

ARTICLE IX.

THE HOUR OF CHINA AND THE UNITED STATES.

BY HENRY WILLIAM RANKIN.

"We live in a new and exceptional age. America is another word for Opportunity. Our whole history appears like a last effort of Divine Providence in behalf of the human race; and a literal, slavish following of precedents, as by a justice of the peace, is not for those who at this hour lead the destinies of this people."—RALPH WALDO EMERSON.¹

THE longest regular steamer route that has to be traveled wholly without sight of land is that between San Francisco and Japan, a distance of about five thousand miles. This is the widest separation of continents in the world, and represents the extreme limits of the Old World and the New. Here through all the centuries of human history the Orient and Occident have faced each other; but each, until recently, has for the most part held aloof. It is probable that the early races of America came hither by some way from Eastern Asia. Between the indigenous races of Northeastern Asia and Northwestern America there seems to be a blending and close approximation of cranial, physiognomical, and other characteristics; and within two years there have been reported in Mexico rock-graven inscriptions in Chinese that are centuries old.

But whatever may be the fact regarding the original settlement of the western hemisphere, and the sporadic and accidental immigrations which have followed that, it is obvious that for most of the time covered by human tradition this hemisphere has been practically isolated from the

¹ *On American Civilization, Miscellanies, p. 297.*

other. The discovery of gold in California in 1848, and occupation of that coast by the United States, marked a new era for the Pacific Ocean. Trade and intercourse between America and Asia immediately assumed a new and very great importance. Then began the extraordinary influx of Chinese to our shores, to meet the demands of labor and the opportunity of fortune. And now this most ancient, most conservative race, which has retained for at least three thousand years its wholly unique and truly marvelous national coherence, despite the corruptions and blindness of a pagan civilization, always by us regarded as effete, has exhibited in the face of the nineteenth century a degree of physical, intellectual, commercial, and even moral, vitality, which excites the continual amazement of those who are best acquainted with that people, and which still remains to be accounted for.

Not only did the Chinese pour into California until, in the interest of peace, it became necessary to place a stringent check upon their immigration, but from Alaska to Patagonia the entire Pacific coast of the western world within fifty years has received them in great numbers. And not only this, but the principal islands of the Pacific, from Australia to Hawaii, have swarmed with the Chinese. They have proved themselves to be among the most successful, as they are the most singular of colonists; combining in a way that is not only amusing but impressive an audacious strength of purpose and nonchalance of manner. Wherever they go they carry the most persistent individuality. They make no effort to amalgamate with the people among whom they live, and they seldom wish to conform to local ways which are foreign to their own, further than may exempt them from arrest, or over-attention from the police. The proportion of crime among them is small. They stick to their own business, and ask few favors. Whatever contempt they incur they answer with an equal

contempt for our customs and ideals, except as these may seem to be immediately conducive to their private ends; and they are most tenacious of their own. They both survive and flourish on persecution, and an exceedingly jealous competition with their labor wherever they are numerous. They have spread to all of our principal Eastern cities, forming little communities, plying their trades with indefatigable zeal, and largely accomplishing their strictly commercial ends; returning at will to their own land. We crack our jokes on them; but could we understand their remarks in the back parts of their shops and laundries, we would probably find that the jokes we make are small affairs to the jokes they make on us. They understand average human nature quite as well as we do, and are not forward to trust the disinterested sincerity of our advances. They have a plenty of experience to the contrary in their dealings with us. Yet when once convinced that our interest in them is of a genuinely right sort, they are quite as accessible and responsive to kindness as anybody else; while none can outdo in generosity the truly Christian Chinamen, of whom there now are many.

They are charged by their enemies with gross iniquities. But the most effective answer to this charge lies ready to hand in their very general, acknowledged, and quite unsurpassed industry in honest occupations. Such industry is wholly incompatible with a large prevalence of vice among them.

For the most part the Chinese in this country are not students nor men of independent means, who come here, like many Japanese, in pursuit of education. So it is not fair to compare them with this class. They are mostly small tradesmen and small farmers, by no means paupers or vagrants, and may be favorably compared with the immigration of their own class and pursuit from any part of Europe. But the few Chinese students who have attended

our schools and colleges are not only the equals of the Japanese, but above the average of home-born boys both in manners and in scholarship. This has often been observed.

