

RUSSIA AND JAPAN

A PROPOSAL.

From Our St. Petersburg Correspondent.

The peace of the world depends, in last analysis, on the outcome of the negotiations between Russia and Japan, which have been temporarily suspended during the Christmas holidays. This contention may seem far-fetched, because there is no likelihood of a sharp immediate change for the worse in the relations, at present strictly correct, which obtain between the two Empires. Neither country wants war, and neither could materially or morally afford a new campaign. But five or ten years constitute but a brief space in the life of a nation, and what is improbable to-day might be feasible, and appear to be advantageous, then. And that would be a terrible misfortune. No coming event throws a longer, a deeper, or a more Upas-like shadow over men and things than a sanguinary war looming on the distant horizon. It is a shadow that withers, as with a blight, some of the most precious fruits of actual peace, narrows the scope of productive efforts, drains the financial and exhausts the economic resources of the nation.

This forecast, hypothetical though it is, will probably be considered pessimistic by many who hold that however slowly the Russo-Japanese negotiations may proceed, however difficult it may at present seem to harmonise aims which tend to clash, a compromise will—nay, must—be ultimately reached, were it only because no other result is at present conceivable. Moreover, diplomacy can always find or devise a ready way out of the most bewildering mazes. And there is nothing very puzzling in the present situation. The two principal questions now at issue between the Japanese Minister, M. Motono, and the Russian Foreign Secretary, M. Izvolsky, might, if looked at in the light of the Portsmouth Treaty, find a natural solution. For example, the standard or authorised text of that treaty being French, not English, the meaning of the French equivalent for "fishery rights" may possibly exclude part of the claims grounded by Japan upon that phrase. If it be true, as some authorities contend, that the French term does not include whale or seal fisheries—neither of the mammalia in question being, properly speaking, fish—that would upset Japan's thesis that seal and whale fisheries are also meant. And one source of difference would be accordingly closed up.

Again, if it could be clearly shown, as many Russians maintain it can be, that the Tsar's plenipotentiaries at Portsmouth neither harboured the intention nor gave an undertaking to renounce the rights which the Aigun Treaty conferred upon their country, one would be forced to reject as untenable the claim advanced by the Mikado's Government that, in virtue of that undertaking, all nations may now participate in the right of navigating the Sun-

gari river. The argument on the Japanese side is briefly this: It is an exclusive right in Manchuria given by the Aigun Treaty. Now the Tsar's plenipotentiaries expressly declared that Russia enjoyed no exclusive rights in Manchuria. Therefore they must be taken to have renounced those exclusive rights which the Aigun Treaty bestowed, including the privilege of navigating the Sungari river.

Russia's reply is based, among other things, upon the whole conversation of which M. Witte's declaration was the upshot; and the tenor of that conversation, which is succinctly recorded in the protocols, was to narrow down the topic of discussion to territorial privileges. M. Witte, at the close of a series of remarks, resumed them in the words: "Russia has never claimed, supported, or sanctioned exclusive rights which would correspond to the notion of a monopoly or privilege and would impair the sovereignty of China." Now as Russia did notoriously claim and for nearly fifty years openly exercised the privilege of navigating the Sungari, it is clear that territorial, not riverain, concessions formed the question before the conference. Secondly, the plea that the navigation on the Sungari was obviously eliminated from the discussion is indicated by the words "and would impair the sovereignty of China." China's sovereignty could not be impaired by a right which it is usual for two neighbouring States to grant each other in respect of a river flowing through part of the dominions of both. Finally, the debate took a turn when the Japanese plenipotentiary must have expressly mentioned the Aigun Treaty, or the right of having steamers on the Sungari, if he had either in view. For a point was reached when silence on the subject connoted its exclusion.

Baron Komura, being asked to specify the concessions to which he was desirous of putting an end, replied that he had an impression that certain engagements had been entered into between the Dzianzsuns of Manchuria and the Russian authorities—for instance, the exploitation of the mines in the province of Kirin. Then, he added, Russia exercised administrative authority in certain places—"in Kharbin, for instance, over a tract much more extensive than is required by the exploitation of the railway." But not one word about the Sungari River or the Aigun Treaty. Yet that was the moment to specify either or both.

