

CHAPTER X

CHINA HITS BACK

As one looks back on the succession of outbreaks which made the early summer of 1925 so terrible a period in China, the difficulty of assessing fairly the significance of what occurred is uppermost in mind, for other elements than foreign aggression were involved, and vitally involved. The long period of political chaos in China has weakened the moral fiber of the nation, encouraged acts of violence, and stimulated the more debased elements of the population to robbery and looting. The World War, with British, Germans, French, Austrians, and other belligerent nationals reviling one another on Chinese soil, has brought home to every Chinese of intelligence the weakness and division among the European powers, which provide his country's opportunity.

The blocking-off of Russia from Europe—her loss of Finland, Esthonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Bessarabia—followed by the ill-judged attempt at a *cordon sanitaire*, has naturally resulted in increasing Russian interest and intrigue in China, not now in concert with the other powers, but opposed to them. To these obvious factors must be added many others: the growing bitterness over the white assumption of racial superiority; the hot-headed activities of immature students too suddenly released from the old disciplines which the changes of late years are sweeping away; the contrast between the idealistic slogans of the war period and the disillusionment of the present; last but not least, the introduction

of a new element of unrest as a result of the industrialization now taking place in many Chinese cities. As an extreme example of the extent to which large-scale production in China is taking root, statistics of the cotton-mill industry in the Shanghai district may be cited. In and around Shanghai there are now operating no less than 58 of these large, well-equipped factories, 32 of them Japanese, 22 Chinese, and 4 British in ownership. They employ approximately 117,000 work people, an average of slightly over two thousand employees to each mill.

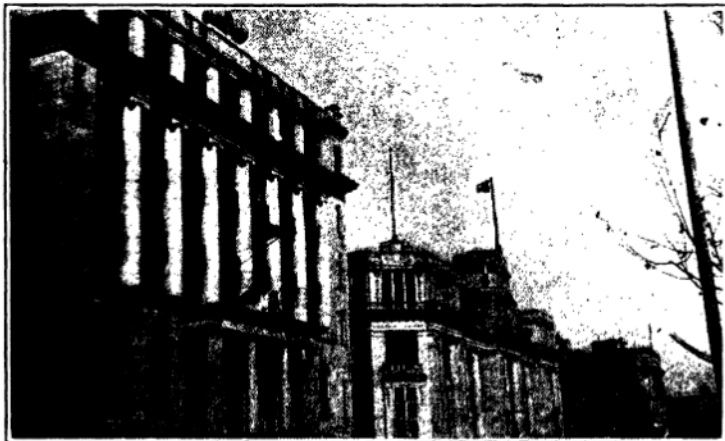
In one of these Shanghai mills, significantly enough, was lit the flame which showed how tinder-dry for conflagration is all of contemporary China. A strike at one of the Japanese-owned concerns resulted in disturbances in the course of which a native workman was fatally shot by a Japanese overseer defending the company property. A few days later, on Saturday, May 30, 1925, a large, though unarmed, demonstration was staged under student leadership in the International Settlement of Shanghai. Several students were arrested for disorderly conduct and taken to the Louza police station, just off the Nanking Road, in the very heart of the concession. Shortly afterwards the crowd, now grown to mob spirit and size, forced its way to the gates of the station house, threatening violent entry. The British police officer in charge gave the order to shoot—in English. From ten to fifteen seconds afterwards, by admission of the authorities, a volley was fired which killed seven Chinese and wounded many more. The following day there were further clashes with the police and several more Chinese were killed. The municipal council placed the city under what amounted to martial law, and 250,000 Chinese workers of every variety went out on a completely spontaneous general strike.

