

## Maurice Baring's Memorable Perceptions of War in Pre-Bolshevik Russia and Constantinople

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### Epigraphs:

*“It is often said [as of 1905] that the Russian soldier is admirable on the defensive and when qualities of endurance are needed, but that he is no good on the offensive. **I believe this is a catch-word which has no foundation in fact.** I believe the truth to be that the Russian soldier will go anywhere and do anything, only that the amount of dash of which he will be capable will depend on the amount of dash with which he is led. That Russian infantry is capable of doing marvels under inspired direction was proved to the world in 1799 by the campaign of Suvorov, but since Suvorov Russia has not had **an inspired leader of genius.** Skobelleff was a dashing soldier, but he had not **the Napoleonic rapidity of conception and action** as Suvorov [d.1800] had; and it needs something more than dash to handle an army, **as a great musician handles a musical instrument.** (Maurice Baring, *With the Russians in Manchuria* (London: Methuen, 1905— 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. in 1906), pp. 183-184—my emphasis added)*

*“A great deal has been written **and is still written daily** [as of 1905] about the hardships Russians are enduring owing to their being without food and winter clothing [in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905]. **This is mere fancy.** The soldiers have a plentiful supply of meat and are probably, as far as feeding goes, better off at the front [in Manchuria and Korea] than they are in barracks....As to warm clothing—by the middle of December [1904] the whole army was provided with thick coats reaching to the knees and lined with sheepskin, fur caps and felt boots....Besides the thick overcoats (poloushoubki) the men had shirts made of a soft woolen stuff like a blanket. **It is the more discontented of the 'intellectuals' in St. Petersburg and Moscow who are responsible for the reports about the wretched insufficiency of the men's clothing; and they are magnified by our daily press** [in England].” (Maurice Baring, *With the Russians in Manchuria*, pp. 186-187—my emphasis added)*

*“If lack of initiative is the most crying defect of the Russian army [given the absence of clear purpose and objectives in the War], lack of proper organization is the second fault. Just as in the civil administration of Russia disastrous results are obtained by the utter lack of cohesion and complete disconnection between one department and another, so in the army there is a deplorable want of connection between the various parts. As to the strategy and tactics, the competent authorities seem to agree that there has been no very brilliant display of strategy on either side; and that the war in this respect has been almost pre-Napoleonic.” (Maurice Baring, *With the Russians in Manchuria*, p. 187)*

## A salutary warning

After considering these varied, but representative, above insights from Maurice Baring's 1905 book, *With the Russians in Manchuria*, we shall be even more grateful to reflect upon the admonitory conclusions he draws from his trenchant depiction of modern war, which he so diversely experienced in several foreign cultures before the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Moreover, his piercing and humane warning about the nature of modern war came some twelve years before the impending Bolshevik Era of Revolutionary Total War and thus also before the 1917 events in Portugal, at Fatima.<sup>1</sup>

It seems fitting, therefore, now at the outset to quote in their entirety the three final paragraphs of Baring's 1905 book about Manchuria, in order to prepare us, and even to help clarify for us in proper proportion, what is to follow. For, most of these rare glimpses of early-20<sup>th</sup> century war will come from the candid Russian and Balkan writings of Maurice Baring, who—like his intimate friends, G.K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc—was himself a very cultured and courageous man with a deep, answering heart and a poetic soul of rare and nuanced perceptions. And that was so even before he was gratefully to enter the Catholic Church on 1 February 1909, on the Vigil of Candlemas—after having had, for some years, his own privileged experiences of the Orthodox Faith and its rooted sacred (and sacramental) culture in Russia.

## The horrors of modern war – the palace of truth

At the end of his vivid narrative account as a gifted multilingual journalist amidst many battles in the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War, Baring says, by way of conclusion and warning, the following:

*As to the war I shall be satisfied **if** there is a **single** sentence in this book which will have brought home **to anyone** the **unalterable** horror, misery, pain, and suffering which is caused by a modern war—**anything** which will make people reflect when, **or rather before**, they beat the big drum and appeal to **St. Jingo**.*

*War is an insensate abomination, and the **only** redeeming feature in it seems to me **the sparks it knocks out of the human character, apart from** the actual courage displayed, and the deeds of heroism which are done.*