But the point is clenched, the Russians urge, by M. Witte's answer. The first Russian plenipotentiary stated that he knew of no stipulations or mining concessions of the nature of a monopoly or exclusive privilege. If there were any such, they were the acts of Russian agents, devoid of Imperial sanction, and they ought to be, and would be, annulled. Now, the Aigun Treaty and the right it confers had been sanctioned by the Imperial Government, and recognised by all the Powers interested in the Far East. Therefore, that treaty was excluded from the subjects discussed. For if Japan wished to have it abolished, or to have the rights it conferred shared by other Powers, her plenipotentiaries at Portsmouth must at that conjuncture have said to M. Witte: "You say that Russia enjoys no exclusive rights in Manchuria in the nature of a monopoly or calculated to trench upon China's sovereignty. Do

Copying from
 24 Dec 1906
 Dec 4 '06

F.W. 1797

you not reckon the privilege of navigating the Sangari River as coming within this category?" To that objection, had it been offered, the Russian negotiator would have replied: "We are unable to see in that privilege anything more than one of those ordinary concessions which are in common among riversain neighbours. And if we did not actually enjoy it already, we should not contract ourselves out of it in the future, because it is not a monopoly, does not impair China's sovereignty, and is in vogue among States whose territories adjoin, and whose relations are neighbourly."

By thoroughly threshing the questions in some such way as this, it ought not to be difficult to bring them one by one to a satisfactory issue. These two do not exhaust the list of differences. There are, there must be, others connected with the treaty of commerce, which has to be concluded for four years, connected with the frontier traffic and with a variety of matters which have not, perhaps, been mooted as yet by the negotiators themselves. If this conjecture be right, fresh difficulties may be superadded to those when the negotiations are resumed. In all these attempts at breaking fresh ground Japan would seem to have assumed the active, Russia the passive, rôle. That, at least, is the conclusion to which the recent Government communiqué points, one passage of which states expressly that Russia, in arranging for the new treaty of commerce, accepted the stipulations of the old treaty, whereas Japan preferred new demands.

And it would be unfair to blame Japan severely for trying to drive a hard bargain with her ex-adversary. The terms she obtained by the Portsmouth Treaty were honourable rather than advantageous, and to a large section of the Japanese people they seem small out of all proportion to the great sacrifices of the nation and to the strategic results of the campaign. And what one diplomatist failed to obtain may well be secured by another, who, in any case, is well within his rights in putting forth the effort. The moment is well chosen. If Japan is weakened financially by the war, Russia is enfeebled, financially and otherwise, by the revolution. And she has withdrawn her troops from Manchuria so speedily that the Japanese have at present about twice as many there. Consequently—

And yet it may well be questioned whether, from another and a higher point of view, the generous ambition of a patriotic statesman might not find a worthier and more profitable problem for his ingenuity than that of squeezing the largest possible number of concessions from his ex-enemy and permanent neighbour. For, suppose him to be successful. Imagine Russia, moved by a set of motives which it is needless to analyse, assenting reluctantly now to this demand, now to that. *L'appétit vient en mangeant*. There is no finality either in the claims or the concessions. Neither, therefore, can there be any in the final agreement. The condition of things in the Far East will necessarily

be as provisional as its basis. Peace will be but a more or less long pause to enable preparations for war to be made with greater thoroughness. And the latter state of things would be worse than the former.

Bearing in mind the remarkable spirit of conciliation in which Russian diplomatists would seem to be approaching the subject, and their new departure in foreign policy, which—if overt acts be admitted as evidence—can be made more serviceable to the cause of peace than any diplomatic achievement since the Franco-Russian Alliance, one cannot help regarding the Russo-Japanese negotiations as a golden opportunity which it would be a crime and a blunder to let slip untutilised.

There are excellent elements in the national character which, in justice to the Russian people, ought to obtain expression in the relations and dealings between the Empire and its neighbours. They make for peace, and are therefore calculated to bring stability into the standing arrangements between the two nations. Hitherto this has been seldom attempted, and still more seldom achieved, by Russia in her intercourse with foreign Powers. And the result is writ large in recent history. Now it needs a vigorous effort to look one's sins in the face, and to resolve to turn over a new leaf. And that would appear to be the soul-state of Russia, as represented by her new diplomacy. Formerly Russian diplomacy displayed a highly developed sense of what was feasible in the direction of expansion without consolidation; now it cultivates a sense of what is feasible in the direction of productive compromise. Frankness and sincerity as a means of understanding others, and being understood by them, a spirit of compromise in negotiating, and a scrupulous regard for her treaty obligations will, it is affirmed, be found among the salient characteristics of Russia's new diplomacy. What seems pretty clear to the dullest is that Russia's paramount interest now has become identical with that of the civilised communities of the world; it is peace. To recognise this obvious truth, and to draw the practical consequences from it may to many seem an easy grace. But in Russian diplomacy, in which other traditions had considerable depth of root, it was hard of attainment. To eliminate from these traditions the elements which were hitherto supposed to make for national progress, though they are now seen to have contributed to national disaster, and sincerely to accept the given situation, is a kind of heroism which is worthy of universal recognition.

