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THE SPREAD OF RUSSIA

“The Russian is a delightful person till he tucks his shirt in.”

“It is only when he insists upon being treated as the most easterly of western peoples, instead of the most westerly of easterns, that he becomes a racial anomaly extremely difficult to handle.”—
KIPLING, “The Man Who Was.”

The Colonization of Siberia—Conflict Between China and Russia

RUSSIA resembles the United States in the extent to which she has spread her people and her institutions from sea to sea across a continent. But there the resemblance stops. Every foot of North American soil has been conquered by free men who have marked every stage of their progress by free schools and representative government. From the Gulf of Mexico to Hudson's Bay and from Newfoundland to the Golden Gate, the march of Anglo-Saxon colonization has been in this century one of human liberty and of English language and institutions. Liberty tempered by the common law has produced over this vast area a practical homogeneity of social and political life, unprecedented in the history of the world. Looked at from a distance—say the standpoint of the Russians—there is less dissimilarity

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between Manitoba and Minnesota, New York and Ontario, than between almost any two of Russia's great provinces, which from an English or American point of view seem monotonously like one another.

The colonizing movement of Russia commenced three centuries ago and even earlier. Successive Muscovite emperors suppressed the independence of neighboring states, and then proceeded to spread religious and political orthodoxy by such brutal methods that the few who were able took refuge in the wilderness, banding themselves for offensive and defensive purposes.

In this way arose the Cossack communities which for generations maintained their liberties as against the home government, and proved a strong attraction to those who were compelled to fly from the injustice of their home government.

Peter the Great did not die till 1729, which shows us that up to that time the government of Russia had but little to distinguish it from that of semi-savage tribes, whose liberties are at the mercy of a monster—half monkey, half maniac—exercising authority through the superstitious reverence inspired by a cunning priesthood.

Step by step the Russian Empire has enlarged its area, and each successive step has been marked by the crushing out of national independence and personal liberty. Three European communities has Russia incorporated, and she has sought to drag each down to her own level—I refer to the Poles, the Finns, and the Germans of the Baltic Provinces. History furnishes few parallel examples of an inferior civiliza-

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tion so situated geographically as to crush out in detail the superior civilization of so many neighboring communities. It was the good fortune of Russia to have as an ally in the crushing of Poland the cordial assistance of the Prussian Monarchy, through successive reigns, so that the refugee Poles, when defeated in their own country, found the frontiers of Prussia as inhospitable as those of Russia. Finland became a Russian province through a bargain with Napoleon the Great, and the German Provinces on the Baltic are being de-Germanized by Russian priests and policemen, because the German Empire is so busy maintaining its rights on the other side of the earth that it cannot feel its children tugging at the very skirts of the mother country.

For the colonization which Russia undertakes she has facilities of an exceptional kind. The mere fact that out of 100,000,000 Russians there are some 99,000,000 who can neither read nor write, is of incalculable value to an administration like that which the Holy Czar represents. The Russian peasant, as he crouches in the furrow munching his noon-day crust, resembles some animal just emerged from a burrow—essentially akin to the soil he inhabits. Of him pre-eminently are the words of Edwin Markham applicable when apostrophizing "The Man with a Hoe."

"The emptiness of ages in his face,
And on his back the burden of the world."

Russian history amply answers the poet's fierce query:

"Whose was the hand that slanted back his brow?
Whose breath blew out the light within this brain?"

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With 99,000,000 of two-legged creatures on the social and intellectual level of domestic cattle, colonization on the Russian plan cannot fail to succeed. The priest gives the order in the name of the Czar, and whole families transport themselves to Siberia with as little concern for the future as a car-load of oxen on their way to Kansas City.

These colonists squat in the furrows of Siberia with the same rabbit-like fitness of color that they show in the fields about Moscow, or in the sandy wastes between Petersburg and Vilna. The parish priest goes with them, and the same communistic village community reproduces itself on the banks of the Amoor as on those of the Volga.

Russia is anything but an over-populated country,* and Siberia is not a California or a Johannesburg. The Czar has moved his people eastward for political and strategic reasons, because he required an army of occupation and the cheapest army was the one which handled the hoe as well as the rifle.

