

THE RUSSIANS IN MANCHURIA.

IN writing these pages I have no intention of discussing the political question concerning Manchuria. I merely think that, once an armed conflict in the East is on the verge of breaking out on account of Manchuria, it is well worth knowing what Manchuria is, why the Russian Government tries to establish its rule over this portion of the Chinese Empire, what are its real interests there apart from a mere desire of increase of territory, and, consequently, to what length of sacrifice it may be ready to go in supporting its claims. As one of the pioneers of the Russian advance in Manchuria, and as a geographer whose speciality for the last thirty years has been to deal with these portions of Asia, I am going to answer these questions.

Speaking for myself, I regard it as one of the greatest misfortunes of the Russian nation that the Caucasus, the Trans-Caspian territory and Turkestan were ever annexed to Russia, and, still more, that the Russians entered, in 1856, the basin of the Amur, and took possession of the North Manchurian coast of the Pacific Ocean. Of course, there was quite a chain of historical circumstances which brought about this result; nevertheless, I cannot but regret that this annexation took place. With respect more particularly to the annexation of the Amur, which was accomplished in 1856-1859, immediately after the Crimean War, when the attack by the British on the Russian settlements on the coast of the Sea of Okhotsk and in Kamchatka resulted in a fear lest England would take possession of the Pacific coast of Manchuria — the Russian nation would have lost nothing, and would have won a good deal, if Count Muravioff-Amurskiy had *not* taken possession of the uninhabited wildernesses on the left bank of the Amur, and up the Usuri, down to Vladivostok.

No matter which nation — England, the United States, Germany, or Japan — might have taken hold of this portion of the Pacific littoral, the great bulk of the Russian nation would have been spared the considerable sacrifices which they have made for colonizing the wildernesses of the Amur. With the extent of these sacrifices I am acquainted, as I

saw them. Further, Siberia would only have been the winner from having at her Southern border a civilized nation, instead of the semi-wild Mongols, Solons, Daur, and the like whom she has now — just as Canada is gaining immensely by having the United States for a neighbor. As to the military defence of the frontier, the Amur frontier and the Pacific ports of Russia are infinitely more difficult to protect than the frontier of Trans-Baikalia.

Statesmen of all nations will probably disagree with this “popular,” but not “national,” view of the matter. They have already pronounced that Muravioff’s annexation of the Amur and his “taking for Russia a strong footing on the Pacific” were acts of wise statesmanship and of deep political foresight. But, then, geography also has its rights; and, as a geographer, I am bound to say that the power which holds the mostly uninhabitable left bank of the Amur and the absolutely uninhabitable portion of the Pacific coast between the mouth of the Amur and the Bay of Peter the Great (Vladivostok) must be naturally and forcibly driven to find the method of connecting Vladivostok with its Trans-Baikalian possessions by means of a direct line of communication, via Manchuria; because without such a connection Vladivostok and Port Arthur are worse than worthless. And, in order to establish that connection, Russia has to establish her power over a very large territory, her possession of which will be disputed and which, even if it be annexed to Russia, belongs to a different race, and never will be truly Russian.

The first steps of the Russians in Manchuria were made in 1864; and it so happened that the writer of these lines was among those who made them. However, the initiative of these first steps came, not from the Government, but from a number of Trans-Baikalian Cossacks.

Trade, not conquest, was its origin. Immense numbers of horses are bred by the Cossacks on the plains of the southeastern corner of Trans-Baikalia, and there is no market for them. The Cossacks knew that the middle Amur would be a good market for their horses; and they had learned from the Mongols that if one should go straight to the east, across Northern Manchuria, one would easily reach the middle Amur after a journey of 500 miles; while if the journey should be made on Russian territory, down the Argun and the Amur, it would require first an extremely difficult voyage on rafts for 500 miles down the rapids of the Argun River, and next 50 miles on boats, down the Amur. They consequently asked permission of the Governor-General to go across Manchuria, and only requested to have somebody who might help them in finding a route across the Great Khingan mountains. A topogra-

pher had taken, a few years before, that same route, but he was killed by the natives. I was offered to take the lead of the small trading caravans of Cossacks; and so we went, twelve unarmed men — I was disguised as a merchant, — starting from the very point where the Trans-Manchurian Railway now crosses the Russian frontier.

