at Skobelev's demand, that the Transcaspian Railroad was first begun. He felt that he needed it in a campaign in the desert as a means of transporting supplies. But there seems to be no evidence that he regarded it as other than temporary in its purpose, or that he expected it to be continued further than the very short distance which had been necessary for the immediate objects of the campaign. At any rate nothing was done for five years, and the Russians seemed to have abandoned any idea which they might have had of a systematic eastward movement at this point. They were actually disbanding some of their auxiliary forces in this region, when the action of the Merv Turkomans, in putting themselves under the protection of Russia, roused them to new activity in this direction.

The extension of Russian authority over Merv gave rise to much controversy and some warlike talk. But, while both parties were talking, Russia was acting, and was acting in the most efficient way by extending her railroad to Merv and beyond it. Work was begun in May, 1885, under the direction of Gen. Annenkoff, one of the ablest Russian engineer officers, who was already familiar with the country, having been with Skobelev in the campaign of 1879. Operations were pushed with the utmost rapidity. The Russians are said to have pressed no less than 30,000 Turkomans into the work of railroad building; and, what is still more remarkable, these Turkomans seem to have worked efficiently. The location was easy; the only difficulty in construction was due to the looseness of the sand, and this they succeeded in consolidating by a plaster made of loam and Caspian Sea water. The track-layers were accommodated in movable cars, which furnished both kitchen and barracks, and which were pushed out into the desert as fast as the line was completed. The petroleum wells of Baku, on the Caspian, furnished a cheap and effective fuel. The road is already open for traffic for two-thirds of the distance to Samarcand. Next summer will probably witness its completion.

The line starts from the harbor of Uzun Ada, on the east shore of the Caspian, in latitude 39° 35' (the name is not marked on any of the ordinary maps). It at first runs E. S. E. for over 300 miles, passing through Gök-Tepe and Askabad, and finally reaching Dushakh, situated in long. 60°, lat. 37° 20'. Here it comes so near the Afghan frontier that it can no longer continue its southward progress, and turns a trifle north of east, to Merv, a hundred miles further. Thence it runs northeast more than 200 miles to Bokhara, crossing the Oxus at Tcharjui. Its further course to Samarcand is almost due east. For military purposes the location could hardly be improved. It is not aggressively hostile to any one; it runs parallel to the Afghan frontier; but this parallelism is really precisely what is wanted, for it will enable Russia to choose her point of attack. A branch from Dushakh towards Herat—the two places are little more

than 200 miles apart—and another up the Oxus, from Tcharjui to Tashkurghan, would each give Russia a line of attack. More than this, if the two existed side by side, she would be able so to mask her movements as to leave an enemy in doubt as to the position of her main force until the blows were actually struck.

What will be the effect of all this upon the relations of England and Russia in Asia, it is hard to say. For the moment it gives Russia a dominant influence on the Afghan frontier. But if it causes the English authorities to discard once for all the idea of checking Russia on the northern frontier of Afghanistan, it will be a gain to England in the end. In the first place, England will see that the only defence on which she can really rely, is her own defence of her own frontier in India. And, further than this, should it really come to a war between the two Powers, the one that fights with Afghanistan at its back will be weaker instead of stronger on that account. More will be lost by distance from home than would be gained by any support which the Afghans can give. If England will look these facts squarely in the face, and make up her mind to protect herself against Afghanistan, rather than Afghanistan against Russia, it will be best for all parties concerned.

THE ITALIANS AT MASSOWAH.

THE Italians were induced in 1885, probably under the influence of the tradition left by the interference of the Piedmontese in the Crimean war, to take a hand in the struggle of the British with the Sudanese, by sending 800 men to occupy Assab, on the Red Sea. For one reason or another the expedition stopped at Massowah, which may be called the port of Abyssinia, at which many of the great routes from the interior concentrate. By the time it had got fairly settled, however, the British had retreated from the Sudan, and the Italians were left to work out their own salvation in their own way. So they determined to form a colony, which should do something to counterbalance the seizure of Tunis by the French, and form a centre of Italian influence in eastern Africa. Their arrival was viewed with some suspicion by the Abyssinians, but they made, by sending presents and negotiators, strong efforts to establish good relations with the King, or Negus, as he is called, but without much success. So they went on during the year 1886 improving and fortifying Massowah, and establishing posts in the interior on the great roads, forty or fifty miles out, without any other disturbance than raids from small bands of marauders.

But early in 1887 the Negus got out of patience, and called on the Italian general in command, Gen. Gene, to evacuate these posts, and, on meeting with a refusal, despatched his head man, Ras Alula, with 6,000 men, to clear the Italians out of one of them called Saati. Ras Alula was, however, driven off after a three hours' fight, in which he lost heavily and the Italians had only four killed. He took his revenge the following day by falling with 20,000 men on a

detachment of 500 Italians which was marching to reinforce Saati. The Italian square was broken by the Abyssinian charge, very much as the British were by the Zulu charge at Isandhlana, and came near being once or twice in the Sudan, and the force was massacred to a man, after eight hours' fighting. This misfortune led to the withdrawal of most of the advanced posts, which, however, got back safely to Monkulla, a fortified suburb of Massowah.

With this warning as to the serious character of the undertaking, the Italian Government continued through the remainder of the year 1887 to send out reinforcements, until it had accumulated at Massowah and the environs a force of 25,000 men, with fifty guns, commanded by Gen. di San Marzano. An attempt of the British to mediate, through a consul who visited the Negus for the purpose, has ignominiously failed, the mediators barely escaping with their lives, and both sides are now preparing for the conflict which seems inevitable. The Italians are in hopes that Ras Alula will gather up the Abyssinian army and come down to the coast to attack them. If he does this, they expect to be able with their advantages of armament and discipline to make short work of him. But if he refuses, and hangs back, and confines himself to cutting off intercourse with the interior, and attacking outposts and convoys, and shutting up the Italians in Massowah, which an Arab proverb compares to "hell" for heat and unhealthiness, then indeed the situation will for Italy become very grave.

As yet Ras Alula has shown no disposition to accommodate the Italians by fighting on the coast. If this state of things should be prolonged, they would have to organize an expedition to reach the high plateau on which the kingdom of Abyssinia lies, through the mountain gorges by which it is on all sides surrounded. What the Abyssinian forces amount to can of course only be guessed at in a vague way. They are supposed to have about 15,000 Remington rifles which Ras Alula has taken from the Egyptians in various encounters, and to have bought as many more. Then they took 500 of the new Weteli rifles from the Italians whom they massacred at Dogali; so that if they can get ammunition, it may be said that they will have about 25,000 well-armed troops. A writer in the London *Daily News*, who accompanied the British expedition under Lord Napier to Magdala in 1868, says that if the Negus could turn out all his fighting men, he would probably muster 100,000 men. But he is not likely to do anything near this. Theodore never was able to get together more than 8,000 to oppose Lord Napier, but it is true that a great many of the local chiefs were hostile to him, and aided the invader with provisions and transport. The best calculations that can be made do not put the force which would oppose the Italian advance, day in and day out, at over 20,000 men. Any reinforcements it might receive would be peasantry armed with spear and shield only. To get to the Abyssinian plateau, which is cool, exceedingly healthy, and well watered, the Italians