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The Vivisection of China

Elisée Reclus

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THE great events which are creating such an excitement in the West Indies over the last shreds of the ancient colonial empire of Spain will undoubtedly have consequences of extreme importance, and become, in the fullest sense of the term, a part of history. But, however intense their interest, and however marked the change which they are certain to occasion in the equilibrium of the world, they remain altogether inferior in real significance to the revolutions which are taking place in the Far East.

War of some sort between America and Spain on the subject of Cuba had long been unavoidable. No less than a century ago, — at the time when France lost her plantations in San Domingo, and the republic of Hayti was born, — it was easy to foresee the rupture of the ties which had bound to the Spain of Cortez and Pizarro the insular fragments of the great hemisphere appropriated by Pope Alexander VI. The various colonies were sure to break away, one by one, from their metropolitan stepmother, set up for themselves, and live their own life. Cuba and Porto Rico, sucked into the whirlpool of war, are but accomplishing their "manifest destiny," and fulfilling the prophecies repeatedly uttered by the historians of the last generation but one.

The progress of events in the eastern portion of the Asian continent had by no means been so fully anticipated. One might certainly have ventured to predict that there, also, populations long crushed by civil and military oppression would one day lay claim to the rights of free men; but it could never have been foreseen under what amazingly dramatic conditions the claim would be asserted. Our ancestors, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, would never have harbored, in their wildest dreams, the fantastic notion that Japan, the empire of the Rising Sun, would spontaneously transform itself into a "European power;" European, at least, if not in language, history, and traditions, in the complete recasting of its administration, institutions, customs, and theories, in its devotion to science, and in its entire and unreserved acceptance of a policy based on observation and experience.

This is the great event of the century, — one which casts into the shade all the other occurrences of an epoch which has nevertheless been rich in memorable events. And it will be no solitary *avatar;* there are unmistakable signs that other transformations of the same character are about to take place in the vast empire of China, and in all those countries where inhabitants of different race, yellow, red, or black, are brought into close contact with the men of our own Aryano - Greco - Latin civilization. So vanishes that oft-repeated assertion of the ethnologists, that *race* is a final and irreducible fact, and that no possible progress in the perception of scientific or moral truths can ever prevail against it. It is from this point of view that the recent history of the Far East presents phenomena to which it behooves us to devote our most serious attention.

There are those, of course, who tell us that all these events are illusory; that the prodigious changes which have taken place in the Japanese world are a lying phantasmagoria and a vain show; that the national mind and character have undergone no real modification; and that the Japanese are sure to

escape, sooner or later, from the sphere of European attraction. We hear them compared to savages, who, having learned in the schools of London or Paris the customs of civilization, make haste, as soon as they get back to their forests and savannas, to cast aside their conventional garments, and array themselves in the toggery consecrated by ancestral instinct and hereditary custom.

Such assertions appear to us to rest on a complete misconception of indisputable facts. The Japanese have most certainly entered into that realm of civilization on which Bacon and Darwin have set their seal; for if imperial caprice and the spread of bourgeois fashions have power to alter the external aspect of a nation, such influences can have but little effect on its underlying moral sense, its religious beliefs, its educational theories, and the essential principle of its institutions. But it is precisely these "foundations of society" which we have seen removed. Japan has been shaken to the very roots of its political and social being, and agents other than fashion or caprice have been called into play. Is not the suppression of the feudal system, and the substitution for it of a bourgeois organization after the European model, a fact of capital importance? And how complete were the changes effected is shown by the fact that they entailed a formidable reaction, and had to be confirmed by domestic wars, revolutions and counter-revolutions. The resistance of the *daimyo*, or feudal lords, and of the *samurai*, or lesser noblemen, continued for fifteen years, and assumed the proportions of a magnificent epic; while the shock of contact between the two societies was so violent as ultimately to shatter all the traditional moulds handed down from the Middle Ages.