We found the road, reached without difficulty the insignificant town of Merghen, and next came to Aihun (the scene of the latest battles) and to Blagovyeschensk, on the Amur, where all our horses and goods were sold at a profit. I hurried next to rejoin my commander, the Governor-General of Siberia, at the mouth of the Amur. He was delighted with the success of our adventure; and, partly under the influence of us, the younger people, he suddenly decided to send the same autumn a steamer up the great river of Manchuria, the Sungari, which had never before been navigated by a steamer, and which was quite unknown to Europeans. Colonel Tchernyaeff was placed at the head of this little expedition, to which the Russian Consul at Urga, M. Shishmareff, a doctor, M. Conradi, an astronomer, M. Usoltseff, two topographers, and myself belonged. The aim of the expedition was simply to explore the Sungari, and, if we should succeed in reaching Ghirin (or Kirin), the capital of one of the three provinces of Manchuria, to enter into direct communication with the Governor-General. We reached Ghirin, and returned home the same autumn, after having found that the great Manchurian river was navigable as far as Ghirin, situated at its head-waters.

Immense stretches of a high, cold, and marshy plateau; wide, sandy, and waterless plains on the middle Sungari, similar to those of the Eastern Gobi, and also inhabited by nomad Mongols only; great expanses of marshy lowlands on the lower Sungari, inundated during the period of the monsoon-rains; poverty and a hard struggle against an inclement nature; a thin population scattered along the rivers, in the deep valleys separated from each other by mountains thickly clothed with wood, in the Ghirin province — these are what we saw during those two journeys. Only a few fertile plains, one about Tsitsikar, on the Nonni River, and another between Merghen and Aihun, relieve the generally poor aspect of the territory. This is, in a few words, the general character of more than two-thirds of Manchuria. As to its northern portion, there are surely not so many as 1,000 hunting Tunguses and lumbermen scattered over the whole of the territory to the north of my Merghen route, *i.e.*, roughly speaking, to the north of the fifty-first degree of latitude. This first impression of the country has been fully confirmed since by recent exploration. All Manchuria is now perfectly

well known; and it appears from Dr. Pozdnéeff's estimates, which are quite correct, that while Manchuria covers 375,000 square miles, *i.e.*, very little less than France and the German Empire taken together, its population, including the recent Chinese immigration, does not exceed 7,500,000 inhabitants. And even this population is chiefly concentrated in the south, on the Lao-ho River, in the vicinity of the Gulf of Lao-tong; the population of the Mukden province being 4,250,000, while the remaining 3,250,000 are scattered over the two other immense provinces of Manchuria — Ghirin and Tsitsikar (Hei-lung-tsian).

None of us could think at that time that Russia would ever try to establish her rule over Manchuria. The immense uninhabited stretches of high plateau land in the north are absolutely unavailable for agriculture; while the fertile and cultivable portions of Manchuria are already occupied by Chinese and Manchus, among whom Russian emigrants could never take a footing. As to the excellent forests of Manchuria, or its gold, coal and lead mines, Siberia is replete with mineral wealth of all sorts, which is not exploited simply from want of enterprise and knowledge, while the forests on the Amur are but slightly inferior to those of Manchuria. The lines of geological structure going from the southwest to the northeast, Russia has already within her dominions the very same plateaus and mountains which cover Manchuria. Why, then, should Russia try to take hold of Manchuria, and thus impose upon herself new and formidable sacrifices, without gaining any notable advantage in return? However, the rapid progress of the Trans-Siberian Railway, the sudden growth of Japan, and the German, Russian, and English occupation of ports in the Gulf of Pechili have entirely changed the conditions which prevailed in 1864.

Already at that time it was evident to most of us that the seizure by Muravioff of the left bank of the Amur and the Pacific littoral, down to Vladivostok, was *not* the rich acquisition which it had been said to be at the time. Muravioff's dreams of a new Russian United States growing up on the Pacific coast, and joining hands with the United States across the Pacific, could not be realized on account of the poverty of the territory he had taken possession of; and no sooner was it taken than the eyes of the new settlers were already turned farther southward. I do not speak of the fact that the Cossacks, settled along the left bank of the upper Amur, always find out that the right bank is the best, and consequently have their meadows, and occasionally their fields, on the right, or Chinese, bank, of the great Mississippi of the East. Such encroachments are of little importance.

Nor do I speak of the gold mines on the slopes of the Great Khingan, in Northern Manchuria, which were worked a few years ago by all sorts of runaways, who founded on the Zheltuga River the little republic so charmingly described in 1897 by Mr. George Kennan. Certainly, there is gold in the Manchurian mountains which fringe the border of the high plateau — but exactly the same mountains, equally rich in gold, run on Russian territory as well, on the upper Zeya, and yield fabulous returns of gold. There is, however, something much more important than the local encroachments just mentioned; namely, the absence on the left (Russian) bank of the Amur of wide fertile plains which might some day become the seat of a wealthy and numerous agricultural population. The consequence is that even now, forty-five years after the annexation, wheat and oats for Russian settlers, for the military, and for the Zeya gold mines, have to be bought every year in Manchuria.