Never was the underlying unity of China more strongly

demonstrated. During the first week in June enormous protest meetings, for the most part orderly, were staged in Peking, Hankow, Tientsin, Nanking, Changsha, Swatow, and most of the other larger cities. On June 4 the diplomatic corps in Peking replied to protests of the Waichiao Pu¹ with a note stating that "the responsibility of the events . . . rests upon the demonstrators and not upon the authorities of the concession." Immediately thereafter a new and uglier tone entered the nation-wide protest meetings, not checked by a subsequent decision of the foreign ministers to make a thorough inquiry on the scene, which eventually resulted in sharp censure for the Shanghai authorities. But long before that, on June 11, there was an outbreak of mob violence in Hankow in which shops in the Japanese concession were looted, a Japanese murdered, and an attempt made to storm the foreign banks, resulting in the killing of eight Chinese by foreign naval forces landed from gunboats in the Yangtze. At Kiukiang a Japanese bank was burned, and the Japanese and British consulates damaged. Then, on June 23, in Canton, came the most terrible of all the incidents in this significant uprising.

It had been preceded by a general strike of Chinese workers in the neighboring British colony of Hongkong, which for nearly a month made the white residents of this community dependent on their own efforts for everything. As the Chinese servants and operatives of every kind began to trickle back to work, in spite of opposition sometimes amounting to terrorization by labor union heads, a huge protest meeting against the Shanghai killings was called in Canton. After that meeting, at which incendiary speeches were numerous, over twenty thousand Chinese, for the most part school children, members of workers' guilds, and college students, but including some two thousand armed soldiers and cadets from

¹ The Chinese Foreign Office.



FOREIGN BANKS IN CHINA

Financial institutions of the United States, Great Britain and Japan line the Yangtze River at Hankow, deep in the heart of the Republic.



WHITE TRENCHES IN CHINA

A corner of the foreign concession on Shameen Island (Canton) as it looked after the fatal Twenty-third of June, 1925.



the Whampoa Academy, began their fatal march along the Bund opposite the little island of Shameen. On Shameen,¹ which is the foreign concession of Canton, were detachments of British and French marines and perhaps a hundred armed civilian residents. In anticipation of a Chinese attack, both of the bridges connecting Shameen with the mainland had been closed with barbed-wire entanglements, and the whole side facing Canton was (and is) entrenched and protected with sandbags. Virtually all the women and children from the concession had been sent down to Hongkong. It has not been felt safe as yet for them to return to Canton.

Just after three o'clock on the afternoon of June 23, 1925, when the bulk of the parade had passed Shameen and the Chinese troops were opposite the island, firing started. On Shameen a Frenchman was killed, and three English, three Japanese, and two Frenchmen wounded. Among the Chinese demonstrators 52 were killed and 117 wounded, 22 of the dead and 53 of the injured being armed soldiers. The immediate effect of the tragedy was to rally all of Canton to the Russian-advised Kuomintang government, then just coming into power, and to turn the strike at Hongkong into a carefully organized boycott which has now continued for over a year and nearly prostrated that once flourishing British colony.

By most Cantonese this terrible disaster is regarded as a cold-blooded "massacre," for which the British in particular are held responsible. By a majority of foreigners in South China, regardless of nationality, the incident is regarded as a barely frustrated attempt by Chinese troops to seize the foreign settlement of Canton by force. The issue will probably go down as one of those which history can never answer with certainty. I myself am satisfied that Russian-officered Chinese mounted machine

¹Literally, "Sand Bank." It was exactly that until foreign enterprise converted it into a pretty little island.

guns on buildings overlooking Shameen some time before the parade started. Shakee Creek, which separates Shameen from the water-front street of Canton where the parade was marching, is not a hundred feet in width. Yet a majority of the bullet holes with which the buildings on Shameen are spattered are, as I observed on two visits there, more than twenty feet from the ground and of a downward incidence. Without the accounts of trustworthy eyewitnesses and other circumstantial evidence, it would be strongly indicated by this that firing on Shameen came from prepared snipers' nests on roofs in the Chinese city. The concentration of native bitterness against the British is also strongly indicative of Russian influence, for the French, with whom it suits the Soviet government to be on good terms at present, unquestionably did as much firing and caused as many Chinese casualties as did the English. But regarding the question of which side fired first there can be no certainty.