*War seemed to me to be **like the palace of truth**, to act **as a touchstone on men's characters**; it revealed many vices, follies and failures, weaknesses, the meanest and smallest sides of human nature; **but also** in the other scale of the balance, and surely the balance is weighed down on this side, **many noble things and innumerable small forgotten acts which were beautiful, and among these perhaps the most precious are the unexpected surprises in men, the “self-sacrifice of the indifferent, the unworldliness of the worldly, the unselfishness of the selfish.”** (204-205—my emphasis added)<sup>2</sup>*

1 In this context, see especially Major General J.F.C Fuller, *The Conduct of War, 1789-1961: A Study of the Impact of the French, Industrial, and Russian Revolutions on War and Its Conduct* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992—first edition in 1961, from Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey). Notably illuminating are J.F.C. Fuller's Chapter X (“Lenin and the Russian Revolution”) and Chapter XI (“Soviet Revolutionary Warfare”), to be found on pages 183-216.

2 Maurice Baring, *With the Russians in Manchuria* (London: Methuen, 1905, 1906), pp. 204-205. This reference and all further references to this book will be placed in the main text of this essay, in parentheses. In 1927, Maurice

## The embodiment of natural unaffected courage

As an example of such a noble human character amidst that desolating war, Baring had earlier presented his brief, but abiding, depiction of Colonel Philemonoff:

*I left ["to return to Mukden"] on the 30<sup>th</sup> October [1904] with Colonel Philemonoff, who had been ordered home to Russia by the doctors. He had been getting worse, **and could scarcely move from his bed**. In spite of this he would get up from time to time, and, muffled in cloaks, go up to the top of the hill ["Poutiloff's Hill"] in the bitter cold. He was an example of man's "unconquerable mind." **And it was indeed bitter to him when he was at last forced to go and leave his men and the work, which was his life**. I saw him say good-bye to the Cossacks. He made a short speech in a low voice, absolutely simple and unpretentious.*

*Then as he rode away **he told me how he had lived with these men, and regarded them as his children, and that it broke his heart to go away**. He was a man of forbidding exterior, with a quiet, grim manner, but he was refined, cultivated, with a quiet sense of humour. "Lofty and sour to them that lov'd him not; But, to those men that sought him sweet as summer." **The embodiment of natural unaffected courage, and the men worshipped him**. (180-181—my emphasis added)*

## His Japanese

As another sign of the magnanimity and compassion of the Russian soldier for his opponent, Baring—who knew the Russian language very well—reveals another inspiring example, perhaps to form, as well, our own character when we are grappling or under fire:

*The Russians used always to say that the Japanese were "molodtzi," which means "fine fellows," and is the greatest praise you can express in Russian.*

***The following is a story of truth which I can vouch for.** A Russian and a Japanese were found locked in a hand to hand struggle. The Japanese was taken prisoner and **the Russian was severely wounded**. The Russian **refused** to be taken to the ambulance **unless** the Japanese were taken with him; because the Russian said that it was "his Japanese." They were put together in the same hospital train and the Russian **refused** to be separated from the Japanese **and spent his time looking after him, and fanning his head** and telling all visitors that it was "his Japanese."*

***A Cossack officer** in General Kossogovski's division, when I was dining with his regiment one evening, made us all nearly cry by his account of the way in which*

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Baring published a larger volume of his pre-Bolshevist writings on Russia, but, for some reason unknown to me, he does not therein include these poignant, final three paragraphs presented in the three earlier editions of *With the Russians in Manchuria* (June 1905, August 1905, and 1906). See Maurice Baring, *What I Saw in Russia* (London: William Heinemann LTD, 1927), 386 pages. The selected portions of *With the Russians in Manchuria* are to be found in Part I of this latter volume, on pages 1-156. Part II considers "What I Saw in Russia, 1905-1906," after the Russo-Japanese War; and Part III considers "What I Saw in Russia, 1907-1914," and just before the outbreak of World War I.

the Japanese fought and met death in front of the forts of Liaoyang. “Their officers are superior to us,” he said, “more intelligent, more cultivated, and unsurpassably brave.”

