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ESOTERIC CHINA.

So thoroughly interwoven with secret societies is the Chinese Empire that it is a marvel the national existence maintains itself. No country on earth presents such a spectacle in this regard. Long as the life of those societies has been, and so wonderfully imbued with their principles as the people are, the dawn of their extinguishment seems to have flickered on the mystic East. The western sun of enlightenment shall soon, in all probability and hope, shed a new light over China.

The life of the secret societies dates from the second century of the Christian era, an existence vouched for by history. They are diverse in the elements of which they are composed, in their rules and practices, although most of them, especially the Triad, which is the most important of them all, have such extraordinary analogy with Western Freemasons as to simply a community of origin. The only foreigner who ever obtained admission to the Triad, namely, an Englishman of the name of Mason, achieved this feat on the strength of his belonging to the higher grades of the Scottish Rite of Freemasonry. Originally a form of Oriental mysticism, these societies became political factors toward the seventeenth century, and until a year or so ago had in view as their principal object the overthrow of the Manchu or Tartar dynasty, and as watchword "China for the Chinese." The Tai-Ping rebellion of forty and fifty years ago was fostered and promoted by the Triad, and came near overthrowing the Pekin Government, which it could doubtless have accomplished had it enjoyed the co-operation of the other secret societies.

To-day the meaning of the watchword of the various secret societies, "China for the Chinese," is changed. For the aim is no longer anti-dynastic, nor do they seek the expulsion of those ten or twelve million Manchus who, for the last two hundred years, have imposed themselves as the ruling class over four hundred million Chinese, compelling them to adopt the Manchu style of hair dress, namely, a pigtail, in token of subjection. Today the secret societies have for their object the expulsion of the foreigner from the land. It is a mistake to believe that the Chinaman is a stranger to patriotism. His fibre of patriotism has been utilized by that extraordinary clever woman, the Dowager Empress, to rally the entire nation into the presentation of a virtually united front to the foreigner, to convert the secret societies from anti-dynastic into anti-foreign movements, and to achieve that which the Triad sought in vain to bring about at the time of the Tai-Ping rebellion, namely, co-operation of all secret societies one with another against the common foe, which this time is not the Manchu, but the white foreigner.

It cannot be denied that for more than half a century China has been subjected to a degree of indignity, insult, extortion and bullying on the part of foreign powers which no Christian power would have tolerated. Treaties have been imposed upon her by force, her finest harbors seized, and vast stretches of her littoral successively placed under foreign rule. She has been compelled to consent to agreements providing for the transfer of her immense river trade to foreign flags, and for the gridironing of the entire land by foreign-built and foreign-controlled railroads, while for every concession made by her a dozen new ones have been presented by the foreign powers. At length, exasperated beyond endurance and driven to the wall, the Empress issued in December last an address to the viceroys of the various provinces. "The foreign powers cast upon us looks of tigerlike voracity, hustling each other in their endeavours to be the first to seize upon our innermost territories," she declared. "They fail to understand that there are certain things which this empire can never consent to do, and that, if hard pressed,

we have no alternative but to rely on the justice of our cause." Four weeks later another edict was despatched to the same officials by the Dowager Empress, who, according to widespread belief in the Orient, has English blood in her veins, her mother having been an Eurasian, or child of a white father and a Manchu mother. In this second edict the viceroys were warned to exercise a prudent discrimination toward the disturbers of public peace. "The reckless fellows," who band together and create riot on the pretext of securing reforms, were to be punished, while those "loyal subjects who learn gymnastic drill for the protection of their families and their country," that is to say, the members of the "Righteous Harmony Fists Association," were to be favored.

This was the first heard of the so-called Boxers—openly a society for the cultivation of gymnastics, secretly an anti-foreign political movement, something like those "Turn Vereins," or gymnastic societies, which played so important a political role in Germany at the beginning of the present century. From that time forth the so-called Boxers were more or less openly encouraged by the Empress. They became a means of union among all the various secret societies, and if today these societies in all parts of the immense Chinese Empire are simultaneously taken to arms to expel the foreigner it is due to the cleverness of the old Empress, who is thus, at the close of the nineteenth century, emulating the role played nearly one hundred years ago by Queen Louise in Prussia, when she roused her countrymen to rid Germany of the thudom of Napoleon.