What is certain is the fact that this culminating tragedy of a series which may at any time be reopened has stirred China to a policy of resistance which deserves the closest attention abroad. This resistance has been most strongly expressed in the concerted and sustained effort to ruin the British colony of Hongkong. The present civil warfare precludes any attempt at nationwide, armed opposition. But the civil wars themselves are hardening the Chinese people and enabling them to approach equality in that military efficiency on which the Occident mainly relies for its assumption of superiority in China. As an American military observer in Peking remarked to me: "It is a senseless provocation for us to retain a few hundred soldiers here now. The situation is totally different to what it was at the time of the Boxer rising, when the foreign troops were opposed by

a mob with antiquated arms and entirely ignorant of modern warfare."

Less spectacular than armed resistance, the Chinese boycott of Hongkong, carried on with a complete contempt of foreign treaty rights, is none the less significant, even though the casual visitor to that British port does not immediately see its grim effects in full. The mind is naturally first occupied by the remarkable skill and energy which the British have shown in converting, within a span of eighty years, a precipitous mountain-side into one of the world's greatest ports. And the shipping in the harbor, though cut down by more than half since the boycott started, is still sufficient to give a false impression of bustle and prosperity.

In 1842, the island of Hongkong, then desolate and sparsely inhabited by fishermen, was ceded to Great Britain by the treaty of Nanking. Following her second war with China in 1860, chiefly remembered by the Chinese for British and French vandalism in burning the beautiful Summer Palace near Peking, Great Britain annexed Kowloon Peninsula on the mainland opposite Hongkong. In 1898, when Russia, Germany, and France were all busy acquiring slices of Chinese territory and the United States was taking the Philippines, the British acquired a ninety-nine year lease on an area adjacent to Kowloon known as the New Territories. The whole district is now heavily fortified and, pending the construction at Singapore, is Great Britain's most important naval base in the Far East.

Counting Kowloon Peninsula and the leased territory, the colony of Hongkong has an area of 345 square miles and a population of over 700,000, of whom less than 9,000 are British and about 4,000 other foreigners. The island of Hongkong, itself, where the officialdom, commerce, and major portion of the population concentrate, is but eleven miles long and, in average, three miles in

width. In substance it is a chain of rugged mountain peaks, rising sheer from the sea to an elevation of two thousand feet. Along an artificial shore line, which British ingenuity has constructed where once was deep water, and up tortuous roads which have frequently been hewn from the cliff, clusters a beautiful and cleanly tropical city. There are many islands along the China coast as desolate and barren as Hongkong was a century ago. Many have harbors which could be made as fine. But the Chinese knew very well that they could not possibly accomplish by themselves the engineering which Great Britain has done to make Hongkong important as a focal point of world commerce.

The British in Hongkong are naturally sensitive about letting it be known how hard the Chinese have hit them through the rigid boycott which followed the Shameen tragedy. One learns, however, that the import and export trade of the port, which is almost the sole source of Hongkong's livelihood, was during the last quarter of 1925 almost fifty per cent less in value than during the corresponding months of 1924. During 1924 an average of 210 vessels of all types arrived at Hongkong daily. After July, 1925, the average dropped to 34 vessels a day. It is not merely small junks which, under orders of the Kwangtung provincial government, are passing Hongkong by. The total tonnage cleared from the port has been more than cut in half.

Naturally, individual and firm losses have been enormous, though the Chinese merchants of Hongkong have on the whole suffered more heavily than the English. The banks have been severely strained and, in spite of a special loan of £3,000,000 advanced by the British government, business men have for months found it almost impossible to obtain credit. Everyone in the colony is hard up and the courts are congested with bankruptcy cases. Nevertheless there is little doubt

that Hongkong can hold out indefinitely, though in severely straitened circumstances, against this economic pressure.

