

## MISCELLANEOUS.

### THE CRISIS IN CHINA AS SEEN BY A CHINAMAN.

*To the Editor of the Open Court :*

Since you published extracts from my last letter<sup>1</sup>, the crisis alluded to has set in,—a crisis which is as yet unnamed and unnamable. Carlyle, speaking of the French Revolution, said : " When the right name itself is here, the thing is known henceforth. The thing is then ours, and can be dealt with." The upheaval in China is in magnitude comparable to the French Revolution, but the right name has not yet been found, and the situation can be understood only when we know the factors of the Chinese political revolution.

Previous to the advent of foreigners the two most important factors which determined the national destiny of China were on the one hand the governing classes and on the other hand the governed masses, or rather the proletariat. The governing classes are the Imperial dynasty, the official oligarchy and the literati. The masses consist of the commercial and agricultural communities and the *sansculottes*. Between these two groups there had never been established any well-recognised system of inter-communication. The function of the former was merely to command, that of the latter to obey. Disobedience on the part of the latter was treated as rebellion. The former owed their authority merely to the possession of superior military force. When the administration had become corrupt, however, the military force degenerated, and the proletariat was then enabled to shake off its domination. Rebellion itself then became a legal means of reinstating authority and either a new dynasty was called into existence or a purer administration inaugurated. Sometimes the new dynasty was founded by a capable semi-foreigner and new blood was thus instilled into the body politic and assimilated by the whole race. In any case an entire evolution would have been effected and a new start commenced only to ultimately end in the same natural causes.

It is thus that the Chinese nation has been accustomed to advance by cyclic political upheavals, but preserving always whatever elements of a durable nature exist in the national characteristics. All else were burnt up, destroyed as mere shams, formulas, or stuffed clothing. Progress of such a kind may indeed be considered as mere national cataclysm but nevertheless it has helped to clear the political atmosphere, to wipe clean the administrative slate, and to enable the meritorious to come to the front. The Chinese temperament is unlike the Gallic in that the main element is not of a merely destructive nature but includes also a construc-

<sup>1</sup> See *The Open Court* for June, 1900, page 365.

tive tendency along well-known and well-tested bases. In other respects their evolutions were parallel as regards cause and effect—but on a vaster scale—with that great national upheaval at the end of the last century known in history as the “French Revolution.”

With the inauguration of European intercourse a new factor was added to the political situation. Its ultimate force and scope are, however, still undetermined. At one time it could have allied itself with the proletariat by mere commercial intercourse or it could have supplanted the dominant factor and become itself the governor by military means. But circumstances compelled it to adopt an indeterminate course, thereby constituting it as a third irreconcilable factor in the present political problem. We have here therefore a perpetual triangular contest between the governing classes of China, the proletariat, and the foreign powers. The treaties of peace and commerce were entered into only between the first and the third parties, while the second party was entirely ignored. The interests of the governors and the proletariat of China, however, had never been identical, and there had never been a common ground of understanding upon which concerted action could have been undertaken. When the Imperial authorities therefore stipulated away the vested rights and privileges of the proletariat communities by treaties to foreign powers, they in fact surrendered what had never been duly recognised as their own property. Indeed, such stipulations could only be effectually carried out if the superior military force of the Imperial government or its prestige were in due evidence. Otherwise they must remain inoperative. But when this military force itself had been previously injured or destroyed by the foreign powers, the proletariat could never have been expected to yield implicit obedience to undertakings to which they had never been party. At first the officials, by some means or other, succeeded in punishing those *sansculottes* who had dared to assault foreign travellers or in indemnifying the latter's governments for these outrages. But when foreign governments increased their pressure upon the governing bodies and continued to cripple the latter's military resources they thereby but increased the audacity of the proletariat and encouraged it to despise its own governors. The results have therefore been but to emphasise and complicate the triangular struggle now going on.