These facts are no longer open to question. The amazing, and until very recently impossible spectacle has been presented of mixed marriages, — that is to say, between patricians and the proletariat; and of schools where the sons of noblemen and mechanics have sat side by side, and applied themselves

to the solution of the same problems. Serfdom was abolished, setting free two millions of slaves, at the very moment when, by the strangest of historical coincidences, four millions of blacks recovered their liberty in the United States of America; and, by another curious freak of fate, it was an American, Commodore Perry, who, in 1853 and in the name of the world's commerce, forced the opening of the Japanese ports, and thus became the chief agent in a tremendous upheaval. The tenure of property, the corner-stone of the economic system, was also revolutionized by the same blow. The land no longer belongs to the state, and peasant laborers become the virtual proprietors of the soil on payment of a tax of two and a half per cent. It is true that there have been some obstacles to the evolution of Japanese law in the direction of that Roman law, or "personal" privilege of use and abuse, which governs Europe; and the fact that speculators have seized the opportunity to buy up large tracts of forest, moor, and other waste land seems to open a vista of future revolutions. But, on the other hand, the remedy has grown up beside the evil, and the pretensions of capital aiming at an absolute sovereignty of labor are confronted by Socialism, with all the shades of opinion and tendency which it presents in the rest of the civilized world. So remarkable is the coincidence of ideas that the selfsame phrases appear to flow spontaneously from the pens of two Socialist writers, who appeal to the workingman, the one at Berlin, and the other at Tokio or Yokohama.

But the European art for which, unhappily, the Japanese have shown most aptitude is that of war. They have learned with astonishing rapidity how to handle firearms and bayonets, how to load and fire cannon, how to equip navies and conduct land manœuvres. In short, they have become adepts in the science of human slaughter. This people, in whom the old instincts of the Malay pirate still survive here and there, do great honor, unquestionably, to their military instructors, trained in the Prussian school. The Chinese despise the islanders of Japan

tory consummated by this power or that, to the detriment of the Flower of the Midland; commercial and industrial societies, founded upon the European model, in lands but lately closed to the "barbarian," — all those facts, in short, of contemporary life which in their rapid succession help to confront us with that supreme problem of "bread and justice for all," which each one of us is bound to study for himself.

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competition of the Far East in the labor market, under such conditions of inferiority that the centre of industrial and commercial civilization will be removed toward the Flower of the Midland, entailing a widespread material ruin, of which moral decadence will be the inevitable result? This fear is equally chimerical. Doubtless there will be great alterations in the balance of power among the different nations of the earth, no less than in the activity of their several markets. Doubtless, brute capital, ever eager to obtain the most labor for the lowest wage, wall speculate as long as practicable on the traditional moderation of the Chinese and Japanese; but in the end there will assuredly be something like an equalization in the rewards of the great industries. Even now, we are told, the Chinaman in New York or Boston knows perfectly well how to secure for his labor the same pay that his white rival gets; while, at the same time, how many Irish workmen, Lombard *contadini*, and Russian *moujiks* are painfully striving to keep soul and body together, at famine prices, — prices quite as low as those of which the poorest Japanese complains ! There will be no change in the relations of labor and capital save this: that they will henceforth contend upon a broader stage; that all social questions will be discussed openly, before the great public, with a full understanding on the part of the opponents that their struggle involves the disinherited in all parts of the globe. Everything now assumes an international character; and as the Americans have set out in the present war by enlarging the narrow bounds of the Caribbean Sea so as to take in the seas of the Far East, so every labor crisis hereafter, every strike and lockout, every lowering or raising of wages, will be propagated from country to country, as far as the ends of the earth. What passes in China or Japan will affect Europe and America; and the events which take place among ourselves will make part of the history of our autochthones.

Thus, all things lead us back to the larger human question: the shock of navies in the Chinese seas; annexations of terri-

precisely on account of their warlike spirit. They call them *Ou-hang*, or brutes, and say that the only two things they can do well are to give a sword-thrust and "make bang,"— that is, let off firearms; and indeed, they had dismal personal experience, during the late war, of the homicidal talents of their adversaries.

The European influence which has been so potent and so subversive in Japan was bound to be equally so in China, and, whatever the lovers of set phrases may say to the contrary, it is already working, powerfully and effectively. But the enormous mass of the Chinese continental empire represents a body far more difficult to permeate than the archipelago of Japan, which is open on all sides. In the middle of the present century, when the kingdom of the Rising Sun had already entered decisively upon its career of readjustment, China, with a population at least ten times as great as that of Japan, was able to oppose a resistance ten or twelve times as formidable as that of the latter, to foreign elements of transformation; just as the color of a liquid seems deeper or paler to the eye according to the proportion of pure water with which it is mixed. If, as has been rashly said, China has indeed undergone no modification by foreign influence, it is because the government is petrified in the routine of a ceremonial ten centuries old. But it should be remembered that every essentially conservative government is, for that very reason, a backward government, one forced upon the nation; and that it is among the depressed masses that we have to look for its accomplished work.

