

CHAPTER XXIII. THE RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR.

I.—THE POWERS AND THE WAR, JUNE-SEPTEMBER 1904.

[*ED. NOTE.*—Full details of Russian policy in the Far East, up to the Declaration of War by Japan on February 10, 1904, were given in *Gooch & Temperley*, Vol. II, Chapter XIII, pp. 197-252. A few extracts are given here of the opinions of neutral and interested Powers during the first few months of the War.]

No. 1.

Sir C. MacDonald to the Marquess of Lansdowne.

Tókió, June 23, 1904.

F.O. Japan 581.

D. 5.40 P.M.

Tel. (No. 165.) Very Confidential.

R. 10, P.M.

King's visit to Kiel.⁽¹⁾

Japanese Government have received reliable information from several sources that the successes which they have so far achieved in the war have been looked upon with anything but a friendly eye by Germany. They have also heard, on information which they consider very reliable, that the opinion in the highest quarters in Germany is that Japan's ultimate success will be a serious menace to the interests in China of all the Western Powers.

An uneasy feeling prevails, which is shared by a good many Cabinet Ministers, that the King's visit to Germany may be of a political character, and may result in a change in the sympathetic feeling and just appreciation which they think prevails generally in England with regard to cause for which Japan is fighting.

Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs told me to-day that he had assured his colleagues and some of Japan's prominent statesmen, who had expressed anxiety on this point, that the King's thorough knowledge of affairs in the Far East, combined with His Majesty's well known good sense, was a guarantee that the visit would be absolutely non-political.

I assured Baron Komura in the most emphatic manner that the visit was entirely of a social and complimentary character, and in no way political. Anyhow a telegram from your Lordship to me in this sense would be useful.

(¹) [The King arrived at Kiel on June 25 in his royal yacht, and left for England on the evening of the 29th. At two banquets complimentary speeches were made by both the Emperor William II and King Edward, and a complimentary speech was also made by the latter at Hamburg. These were all made public at the time, and there is nothing in the Archives to suggest that any interview of serious importance took place. Sir Sidney Lee: *King Edward VII* (1927), Vol. II, pp. 292-7, quotes passages from Prince Bülow's account of his interview with King Edward, which is not confirmed by anything in the Foreign Office Records. *cp. G.P.* XIX, I, pp. 186-90. For the Emperor's views, *v. ib.* p. 189, and *My Memoirs* by Ex-Kaiser William II (English translation 1922), p. 112.]

No. 2.

The Marquess of Lansdowne to Sir C. MacDonald.

F.O. Japan 580.
Tel. (No. 94.)

Foreign Office, June 24, 1904.
D. 12.45 P.M.

Your tel[egram] 165 (of June 23).⁽¹⁾ King's visit to Kiel.

Apprehensions referred to are groundless.

M[inister for] F[oreign] A[ffair]'s language to his colleagues and your observations to him were in strict accordance with the facts.

You may say so, but your statement should not have the character of an official denial.

MINUTE BY KING EDWARD.

I entirely assent.

E.R.

⁽¹⁾ [*v.* immediately preceding document.]

No. 3.

Sir C. Hardinge to the Marquess of Lansdowne.

F.O. Russia 1680.
(No. 927.) Very Confidential.
My Lord,

St. Petersburg, D. June 30, 1904.
R. July 11, 1904.

I called today on Monsieur Witte at his country house on the islands and as his conversation was remarkable for its refreshing frankness I have considered it worth while to report its substance to Your Lordship.⁽¹⁾

Monsieur Witte was employed at the moment of my arrival in revising the memoirs of a certain Prince Obolensky, who never rose to any degree of historic fame, but who nevertheless was well known for his liberal views and took an active part in the reforms which were initiated by the Emperor Alexander II shortly after his accession to the throne. Monsieur Witte's occupation naturally supplied the subject of our conversation, and he enlarged for some time on the glorious epoch made in Russian history during the first few years of the Emperor's reign and the misfortunes which had been entailed by his having listened to the reactionary counsels of his advisers during the latter years of his life. Upon his alluding to the fact that the reforms in question had followed almost immediately after the conclusion of the Crimean war, I asked him whether he thought it possible that reforms of some kind might be introduced when peace had again been restored. He replied that he thought it not impossible that such might be the case, but that it depended chiefly upon the Emperor and his surroundings, and a great deal upon circumstances which it was quite impossible to foresee. Thus, for example, it had been the policy of the Government for the last six years to suppress the liberties of Finland, to deprive her of her constitution and to reduce the Grand Duchy to a state of homogeneity [*sic*] with the rest of Russia. He had always opposed this policy but unsuccessfully, and the assassination of General Bobrikoff would, he believed, prove to be the means of reconciliation and pacification. He explained this view by informing me confidentially that it had been decided to appoint Prince Obolensky, formerly Governor of Kharkoff, as Governor General of Finland, and that although during his former governorship he had got into trouble and an attempt had been made upon his life, he knew him to be a man of moderate views and to have friends and associates among those who deprecated the recent policy of the Government towards Finland and advocated more conciliatory methods. So also the unforeseen might play a considerable rôle after the war, but it would first be necessary to bring the war to a