**The soldiers said the same thing.** The good-nature and unselfishness of the Transbaikal Cossacks was never more noticeable than it was on the day we arrived at Poutiloff's Hill. For **of their own accord** the men went **in search of the wounded** [also the Japanese!], brought them to the fire and gave them tea and cigarettes and carried them themselves to the village, three versts off [almost two miles distant, some three kilometers]. The [Russian] doctor was much struck by this and he begged me to notice it and to say something about it some time. (177-178—my bold emphasis added; the italics in the original)

### **Mercy and tenderness**

Earlier, by way of general introduction, Baring had said:

*I often had opportunities of watching their [the Russians'] dealings with the Japanese wounded, and their treatment was exactly what the [London] Times described the Japanese treatment of the Russian prisoners and wounded as being; “namely that they treated them not only with mercy but with tenderness.” I saw one Cossack sponging the face of a Japanese wounded man as if he had been a nurse....The same thing is true of this war [despite a few “exceptional cases of excess or brutality” on each side—(176)]. **There is no sort of bitterness between the combatants.** The Russians are full of the greatest admiration for the Japanese....[moreover,] A correspondent who returned to Mukden from Liaoyang since the Japanese occupation told me that the Japanese were full of praise for the Russians. (176-177—my emphasis added)*

### **Plunged in the lowest circle of human pain**

One other example, after the battle of Sha-Ho, shows a little more of the nature of this war in Asia, but also, in Baring's moving words, gives us a further glimpse of high character and virtue:

*The Russian soldier, as a rule bears his wounds with astounding fortitude, but the wounded of whom I am speaking were so terribly mangled that many of them were screaming in their agony. Two officers were brought in. “Don't bother about us, doctor,” they said, “we shall be all right.” We laid these two officers down on the k'ang [divan, couch]. They seemed fairly comfortable; one of them said he felt cold; and the other that the calf of his leg tingled, “Would I mind rubbing it?” I lifted it as gently as I could, but it hurt him terribly, and then rubbed his leg, which he said gave him relief. “What are you?” he said, “an interpreter, or what?”....I said I was a correspondent. He was about to give me something, whether it was a tip or a small present as a remembrance, I shall never know, for the other officer stopped him and said [half deliriously], “No, no, you're mistaken.” He [the one I relieved] thanked me very much. Half an hour later he died. **One seemed to be plunged into the lowest circle of human pain.** (163-164—my emphasis added)*

## Faces of no human semblance

Indeed, more and more came to meet Maurice Baring himself in his own works of mercy, as he further assisted the already overburdened Russian doctor, and Baring went on to say:

*I met a man [Russian soldier] in the street [outside the makeshift infirmary] who **had crawled on all fours the whole way from the hill. The stretchers were all occupied.** The manner in which **the doctor** dealt with the men was magnificent. He **dominated the situation, encouraged everyone, had the right answer, suppressed the unruly and cheered up those who needed cheering up.***

*The house was so crowded and the accommodation so scanty that it took a very short time to fill a house, and we were constantly moving from one house to another. The floor was, in every case, **so densely packed with writhing bodies** that one stumbled over them in the darkness. Some of the men were being sick from pain; **others had faces which had no human semblance at all.** Horrible as the sight was **the piteousness of it was greater still.** *Mentem mortalia tangunt* [Virgil's sad half-line from *The Aeneid*, Book I, Line 462]. **The men were touching in their thankfulness for any little attention, and noble in the manner they bore their sufferings.** (164—my emphasis added)*

## The Balkan wars

Just before the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, Maurice Baring also published *Letters from the Near East 1909 and 1912*,<sup>3</sup> a series of insightful reports from his experiences in the Balkan Wars which were also a sort of rehearsal for World War I, the way the later Spanish Civil War was a rehearsal for World War II. The last two chapters of Baring's 1913 book are entitled "Constantinople During the War" (21 November 1912) and "The Cholera at San Stefano," (10 December 1912), a small village also in Turkey, a short distance outside of Constantinople. An even fuller account of the latter article on San Stefano is later given in Maurice Baring's 1922 autobiography, *The Puppet Show of Memory*, in Chapter XXII, entitled "Constantinople Once More" (1912).<sup>4</sup>

We propose now, on the whole, to consider what Baring first presented in his 1913 book, adding, when appropriate, some portions from the autobiographical book's account nine years later, and thus after the ravages of World War I where Baring served and distinguished himself as a British staff officer in combat, especially in France.<sup>5</sup>

Soon after the First Balkan War started on 8 October 1912, with the Balkan League's attack upon the Ottoman Empire, Maurice Baring was in Constantinople, from where he wrote his report, dated 21 November 1912 and entitled "Constantinople During the War." Baring explicitly says that

3 Maurice Baring, *Letters from the Near East 1909 and 1912* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co. 15 Waterloo Place, 1913). It contains a summary Preface and nine additional chapters, several of them written from Constantinople itself in 1909 and then again upon his return to Turkey in the autumn of 1912.

4 Maurice Baring, *The Puppet Show of Memory* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1922), Chapter XXII, pp. 418-429.