When the Amur was taken possession of, there was no end to the descriptions of its wealth and beauties. "The vine grows wild, climbing on the trees; the forests of the lower Amur are the most beautiful in the world; the prairies can give food and wealth to millions of settlers." And this was true. The vine grows wild; the prairies are splendid, when they are not inundated in August during the monsoon period; and the virgin forests are not bad, although very much inferior to those of British Columbia. But neither the virgin forests nor the periodically inundated prairies could become the abodes of a numerous agricultural population; while the fertile plains really suitable for agriculture appear to be very limited in extent.

In its upper course, the Amur flows in a narrow valley which is excavated to the depth of from 1,000 to 2,000 feet in a high and cold plateau, so that the bottom only of this valley and of the valleys of the tributaries is suitable for agriculture. On the other side, in the great curve which the Amur describes southward in order to join the Sungari and the Usuri, it flows through low, periodically inundated prairies, entirely unsuitable for agriculture; while in its lower course there is no land to till except what is cleared from under extremely thick forests. The only two fertile belts in the Russian Amur dominions are a plain 250 miles wide and some 250 miles long, in the east of Blagovyeschensk, and a plain of much smaller dimensions on the Suifun River, near Vladivostok. But even these two plains are separated from each other by a distance of about 600 miles, along the Usuri and the Amur, where only a chain of villages on the very banks of the two rivers can be maintained. If you ride ten or twenty miles away from the river,

you find nothing but a succession of low, marshy troughs, soaked with water, and separated from one another by low, unfertile hillocks, or impenetrable marshes on the banks of the Usuri, until you reach the stony, wood-clothed mountains.

The result is that Vladivostok has no hinterland, properly speaking. It is a port thrown out on the Pacific coast, very far from the regions where a thick Russian population can ever be settled. It is more than 600 miles from the Blagovyeschensk plains, and another 1,000 miles from the plains of Trans-Baikalia; and nothing but mere strings of villages could be kept up between the Pacific port and these two possible centres of a future population. This is what "the strong footing of Russia on the Pacific" comes to in reality.

And then came the Trans-Siberian Railway, which, it was evident, could *not* be built along the Amur. So long as it was built across the prairies of Western Siberia, similar to those of Winnipeg, and farther on across the high plains, similar to the "rolling prairie" of Calgary in Canada, there were no real difficulties in its construction, except in the number of large rivers which had to be crossed, or in the absence of stone and shingle in Western Siberia. Nay, even to the east of Lake Baikal, along the valley of the Uda and across Trans-Baikalia, there were no very serious difficulties in the way until the present terminus at Sryetensk was reached. But many years ago I already wrote that I could not understand how the railway could be continued beyond Sryetensk down to the Amur, nor how it could be built on the marshy stretch where the Amur is joined by the Sungari and the Usuri, without going into simply fabulous expenses which could never be recouped. The formidable Gazimur Mountains, through which the Shilka River has pierced a narrow gorge below Sryetensk, and the 200 miles of marshy ground inundated every year by a formidable river raising its level for twenty feet in a few days during the monsoon period — these obstacles could be overcome, but at what cost?

Of course, there exist no "impossibilities" for the modern railway engineer, if only he need not reckon what every yard of the railway will cost. But — why should this expenditure be made, when it was evident that the first 800 or 1,000 miles beyond Sryetensk and the 300 miles above Khabarovsk could *never* become the seat of a numerous population? I know well the banks of the Amur, and I fully remember even now the hardships I had to endure when I had to ride along them on horseback. Consequently, as soon as the Trans-Siberian Railway was begun, I wrote in England and in the United States that it most

probably would never be built beyond Sryetensk. To build such a costly railway, of such a length, across a region which will never be thickly inhabited, would simply have been foolish. In fact, speaking as a geographer, I must say that the only reasonable means for connecting Lake Baikal (Irkutsk) with the Pacific would be to build the railway across Mongolia, via Kiakhta, Urga, and Peking; and that the only possible way to connect Lake Baikal with Vladivostok is evidently across Manchuria — not because these are the shortest routes, but because a railway along the banks of the Amur, via Khabarovsk, would be absurd for the reasons just indicated.

As to the Trans-Manchurian railway — speaking again as a geographer only — its direction seems to be perfectly well chosen. It avoids the terrible Gazimur Range, by passing at its southern extremity; then it runs over the lower terrace of the plateau, which represents an undulating, naturally macadamized surface of so easy access that the Cossacks and myself crossed it with our two carts without any road. Next comes the crossing of the Great Khingan escarpment, which cannot be avoided, and offers no serious difficulties. The railway next reaches the fertile and populous plains of Tsitsikar; avoids the marshy lowlands of the lower Sungari; and crosses the highest of the three parallel chains which it must cross before reaching the Pacific, at a point where this mountain is pierced by the Sungari. Broadly speaking, a better direction could hardly have been chosen. This and the fact that Chinese laborers could be found in any number are the reasons why the building of this railway progressed so rapidly before the Boxer rising — far more rapidly indeed than was known to the Western press. Moreover, the railway had thousands of customers even before it was completed. In those portions of the line which were nearly ready for temporary traffic, crowds of Chinese and Manchus came to fill up the working-cars whenever a train started.