That, indeed, is the only course possible. The hot-heads in the colony who advocate a British punitive expedition against Canton are, fortunately, powerless without a support which the home government is unlikely to give. Such retaliation would, in the long run, result in complete disaster for British interests in China. Let alone, the boycott will eventually peter out; 80 per cent of the Hongkong strikers had returned to work by the first anniversary of their quitting, in June, 1926. On the other hand, attempts to force a resumption of normal trade relations by military action can only result in hardening the Chinese resistance. You cannot make your enemy purchase at your store by kicking him.

A problem of extreme delicacy for the colonial government of Hongkong has been rendered still more difficult by the impossibility of ascertaining just what concrete aims the Kwangtung government is seeking in the boycott. Reinstatement of and strike pay for those who left their jobs in Hongkong as far back as June, 1925, can no longer be regarded as a serious objective. Some of the political demands are reasonable, such as Chinese representation on the legislative council of the colony. Some are unreasonable. No restrictions on Chinese for residential purposes, for instance, would simply mean that the far wealthier Chinese merchants would be able to oust the British from homes which they have gradually engineered far up on the precipitous "Peak." Then there are demands that the Chinese in the colony should have "absolute freedom" of meetings, parades, public speeches, publications, etc., and that the power of banishment should be entirely rescinded. At first glance it looks as though Canton wants to force the rendition of Hong-

kong to China, but this is not a serious purpose except in the minds of a few extremists.

The actual aims of the moderate leaders in Kwangtung, and they are gaining in power as Russian influence wanes, are about as follows: *First*, to teach the British, and through them the other Treaty Powers, that the dominant race in China is the Chinese, and that foreigners are there on sufferance just as much as Chinese are in England, or America, or France, on sufferance; *second*, to stimulate the Chinese to develop their own country for themselves, and to encourage a racial pride, with modern military force to support it, which will no longer passively submit to foreign impositions; *third*, to hasten tariff autonomy and abolition of extraterritorial jurisdiction by making it evident that one large section of China is no longer disposed to wait around as a suppliant on these issues; *fourth*, to oppose the effort towards overcentralization in China by showing her people that a single province—Kwangtung—can accomplish more towards stemming foreign encroachments by acts than the so-called national government at Peking has ever done by talk. This last aim was achieved in July, 1926, when the Hongkong colonial government tacitly recognized the independence of Kwangtung by sending an official delegation to Canton to open negotiations for terminating the boycott.

Well before these negotiations started, however, there was no doubt that the Kwangtung government was ready to call the boycott off, even on a basis of "honors easy." The chief obstacle has been the authority given in this matter to the strike committee, as already discussed.¹ These strikers, acting on the Russian theory of the rights of proletarians, have been responsible for virtually all the serious disorders which have continually smirched the record of the Canton government. The armed

¹See p. 85.

strike pickets like the domination which has been given them, and like to live at public expense. They like to loll around in the sun with rifles, shooting Chinese *bourgeoisie* who disagree with them. They like the countless opportunities for bribes which come their way. This absurd apotheosis of debased and ignorant coolies has come near to proving the Frankenstein of the Kwangtung government—its penalty for being too ready with lip service to Russian doctrines.

In this juncture Hongkong is fortunate in possessing, in Sir Cecil Clementi, a colonial governor who knows China and the Chinese, is very sympathetic to their reasonable claims, and who is personally a most charming, cultivated, and keen-minded English gentleman. It was his appointment to Hongkong which gave most hope for constructive solution of South China's most acute problem in international relationships. Indeed, at this period of rising Chinese antagonism, increasing Chinese sensitiveness, and changing Chinese conditions, no duty is more imperative for Occidental governments than to see that their diplomatic and consular representatives in China are of the highest grade, chosen for their advance knowledge and understanding of the acute problems which they will be called upon to face. More important than warships and regiments for the protection of foreign lives and property in China is the presence there of clear-visioned envoys. In this class, fortunately for American prestige, belongs the American Minister at Peking, J. V. A. MacMurray. Whether his power to act along lines in full accord with America's traditional Chinese policy is equal to his ability to visualize the desirable course is, however, another question.