

A GLANCE AT THE WARRING CHINESE FACTIONS.

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I HAVE the clearest recollection of a consistent failure in attempts to understand Canadian press reports on Chinese matters. Not only is the geography of China somewhat hazy in the mind of even the best educated Canadians, but the unfamiliar names of Chinese men get inextricably mixed up with the equally puzzling names of towns and provinces. I have no doubt that when the present civil war broke out in August, many Canadian readers attempted to understand the Chinese situation, but gave up in despair. In reality the matter is as simple as it is romantic. By a judicious neglect of non-essentials it can be set forth quite clearly. All that is necessary on the part of the reader is a surrender, *pro tem.*, of his western ways of thinking and western ideas of the structure of Chinese social and political life.

The reader must first divest himself of the idea that the Republic of China is comparable to the Republic of France or to the United States. One or two of these national republics would be but a drop in the Chinese bucket. China is not politically homogeneous. The Peking or National Government is not representative. It is a faction which happens to hold the reins of power in that locality, through fortune and military backing. It has little relation to the millions and millions of Chinese people, who have nothing to say in its formation. It does not govern, at least in the western sense. It is a group of men who act toward foreign Powers in virtue of opportunity rather than of competence to represent the Chinese internal factions.

Nor is it correct to think of Chinese generals in the terms in which we think of British generals. A general is a man with an army, who is more or less detachable, but who usually allies himself with some faction. In other words the armies are not, as with us, a unified group, which responds to the will of the central government. Theoretically a Chinese general fights for the good of his country, but frequently his real motive is ambition for power and riches.

Having thus cleared the ground of western attitudes, we may go on to consider what happened in August. The Peking Government was headed at that time by the President, Tsao Kun, an incompetent, whose private life is said to have been vicious. He was no President according to western republican ideas, but was

more like an emperor, of the decadent type which so often in the past closed the life of an historic dynasty. This man was backed by the military force of an imperialistically-inclined general of strong power, Marshal Wu, the villain of the present story. It was this pair who were ruling in Peking in Republican guise, while—within his huge yellow-roofed Imperial Palace and grounds—the Son of Heaven, a boy-emperor seventeen years old, kept up his meaningless state. The emperor, of course, did not count. It was against the so-called Republican Government that the reaction of August was directed. In the south, near Shanghai, for two months opposing forces fought for the possession of the arsenal there. The matter was cleared up by the sudden departure of one of the generals on a war-ship for Japan, followed by the inevitable looting by a deserted army, and by unpleasantness in Shanghai. In the north things went rather badly for the Peking Government. Wu was forced to face the serious problem of defending his position to the north of Peking against the powerful Manchurian general, Marshal Chang. It is no wonder that Chang's armies made headway against Wu in their attempt to wrest from him his power. Insufficiently clad and unfed, the armies of the Peking general were badly defeated.

In Peking little news was allowed to reach us, and although insistent rumours spread about the city that the powerful Wu was falling back before the armies of Chang, we could not know. Suddenly one morning we awakened to find Peking in confusion, the streets deserted, the city gates closed, and the city under military control of General Feng, the Christian general. Like a meteor, Feng descended upon the city, and by ten o'clock we knew that it was securely in his hands. This *coup* was a great surprise to many; for the general impression was that Feng, who had left the city with his troops, had gone to the support of Wu. In reality he had done no such thing, but had encamped in the hills outside the city. He must have suspected that Wu was likely to suffer defeat before the armies of the well-prepared Manchurian, and have planned his stroke long in advance. Certainly there was no reason why he should support Wu, who had done him serious injury. Until a year or so ago Feng had been governor of an important province, where he had made himself the idol of the people by his excellent rule. It seems, however, that in his activity against the growing of opium he was injuring the financial interests of certain officials who were friends of Wu. For this and other reasons, Wu used his influence with the President to have Feng removed to Peking, where he has since been in the South Barracks, without the provincial revenues he had used to pay his soldiers. Funds to

pay these men were withheld, so that for months and months the army received no pay whatever.

