

## **PART II--LIFE**

### **AUTOCRACY AND WAR--1905**

From the firing of the first shot on the banks of the Sha-ho, the fate of the great battle of the Russo-Japanese war hung in the balance for more than a fortnight. The famous three-day battles, for which history has reserved the recognition of special pages, sink into insignificance before the struggles in Manchuria engaging half a million men on fronts of sixty miles, struggles lasting for weeks, flaming up fiercely and dying away from sheer exhaustion, to flame up again in desperate persistence, and end--as we have seen them end more than once--not from the victor obtaining a crushing advantage, but through the mortal weariness of the combatants.

We have seen these things, though we have seen them only in the cold, silent, colourless print of books and newspapers. In stigmatising the printed word as cold, silent and colourless, I have no intention of putting a slight upon the fidelity and the talents of men who have provided us with words to read about the battles in Manchuria. I only wished to suggest that in the nature of things, the war in the Far East has been made known to us, so far, in a grey reflection of its terrible and monotonous phases of pain, death, sickness; a reflection seen in the perspective of thousands of miles, in the dim atmosphere of official reticence, through the veil of inadequate words. Inadequate, I say, because what had to be reproduced is beyond the common experience of war, and our imagination, luckily for our peace of mind, has remained a slumbering faculty, notwithstanding the din of humanitarian talk and the real progress of humanitarian ideas. Direct vision of the fact, or the stimulus of a great art, can alone make it turn and open its eyes heavy with blessed sleep; and even there, as against the testimony of the senses and the stirring up of emotion, that saving callousness which reconciles us to the conditions of our existence, will assert itself under the guise of assent to fatal necessity, or in the enthusiasm of a purely aesthetic admiration of the rendering. In this age of knowledge our sympathetic imagination, to which alone we can look for the ultimate triumph of concord and justice, remains strangely impervious to information, however correctly and even picturesquely conveyed. As to the vaunted eloquence of a serried array of figures, it has all the futility of precision without force. It is the exploded superstition of enthusiastic statisticians. An over-worked horse falling in front of our windows, a man writhing under a cart-wheel in the streets awaken more genuine emotion, more horror, pity, and indignation than the stream of reports, appalling in their