The aristocracy of this army consisted in fugitives from justice or criminals deported for political or other crimes. The total number it is no more possible to establish than the number of Americans who crossed the Mississippi River fifty years ago in search of Pike's Peak. It is sufficient, though, for us to know that more than 1,000,000 have been deported, according to official returns, since the beginning of that system, and that many more have gone thither of their own accord to escape the Metropolitan police. In the Rus-

* Russia controls about eight and a half millions of square miles and a population of nearly 130,000,000. Fortunately for civilization the power of an army is not measured by numbers only.

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sian army it has been the rule to allow no Pole to rise to any position of importance so long as he remained in Poland. If he wishes to have a military career it must be far away, against Asiatic tribes where no love of his own people can interfere with the allegiance due to the Czar. The reason for this is to be sought in the fear of a Polish rising. Consequently Russian officers command in Poland, while Polish officers are to be found mainly to the eastward of the Black Sea.

The Czar is aided in his colonial work by being not merely the nominal, but the actual head of his Church. Every peasant's hut, every boat, the waiting-room of every railway station—indeed, nearly every available spot in the Russian Empire has an Eikon or religious tablet, dedicated to the Czar as the head of the Russian Church. In the upper walks of this Church are scholars and politicians of the first rank, and at the bottom is a priesthood closely in sympathy with peasant life and superstition. The parish priest of Russia knows a little more than the peasant—not much. He tills the ground like the peasant; enjoys his glass of brandy, and makes no pretension of belonging to a higher social stratum. Any superiority he arrogates is exclusively that of his license to perform clerical functions, and, above all, to get a few fees from the credulous by squirting holy water over pigs and cows in order to prevent disease.

In a third-class carriage on the way from Odessa to Kiev, I found myself once in the midst of a mixed company of peasants, two priests, and a partially intoxicated Polish pedler. The priests were communi-

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cative and I asked them, since they understood no French or German, whether they could talk Latin? They shook their heads, and the Polish pedler then took off his hat, held it up to the forty-odd fellow-passengers, and shouted after the manner of a prestidigitator: "Is there anything in that hat?"

There was an answering shout of "No."

"Then my hat is just as full as a priest's head,"—at which there was a hearty laugh in which the priests joined!

A priesthood of this nature, whose grasp of civilization reaches little beyond a brandy bottle and an Eikon, has great advantages in certain forms of colonization over men who represent generations of mental and physical breeding.

To somewhat the same degree the Russian official, military and civil, lends himself readily to a life of rough frontier work among half-civilized natives. The Russian uniform frequently masks a man little better than a serf; for while Russia has in her military service, as in her Church, a small élite of highly presentable men, mainly of Polish or German ancestry, the average Russian officer shares the weaknesses and the virtues of the Slav. He is essentially an easy-going nature, fond of food and drink, and readily mingles with his fellow-men of every grade.

One morning, between Petersburg and Novogorod, I awoke in a railway carriage to find a Russian major in uniform rolling on the floor with a fat civilian, whom he was hugging and kissing in maudlin rapture. They were both happily drunk. The civilian was a forage contractor, and the major belonged to a regi-

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ment of which the German Emperor is honorary colonel, and among whose officers I had some acquaintances. The extraordinary thing about this drunken episode was not so much that an officer should appear drunk in public, as that his brother officers should regard the matter as something quite usual.

No other European power has sought to fuse with Chinese. The Russian is doing it and is moderately successful.

In Eastern Siberia are many tribes that bridge over the ethnological difference between the Caucasian and the Oriental, and thus Russia has at hand useful agents for her administrative pioneering.

For more than a century the Czar has maintained at Peking a mission consisting of ten priests who have carefully abstained from missionary work, but have furnished their Government with information on what was going on about them.

When I reached Chefoo, opposite Port Arthur, in 1898, I met there a delightfully sociable Russian colonel, who took great interest in my movements, and was apparently visiting Chefoo for his health. On inquiry I found that he had been for years stationed there for no other purpose than to act as a government spy at that point of the Chinese coast.