When the war began, Feng received orders from the President to remove to the front and assist Wu in the fight. If he had not left the South Barracks immediately, he would have been entrapped there and ruined. Consequently he made a show of moving toward the front; and at the opportune moment, when Wu was absent with his troops, he fell back on the city, and neatly took things in his own hands.

It was my privilege to meet General Feng, three days after his *coup*, eight miles out of the city at the North Barracks. The huge fellow, in his plain private's uniform, looked tired and serious, as indeed he might, for he has had to act boldly and firmly. One of his very first acts was to abolish the Peking local *gendarmerie*, which was giving little service and was sapping away needed funds. He next astounded and dismayed many by surrounding the emperor in his palace and demanding his relegation to private life. The emperor signed away rights even over his small domain and his court circle, and has been reduced to the rank of gentleman, with the summer palace outside the city thrown in. In dealing with the political situation Feng called a conference of the country's foremost statesmen, which has just been meeting at Tientsin, a few hours' journey from Peking. At first there was great trepidation lest Chang and Feng might not agree. Now, however, things seem to be running smoothly. Tsao Kun has, of course, very courteously resigned, and Marshal Tuan, once before Prime Minister for a brief period, is Provisional President. On the very day on which this article is being written, Tuan has arrived in Peking, and Chang—who seems to be becoming the most prominent individual concerned—together with Feng may arrive in Peking any day now. It is hoped and expected that all will go well.

Who, then, is Chang-tso-lin? In China the historic tale must be told in terms of men and generals. We are having much of social history in these days. Chinese history cannot be written or analysed in such terms, for the people are not formed into social groups, but are an incoherent mass, whose chief part in the historic panorama is to suffer from famine and pillage, which beset them almost with regularity. We need not consider these hordes of the poor. Far removed from them is the rich and powerful Chinese chieftain so well prepared to attack the armies of Wu. General Chang, although now as governor of three Manchurian provinces he is extremely wealthy, was once a poor boy. Urged on to revenge upon one who had killed his brother, he was finally forced to become a bandit, and for some time was the influential chief of a strong

robber band. At last, fallen upon in his camp by a retaliative expedition, he escaped among the baggage in the dark, carrying on his back his wife, who was about to give birth to a child. The child, born thus in the midst of conflict and danger, is now the brilliant polished young general, with a perfect command of English, who is his father's right-hand man. After changes of fortune Chang at last rose to be general of a great army. Realizing that the recent war in Europe was won largely by good supplies of ammunition, he set to work to modernize his army. Providing himself with a well-trained force and an abundant supply of arms and deadly trench mortars, he at the same time built the greatest arsenal in China, which cost millions of dollars, and is said to be so great that it takes fourteen hours to walk completely round it.

But after the victory of Chang, what of Wu? The first act of that old fox, who had recently ordered a defeated general of his to take poison, was to behead the unfortunate general whom Chang overcame. Then, in spite of a substantial price on his head, he escaped on one of his ships and slunk southward. News comes that he has set up a rival Government at Wuchang. His manifesto concerning this new Government bears the forged signatures of several prominent men, too far away to have possibly signed it. Telegrams are arriving from certain of the boasted signatories denying any participation in Wu's scheme. It is but another of Wu's bluffs. If he can be captured, he will certainly lose his life.

We have now to watch the development of the new Government in, the hope that the earnest men who compose it will be able to find some way out for China, and lead her into a degree of unity. The influence of Feng will be definitely for a clean government, and what he believes to be the very best interests of China. He is rather anti-foreign, in the sense that he resents foreign exploitation of China, especially by the Japanese. What Canadian can blame him, when he recalls the fact that the existing opium treaty with Great Britain forces China to accept every year large quantities of Indian opium? Being an active reformer, Feng is inclined to be idealistic and radical. For this reason he is easily met by the southern leaders who are inclined toward socialism, so that there is danger of the Government playing into the hands of Russia, whose Soviet flag flies over the Russian Ambassadors' compound in the Legation Quarter. Between the radical and conservative elements Chang exists as a sort of bridge. His attitude is inclined to be imperialistic, but tempered by the wisdom of his son he has sufficient breadth to enable him to work with the other parties. It is to be hoped that the fusion of these elements will give China better government than she has ever had before.