In proof of what has really been achieved among the lowest of the lowly in China, we may mention first the great revolt of the Tai-ping, which may have been surpassed by previous revolutions in the loss of life and the general destruction which it entailed, but which differs from them all in having been of foreign origin. The men who provoked the conflict that broke out in 1850, side by side with the intestine disorders then agitating Europe, were all of pure Chinese race. Rejecting the precepts of their official masters, these "yellows" were so influ-

enced by the propaganda of certain missionaries, whom they but half understood, that they adopted the Bible as their sacred book, and caused parts of it to be translated. They raised Jesus Christ to the rank of their own gods, and recognized the Protestants of Europe and America as "brethren in the faith." They used reverently to recite the "ten great laws of Heaven," which are none other than the ten commandments of the Jews, translated very correctly, but with one addition: "Thou shalt not use unclean things;" that is to say, opium and tobacco. The communism of the primitive Christians awoke in them certain longsleeping ancestral instincts, and caused them to proclaim a community of goods, and to devise a redistribution of landed property among groups composed of twenty-five families, who were all to live together on a single domain. For fourteen years they constituted an *imperium in imperio,* and they would most assuredly have succeeded in altering the whole equilibrium of the Chinese world had they not accepted the guidance of a wild visionary, who lost his wits under the dizzying effects of power, and who, after he had become one of the persons in the Holy Trinity, could deign to take no further notice of the affairs of earth. They also committed the mad mistake of recklessly attacking the European settlements along the coast. Europe, however, preferred dealing with the decrepit government at Peking, whose foibles she understood, and which was docile under her orders, to entering upon an untried course of wily diplomacy in order to reconcile her own interests with those of a transformed China; and troops of mercenaries of every nationality, commanded by French, English, and American adventurers, — Brethon de Coligny, d'Aiguebelle, Ward, Burgevine, Holland, and Gordon, — undertook to quell the insurrection in the interests of the Manchurian government. Thus it was by aid of the European element that official China was enabled to put down a revolution largely due to European influence.

Now, however, fifty years after the revolt of the Tai-ping, changes of another sort have been accomplished, — changes all

Monroe Doctrine. That doctrine was reasonable in its day, and sufficed for a time for the political guidance of America; but it has been shattered once for all by its own indirect extension, — the very first act in the war of Cuban independence having taken place at the Philippines, or precisely at the antipodes of the Pearl of the Antilles. The world's equilibrium is destroyed at once, and Spain, France, the German Empire, Great Britain, Japan, China, Europe and Asia, are agitated alike. "America for the Americans"! How trivial the formula in comparison with that other, equally applicable to all races and countries, "A free land for free men"! History is making haste, and precipitating the consequences of previous events.

But what is to become of China herself, in this squabble of the nations about her territory? In the first place, it is quite evident that the four hundred millions of the "children of Han" do *not* constitute, for Europe, a "yellow peril," in the sense lately given to that term by certain pessimistic prophets. The Chinese have survived by many centuries their belligerent age. More civilized in this respect than the Europeans themselves, they do not believe that "iron is good only to make swords of;" and if they are compelled to fall into military step, it will always be against their own convictions that they engage in wars of conquest or even of defense. Mongolians and Manchurians will doubtless serve as recruits in the Russian armies, but they will never again invade Europe in independent hordes, as the Huns and the Mongols did in days of yore.

The civilized world is no more hemmed in by barbarians, as it was at the downfall of the Roman Empire. It is the barbaric regions, on the contrary, which have become rapidly diminishing fragments, melting like icicles in the sun.

But ought the term "yellow peril" to be understood as implying a different sort of menace, and one much more to be dreaded than the first, were it ever to be realized ? Will the countries which have achieved an "Aryan" civilization — that is to say, Europe and the New World — have to encounter the

very inferior to Port Arthur, which actually commands the inner waters; nor can it compare with the German Kiao-chau, of which the appurtenances and dependencies extend into the very heart of the Chinese territory, and which is thus in a position to neutralize any movement from the interior. The very costly military station of Wei-haiwei in no way augments the real strength of England, whose commercial interests all centre in the south, on the shores of the Flower of the Midland, and in the valleys of Sikiang and of the Yang-tse.

