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THE WAR AS A CAUSE OF CHINA'S TROUBLES.¹

BY GILBERT REID.

THE truth as to China's troubles, complications and misfortunes cannot be understood without the knowledge of the great first cause of all these conditions. This primary cause was the Great War, or, more specifically, the entrance of the war into Chinese territory. If war had been kept away from China, it is unlikely that any of her present troubles or her bondage to Japan would have happened. Also it is probable that the Republic of China and democratic principles would have been proved adaptable to Chinese thought and conditions.

The Chinese government, realizing possible danger of conflict on the territories leased to Great Britain, France and Germany, as also to Japan, proposed a plan for neutralization, thus making these territories as neutral as all the territories under Chinese control.

No obstruction came to the proposition from Germany. She was as anxious to keep the war away from Tsingtao as China was to keep it away from the whole of the China coast. The German Minister, finding that Japan was delaying to give consent to the plan of neutralization, went so far as to negotiate with the Chinese government for transfer to China of complete authority over the German-leased area of Kiaochow. This re-cession to China was even brought to the attention of the American government by the Chinese government. Events were sweeping on with electric speed, and this plan, like the other, failed of consummation. Japan's speed was too great for the rest of the world.

Should these negotiations come to naught, it was the wish of

¹ [The following article is portion of a chapter from Dr. Reid's forthcoming book, *China, Captive or Free?* Dr. Reid, organizer and director of the International Institute, Shanghai, China, spent practically the whole period of the war in the Far East.--ED.]

China, that if war by any means should approach the China coast, it should avoid the treaty ports, such as Shanghai, Tientsin or Canton, and be restricted to the limited areas held under lease by the nations at war.

The places likely to be affected under these conditions were the British leasehold of Kowloon (opposite to Hongkong), her leasehold of Weihaiwei on the north coast of the Shantung peninsula, and the German leasehold of Kiaochow, with fortifications at Tsingtao, on the south coast of the Shantung peninsula.

Much, therefore, depended on the respective purposes of mind of the two antagonists, England and Germany, or, more properly, on the British and German governments. Much also depended on the tendency of the Japanese government toward war or toward peace, toward helping China and Yuan Shih-kai to remain neutral or toward embroiling China in the many complications incident to war at one's own door. As for Japan, jealous of Yuan Shih-kai since the early antagonisms over Korean affairs and averse to China's experiment in a democratic government, she was more likely to make it hard for China than easy. When China formally requested that Japan use her influence to render China immune from warlike activities, the reply was that the time was not ripe to consider the proposal and that Japanese action awaited the war measures of Great Britain.

As for Great Britain and Germany, everything depended on the war schemes of the home governments and on the larger issues of military strategy. In a word, China's fate rested not with the thought of peoples but with imperialistic governments, engaged in the great but perilous game of war. The entrance of Japan into the war was not popular with the Japanese people; and as for the majority of British residents in China, there was sympathy felt for China and dread of coming trouble, if Japan should enter the fray. It was not until the British government took action, that the British resident in the Far East began to discipline himself into enjoying the new condition of Japan as an ally waging war on Chinese soil.

As for the German government, it sent on August 12 the following telegram to its ambassador in Tokyo:

"East Asiatic squadron instructed to avoid hostile acts against England in case Japan remains neutral. Please inform Japanese government."

The Japanese government gave no reply, as it had given no favorable response to the proposals of China.

The German government, while anxious that Tsingtao should not be attacked, did the fair thing by making no attack or threat of attack on either British or French leased territories or on their colonial possessions. Russian Vladivostock also remained immune. The German attitude toward China was thus a considerate one.

What is most significant, as giving proof that Tsingtao was not to be used as a base for naval operations, the German Pacific squadron having left the China and Japan Seas in the summer months, sailed toward the southern Pacific waters, and all that remained behind was what an Englishman has described as "only obsolete craft."

In early August, when war was declared, most of the German Pacific Squadron, under Admiral von Spee, were cruising in the South Seas among German colonial islands, and instead of aiming for the China Sea and the Tsingtao naval base went southward along the coast of South America. Only one ship, the Emden, came into Tsingtao harbor with despatches from the Admiral, but by August 4, along with four colliers "apparently proceeded to cruise in the neighborhood of Vladivostock where she captured a Russian auxiliary cruiser and one or two merchant ships, before going south to make history in the Bay of Bengal." The author from whom I quote, Commander Spencer Cooper, then outlines five possible objects which the German Admiral may have had in mind in this peculiar naval strategy. Among these there is no mention of any purpose to wage war in either the China or Japan Seas. He concludes that the object "likely to yield a richer harvest" than any other scheme was "to harass our trade with South America." For Britain or even Japan to make the attack in that part of the broad Pacific was legitimate.