There is in this race of men, in their institutions, their maxims, their education, their aims and personality, some remarkable staying-power, a quality and capacity of self-preservation, some conserving element, some factor of permanence, that has no equal and no precedent among all the pagan races that the world has known. Rome is supposed to have been founded about 753 B.C.; but China was then already old, and here she is to-day. Confucius lived but a century later than that date, and regarded his country as already decadent. He made it the business of his life to rescue the old and better traditions of the land, and to set these again before the people, as furnishing the ideals and standards by which they ought to live. He urged a return to the former paths, and the perpetual consideration of those more ancient examples in which alone, he thought, might be found illustrations of eminent virtue, and adequate rules for individual, domestic, civic, and national life. For the most part his teachings are sound and good, so far as they go; and the greater Chinese classics are singularly free from impurities, and make clean and wholesome reading, of a high intellectual order. Any one may be easily convinced of this by reading the available translations from Confucius, Mencius, and Laotse.

The pagan Roman Empire has long since passed away; but whatever faults and degradation may be actually found in the life of China to-day, it is more than probable that this civilization is far healthier, purer, and better to this hour, than was that of Rome at the beginning of the Gothic invasions.

Now at last a new page of history opens with the virtual invasion of China, not by barbarous hordes, but by the governments of Europe; and the probable participation, in

a very influential degree, of the United States, this newest nation, in shaping the tremendous change now at hand in that oldest of lands, yet far from obsolete, which has thus far preserved its autonomy. It may well be regarded as wholly to the interest of China, as well as of this country, that the United States should have such a part in determining those new destinies.

It should not be concealed that all such extension of our influence is certain to be accompanied by great evils in many directions in both lands; by that dangerous inflation of national pride, and increase of domestic wealth and luxury, whose invariable tendency has been to promote demoralization at home; by the vast increase of political jobbery, and the lust of national aggrandizement; by a growth of armament that always tends to an excess, with the accompanying enlargement of taxation, discontent of the poor, a widening of the breach between employers and employed; by the exaltation of military above civic virtue, the intensification of military ambition, the jealousy of rivals for popular acclaim, and the unsettling disturbance of vast numbers of young men who love the excitement of war, and can hardly endure the inactivity of the camps; the fast dissemination through a pagan land of what that land would call our Christian vices, and the consequent disgust with our pretense to be a superior and Christian people. Such are the dangers that the United States already has incurred. Whoever would realize to himself more fully what they are would do well to study the influence and effects of her eastern conquests upon ancient Rome, after the fall of Tarentum, and of her western conquests upon modern Spain since the capitulation of Granada. Nor can the analogy of any history justify us in expecting any exemption from equally disastrous consequences in the end, saving as that expectation is based upon one differential factor. The United States together

with Great Britain still possesses, in a degree hardly paralleled elsewhere, the ideals and faith of the New Testament. This inestimable factor is all too little reckoned in our political thought, and its very existence is menaced by the strongest gravitation of human nature. But great as are these dangers that beset us, we have no right to name them without equal attention to the international obligations in which we are quite as certainly involved. Some of these obligations need no better statement than was recently made as the sober and formal utterance of the Republican Convention of New York in the following words: "We realize that when the necessities of war compelled our nation to destroy Spanish authority in the Antilles and in the Philippines, we assumed solemn duties and obligations alike to the people of the islands we conquered, and to the civilized world. We cannot turn these islands back to Spain. We cannot leave them unarmed for defense, and untried in statecraft to the horrors of domestic strife, or to partition among European powers. We have assumed the responsibilities of victory, and wherever our flag has gone, there the liberty, the humanity, and the civilization which that flag embodies and represents must remain and abide forever."

It was in 1862 at Washington, prior to the issue of the Emancipation Proclamation, and probably in the presence of Lincoln and some of his cabinet, that the deeply significant words were uttered by Ralph Waldo Emerson which stand at the head of this paper. And again he said in that noble address on "The Fortune of the Republic," one of his very last, given at Boston in 1878: "Our helm is given up to a better guidance than our own; the course of events is quite too strong for any helmsman, and our little wherry is taken in tow by the ship of the great Admiral which knows the way, and has the force to draw men and states and planets to their good. Such and so potent is this high

method by which the Divine Providence sends the chiefest benefits under the mask of calamities, that I do not think we shall by any perverse ingenuity prevent the blessing."¹ This is a time to read that entire volume of political addresses, in which Emerson was at his best.