⁽¹⁾ [For M. Witte's views generally on the war and its origins *v.* his *Mémoires* (1921), Ch. V.]

victorious conclusion and to settle upon the terms of peace to be imposed upon Japan. He asked me if I thought that His Majesty's Government or that of the United States would at that moment endeavour to interfere in the negotiations which would take place. I replied that, although it was impossible for me to say what the views of the Government of the United States might be, I could safely say that His Majesty's Government had no desire to interfere unasked unless their existing rights were menaced by the proposed terms of peace.

Monsieur Witte remarked that the phrase "existing rights" was somewhat vague, and might give rise to misunderstanding. If it meant the rights we held in Manchuria prior to the Boxer rising in 1900, he believed the Government would be ready to guarantee them at once to His Majesty's Government, since they were limited to the treaty port of Newchwang. Since the occupation of Manchuria by the Russian troops that province had become practically a Russian protectorate, the administration was in reality Russian, and Russians received a preference in all undertakings and concessions that were in prospect. It was impossible that other countries should expect to be on a similar footing.

I reminded Monsieur Witte that a treaty had been concluded with China for the evacuation of Manchuria, and that assurances of the intention of the Russian Government to carry out this measure had been given to His Majesty's Government on more than one occasion. I added that I knew that His Majesty's Government laid great stress upon the maintenance of our commercial rights and of equality of commercial treatment and that I considered it essential, upon the assumption that the Russian arms would ultimately triumph, that the Russian Government should not ignore these points when making terms of peace with Japan.

Monsieur Witte very frankly stated that, although a treaty for the evacuation of Manchuria had been concluded with China, there had never been any serious intention of carrying it out, and that since it was for this and for an equality of treatment in Manchuria that Japan had gone to war with Russia he did not think it likely that the Emperor would be willing to yield upon these points in the hour of victory.

I asked Monsieur Witte if he had heard discussed or if he had any idea of the terms which the Russian Government would impose on Japan in the event of a successful termination of the war. Monsieur Witte replied that he was of opinion that the nature of the terms of peace would depend in the first place upon the Emperor and upon those who formed his *entourage* at that moment. As long as Count Lamsdorff was in office he felt confident that the views and rights of other Powers would be honestly laid before the Emperor, but that if at that moment a new Minister for Foreign Affairs had been installed he would probably, with the view of maintaining his position, follow the example of other Ministers who only advise the Emperor in the sense that they think will be most pleasing to His Majesty. Much would depend on the question whether the war was brought to an early conclusion by a succession of victories, or whether it was indefinitely prolonged and entailed great sacrifices of men and material before being brought to a victorious termination. In the latter eventuality he was of opinion that greater moderation would be shown than in the former, and as a Russian patriot he asked himself whether it was to the real advantage of his country that the war should be brought to an end by a series of victories, and that his country should be for ever after burdened by the obligations dependent upon territorial aggrandizement in its most distant dominions. In any case apart from the question of the absorption of Manchuria and Corea, which was the desire of certain Chauvinists, opinion was unanimous that Japan must be for ever crippled and the predominance of Russia on the Pacific Coast assured. In the same manner that Russia was precluded by the Treaty of Paris from having a fleet in the Black Sea so also would the condition be imposed that Japan should have no fleet, and in order to maintain the supremacy of Russia in the Yellow Sea it would be necessary that the Russians should in addition to Port Arthur hold fortified posts at Yongampho [*sic*] at the mouth of the Yalu and on the South East coast of Corea, so as to control the country traversed by the Yalu and to command the Korean straits. "What will you and the Americans say to that?" he asked.

I answered that in my opinion such terms would be regarded in Europe as a simple act of brigandage and would meet with universal condemnation. It would certainly be a new departure in international usage if the victor in a great struggle was to seize the moment of victory to despoil his neighbours of their territory, and that in view of the conditions upon which His Majesty's Government had on a previous occasion evacuated Port Hamilton the demand for a cession of territory on the coast of Corea would in my opinion precipitate that intervention which the Emperor and the Russian Government appeared to deprecate so strongly.

Monsieur Witte argued that after the sacrifices which Russia would have made in blood and money before the end of the war it could not be expected that the *status quo* of before the war would be maintained and that Russia should remain without material compensation, and that since this compensation could not be procured from Japan it would have to be obtained at the expense of her weaker neighbours. He warned me that whatever objections His Majesty's Government might raise to such conditions they would not be able to count on the support of France and Germany, but would have to rely solely on their own efforts or on the co-operation of the United States.

I remarked that fortunately we were far from being in the condition of affairs which he had foreshadowed, that many and possibly unforeseen events would take place before such a crisis could arise, and that in any case I felt certain that His Majesty's Government could count on his moderating influence and advice in the Council of Ministers of which he was President.