The German squadron ultimately consisted of the Scharnhorst, Gneisenau, Leipzig, Dresden and Nürnberg, under Admiral von Spee. The Emden, as I have said, started forth on a raiding expedition of its own in the southern Pacific and the Indian Ocean. Another Englishman, W. L. Wyllie, also writes: "The German Squadron was in the Carolinas," at the opening of the war, and "curiously enough, made no attempt to return to their base at Tsingtao." "During August and the first half of September, Count von Spee's ships steamed about in the South Pacific." On October 30 the squadron was about fifty miles west of Valparaiso. On November 1 there came the battle with Admiral Craddock's ships, the Good Hope and the Monmouth, in which the latter were sunk, the British defenders dying an heroic death.

The German purpose was to restrict the war to Europe. There was no desire to tempt the enemy to attack Tsingtao. If any fighting should take place, far away from the center of military action, let it be on the high seas and not in a neutral country like China. A battle between the British and German fleets on any ocean would have been legitimate, bringing no harm to others. For either fleet to take possession of the island colonies of the other country was also a fair game in war. But there was dynamite in the proposal that an attack be made on Tsingtao, still remaining under Chinese sovereignty, and situated on the China coast.

To infringe on the neutral rights of Belgium may have been construed by the German Staff as a "military necessity," but for Germany or Great Britain or any one else there was no "military necessity" to thrust the European War into the Far East, on to Chinese soil, for the attack of either Weihaiwei or Tsingtao. For a few thousand isolated Germans, 4500 in all, to be subjugated by any kind of enemy forces, whatever the flag, could have no bearing on the ultimate issue of the war, either for or against Germany. "Foreign leased territories in China," says Thomas F. Millard, "were only pawns in the war, and could have been eliminated without affecting in the slightest degree the essential strategical zones of operations."

If the combined naval forces of Russia, France and Great Britain were insufficient to vanquish Tsingtao, it would have been better if they had preserved the peace in the Far East by keeping war nearer home and by using peaceful means in relation to the Far East. Being unnecessary, uncalled for, a mere incident in a mighty struggle, such belligerent activities should have been discountenanced, all the more that China's national entity and well-being might be impaired or imperiled. This was the view I took at the time, thinking of China's interests. What has happened since has confirmed me in this view. To bring the war from Europe to Asia has been a calamity to China, though so worked as to be a gain to Japan. Marquis Okuma was no doubt right in thinking that the new circumstances afforded Japan "the one opportunity of 10,000 years." As for China they brought the one catastrophe of 10,000 years. As between Great Britain and Germany, the blow which Germany received in the loss of Tsingtao and the glory which Great Britain received have been too insignificant to deserve a passing thought. The one serious matter is the harm wrought to China through the inevitable consequences of an unjust war. It

is here that friends of China may be allowed to criticize in calm discriminating spirit the action of the various governments concerned in bringing Europe's war into Asia.

We now come to another question, one more of fact than of opinion: *Which country brought the war into China*, in the attack on Tsingtao, Japan alone or Japan in conjunction with Great Britain?

The world is anxious to know what nation brought on the war in Europe. Many in China are equally anxious to know who was the guilty party to bring on war in China. Will the guilty be made to suffer?

Most writers and speakers have been accustomed to refer to Japan as the guilty interloper. Few Americans or Britishers, especially those living in the Far East, have such regard and admiration for Japan that they are eager to exonerate her through a division of the degrees of culpability. An easier way of rendering judgment is to assume one's own innocence and cast all blame on one individual or on one nation. So far as this is done, Japan is unfairly treated, and the cause of justice dishonored.

Now as to the origin of the war in the Far East. Baron Kato, Minister of Foreign Affairs, in a speech in the Diet on September 4 said: "Early in August the British government asked the Imperial government for assistance under the terms of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance." Then, after recounting the terms of this alliance, he continued: "Therefore, inasmuch as we were asked by our ally for assistance...we could not but comply to the request to do our part." And again: "The Japanese government therefore resolved to comply with the British request, and if necessary to open hostilities against Germany."