Russia to-day affords the most complete picture of administrative colonization on record. No other country has the same number of tame human creatures which can be moved upon the political chess-board according to orders from one centre. Other countries would gladly do it, but their rulers lack either the power or the territory. The Trans-Siberian railway

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promises to make her Asiatic conquest still more complete by carrying the centre of population further away from Moscow. We are now only on the threshold of Russian power in Asia. Only in our day has the stage of violent conquest ceased—the next will see vast engineering works—land improved by means of irrigation, more railways, and other improvements in the way of transportation, new cities and centres of commercial life. Schools must follow and universities as well, if only to supply the professional needs of the Government.

We cannot suppose that this vast country will remain, as it now is, merely a desert of official monotony with an occasional oasis of Polish exiles. Time is not far away when the people of Siberia will challenge those of Russia proper, as do the people of the American West challenge the old States of New England. Commercial interests will clash, and the problem of despotism will become the more difficult in proportion as population increases in intelligence at a greater and greater distance from the capital.

Will Russia over-run China and India? Possibly, but not under her present form of government. The Chinese as well as the natives of the British East Indies are not wholly without some knowledge of the relative merits of European powers, and as time goes on this knowledge will increase rather than otherwise. The fact that to-day China coquets with Russia, and that the Emir of Afghanistan is ambiguously loyal to the British Crown is no criterion of what would happen in case Russia seriously attempted the absorption of either India or China.

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Russia may occupy Kandahar, and even fly her flag over Peking. She can do that according to her present colonizing programme, and the world need not regret the change of ownership. But beyond that the machinery of the Czar will prove inadequate unless the nations themselves invite Russia to become master among them. India supports the rule of England because no considerable portion of that population can see their advantage in making a change. But even those who like British dominion least would suffer much more, rather than shift from under the present yoke to that of Russia.

And in China the people are likely to be influenced by much the same line of reasoning. Under the English flag, Chinese trade has expanded enormously and Chinese life and property have been safe; more than that, the Chinaman has enjoyed a personal liberty equal to that of white men. He is not likely to wish a change to Russian rule, and the more he studies the matter the more inclined will he be to create obstacles in the path of Russia rather than to assist in any further Russification of his country.

The Japanese of to-day entertain aversion to Russia because of her having (1875) annexed a Japanese island, Saghalien, and having added insult to injury by making it a dumping ground for criminals. The Japanese also maintain a species of "Monroe Doctrine" in regard to European interference with things Chinese, particularly in Corea, which the Japanese regard as jealously as the United States do Mexico.

On my visit to Corea, I found Seoul practically a Japanese settlement, and, considering the nearness of

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Corea to China, it is not strange that the Mikado should look with suspicion upon any move likely to make Russia his neighbor at that point.

The last quarter of a century has seen the awakening of the Far East to a sense of national responsibility. Japan has led the way, and has now an army and navy and civil administration which make her to-day the strongest fighting force in the world, in proportion to her population.

China, on the other hand, is one of the weakest. The Chinese-Japanese War of 1894-5 was of great importance to Europe, in that it established the ascendancy of Japan over China; convinced the Chinese that they must make internal reforms, and led them to seek support in Japan rather than in Europe.

The basis of Chinese and Japanese understanding was laid during that war—a war which has left friendship, not bitterness, behind.

In 1898 China sent no less than thirty military representatives to the Japanese army manœuvres, and these fraternized with the Japanese officers in a significant manner.

Russian colonization, then, so far as it is administrative and military, is nearing its limits. Each day makes her progress more difficult, each day creates a stronger national opposition in China, each move brings the Russian serf face to face with a denser and less malleable population. The task of Russia is a large one—simply to prevent her Empire from falling to pieces, under the weight of official ignorance and corruption.

Russia has done marvellous colonizing work where resistance has been slight. She has spread herself suc-

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cessfully among barbarous tribes, but has failed completely in commanding the respect of Poles, Finns, or Germans.

The failure of her methods at the westernmost end of her Empire will be repeated in the Far East, should she seek to match the Moudjik against the crafty and tenacious Chinaman. For tasks of this nature instruments are needed such as are not forged in the workshops of Holy Russia.