Seeing how rapidly this railway was built before the Boxer rising, it is easy to foretell that, if no new complications arise in the East, the Transcontinental Railway will be nearly ready in a couple of years. And as this railway is going to connect the naval port of Russia on the Pacific, Vladivostok, with, so to say, the mainland of Russia — its connection with the Amur region is no connection at all, as already mentioned, — it is evident that the Russian Government will not easily abandon its claims upon the control and the possession of the railway line. Even if Port Arthur were never taken by Russia, or were abandoned by her, the Russian Government would surely do its utmost to

hold, at least, this railway across Manchuria, even at the risk of being entangled in a war.

It is not generally known, but it is a fact, that even before the Boxer rising the Russian Government was already holding this railway line in a military way. Russian papers reported, indeed, that 3,600 soldiers and Cossacks were already quartered along the line when the Boxer movement began. It is thus evident that it was already the intention of the Russian Government to establish across Manchuria something similar to the line of communication which it has maintained for nearly forty or fifty years across Mongolia. I mean the caravan route and the telegraph line from Kiakhtha to Peking, via Urga. Both run over Chinese territory, but both are practically in the hands of the Russian Government. The road is a Russian road running across Chinese territory. When I mentioned this fact lately to the well-known Belgian Professor of International Law, Dr. Ernest Nys, he remarked that such communications were known in international law in the first half of the nineteenth century as "military roads." Thus, to quote but one example, Prussia kept such a road across the Rhenish provinces previously to their annexation. Something similar will probably be the outcome of the present conflict. It would be foolish, indeed, for Japan to let herself be rushed into a war for the Manchurian Railroad, as it would be foolish for Russian statesmen not to recognize that one day or another Korea will be so thickly colonized by Japanese that it will be Japanese for all practical purposes. There lies the possibility of an understanding.

And yet I cannot but repeat that the interests pursued by Russian statesmen in the East are the interests of a military state, not those of the Russian nation. If Russia should abandon all her possessions on the Pacific — with which she cannot be connected otherwise than by keeping a "military road" across a territory which will never be Russian, but is sure to be more and more colonized by Chinese — this abandonment would spare to the nation enormous sacrifices; it would avoid the possibility of war entanglements in the East; and it would only strengthen the position of Russia against any possible invasion from the East. Fully granting the possibility of a militarily reformed China rushing some day, with its millions of men, against the Aryans, in which case Russia would be the first to support the shock, it is not in the Amur region and still less in Manchuria, but in Trans-Baikalia, amidst a thoroughly Russian population, that the first stand could be made against that invasion.

P. KROPOTKIN.

BONDS OF FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS AS AMERICAN INVESTMENTS.

THE increase of wealth in the United States within the last decade has largely diminished foreign ownership of our corporate securities. A further result of this accumulation of capital is the placing of certain foreign government loans in the American market. These present to our investors a new kind of security, and novel problems. It may be useful to dwell upon two or three aspects of the question, from both the public and the private point of view.

First, there are the ordinary, the surface considerations. When the money lender scrutinizes a loan, the character of the borrower goes for much. His ability and prospects, his reputation for promptness, his moral character and business rating are important, as well as is the security which he offers. So it is with a state. If its credit is doubtful, the lender insists upon a specific security, like the lien upon Chinese customs. If its monetary standard is uncertain, the terms of payment will naturally specify the medium. If its good faith is doubted, a higher interest rate reflects that fact. But there are quite other questions than these, which both the investor and his government will do well to ask.

However, let us first try clearly to realize the distinction between a state in debt and an ordinary debtor. In the latter case there will be a definite security. In case of default this security may be taken by foreclosure or other process. No such right exists against a state, the nearest approach to it being in the rare cases where some specific form of revenue is pledged to the satisfaction of a particular loan or the interest due upon it. What the state gives as security for a loan is not a tangible asset, but its pledge of honor, of national reputation, of good faith.

There is a marked difference, also, between the remedies open to the two kinds of creditors, the one who lends to a foreign individual and the one who lends to a foreign state. The former can proceed single-handed against his debtor by judicial methods. A specific remedy is within his grasp. The latter, on the other hand, can only proceed diplomatically,