5 Maurice Baring, *R.F.C. H.Q.—1914-1918* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1920), a text of 315 pages, inclusive of the index.

he is trying to assess “**the moral atmosphere** of the place,” which he concedes often undergoes many a “sharp change,” and “one must always remember that all news here is unreliable.”<sup>6</sup>

### The most gruesome sight ever seen

Then begins Maurice Baring's eye-witness account, which, as further “Reports from Reality,” we may now contrast with his earlier harsh experiences of war with the Russians in Manchuria:

*But before discussing anything else I will tell of a thing which I saw with my eyes, and which throws some light on the conditions under which the war is being carried on here. On Tuesday morning I drove out in a motor-car with two companions and a Turkish officer with the intention of reaching the Tchataldja lines. Up to Tuesday people had been able to reach the lines in motor-cars. Probably too many had done this; and very properly an order had been issued to put a stop to the flood of visitors [to the battlefield!]. In spite of the presence of a Turkish officer with us we could not get beyond the village of Kutchuk [i.e., “Little”] Tchekmedche, which is right on the Sea of Marmora [some 10 kilometers southwest of Constantinople]. Not far from the village, and separated from it by a small river, is a railway station, and as we drove past the bank of the railway line we noticed several dead men lying on the bank. **The station was being disinfected.** We stopped by the sandy beach to have luncheon, and before we had finished **a cart passed us with more dead men on it.** (147-148—my emphasis added)*

Baring has given us some foreboding hints—especially a sense of death from infection. Could it even be a germinating pestilence, one wonders, one of the consequences of war and the migratory foreign soldiers and refugees? Baring will prepare us a little further, as they returned to Constantinople by way of San Stefano (which, in 1926, was renamed Yesilköy, the current Turkish name), where a famous Treaty was signed back in 1878 to end the Russo-Turkish War. Baring, implicitly assuming that his reader is informed of these matters, goes on then to say:

*We drove back through San Stefano [also on the sea]. We entered through a gate and drove down the suburb [of Constantinople], where bounded on one side by a railway embankment and on the other hand by a wall, **there is a large empty space** intersected by the road. Beyond this [large space] are the houses of San Stefano. **It was in this space that we were met by the most gruesome and terrible sight I have ever seen; worse than any battlefield or the sight of wounded men.** (149—my emphasis added)*

### Like a heap of half-crushed worms

Given what, in part, we have already seen and learned from Baring's piteous and desolating experiences with the Russians and Japanese in Manchuria, these last words are certainly, in

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<sup>6</sup> Maurice Baring, *Letters from the Near East 1909 and 1912* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1913), p.146—my emphasis added. Further page references to this text will be in parentheses in the body of the essay above, as before it was done with the other texts, as well. In Turkey, too, Baring will have many occasions to recall Virgil's famous line from the *Aeneid* (Bk. I, 1.462): “*Sunt lacrimae rerum, mentem mortalia tangunt*” (“There are tears for (in) things, and things that die touch the mind.”)

themselves, a formidable and heart-piercing claim. And now what are we to expect, a *fortiori*?

*This plot of ground was littered with dead and dying men. The ground itself was strewn with rags, rubbish, and filth of every kind, and everywhere, under the wall, by the edge of the road, and on the road, were men in every phase and stage of cholera. There was nobody to help them [i.e., no Turkish civilian or military doctors, no Turkish military medics]; nobody to look after them; nothing to be done for them. Many of them were dead, and lay like terrible black waxworks in contorted shapes. Others were moving and struggling, and others again were just gasping out the last flicker of life. One man was making a last effort to grasp a gourd [to slake his agonizing thirst, from dehydration]. **And in the middle of this there were other soldiers, sitting patiently waiting and eating bread under the walls of the houses** [the dwellings of the traditional Turkish elites in prestigious San Stefano]. **There was not a sound, not a murmur.** Imagine a crowd of holiday-makers at Hampstead Heath [in England] **suddenly stricken by plague**, and you will have some idea of **this terrible sight.** Imagine one of Gustave Dore's illustrations to Dante's "Inferno" made into **a tableau vivant** [costumed actors on stage who remain hauntingly silent and motionless!] by some unscrupulous and decadent artist. Imagine woodcuts in old Bibles of the Children of Israel **stricken in the desert and uplifting their helpless hands** to the Brazen Serpent. **Deserted, helpless, and hopeless, this mass of men lay like a heap of half-crushed worms, to suffer and to die amidst indescribable filth, and this only seven miles from the capital [Constantinople], where the nurses say they cannot get patients!** (149-151—my emphasis added)*