An unexpected event, almost grotesque in the sharp contrast which it affords to the usual slow phases of Oriental diplomacy, has improved, though quite indirectly, Great Britain's position with regard to Russia. The destruction of the Spanish fleet in the bay of Manila, with its inevitable consequences, — that is to say, the prolonged, and it may be permanent intervention of North American influence among the islands of Indonesia, — will certainly react, in an increase of prestige, upon that nation, which is most closely bound to the American republic by language, sympathy, and common traditions. There can be no question that in the popular imagination, of the Orientals especially, the Americans and the English, however different in many ways, even in the admixture of ethnic elements, are looked upon as sister nations; or rather, as one and the same nation under different administrations. Experience shows that, at grave crises, the two English-speaking peoples have outbursts of sympathetic feeling, — a sort of gush of mutual affection, not to say common patriotism, which is powerful enough at times to manifest itself in semi-official acts. A "Greater Britain," very much greater even than that of which the politicians were talking but yesterday, is looming in the near future. It is a fact of the first importance, showing as it does how the very shrinkage of the earth, brought about by the progress of science and by increased facilities of communication, has the effect of enlarging men's minds and of broadening every question. Contemporaneous history is far outstepping the narrow conceptions of the

the more remarkable in that they could never have come about save by the consent of the entire nation. All over the empire railways have been built from city to city, under the direction of "red-haired" engineers; and the populace has *not* arisen and stoned these violators of the ancestral graves. The *FangChoui* — that is to say, the collective genii of earth, air, and water — have been dethroned at the bidding of a more powerful divinity. European industry has conquered China, launching steamboats on her rivers and erecting factories along their banks, and it is to Chinese workmen that the responsibility has been entrusted of managing and maintaining these engines of revolution.

Again, science — that genuine science which observes, experiments, and compares results— has penetrated into the Chinese schools; and the geographers among the "Sons of Heaven" have resigned themselves to the conviction that China alone does not occupy nearly the whole of the earth's surface, while the "barbarians" are relegated to nooks and corners. Students of every description are learning a new orientation of ideas: their horizon is widening; to the study of Confucius and other moral philosophers they are adding that of the savants and the economists of to-day; they are going on — it may be even too rashly — to reform their medical practice. All is movement and transformation. The very music of our European artists, to which the Chinaman was supposed to be absolutely insensible, has finally prevailed over his ancestral prejudices; and Canton, Shanghai, Fu-chau, already show a fine appreciation of the "music of the future." These are prodigious changes, but they are due to the influence of a very small number of men. The foreign element is increasing rapidly in China, but as yet there are not more than twelve thousand civilized Europeans in the entire empire; that is to say, one to forty thousand Chinese. A quantity so infinitesimal would be utterly without importance, were it not that these foreigners, however lacking they may be, as individuals, in nobility and seriousness of pur-

pose, are often, in spite of themselves, torch-bearers of learning and harbingers of ideas.

The nation is being modified to its depths, while the government remains obstinately conservative; that cannot be modified without going utterly to pieces. The examinations for the mandarinate are kept up exactly as of old; the clumsy machine cannot adapt itself to the complete change in its environment. This is evident from the fact that the capital of the empire has remained the same since the Manchurian conquest; whereas the political situation actually required the choice of a new centre of gravity whose defense could have been more easily organized. Formerly, no doubt, the strategic importance of Peking, the "Northern Residence," was indisputable, because the dangers most readily foreseen were those which menaced the northern frontier. The emperors of the Manchurian dynasty had always reason to dread the warlike inhabitants of their former country, no less than the Mongolian hordes who were perpetually descending from their high tablelands, in the attempt to thrust the Chinese back into the plains, and install themselves in their place. This is why the capital of the empire was long maintained so far to the north of its true centre, which is that "Flower of the Midland" comprised between the two great rivers. The mandarins had to leave the peaceable tribes to themselves, in order to keep watch over their turbulent neighbors.