On his tour of the world, General Grant received exceptional opportunities of intimate contact with the governments of Kioto and Peking, by acting at their joint request as arbitrator in a dispute over certain islands to which both China and Japan had some claim. He gave satisfaction to those governments, and was treated by them both with singular favor; such as they had never shown to any foreigner before. He had an unusual opportunity for observing the ways and resources of both countries. He regarded Li Hung Chang, whatever his delinquencies, as the peer of any living statesman; ranking his intellectual and political ability with that of Bismarck and of Gladstone. He expressed the conviction that the three chief countries of the future were Russia, the United States, and China; as he also remarked that the Latin nations were surely doomed. He would doubtless have admitted that an Anglo-American combination of influence, were an intimate alliance brought about, would not only greatly increase the separate strength of each nation of these two, but prove an irresistible and paramount factor in the new course of events. England isolated must fall behind in the race; but England joined with America, in strong and vital union, must enormously enhance her own power, and double the advantage of both nations.

At this time there is much reason to believe, with Professor W. Douglas Mackenzie of Chicago, that an Anglo-American alliance against Russia is inevitable; and that, as regards the retention of the Philippines by the United States, "it is not a question of whether we are willing, but

¹ *Miscellanies*, p. 424.

whether we can resist what is evidently the trend of the human race at this juncture.”¹ Nor is this merely the trend of a selfish ambition, but the trend of a solemn obligation. Having, as the issue of a war that needs no apology, and which we would only have been recreant to avoid, brought the control of those islands into our hands, wresting them from hands of blood and violence and intolerable injustice, the United States has no right to shirk the obvious duty of doing for the people of the Philippines whatever thing may be the very best for them; and at whatever cost of trouble to ourselves. Righteousness first, and peace afterward; unless by the abandonment of this ideal we propose to place ourselves in the same category with that lamentable government which has sown the wind, and now has reaped the whirlwind. This obligation will not be lessened by the fact that grave dangers and evils will come with it. That is the inevitable order of this present evil age; an order that is only aggravated by every failure to fulfill unpleasant duty. Grave dangers and evils accompanied the Incarnation, and everything that has ensued from that. That golden age foretold by all the noblest bards and prophets of the past, lies straight before us, and may draw near more swiftly than we think; but it never can be hastened by any disregard of a tremendous national obligation.

That any pagan nation in our day should be aroused from the sleep of ages, in which an absolute resistance has been offered to all new influence from without, and should within a brief forty years, as Japan has done, attain to so high a degree of equality with the stronger modern governments, is an unprecedented event that in 1858 no man could have foreseen, and no man would have thought possible. This achievement on the part of Japan has led to comparisons very disparaging to China. Yet it might

¹ See *The Congregationalist*, Oct. 6, 1898, p. 440.

easily be shown that this disparagement is due to an enormous ignorance of China, and a popular misapprehension of the real facts in the case. It is a disparagement by no means shared by those older foreign residents of the East who are best acquainted with both of these two countries. It was death to any foreigner to land in Japan but forty years ago, and death to any native caught in the attempt to leave its shores. No conservatism nor delay of China can surpass the intensity of Japanese antagonism to all occidental demands prior to the advent of Commodore Perry's fleet, and for some time after that. The marvelous change has by no means been effected because the Japanese were so much more open and accessible than their neighbors. It was due to other factors, and largely to a violent exigency in the domestic politics of that land of the Rising Sun; an exigency which made it the obvious interest of one party to oppose its rival with all the thunder which might be stolen from abroad. And so a reversal of traditional policy supervened, and things became possible that could not have occurred had the Japanese not been embroiled in a domestic strife.

There are points of great interest, little considered among us, as to the relative merits of China and Japan; but only this may be said here, that probably no English nor American missionary, merchant, or diplomat, having a large experience of both countries, ever puts China one whit behind Japan, in its native resources and capabilities or possibilities of modern development. It is a greater mass to move than was Japan; but once profoundly moved, nothing can stay its momentum towards the light but an arbitrary hindrance to its advance interposed by some stronger foreign power seeking its own interests alone.