In Baring's sequel, submitted to London on 10 December 1912 and again written in Constantinople, we shall learn more of this "cholera camp" (162) and come to see selfless and heroic works of mercy from some perhaps unexpected sources, in generous collaboration. Once again, Baring prepares his reader:

*San Stefano, at the time of my writing, is **entirely deserted.** The elegant summer "residences" are **empty.** The streets are **silent**....The whole place at present is **lifeless.** Only on the quay you see porters and Red Crescent [the Moslem Red Cross] orderlies [not nurses] dealing with great bales of **baggage**, and **every now and then in the silent street you hear the tinkling stale music** of a faded pianoforte which plays an old-fashioned—not an old—tune. **I wondered when I heard this music who in the world could be playing the pianoforte in San Stefano at such a moment.** I need hardly say that **the effect was not only melancholy but uncanny** [especially on Maurice Baring, who was a cultivated and nuanced connoisseur of music himself]; **for what is there sadder in the world than out-of-date music played on an exhausted and wheezy instrument** [in such a macabre and desolate setting]? (163-164—my emphasis added)*

## Foreign angels

Within some walls on “a slight prominence” (164) inland off the seacoast and quay of San Stefano there was a “deserted Greek school,” (164) and, Baring says:

*This is the place where cholera patients **at last** found shelter, and this is the place to which I was brought by the kindness of [a surgeon] Major Ford, U.S.A., and Mr. Philip, First Secretary of the American Embassy, who were both of them devoting themselves to the relief of the cholera victims. It was at San Stefano about a fortnight ago that under the outside wall of the town and on the railway embankment the dead and dying were **lying like crushed insects, without shelter, without food, without water**. Since then [other foreigners] Miss Alt, **a Swiss lady of over seventy**, and a friend of hers, an Austrian lady, Madame Schneider, **seeing that nothing was being done for these people, and that no medical or other assistance was being brought them, took the matter in their own hands** and started a relief fund..., and gave themselves up to the task of doing what they could for the sick. They turned the deserted Greek school into a hospital, and they were joined by Mr. Frew, a Scotch minister of the Dutch Reformed Church in Constantinople [and others from Foreign Embassies who] joined **these two heroic ladies**....And it was owing to Major Ford [“an American surgeon, who was in Constantinople **by way of having a rest cure**” (166)] that I was allowed to visit the spot. (164-166—my emphasis added)*

## Details too horrible to write

After presenting many details about the accommodations and the varied diagnoses of the likely diseases present, Baring says:

*From the human point of view, and not from the scientific point of view, the question [about “the cholera microbe” and its suspected alternatives] was indifferent. **The solemn fact from the human point of view** was that the Turkish soldiers at San Stefano were sick and dying from a disease that in many points resembled cholera, and that others were dying from what was indistinguishable from cholera and its outward manifestations. Every day and every night so many soldiers died, but less and less as the days went on....It is difficult to convey to those who never saw it the impression made by the first sight of the [crowded] rooms in the Greek school where the sick were lying. **Some of the details are too horrible to write**....Many of the soldiers had gangrened feet and legs, all blue, stiff and rotten, as if they had been frostbitten. These soldiers had either to have their limbs amputated or die—and there is no future for an amputated Turk. There is nothing for him to do save to beg....[A]nd although most of them [the soldiers present] were wounded, all of them were unwashed and many of them covered with vermin....Their underclothes were in rags, and caked with dirt. The sick were all soldiers; most of them were Turks; some of them were Greeks. (168-171—my emphasis added)*

More and more fully now, Baring will describe the inspiring examples of the two heroic ladies, one Swiss and one Austrian:

*During the first week of this desperate state of things Miss Alt and Madame Schneider worked like slaves and accomplished the impossible. They spent the whole day and very often the whole night in bringing clothes to the ragged, food to the hungry, and water to the thirsty....When one spent the whole day in this place, and one had seen people like Miss Alt, Madame Schneider, Major Ford, and Mr. Frew working like slaves from morning to night, one still had the feeling that nothing had been done at all compared with what remained undone, so overwhelming did the odds seem. And yet at the end of one week there was a vast change for the better in the whole situation. (172-175)*

### **The innate *politesse de coeur* of the Turk**

As Maurice Baring compassionately did in his writings on the Russo-Japanese War, so, too, here he gives us memorable ennobling glimpses of the suffering victims, especially the Moslem Turks, and renders to them a very profound tribute:

*With regard to the sick, great as was the distress of these wretched victims, **they were sublime in their resignation. They consented, like Job, in what was worse than dust and ashes, to the workings of the Divine will....**Thirsty as they were—they would not drink all the water [they had implored to have and then fully received in their own “military water bottles”], but they kept a little back to perform the ablutions which the Mahometan religion ordains should accompany the prayers of the faithful. **Even in their agony the Turks never lost one particle of their dignity, and never for one moment forgot their manners. They died as they had lived—like the Nature's noblemen they are—acknowledging every assistance;** and when they refused a gift or an offer **they put into the refusal the graciousness of an acceptance.** Only those who have been to Turkey can have any idea of **the politeness, the innate *politesse du coeur* of the Turk.** (175-176—my bold emphasis added, italics in the original)*

### **In the east, it is impossible to do things in a hurry**

After the strategic initiatives and acts of mercy of several foreigners, the Turks started to become involved:

*After the first few days, the Turkish medical authorities took steps in the matter of the Greek school....A British unit of the Turkish Red Crescent arrived from England under the able direction of Dr. Baines....**Although it was impossible to persuade any of the [wealthy] owners of the houses at San Stefano to allow them to be used as hospitals,** a house was found for Dr. Baines' unit....But he received this house for himself and his staff **on the express condition that no sick of any kind whatsoever, and not even the owner's father, should be allowed to go into it.** [The Charity of the Elites of San Stefano is a touching thing!]**....Hard words** have been said about the Turkish medical authorities with regard to this matter....**But an epidemic of cholera such as that which I have described seemed to paralyse them. It took the Turks unprepared.** Steps were taken but tardily, and to Western minds the procedure seemed incredibly and criminally slow; **but the fact remains that in the East it is impossible to do things in a hurry, and if you try to***

*hustle you will find that there will be **less speed in the long run....But it is useless to slur over the fact that** when this appalling situation arose, when the cholera victims were **lying like flies** on the railway embankment at San Stefano, they [the Turkish medical authorities] **took no steps to cope** with the situation **until** they were **stimulated** to do so **by the heroic examples of Miss Alt and Madam Schneider** and the pressure of foreign opinion. **This was partly due to the fatalism of their outlook, to the resignation of their temperament, and partly to the disorder which was rife throughout their military organisation.** (180-184—my emphasis added)*

Baring will conclude his perspicacious and moving report by returning to the two ladies:

*Had it not been for the spontaneous efforts of Miss Alt, and Madam Schneider, and Mr. Frew, the Turkish soldiers who were **shut up** in the cholera camp of San Stefano, **without any possibility of egress**, would have died of hunger and thirst. And...among the cholera patients there were a great number of soldiers who were suffering simply and solely **from exhaustion and starvation....and what was at the beginning an ante-chamber to Hell** has been now, I believe, converted into a clean hospital with all necessary appliances and attendants. That this was done was **due to the initial enterprise of Miss Alt and Madam Schneider. They were the leading spirits and the soul of this undertaking.** (184-185—my emphasis added)*

### **Overflowing with love, radiating charity**

In his eloquent peroration from his deep and sincere heart, Maurice Baring then gets more specific in his **enduring description** of the labor and the manner of mercy, especially of Miss Alt:

*Their work was **untiring and incessant.** To have seen Miss Alt [some seventy years of age] at work was a rare privilege. **Impervious to disgust, but saturated with pity, overflowing with love and radiating charity, she threaded her way, bowed with age and with silvered hair, like a good angel or a kind fairy, from tent to tent, from room to room laden with gifts; unconscious of the filth, disdainful of the stench, blind to the hideous sights, she went her way, giving with both hands, helping with her arms, cheering with her speech, and healing with her smile.** (185-186—my emphasis added)*

### **Broken angels**

Along with a fitting reference to his beloved Dante (*Inferno*, Canto II—lines 91-93), Baring also says that “Miss Alt came to San Stefano like an angel to Hell” (186) and had some of the qualities of Dante's Beatrice, who because she was a mediatrix of Grace, was able to see and endure and heal the suffering of others, especially the anguish and pensive yearning of Dante the Pilgrim. (Beatrice's actual words to Dante were, in a prose translation from the Italian: “God in His Mercy such created me that that misery of yours attains me not, nor any flame assails me of this burning.”)