Behind these neighbors there loomed, with the stern front of inflexible destiny, a power more formidable than that either of Manchurians or of Mongolians, — the Muscovite power. Up to the middle of the present century the menace of Russia was still remote. Encroachment along the seaboard was apparently much more to be dreaded. While the European powers remained separated from the Far East by the whole vast mass of the continent, they had every facility for approaching it by sea; and the countries which it most behooved them to draw within the sphere of their influence were precisely the middle and southern provinces, the estuary of the Sikiang, the bay of

the tenor of this diplomatic agreement; and whatever may be the remote consequences of this move of theirs, even though it should entail a terrible convulsion at some future day, they will none the less have been the leading spirits, for a time, in a great political work.

Russia's attitude, in thus generously conceding to Japan the first place in the Corean *condominium*, has been determined by the conduct of Great Britain, which does not seem, in the present instance, to have been particularly astute. England has never yet played, in the northern seas of the Far East, that leading part which she believes to be her due. In 1885, for example, after she had seized Port Hamilton in the Nanhou group, she proceeded to evacuate it, at the invitation of Russia, who undertook, on her part, never, upon any pretext, to occupy any Corean port. But we all know what such promises are worth. Hardly two lustres have elapsed since then, and Russia is already signing, with another rival, a compact implying very different views. England, meanwhile, startled by the transformation scene at Kiao-chau and the capture of Manchuria by the Russians, proceeded to demand her slice of the cake, and fixed her eyes upon Wei-hai-wei, under peril of wounding the sensibilities of the Japanese, who were still holding that witness to their triumph over China, and had hoped, no doubt, to keep it, in case the court of Peking failed to pay the promised indemnity.

It was no light thing thus to mortify a people who hold their grudges with peculiar tenacity, and to throw them back upon a closer alliance with Russia, — the enemy whom England has to encounter at all points, from Constantinople to Peshawur, and from Peshawur to Hankau. From a political point of view, this risk might have been justified by conquests of exceptional value; but Weihai-wei is absolutely of no value to the English, save as a station for docks and arsenals, and for keeping a close watch over the great neighboring market of Chi-fu. As a strategic point, at the entrance to the Gulf of Pechili, Wei-haiwei is

a population of at least thirty millions. It is plain that the balance of the world is going to be greatly affected by an historical phenomenon which at first sight seemed unimportant.

There is but one power, after Russia, which can aim with any chance of success at the permanent annexation of China, or even a portion of her territory, and that power is Japan. Stretching in a series of curves along the front of the Chinese territory, the Japanese archipelago offers a sort of preliminary step to the shores of the Flower of the Midland; and if the European powers had not intervened to arrest the victors in the late war, they would soon have effected a solid lodgment upon the Chinese coast. But the fragment of the continent on which their hearts are specially set is the peninsula of Corea, which, by its formation and its position between two gulfs, seems rather to belong to the collective insular territory of the Rising Sun. Even now, in their childishly boastful talk, the men of Japan speak of Corea as belonging to themselves, and her merchants and artisans assume that their shops and factories will, in future, be erected there. Thanks to the possession of Liu-kiu, and the conquest of Formosa and the Pescadores, which form a kind of line of circumvallation, the Japanese do really command, in a military sense, the seas of Eastern China; and the development of Corea, with its ten millions of inhabitants, would but afford a new opening for the yearly emigration, which is already considerable, and must needs become larger and larger, since the annual increase in the inhabitants of that confined archipelago amounts to more than three hundred thousand souls. The treaty lately concluded with Russia appears to give entire satisfaction in the empire of the Rising Sun; for while stipulating that the sovereign of Corea shall continue to reign independently under the double protection of the two high contracting powers, the compact recognizes, and by so doing encourages, the commercial and industrial preëminence of Japan in Corea. That the colonists and speculators of Japan are in actual possession of the peninsula is proved by

Hang-chau, and the mouths of the Yang-tse. These, then, were the threatened points, against which the main resistance of the Chinese nation ought by rights to have been directed; and if that huge body had still possessed organic life; if the official rulers of the empire, with their hierarchy of mandarins, had not been mummified inside the walls of their trebly inclosed city, — the stately sepulchre of the court, — they could not have failed to go forth and meet the danger, as their predecessors had done at critical times.