The British government has never denied the statement of fact, or charge, if you so desire to call it, that the British government asked for the assistance of Japan. The actual documents of the negotiations have not been made public, but the results are so obvious that they reveal the "inner consciousness" of the two governments. In a true technical sense, Japan was the only *ally* which Great Britain had. The relations of Great Britain and France were only of an *entente cordiale*.

The London *Times* on August 18, some two weeks before Baron Kato made his speech in Tokyo, used these words:

"It should be said at once that the Japanese intervention has not taken place without full consultation with Great Britain."

Later on, under date of September 25, the London *Times* used stronger language:

"We appealed to our ally in the terms of the treaty, and she has answered that appeal with the loyalty we have learned to expect of her. . . . Japan had no desire to intervene in the war. She had done so, the Emperor and his ministers tell us, because she could not break her promises."

I remember how indignant Britishers in Shanghai were when I ventured to use the same word, "appeal," in referring to the form of application which Great Britain made to Japan.

According to Jefferson Jones (*a nom de plume*), who was familiar with the facts as they took place in Tokyo, the Japanese government on August 2, expressed to the British a willingness to put in force the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, and by August 7, the British Ambassador in Tokyo "handed to the Foreign Office at Tokyo a request that Japan join in the European war."

The American diplomat W.W. Rockill, in an address which he delivered in New York, November 12, the last before his death, gave utterance to this careful statement: "The action of Japan was taken after consultation with the ally, Great Britain, and, inferentially, with the approval of France and Russia."

Mr. Kawakami, who is in a position to know, describes how the war plan of Japan was set in motion by the British government, even prior to Britain's declaration of war against Germany. These are his words:

"The assertion that Japan thrust herself upon the war without England's invitation is as sinister as it is unwarranted. Japan did not join hands with England without England's request. When it became evident that England must come to the rescue of France and Belgium, the press of Japan, without exception [notice the words], hoped that Japan would not be called upon to aid her western ally. But the western ally did call upon Japan.

"On August 3, that is, the day before England declared war on Germany, the British Ambassador to Japan hurried back to Tokyo from his summer villa and immediately requested an interview with Baron Kato, Foreign Minister. At this conference the British Ambassador informed Baron Kato that his government was compelled to open hostilities against Germany and that it desired to ascertain whether Japan would aid England in the event of British interests in the Far East being jeopardized by German activities.

"Baron Kato answered that the question put to him was such a serious one that he could not answer it on his own account.

"On the evening of the same day Count Okuma convened a

meeting of all the Cabinet members. Bearing the resolution of this meeting, Baron Kato, on August 4, called upon the British Ambassador and told the latter that Japan would not shirk the responsibilities which the alliance with England put upon her shoulders.

“At this time Japan did not expect to be called upon to aid England for at least a few months. But on August 7, the British Ambassador suddenly asked for an interview with Baron Kato and told the Foreign Minister that the situation had developed in such a manner as to oblige England to ask for Japan's assistance without delay. On the evening of that day Premier Okuma requested the ‘elder statesmen’ and his colleagues to assemble at his mansion. The conference lasted until two o'clock the next morning. Before it adjourned the policy of Japan was definitely formulated.

“What caused Downing Street to invite Japan's cooperation so soon is not clearly known to the outside world. But the Japanese press is in all probability right when it says that Japan and England were obliged to act promptly in order to frustrate the German scheme to transfer Kiaochow to the Chinese government before Germany was compelled to surrender it at the point of the sword. [An interesting confession as bearing on an easy way for China to get back Kiaochow.] Had Germany succeeded in carrying out this scheme she would still have enjoyed in virtue of Article five of the Kiaochow Convention of 1898, the privilege of securing in some future time ‘a more suitable territory’ in China. [And why not, if other nations were to have territory!] This was exactly the condition which the Allies did not want to see established in China. [And what about China's wishes or agreement?] If, on the other hand, Germany were forced to abandon Kiaochow by the arbitrament of the sword, China would no longer be under obligation to ‘cede to Germany a more suitable place.’ [How considerate of China.]”

It may be taken for granted that the British government—not the British people, still less the British resident in China—while approving and even desiring the military assistance of Japan in the initial stages, was not bound to approve of all that Japan did, into the very end of the war. But an alliance is oftentimes a burden to either ally as well as a prolific source of evil to others. Hence, if we desire to overlook the personal factor, we may lay the blame for these unfortunate transactions in China to so impersonal a factor as the *Anglo-Japanese Alliance*, just as we may blame the horrors and evils of the whole war, not on Germany or Russia or Britain, but on *war*.