Unfortunately neither Monsieur Witte, nor any of the Ministers except perhaps Monsieur Plehve, has any weight with the Emperor who is said to be influenced chiefly by his surroundings, and more particularly by the Grand Duke Alexander Michailovitch, a clever and ambitious man, the husband of the Emperor's favourite sister, and a partisan of Admiral Alexeieff and of the forward policy in the Far East which has resulted in the so far disastrous war for the Russian arms.

I have, &c.

CHARLES HARDINGE.

No. 4.

Sir F. Lascelles to the Marquess of Lansdowne.⁽¹⁾

F.O. Germany (Prussia) 1594.
(No. 220.) Confidential.
My Lord,

Berlin, D. September 23, 1904.
R. September 26, 1904.

With reference to my preceding Despatch of yesterday's date,⁽²⁾ I have the honour to report that Baron von Richthofen called on me on the 20th Instant to announce that he had resumed his duties as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. In the conversation which then took place, His Excellency alluded to the statements recently published in the "Times" as to a secret agreement between Germany and Russia. His Excellency could assure me that there was not a word of truth in the statement, and that no sort of agreement had been entered into between the two Countries.

I replied that I had personally not believed in the existence of any definite agreement. It was only natural that Germany should wish to be on the best terms with Russia and I could easily understand that, after the conclusion of the Commercial Treaty which was supposed to be so very favourable to Germany, people should have jumped at the conclusion that an arrangement of a different sort had been arrived at.

⁽¹⁾ [Popular alarm in England, as shewn by an article in *Vanity Fair* on November 17, 1904, raised a war scare in Germany which lasted a few weeks (v. G.P. XIX, II, ch. 136). There was however a real *rapprochement* between the Kaiser and the Czar over the Dogger Bank incident (v. G.P. XIX, I, ch. 135). For suggested drafts of a Treaty, v. *Kaiser's Letters to the Tsar*, (1920), pp. 123-52.]

⁽²⁾ [Not reproduced. It gives a summary of press articles on Russo-German relations.]

Baron von Richthofen said that it would be found out that the Commercial Treaty was not so favourable to Germany as had been supposed, and that under present circumstances Mr. de Witte was certainly not the person to whom negotiations of a political character would be confided.

I observed that it was not suggested that Mr. de Witte had been the negotiator, but merely that the secret arrangement had coincided in date with the conclusion of the Commercial Treaty.

Baron von Richthofen repeated that no secret agreement of any kind existed, and he regretted the publication in the "Times" which could not fail to create a very bad impression in Germany.

I said that I shared his regret and presumed that we must be prepared for a polemical discussion in the newspapers in which hard words had been used on both sides. I had noticed in one of the German Papers a statement which gave the impression that the "Daily Graphic" was officially inspired by His Majesty's Government, and I thought it a pity that such an idea which was entirely at variance with fact should be suggested.

At a subsequent interview with Baron von Richthofen at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, His Excellency said that he had not yet had time to read the "Times" Articles himself but that he would certainly do so, and that then he might perhaps ask me to forward to Your Lordship a statement of his views on the subject.

I replied that I should always be at his disposal for such a purpose, but up till now I have heard nothing more from him on the subject.

I have, &c.

FRANK C. LASCELLES.

[ED. NOTE.—Sir Charles Hardinge's despatches dealing with the internal situation are omitted as having no special bearing on the international situation. They generally record the unrest in Russia as a result of the war and depict the consequent weakness of the Government. The first manifesto suggesting internal reform, published by the Emperor Nicholas II on December 28, 1904, was reported by Sir Charles Hardinge the next day to have been "unfavourably received."]

II.—THE DOGGER BANK INCIDENT (THE ATTACK ON HULL FISHING BOATS BY THE RUSSIAN BALTIC FLEET), OCTOBER-DECEMBER 1904.

[ED. NOTE.—*v. G.P.* XIX, I, ch. 184, and ch. 185 for Russo-German negotiations relating to the coaling of the Baltic Fleet, and *Kaiser's Letters to the Tsar* (1920), p. 123 sqq.]

No. 5.

Messrs. Jackson and Co. to the Marquess of Lansdowne.⁽¹⁾

F.O. Russia 1729.

Tel.

Hull, October 23, 1904.

We act (for) Kelsall Brothers and Beeching Ltd. owners Gamecock steam fishing-fleet comprising about 50 steam fishing vessels. Shortly after midnight Friday 21st inst[ant] Russian Baltic Fleet fell in with them whilst fishing in the North Sea. First portion Russian passed safely, major portion Russian fleet after turning search-lights on British fishing vessels for some time opened fire; steam-trawler "Crane" sunk, decapitated bodies skipper and mate landed here, other members crew more or

(1) [Published with a slight alteration in *A. & P.* (1905), CIII, (Cd. 2350), p. 377.1