If the great exigency of China has not yet arrived which is to shake that hoary empire from center to circumference, yet it can hardly be doubted that it is on the way,

and likely to appear at any hour. Already exists the nucleus of a party of New China, composed of capable and influential natives, in the principal Eastern cities north and south; men who are awake to the situation, and extremely eager to obtain and disseminate the knowledge which may prepare the country to meet it. The interests of England and America in China are identical with the native interests to a degree that is shared by no other power upon earth. Nothing could be more disastrous to the prospects of political independence, freedom of conscience, and a just and liberal reorganization upon modern lines, than the ascendancy of Russia at Peking. Where Russia goes, there freedom of conscience and freedom of trade will equally meet their bound. Nor can anything more be hoped from a European coalition at Peking than from such a similar hypocrisy at Constantinople. Unless either a native government is backed by an Anglo-American alliance, which will encourage, assist, and require development on lines of freedom and light; or else a purely British protectorate is set up at the capital, backed cordially by this country, a most serious detriment to the fortunes of that land is likely to appear, so largely mortgaged as it is to Russia to meet the expenses of its war with Japan. But China is crowded with men of splendid physical and mental powers, the peers in this regard of any race; exceedingly quick, when once their eyes are open, to see where their advantage lies; possessed also of a moral power, endurance, persistence, and singleness of purpose, that are unsurpassed among any people. And even should Russian influence preponderate for a while in the North, if the great middle region may be completely opened up by the commerce, schools, and churches established there by America and England, we need not despair lest China shall not rise up of herself, and receive the aid of that Divine Providence which has, not without some gracious purpose, held that

great nation together, preserved it from destruction, and from all irreparable impairment of its native powers, through these millenniums to our own day. Most of the Chinese in this country came from the one southern province of Canton, and represent only the humbler pursuits which have been named. To judge the whole nation by these specimens alone is like judging all of Italy by the multitudes of impoverished people from the province of Naples, who form the larger part of the Italian influx to our shores. What these people of Southern Italy are to those of the North, the Cantonese are to their compatriots of Shantung. But even so judging, if the humble class of Chinese in our midst, and now spread over the whole Pacific coast of North and South America, exhibit the merits which have been here ascribed to them,—qualities that produce an indomitable and successful enterprise,—then how much more may be expected of the people as a whole. There are many minds in China quite as good as that of Li Hung Chang; and bodies as shapely and vital, and manners as refined, as belong to that distinguished man. The admiration which he elicited on his tour of the world was equally spontaneous in his beholders, and commanded by his personality. But the new times will soon produce those who are more worthy than he of our regard. We soon shall see who are the friends of ancient China. Even Germany is as likely now to follow British lead as Russian there; and from Germany, Great Britain, and America, since the first five ports were opened in 1842, have gone to China companies of men and women, comprising many of the most elevated character and culture, to plant those seeds of truth and life which already have begun to yield the first fruits of a beneficent harvest, and not in religious matters only. With arduous toil, and many tears, they have planted; but they shall reap in joy. “He that goeth forth, and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless

come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Ps. cxxvi. 6).

To-day America stands at the Golden Gate, that harbor for the world, whose only rival, if any, is by the Golden Horn, still facing westward with her destiny. On that coast of the Setting Sun stands the latest, youngest, strongest, freest, and most-filled-with-hope of all the nations; having compassed the limits of its own continent, and reached the time of its majority. There stands America, asking, What must be done next? The declining sun illumines a noble and far-seeing countenance, looking out upon the greatest of oceans and the oldest of nations. But not all the breadth of the Pacific should any longer isolate the interests of this youngest from those of that oldest land. With the intrigues of France and Russia, a tyrant on the south and a despot on the north, such as history shows them to be in every aggressive movement upon other lands, what will they do for China? They will fill their pockets, without permitting, so far as they can hinder, an equal opportunity for any foreign commerce but their own. They will saddle the people, so far as they are able, with an inexorable sacerdotal system, that allows of no dissent, nor the smallest liberty of thought; and will intercept at every point which they can reach, the free circulation of an open Bible, and dissemination of a New Testament form of Christianity. They will not educate the people in self-government, but do all they can to hinder the upbuilding of a strong native state. For they will wish to govern that people exclusively themselves, and in their foreign interest alone. They will sow dissensions among them to keep them ignorant and subject; and stamp upon every sign of growing national unity and life.

