

with Russia about Tibet. Why not, then, have disregarded these idle rumours? Such lofty disregard is easy for irresponsible persons at a comfortable distance in England to display. But the responsible Government in India cannot dismiss such rumours with so light a heart. Russia might not have had any agreement about Tibet, and the Tibetan Mission might have been purely religious; but that she was extremely interested in Tibet was unquestionable. She had for years been sending semi-official, semi-scientific expeditions into the country. These had always reported on the richness of Tibet in regard to gold, and the desirability of getting concessions there. There was at the very moment one of these expeditions with an armed escort in Tibet. Apart from this, the interest of Russian Tibet was thoroughly natural. The Dalai Lama was regarded with superstitious reverence by many thousands of Russian Asiatic subjects. Moreover, at that time it was generally looked upon as inevitable that Russia would shortly absorb Mongolia, and all Mongols look upon the Dalai Lama as a god. It was, indeed, because of his immense influence over the Mongols that the Chinese had for centuries, and at great cost to themselves, secured and maintained a dominant influence in Lhasa. It is easy to understand, therefore, that the Russians would be glad enough of any opportunity of gaining an influence with the Dalai Lama. The mission of the latter to the Czar might, as the Russian Chancellor said, be mainly religious, and similar to missions which the Pope sends out. But even in Europe it is often difficult to distinguish between religion and politics, and in Asia the two are almost indistinguishable. A religious understanding between the Dalai Lama and the Czar might by the former be regarded as a political agreement. And whatever might have been the intentions of the Russian Government at the time, they might on some subsequent occasion have sent a mission to Lhasa, as they had sent a mission to Kabul in 1879 and caused an Afghan War.

Even so, why should we trouble? What possible harm could a few Russians do in Lhasa? Russia might