However, Miss Alt had not Beatrice's youth nor all of the protections which Beatrice had, for:

*After working for several days like a slave from morning till night Miss Alt broke*

*down, and had to be sent to the British Hospital in Constantinople, where it became plain that she had contracted a severe attack of cholera. Later on Madam Schneider also succumbed to the disease. Fortunately both of the ladies recovered, but they have been left in a broken-down and destitute condition, and it is hoped their heroism will be recognised in a tangible way....(186-187)*

Instead of acutely perceiving, as he often did in Manchuria, the heroic courage and compassion (and other virtues) in the pre-Bolshevik Russian **officers and soldiers**—and also in their Japanese counterparts—here now some seven years later in Constantinople, and over three years after the May 1909 Turkish Revolution, Maurice Baring saw these exemplary qualities of character, as well, but in two unforgettable **ladies and civilians**. These self-sacrificing ladies showed forth—amidst all the squalor and disease and disorder of war—a comparably vivid fortitude, and with an inspiring spark and radiance of virtue and high character, while also, with a special touch, **giving with both hands and healing with their smile.**<sup>7</sup>

### CODA

After having now considered these two sets of wartime reflections and Maurice Baring's especially intimate and vivid perceptions of these distinct wars and their contrasting “moral atmosphere,” let us now look briefly at a larger, geo-strategic and cultural analysis, and also then consider the consequences set in motion and spreading out so soon after the results of the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War truly “hit home.”

In his own writings, Maurice Baring, with becoming modesty, always “makes himself small,” often deliberately concealing his own unmistakably courageous actions and deeply responsive heart in the face of human suffering. So, too, is that the case with the objective and morally attentive writings of Major General J.F.C. Fuller; the strategic-minded, British military historian and later-combatant officer in World War I. For, General Fuller also makes himself small in trying to reveal, and not conceal, objective reality and many enduring matters of moment to man.

### A reveille through the East

If we now thus briefly consider J.F.C. Fuller's *A Military History of the Western World*—Volume III—Chapter 4, “The Siege of Port Arthur, 1904-1905”<sup>8</sup>—we may start to realize the further implications of the Russo-Japanese War, apart from its provocatively weakening effects upon Russia herself before (and in the face of) the ongoing strategic subversion of that Christian Empire by the strategic apparatus of the Bolshevik revolutionary virus. General Fuller, with much learning and lucidity, says, in part, as follows:

*The Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 is **one of the great turning points in Western history**, for not only was it a trial of strength between an Asiatic and semi-European power, but above all was **a challenge to Western supremacy in Asia**. When, on February 5, 1904, the Japanese bugles blared forth war,*

<sup>7</sup> For a later and moderately nuanced account, ten years later (and significantly after World War I), see also Maurice Baring's autobiography, *The Puppet Show of Memory* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1922, especially Chapter XXIII (“Constantinople Once More”—1912), pp.418-429. The earlier Chapter XXI (“Constantinople”—1909), pp. 397-405; and Chapter XXI (“The Balkan War, 1912”), pp. 406-417, are also of great worth, especially about the larger political and strategic situation before and during the First Balkan War, which was to begin in October of 1912.

<sup>8</sup> *J.F.C. Fuller, A Military History of the Western World in Three Volumes* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), Volume III, Chapter 4, pp. 142-170, entitled “The Siege of Port Arthur, 1904-1905.”

simultaneously they **resounded a reveille throughout the East and Asia began to stir in her ancient sleep....**

Yet **the moral value of Port Arthur**, as a symbol of Japanese superiority, was as important as the destruction of the Russian fleet [part of which was strategically and perfidiously blocked by the British from going through the Suez Canal]. In 1894, Japan had taken Port Arthur and then had been deprived of it because she was too weak to hold it. To regain it would not only justify the war, but above all it would proclaim the superiority of Japan over Russia, and, incidentally, of Asia over Europe. **In short, whether strategy demanded it or not, the conquest of Port Arthur was for Japan the spiritual pivot of the conflict....**

**More important** than these [aforementioned] tactical changes **were the influences of Japan's victory on world affairs. It disrupted Russia by stimulating the virus of revolution which for long had eaten into her bowels.** By liberating Germany from fear of war on her **eastern** flank it freed her to concentrate on her **western** border, and thereby upset the balance of power in Europe. This caused Great Britain to abandon her policy of isolation, which had been the backbone of the Pax Britannica, and, in order to re-establish the balance, it drew her away from Germany and toward France. Further, **by challenging the supremacy of the white man over the coloured, it awakened Asia and Africa and dealt a deadly moral blow to every colonial empire....**

But it was in **India—the pivot of British imperial power—that the world revolution** took its surest form....[In 1912, “writes C.F. Andrews” in his *The Renaissance in India*, p. 4:] “A **Turkish** consul of long experience in Western Asia said that in the interior you could see everywhere the most ignorant peasants 'tingling' with the news. Asia was moved from one end to the other, and the sleep of centuries was finally broken....A new chapter was being written in the book of the world's history....The old-time glory and greatness of Asia seemed destined to return.”....