Finally, as France herself fawns upon Russia, and feels lost without the latter's moral and political support, that vast octopus is not unlikely to swallow up French influ-

ence in China, and, excepting as effectively opposed by America and Great Britain, to secure a control that is exclusive; just as she may yet turn into mere provinces of her empire all of the Mediterranean countries of Europe, and some others. The will of Peter the Great still rules in Europe as does that of no other man. A new Byzantine empire is on the way, which at Constantinople may reunite no small part of the ancient Roman world. If then the Czar were in a position, through the dependence of Italy on him, to nominate the Pope, what need hinder the coalescence of the ancient Greek and Roman churches? And where is the organization upon earth which could easily stand against that?

Should China be left to herself with only a wide-spread Bible to uplift her, she would yet develop a nobler type of civilization than Russia now possesses. The Chinese are a race of tireless labor and thrift; while a large part of Asia west and south, and a large part of Southern Europe, is sleeping in the shade or sitting in the sun. The Chinese are the most democratic in their instincts, traditions, and actual methods of all orientals. And the Chinese are a race of students, quite as much so as the Germans, who will very soon cease to swear in the words of a master, except as they make that master to be Christ.

Unless the answer to this responsibility be the answer of Cain, the United States is morally bound to join Great Britain in promoting the best interests of humanity in that empire at this most critical moment of its history in many centuries. Standing at the Golden Gate, with arms extended, our right hand passes up to Russia through Alaska, while the left, through Hawaii and Manila, reaches England at Hong Kong. Let us promote the peace of all so much as in us lies, so far as can be done with obedience to the categorical imperative. But let us not forget that *we are our brother's keeper*. Then since we must take sides,

let us side with that party which, whatever its faults may be, has done more than any other nation known to history for the promotion of good government in races that are alien to its own; that party which shares with us the self-same chief fountain of our own liberties, the open Bible, our own first charter and sheet-anchor; that party which with us will insist on the right and opportunity of every man to worship God without any intermeddling intermediaries set over him by other men.

To those who are unfamiliar with the kind of resources which China possesses, in her men and her institutions, it may seem as if that empire were on the verge of disintegration. And indeed, if the spoliation of her territory, and the displacement of her government by Europe, should receive no check, her independence might easily in a little while be overthrown. But if for a very few years her autonomy may be preserved, and the country safely tided over a period of rapid transition, there are good reasons for believing that this disaster would be permanently averted, and an enlightened and powerful home government secured. This is the very thing that Russia and France desire least of all to see, and that England and America should do their utmost to promote. The thing that ought to be done for China is a thing that can be done, and not an impracticable dream. However weak the present dynasty may be, that land is very far from being weak in material for statesmanship. Great as the deficiency may be in public spirit, national sentiment, and unity of purpose among that people, it is not such a deficiency as cannot be made good in a little time if but one thing were done. The Chinese possess at least one agency of enormous influence which has always made for national unity and strength. This agency is found in the imperial unity and universality of an educational system, which is at the same time a system of preparation for the civil service. It

is a system whose value intellectual, moral, and political is laughed at most by those who know the least about it. Within a term of fifteen years this vast institution, pervading every part of that dominion, might be almost as fully reformed as has been the schooling of Japan. And with all of it expressly planned to supply the civil service, there would be no lack of splendidly educated men for every position the government has to fill. They would be men all alive to every new interest; and the leaders among them would be quite as intelligent and capable as any land can produce. No long-resident of China would doubt this for a moment. Within that time strong colleges as well as churches might be established by Christian missions in every large city, supplementing the institutions which the government would found. Then how long need it be to make the English language as prevalent in China as it is in India to-day, or even in Japan; and how long to bring the quickening message of Christianity to every hamlet of that empire? Her native Christians already are her truest patriots, and already the schools established by evangelical missions for both sexes are doing the splendid work they have always done in every pagan and Mohammedan mission field.

It is said that the United States as a government has but one interest in China—the commercial. So far as this means a disclaimer of all design or desire on our part towards our own territorial or political aggrandizement there, it is well said. But what need to speak of the effect on commerce of the development indicated in these other directions, or of the reciprocal effect that commerce itself would have on that? It is very obvious that the most magnanimous thing which England and America could do for China would also be the most profitable to the commerce of those countries. But that is not what here concerns us chiefly; nor is that profit the ulterior end of the

philanthropy which is here advocated as a political obligation.