A move toward Nanking, the "Southern Residence," would have massed the defensive forces of the state near the chief centre of wealth and population. Had the Chinese furnished such an example of spirit and sagacity under the impending peril, the internal dissensions, which were so exacerbated during the revolt of the Tai-ping, would have been in a great measure avoided, and the mandarins would never have had to undergo the humiliation of entrusting the defense of their people to mercenary foreigners. Han-kau, the commercial centre of the empire, the depot for the products of all the provinces, might also have been well chosen; but from a strategic point of view — for advantages both of defense and of attack — the spot indicated by nature was the city of Kiukiang, perched upon a rocky peninsula on the south bank of the Yang-tse, between that mighty stream and the inland sea of Poyang, and traversed in all directions by those navigable canals which have given the great trading - centre opened by the English to European commerce the name of the "City of Rivers." From this focal point, almost equidistant from Nanking and Han-kau, highways radiate in every direction. — some by river routes, and some by mountain passes: first, toward all points in the great river basin of the Flower of the South; then southeast in the direction of Fu-chau, southwest toward Canton, and north toward Kai-feng and Peking. But no ! If ever the government, now paralyzed by alarm, should quit Peking, it would be to retreat toward Singan; or rather, into the interior, by the defiles of the Hwang-ho. Such

a movement would be nothing more nor less than flight, — a final proof of irremediable intimidation.

And so, while the rulers of China, shut up in their palaces, are allowing themselves to be lulled into a fatal slumber by the crooning of the old formulas, events are taking their course. At the close of the Japanese war, the Emperor of China, who had been saved by the intervention of the European powers, turned over and went to sleep again. He was rudely awakened by a fresh calamity. One fine morning — it was the 4th of November, 1897 — news arrived that the Germans had seized the bay of Kiao-chau, on the southern side of the peninsula of Shantung. The choice was unquestionably the best that could have been made, and this important event was probably determined by the advice of the eminent geographer Richthofen. It is true that this bay does not open directly upon the Gulf of Pechili, and does not appear to command the city of Peking; but appearances are deceitful. The position of Kiao-chau combines what would seem to be opposite advantages. Situated nearer the centre of China and its fertile plains than the towns on the Gulf of Pechili, it is at the same time more easily accessible from the high seas; and it also communicates with the northern district by means of a level region, extremely busy and populous, where nothing would be easier than to construct a railway, and where advantage might even be taken of the bed of an ancient stream to dig a canal which would require no locks. Kiao-chau would thus be connected with the opposite shore of the Gulf of Pechili, and would command two seas. If this natural highway were closely guarded by German troops, it would cut off, so to speak, from the continent all the mountainous region to the east of Shantung, and it would sever from the empire and virtually absorb the extensive territory comprising the great port of Chi-fu and the much disputed military position of Wei-hai-wei. Ten millions of people, together with strategic and commercial points of the utmost importance, have thus been detached, at one blow, from China, and brought within the sphere of German influence. Moreover, Kiao-chau is the natural port of a mining region extremely rich in coal, and a concession has already been obtained for the construction of several railways which will ramify all over the interior, even to the promised land of the Yellow Sun.

By way of parrying this master stroke, which for the rest had been delivered with singular ostentation, Russia took an instantaneous resolve; and, like Germany, she proceeded to seize upon the port, or the assemblage of ports, which offered the greatest political advantages to herself. As a matter of fact, it does deeply concern Russia to get possession of the countries which border upon her empire and its dependencies. Now, continental Manchuria, across which the Tsar's engineers are already carrying the eastern section of the trans-Siberian railway, may almost be considered a part of Holy Russia; all that is needed being to add to the territory already annexed the peninsula of Liao - tung, a sharp point, running out in the direction of China, and aptly described upon the Chinese maps by the name of "The Sword."Citadels, arsenals, and formidable redoubts occupy the extremity of the peninsula, offering safe shelter to the Russian fleet, and easy access, at all times of the year. Port Arthur and Talien-wan are like two bolts which secure the approach by sea to northern China, and Russia can draw or withdraw them at her will. Being essentially a continental power, she can thus pursue her victorious march across the continent of Asia without having to double the peninsula of Corea. Russian invasion, in this quarter, wears the aspect of a rising tide. From Slav to Mongolian, from Mongolian to Chinaman, the transitions are insensible. The southern frontier of Siberia is being altered, so to speak, before our eyes, for a distance of thousands of miles; the fact being that the immense territory comprising Kashgaria, Mongolia, and Manchuria, which is being gradually Russified by the prestige of the White Tsar, covers an extent of fifteen hundred thousand square miles, — a territory almost seven times as large as France, and containing