There is every reason to believe that on this occasion the Dowager Empress has at her back not merely her Manchu retainers but all China, and China contains a teeming and seething population of more than four hundred millions, who are almost insensible to pain, have no fear of death and are imbued with fierce hatred of the foreigner. It is true that both Canton and Pekin were occupied some forty years ago by an allied Franco-English army of fifteen thousand or twenty thousand men. But the late Sir Harry Parkes, who accompanied the commanding general as chief interpreter, explained long afterwards at Tokio that Canton, as well as Pekin, were such immense cities that the Anglo-French forces only occupied a small quarter thereof, and that the remainder of the two cities were so little under their control that each morning the heads of those European soldiers who had strayed beyond the cordon of sentinels during the night would be hurled from neighboring houses into the Anglo-French lines. Indeed, the so-called seizure of these immense capitals was so ineffective that not one in a thousand Chinamen will admit that it really took place, and even Chinese who were living in Pekin at the time of its occupation have declared by all they held sacred that the story must be untrue, seeing that they never set eyes on a French or English soldier at the time alleged. Moreover, Chinese history ascribes the destruction of the celebrated summer palace not to the French and English troops, as was really the case, but to Divine agencies, as punishment of sacrilege on the part of one of the members of the Imperial family.

Russia and Japan are the only two powers that can invade China now and place large armies in the field. The former has at the present moment probably one hundred thousand soldiers stationed at Vladivostok, Port Arthur, and along the south-eastern frontier of Siberia. Japan, on the other hand, has an army of at least twice that number of men, assembled at various points on the Mikado's Empire, ready for immediate transport across the small stretch of sea that separates Japan from China. The

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R. H. Mason

Tokio Government threatens to throw an army of several hundred thousand men into Corea and China if the Russians march on Pekin, and in the same way the Czar's representatives declare that if Japan moves they will immediately occupy the northern provinces of China. The other powers concerned, namely, England, France, Germany, and the United States, have no military forces adequate or near enough to deal with the matter promptly, especially in taking any effective steps towards the protection of life and property. Yet they are reluctant to entrust either of the two powers in question with the task. Japan is not only a non-Christian and thoroughly Asiatic nation, imbued with the hatred for the white man common to all yellow races, but is also possessed by the most aggressive ambitions, only to be satisfied at the expense of the Western powers. The idea of Japan is to obtain a preponderant influence in China, to secure differential duties in her favour, in such a way as to close the Chinese market to all other foreign nations, and to drill the Chinese army so as to make it a weapon for the furtherance of her dreams of grandeur. In one word, there is no positive assurance that if Japan were to obtain control of China at the present moment she would not use that control against all Western and Christian powers, thus intensifying the so-called Yellow Peril.

Neither are the powers willing to trust Russia, a country with a long list of broken pledges. It is but the other day that she obtained from Corea the harbour of Masampo, the finest on the entire coast of China, in spite of her most solemn pledges to England, as well as to Japan, not to take any such step. It is in keeping with her conduct in connection with Batoum, on the Black Sea. She bound herself by the Treaty of Berlin that Batoum should remain a free port and unfortified, yet deliberately closed it eight years later and converted it into a naval stronghold.

The powers concerned have no guarantee or assurance that if Russia marches her troops into China and seizes the capital she will consent to march out again. If she remains there and obtains control of the Chinese Government it will be equivalent to the closure of the vast Mongol Empire to the trade and industry of all other nations.

Meanwhile the insurrection continues. It is by no means certain that either a Russian or a Japanese invasion of China would suffice to quell the anti-foreign movement. The forces that would confront an invading army are too great, the empire is too vast in extent, the population too colossal. That there may have been sympathy on the part of the Dowager Empress for Russia in the past is quite probable. For she must have observed that the Moscovite Empire is the only foreign power whose policy

never wavers and always pursues the same aim until it attains it, sometimes only after the lapse of many years. But she has now, according to all appearances, cut herself adrift from her Moscovite entanglements, realizing that Russia is more ravenous than any other foreign power for Chinese territory and constitutes a more serious peril to the integrity and independence of the empire than any other nation. The Empress is resolved to rely on the Chinese alone, and by cleverly appealing to the keen love for their native land, and above all, to their fierce and fanatic abhorrence of the foreigner, may be said to have welded her four hundred million countrymen into a colossal force that no longer constitutes the danger, but a support to the throne, with the watchword of "China for the Chinese."

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