The continual increase of foreign aggression has at length produced a most decisive effect. At last the two original and opposing factors in Chinese politics have discovered a common cause upon which reconciliation and combination could be predicated and rendered mutually effective. Upon the basis of combined opposition to foreign aggressions they have at last solved one of the most pressing and all-important problems in their national domestic history. The Imperial government has at last condescended to ally itself with the *sansculottes*, and in the movement of the “Boxer Volunteer Train-Bands” we see but the prelude to a future national career as yet but dimly discernible. War, famine, pestilence, and social and political disintegrations are now forcing and driving the lethargic and self-sufficient Chinaman to develop the lasting qualities of the race, and we are witnessing but the opening act of the world's greatest drama, “the Struggle between the White and the Yellow Perils.” The dynasty is without doubt doomed, but what the Chinese are at present anxiously waiting for is the advent of a Napoleon capable of organising and leading them towards their destiny. For the present they are assiduously serving their apprenticeship in the arts of war in the best school, that of practical experience.

As regards the foreign powers it is instructive to note the helpless and indeci-

sive situation in which they are now placed. The attitude of the United States and the policy of Admiral Remy are the only laudable and sensible courses so far evident. The others had proceeded with a light heart in their land-grabbing policies in the past, but to-day they are face to face with a world-problem at the possible magnitude of which they are aghast. The threats of the German Champion of Christendom and the paralysis of the British Jingo alike show how utterly unprepared the West is for such an unprecedented contingency. The Chinese nation had in the course of its past history experienced unimaginable humiliations and castigations, and yet to-day it has dared unshrinkingly to look at the united armies of the great powers of Europe, America, and Asia not askance but face to face. It had already been a great power centuries before Germany became a national force, and there is not the slightest doubt that it will continue to be a world power when the Germanic nations have disappeared.

Lord Salisbury's senseless threat of dissolving the Chinese Empire is on a par with his suicidal war in South Africa, and the present subservient inactivity of the British forces in North China will undoubtedly rebound against British prestige throughout the length and breadth of Asia. A Chinese official friend enquired of myself in regard to Lord Salisbury's threat whether the British Prime Minister could arrange with the Almighty to guarantee the dynasty, let alone the Empire, for the next ten years. Even if to save the dynasty and the present régime the Chinese government should concede all that is now demanded of it by the powers in the way of reparation and so forth, who is there to guarantee their specific performance? You may hang Prince Tuan and his confederates, but the effect to the nation would merely be the removal of certain incapable fools for worthier people. The government may stipulate the payment of millions as indemnity, but it remains to be seen whether the nation will pay it. And as regards guarantees for future non-repetition of outrages, whose bond would be acceptable? The Imperial government's? Even at present the Viceroy is using their own discretion as to whether to obey or ignore Imperial edicts. The Reformers have already repudiated the authority of the Empress Dowager and her advisers, but would profess loyalty to the Emperor Kwang Hsu. I am of opinion, however, that they will soon be in the position of the French Girondins, the advocates of legality, who will ultimately be swept off their feet by the flood of Chinese *sansculottism*. In such an emergency it is not difficult to anticipate what would be the fate of mere treaties or conventions. The great powers would probably reply, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." But then what becomes of their far-seeing statesmanship, their united diplomacy, their armed interference, and their vaunting vindictive threats?

TAN TEK SOON.

SINGAPORE, October, 1900.

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#### ON THE TEACHING OF ELEMENTARY MATHEMATICS.

The recent work on the teaching of elementary mathematics,<sup>1</sup> by Dr. David Eugene Smith, Principal of the State Normal School at Brockport, New York, and author of several text-books and historical treatises on mathematical subjects, is one that is eminently fitted to the needs of teachers and students and that fills a decided gap in American pedagogic literature. A vast field of reading and sugges-

<sup>1</sup> *The Teaching of Elementary Mathematics*. By David Eugene Smith, Principal of the State Normal School at Brockport, New York. New York: The Macmillan Co.; London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd. 1900. Pages, xv, 312. Price, \$1.00.