THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN CHINA.

BY GILBERT REID.

FOR years China politically has been in a state of flux. Withal she has steadily progressed. Could she be as free in independent action as Japan has been since the days of restoration, her future would be full of hope. She has determination and ability enough to surmount all internal difficulties. What perplexes and threatens her is the continuance of interference and dictation from without.

China reached her depth in reactionary blindness during the Boxer upheaval of 1900, though this had its birth in excessive intrusion of European powers. Soon the blindness disappeared, and China's eyes were opened. The reforms undertaken by the Emperor Kuang-hsü in 1898 were re-started under the patronage of the old empress dowager. Even after her death and that of the emperor the reform movement continued under the patronage of the prince regent, brother of the late deceased emperor. A program of constitutional government—a monarchy of course, but a limited monarchy—was, in the orderly manner of the Chinese, being carried forward unto completion. The time for completion, including two houses of representative parliament, was 1912, or not later than 1913.

But what happened? Nothing less than a revolution to overturn this very progressiveness. The so-called reform party of Kang Yiu-wei and Liang Chi-ch'iao favored a constitutional monarchy, though still critical of the corrupt political practices, which, strange to say, even increased in the atmosphere of progress. The distinctive revolutionary party under the leadership of Dr. Sun Wen could not countenance the Manchus, in spite of their adherence to constitutionalism. Though the majority of officials were Chinese, and though the Manchu race had long since been absorbed into the Chinese way of thinking, yet the dynasty was Manchu, and this irritated the

Chinese who in spirit were revolutionary, and yet, from a better point of view, patriotic.

With the revolution there came the establishment of a republic. Apparently this was the will of the people; but as a matter of fact only a few, and they the leaders in the revolution, decided the question. There was at the time only one drawback to a real republic under these revolutionary leaders. Yuan Shih-k'ai, who had come forth from retirement, and was for the time being the voice of the Manchu government, must be considered by revolutionists as well as by Manchus, if the whole country was to have one government. He preferred a constitutional monarchy, even to the retention of the Manchu boy-emperor. The Manchu government had no revenue for continuing the war against the revolutionists, and the revolutionists on their side insisted that the Manchu emperor retire, and that a republic be established. The result is known; Yuan Shih-k'ai became the first president of the republic, while the boy-emperor is still an emperor, though not of China, and still lives in the old palace. Yuan Shih-k'ai has sworn to abide by the provisional constitution, which meant a republic and not a monarchy. He also received the government at the hands of the Manchus. Meanwhile the final constitution has awaited future action.

The pro-republic set of officers, whether in Peking or in the provinces, failed to live up to their great responsibilities. As a class they were more corrupt than those who had served under the Manchu rule. The people, and even the merchant class, felt that the republic was something of a delusion. The president went so far as to dismiss the two houses of parliament. A clash in the form of the second revolution came between President Yuan and the anti-Yuan faction. The President won, and the old revolutionary element, which had argued for a republic, disappeared. Only a few remained who were strenuous for a republic, while opposing the second revolution. The military throughout the country from then till now has been composed of northern troops and Yuan's men. The civil officers of the government have more and more been pro-Yuan rather than pro-republic or pro-monarchy.

Thus it is that enthusiasm for a republic has died out, and in some cases the first enthusiasm has turned into a feeling of disgust. The inadvisability of advocating a monarchy, even of a limited kind, during the period of revolution has disappeared, and men who think carefully on these things have dared to argue that a monarchy is more suited to China than a republic. With the monarchical form of state China is familiar, with the other she has no

acquaintance, except through a few students from America and France.

Early in 1914 there were a few who argued that the boy-emperor should again be recognized as the emperor of the whole country, with a strong Chinese premier like Yuan Shih-k'ai. The opposition was too great, coming both from those hostile to the Manchus, and those hostile to a return to a monarchy. There were some who favored a monarchy but did not want a restoration; they wanted a new and a Chinese dynasty, with President Yuan as first emperor. The agitation for the boy-emperor soon died away; even President Yuan discountenanced the restoration.