The peace which Russia needs must not only be permanent; it must also appear so. It must not be the outcome of a miracle daily renewed, but must rest on such a solid basis that it may be relied upon with confidence. Now, the Treaty of Portsmouth, however satisfactory its clauses may be interpreted, cannot supply the indispensable groundwork. Nor can the settlement of a number of claims and counter-claims advanced for the purpose of getting the better

of the other side, furnish the foundation required. Revenge would then be the ideal of the one side, further conquest the aspiration of the other. Whichever of the two is first prepared for war will naturally attack the other by way of defending itself. The example of Germany and France is convincing, and ought to be deterrent, that of Prussia and Austria is equally striking, and might with advantage be taken to heart.

That I know was Count Witte's idea from the very first. When M. Kurino, the Japanese Minister in St. Petersburg, offered to settle all outstanding disputes on the basis of a friendly convention, to be concluded on certain conditions, which seemed moderate to outsiders, M. Witte was in favour of closing with the offer. When, later on, he was about to start for Portsmouth to make peace with his country's enemies, he remarked to me: "In order to conclude a permanent peace with Japan we must go further. No state of things in the Far East which the manoeuvres of diplomatists—craft and clever bargaining—can create, offers a safe basis for permanent peace. A frank exchange of views, a clear understanding of each other's aims, and a sincere rapprochement are necessary." It was the bold conception of a patriotic statesman of broad views. But it takes two to make a bargain, and M. Witte was alone. The result was the Treaty of Portsmouth, not a friendly rapprochement, and still less an alliance.

The conditions of a stable peace in the Far East are to-day what they were a twelvemonth ago. But the plan indicated then might be realised now. It should be. As things are, a second Russo-Japanese conflict is but a question of time, unless a sponge be drawn over the past, and friendship between Russia and Japan be achieved in the near future. Now, in the abstract, that consummation looks feasible enough. Russia, to abandon definitely her dream of over-lordship in the Pacific, to renounce deliberately and irrevocably the commanding position which she occupied in 1902, and sincerely to accept the status quo as determined by the Portsmouth Treaty; and, on the other hand, Japan to withstand the temptation to prepare for a future campaign, the object of which would be the capture of Vladivostok, the annexation of the northern half of Sakhalien, and the complete and definite ousting of Russia from the Pacific coast. No future revenge for one side, no further conquest for the other, while the mutual relations of the two Empires would be uniformly shaped by a spirit of genuine friendship and grounded confidence. Personally, I believe that such a combination is not only desirable, but practicable.

It is still a problem to-day, as it was last year. But the difficulties in the way have since become fewer and less formidable, while the need of the arrangement is grown more manifest and pressing. To the generous spirit of Burke, who held that every human benefit is founded on compromise and barter, such a problem as this would have powerfully appealed. But there are to-day in England, and probably in the

present Cabinet, men equally quick to discern all that depends on the satisfactory solution of that problem, and no less willing to contribute to bring it about. To promote the cause of international peace and good-fellowship among nations would doubtless prove a sufficient motive to call forth their beneficent action. But a more direct and concrete motive could be adduced were it needed. Our own relations to Russia must of necessity be influenced by those which obtain between Russia and Japan. It is inconceivable that it should be otherwise. One can hardly imagine Russia cultivating friendship with England while preparing for a sanguinary war against England's ally.

But whatever the motives adduced, the rôle of peacemaker among nations is well worthy of a generous ambition. And the opportunity to exercise it is at hand. The issues at stake are momentous. The gain to all parties of a friendly agreement between the two ex-foes is obvious, and their loss—if the peace of the Far East be founded exclusively on the Treaty of Portsmouth—is equally sensible. The inference is obvious.