Whether or not the Manchu dynasty can now furnish a proper man for the occasion, if but the form of government be maintained, and the right man be found to be made prime minister, the needed changes may yet be accomplished. Only let England and America pull together in a sincere effort, and by all honorable means, to promote the best native interests of China, and to help that aged country upon her feet; and before they know it China will be as young as either of them yet, and an ally of whom they will have no cause to be ashamed. Moreover they may yet need her as an ally, and she will be strong in proportion to her own independence.

Nor should Japan or Germany be excluded from this combination, if they are willing to accept a British leading, and heartily coöperate. Japan and China certainly ought before this to have been natural allies against all European usurpation, and perhaps they can yet, in some measure, make up for their lost time. If these four countries together can prevent such usurpation on the part of Russia, and maintain the freedom of China to work out her own problem, this indeed would be the best thing for her, and for them all. An equal share with the rest in the favor of China, Russia may well retain; but more than this would be an injury to all parties. Russia may think that China is sold to her. But how long need that debt remain unpaid with the right financier in Peking?

If the worst comes, and North China falls, at least for a time, into Russian hands, then let a more central capital be made, and everything be done to reorganize a native government which may yet recover all that is lost. The apparent blunder of accepting an enormous loan from Russia instead of from England may yet prove an important means of independence. England herself has less tempta-

tion to acts of usurpation, while she also resists the encroachment of Russia. With nations, as with men,

"There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough hew them how we may."

The supreme ground of China's hope must be the active providence of God. May all her believing Christians diligently betake themselves to prayer!

To sum up all in brief: If England and America wish to conserve by honest means their own interests in China; and if also they should be sufficiently just and generous to wish to do their best for her, they must do three things. First, they must act together in all sincerity of open and amicable coöperation; second, they must by all honorable means promote the best interests of an independent native government; third, they must utterly avoid all such acts of injustice to that country as they resent in other foreign powers. Even if the interests of peace should require at any time or place a British protectorate in China, it should be a distinctly provisional arrangement, whose every move should serve to develop the powers of self-government in the people. Give China half a chance to collect her wits and she will yet astonish the world, if she does not with the aid of heaven awe the world, by her self-recovery. In any case our duty in the premises is the same.

POSTSCRIPT.

Momentous events which have to do with China have occurred since this article was written, which cannot here be even named. But in April last an Anglo-Russian agreement was announced, meant chiefly to prevent collision of British and Russian interests in Central China and Manchuria. The agreement also declares that no infringement is intended of Chinese sovereignty, and none of any existing treaty rights. So, for the nonce, the open door and native autonomy remain. Between the ostensible spheres of Russian and British influence lie the capital and the great valley of the Hoang-Ho, regarding which the agreement is significantly silent. Hardly was this transaction over when Russia requested of the Chinese Foreign Board permission to build a road directly con-

necting the Manchurian railroad with Peking; and, being refused, gave notice, not the less, that surveys for this line would proceed. While others vacillate, the obvious aim of Russia never falters, and her onward, glacial movement never recedes. It will soon be a case of Russia against the world. Every other government is likely to be soon forced into coalition with her or against her. The destruction of Chinese autonomy would not only be disastrous to the best interests of China, but injurious to all countries having a large commercial stake in China; hindering her proper development, and intensifying their feuds. This can be averted only by such joint action of other governments as shall effectually bar at the Great Wall Russia's further territorial aggression. Japan and Germany waited for England to act, and it would seem as if England had been waiting for us. Even England has no stake in China greater than our own, and upon the action of America, the quicker the better, hangs the future of China, if not of Japan, as upon no other earthly hope. The suggestions of Archibald Colquhoun, Lord Beresford, and of John Barrett, our late minister to Siam, deserve the best attention. If the territorial integrity and independence of China do not concern the government at Washington, we shall soon have to take what rights we can get from Russia. But the history of mankind has come to its home run, and soon will reach the base from which it started. Another forty years will occidentalize all Asia, and the Eastern question of supremacy is quite as likely to involve America as Europe. When the new cycle of world-history begins, that government will fare best that shall care more to be just than to be first, and to be generous than to rule.