In the autumn of 1915, after suffering humiliation at the hands of Japan, to whom China was compelled to yield up many of her rights and guarantees of security, a number of the government authorities suddenly opened up anew the question as to whether a republic or monarchy was more suited to the country. It was at first stated to be only an academic question. It soon became a strong political movement. The final constitution was soon to be determined, and of necessity it must be determined first of all whether the state shall be monarchical or republican. From the outset the president refused to interfere. The question was for the people and the people's representatives to decide. As for himself, he declared, so long as he remained president he must support the republic. The name or status of emperor he sought not for himself or his sons.

The agitation however has been not only for a monarchy but for Yuan as emperor. The military and civil governors have all petitioned to this effect. Few have dared to speak contrary. Liang Chi-ch'iao, though originally an advocate of a monarchical form of state, has argued that the existing government should not be overturned. He stands opposed to both a peaceful and a bloody revolution. The republic, being started, should be upheld. There are many of the younger element who want the republic fairly tried. Others have supported with a faint voice the monarchical idea, but only as a restoration. They are of the minority. Naturally they have hesitated to declare openly against the president. Moreover the representatives of the people in all the provinces have not really been representative of the people any more than those who decided matters in the first revolution. The men selected have cast their votes as their superiors gave the hint. The whole country in this peculiar fashion has decided for a monarchy and for Yuan Shih-k'ai

as first emperor. Probably the common people are only concerned in having protection for their lives and business.

In the midst of all this movement, entirely a Chinese matter and no concern of foreign powers, one side of the warring nations, Great Britain, France, Russia and Italy, under the leadership of Japan, issued a warning to China that the change of government be delayed, lest an uprising take place. Japan has also made it clear that if the advice is not accepted she may find it necessary to take further measures for enforcing compliance. Japan's previous dictation as to rights and privileges in Mongolia, Manchuria, Shantung, Fukien and Central China, has taught China that for the present she must submit to the rule of force. So this question as to which form of state is more suited to China, a monarchy or a republic, is not left to China alone to determine.

Following this first intrusion the same powers have made it appear that it would be well for China to join their Entente, in opposition to Germany and to all rights and privileges accorded to Germany by China. This scheme, which originated more from England than from Japan, has amounted to nothing save a stirring of Japan's suspicions to the discredit of England and the harm of China. It would have been better if all proposals for taking sides with any set of belligerents had from the start been discountenanced by China and she had remained completely neutral. Through all this scheming Germany has remained unruffled, but Japan has taken offense and has vented her wrath on China rather than on England.

Other warnings have been issued to the Peking government, always under the leadership of Japan. She does not propose to "take a back seat," having through the fortunes of war suddenly sprung to the front. She has convinced Americans that her policy is sound and righteous, because she too has a Monroe doctrine for Asia, and Americans fail to understand that this doctrine, rightly applied, does not authorize perpetual intermeddling in the internal affairs of a great country, and a neighbor too like China. Still less is Japan authorized to plot the subjugation of China.

The first warning from this group of nations was based on the fear that the agitation for a monarchy would lead to disturbances and perhaps another revolution. This was enough to encourage the revolutionists to go ahead, knowing that an uprising would only prove that Japan in her forecast was right.

The disturbances, according to book, have arisen. The government in Peking still continued to push ahead its monarchical program and to arrange for enthronement. Japan therefore let it be

known that so long as the new revolution was unchecked the enthronement would be an offense to Japan's dignity and to her kindly advice. Japan probably would then recognize the revolutionists as representing the true republic, and the Japanese minister would be withdrawn from Peking. The only thing then for China to do was to postpone the enthronement and proceed to suppress all disturbances, which are encouraged by many Japanese.

Sufficient is known to prove that Japan means no good to China. China has as much right to decide her form of government as Japan has her form. Chinese revolutionists should no more be helped by Japan than Japanese anarchists should be helped by China.

The danger came at the outset of the great war, when England appealed to Japan to eliminate Germany from China and thus withdraw one friend and put in place one not a friend but more and more a reinvigorated foe.