In corroboration of this Mr. Pradhan writes: “It is impossible to exaggerate **the effects of the Japanese victory on the Indian mind.**” Indian students began to study the history of Japan to **discover what had enabled her to wound so deeply one of the greatest European Powers.** They found the answer in Japanese patriotism, self-sacrifice and national unity. **Here were miraculous powers beyond the might of armaments.** The rise of Japan was looked upon as a “divine dispensation”....

All these stupendous happenings were **fertilized by this conflict** [the Russo-Japanese War and its outcome], fought **on the far eastern flank of Asia**, as over 450 years before an equally great conflict had been fought **on the far eastern flank of Europe.** The fall of Port Arthur in 1905, like the fall of Constantinople in 1453, rightly may be numbered among the few really great events in history. (J.F.C. Fuller, Volume III, pp. 142, 143, 168, 169, 170—my bold emphasis added, italics in the original)

## A developing coarsening and brutalisation

Great Britain had not only favored Japan in the Russo-Japanese War, as it had earlier favored Turkey (a Moslem power) in the Russo-Turkish War against a Christian nation, Russia; but later, after the Armistice of World War I and the applicable post-War “Carthaginian Peace Treaties,” Britain (among others) also helped to hand over to Japan Germany's remaining colonies in the Pacific Islands **and also in China**, even after the Chinese had fought with the Allies in the trenches of Western Europe against the German Empire! The sense of betrayal that the Chinese rightly felt gave birth to the famous **May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement in 1919**—a revolt of the teachers and students and the various elite classes in China. This 1919 Revolt of just resentment, was—and still is—remembered in China, and likely will be still for many years, as was the just Chinese reaction against the British-sponsored **Opium Wars** in China in the nineteenth century, in part a British initiative to help finance their own Colonies **in India**. However, by giving the German Colonies in China and the Pacific Islands to Japan, the West was planting very dangerous Time Bombs, as Britain herself came to see less than twenty years after the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement 1919—and in all the destructive consequences of World War II itself and its Aftermath. It appears to be the case that a coarsening and brutalization started to take deeper root in the West during, and especially in the vengeful Aftermath of, World War I. As irregular and revolutionary warfare became more widespread, so did the phenomenon of Total War, or “Unrestricted Warfare.” Now in warfare we have more and more **impersonality, anonymity, and unaccountability**—in part, because of advanced and remote **technologies** and various forms of trust-breaking **deception** and “**perception management**.”

## Truly a great man

Therefore, the ethos and insights of Maurice Baring's trustworthy and far-sighted writings about two pre-1914 and pre-1917 wars, in Asia (1904-1905) and in the Balkans (1909-1912), as well as his other later writings on Russian history, culture, religion, and literature (especially on Dostoyevsky), still have so much to teach us—as the selected examples provided by this brief comparative essay may have also now convinced the attentive reader. May it be so. For, Maurice Baring was truly a great man.<sup>9</sup>

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9 (A Concluding and Partly Autobiographical Note: Even after the Muslim Conquest of the City of Constantinople in 1453, however, Constantinople for many years still retained its name—that is to say, from 330 A.D. until 1930 A.D.—and then, after 1600 years, the Kemalist Turkish Revolution re-named the ancient City, Istanbul. Moreover, San Stefano's name was also changed four years earlier, in 1926. The writer of this essay lived in both of these places during the years 1966-1967 when he was a young captain, an Army Special Forces officer, in the United States Military, during which time as an advisor he also traveled all over Turkey, as well as throughout Greece, both countries being **on the eastern flank of N.A.T.O.**, but still mutually regarding each other with much suspicion and even hostility, not only as it concerned the strategic Greco-Turkish Island of Cyprus. The outbreak of the Israeli Six-Day War in early June of 1967 was also another precarious time in Turkey, also for C.E.N.T.O. (Turkey, Iran, and undivided Pakistan, with its American and other foreign advisors present); and that young American officer was helped by Greeks, as well as by unflinchingly generous Turks, to learn many important and abiding things of wisdom and moment which contributed to his own later maturation and to his enduring gratitude.)